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"Big surveys" caught between policies, sociology, and statistics: Measuring cultural participation in national territories

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Abstract

In many countries, "big surveys" on cultural participation are now part of the landscape. Yet they are rarely considered as subjects of study. Necessary for cultural policies, eagerly awaited by the media, and readily used by the social sciences, the national surveys carried out by governments on the cultural activities of their populations are a blind spot in the analysis. This article proposes taking a closer look at the measurement of cultural participation in different national territories. Its corpus comprises around 40 European countries, 15 of which have such a "big survey." The analysis describes the origins of these surveys in the 1960s, in the context of the emergence of cultural democratization policies. It identifies the unexpected variety of statistical approaches used in different countries to capture attendance at cultural institutions, amateur activities, and media practices, often indirectly, avoiding a single, costly survey on the subject of cultural participation. Among the 15 "big surveys" identified, the article examines the diversity of institutional frameworks and methodologies used, highlighting their impact on the results, their representativeness, and their range. It investigates their denominations and, above all, the scope and type of activities covered by these surveys, which vary considerably from one country to another. Ultimately, these "big surveys" reveal how participation in the arts and culture is apprehended in various national territories and, consequently, how their measurement is conditioned by cultural policy paradigms—their symbolic territories—and, finally, about what they do not measure. In conclusion, the text considers the pertinence and the future of these "big surveys."

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1. Introduction

Surveys of cultural participation have been part of the cultural landscape in Europe for more than 50 years. In the wake of the cultural democratization project outlined in the 1960s, they have become an essential tool for measuring inequalities in access to culture and, hopefully, for improving that access. With the rise of evidence-based cultural policy, these surveys have become even more important. Finally, the COVID-19

pandemic has confirmed the strategic role of quantifying cultural activities for politicians and decision-makers. It is therefore legitimate to take a closer look at the “big surveys” of different countries on cultural participation and their methods, breakdowns, and definitions, to better understand what these reading grids allow us to grasp or, on the contrary, what they miss.¹

The centrality that national surveys of people’s cultural activities have acquired is directly related to the growing importance of the audience in both policies and the measurement of culture. In what is probably the first (and only) systematic survey of European cultural participation, in 2012, from which this article is partly inspired, it is stated that the cultural practices of the population “are, without doubt, the most important dimension of the cultural sector.” Audiences are even described as the “*raison d’être*” of different art forms: “Performing arts without an audience; music without listeners; museums without visitors or books without readers will all lose their ‘*raison d’être*’ and soon cease to exist.”² (p227)

It has not always been this way: Since the post-war period, art has tended to chase the audience away,³ busy innovating artistically and bringing forward singular creators,⁴ helped by policies to support the avant-garde against the market,⁵ or even by subsidizing artistic subversion.⁶ At the same time, since the 1960s and 1970s, it has been chasing after the audience in another sense of the word: Art, and, above all, its policies, are on its heels, trying to interest it to bridge the gap between culture and cultural policy on the one hand, and the general public on the other.

As we shall see, there are nowadays several reasons for this quest for audiences. In this context, it is up to the “big surveys” to measure, at the national level, the state of attendance at cultural institutions among the country’s population, and its evolution through the repetition of the approach. However, despite their widespread political use, the media attention they attract and their contribution to research, including sociological research, these “big surveys” are rarely analyzed. Located in the bosom of official statistics and benefiting from the aura of the supposed objectivity of figures, yet figures are not neutral technical objects but social facts.⁷ “Big surveys” on cultural participation are a blind spot in analysis.

Opting for a comparative territorial approach, we present here a “sociology of quantification”⁸ of cultural participation, through an analysis of national surveys on the cultural activities of their population carried out by European countries, as well as their institutional and discursive production context. Our initial corpus is made up of around 40 countries on the Old Continent, 15

of which have a “big survey” on the subject. Behind the relative standardization brought about by the cohabitation of these national surveys and the Eurobarometers, surveys conducted on the populations of all member countries (four of which to date have focused on culture, the latest in 2017)¹, one discovers specific features and even national survey traditions. This gives rise to a paradox: The objective measurement of cultural practices in figures is applied in very different ways and for sometimes opposed purposes in various territorial contexts.

This article proposes a multi-stage exploration of the “big surveys” on cultural participation. After this introduction, which also presents the research question, Section 2 discusses the history of these surveys, which began around 60 years ago, and whose birth and evolution have been shaped by one country, France, between cultural policy, sociological research, and official statistics. Section 3 addresses the question of the delimitation of our subject: What is a “big survey?” Section 4 analyzes the institutional affiliation of these surveys, revealing their anchoring and their perspective, as well as their methods and their implications for the scope of the results. Section 5 then identifies the central question of the name and, more profoundly, the definition of culture and the activities covered by these surveys, which, beyond a consensual core, vary considerably according to national contexts. Section 6 examines the paradigms behind these surveys as symbolic territories with very different aims, where the arts and culture in their narrower sense are sometimes in second place. Finally, Section 7 concludes with a review of the main results and addresses the questions raised by this analysis.

2. “Big surveys” born between politics, sociology, and statistics

While national surveys on cultural participation are now present in many countries around the world and in a significant number of European countries, their original context is marked by one nation in particular, France, which played a decisive role in their emergence and shaping. This emergence can be seen as ternary: The major

¹ Mandated by the European Commission, these Eurobarometers, very numerous and covering a wide range of subjects, have been held four times to date on the theme of culture: in 2002 (Eurobarometer n. 158: “Europeans’ Participation in Cultural Activities”), 2007 (n. 278: “Cultural Values”), 2013 (n. 399: “Cultural Access and Participation”) and 2017 (n. 466: “Cultural Heritage”); see <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/browse/all/series/8924> (last accessed May 10, 2025). Although a European survey on cultural practices is under discussion at Eurostat, no Culture Eurobarometer has been carried out since.

surveys on cultural participation originated in politics and then developed along two opposing but related lines of sociological research and official statistics.

Jean-Louis Fabiani highlighted the decisive role played in France by the political paradigm of cultural democratization, which crystallized in 1959 with the creation of the new Ministry of Cultural Affairs headed by the acclaimed novelist and member of the Resistance during the Second World War, André Malraux. One of his objectives was to “make the major works of humanity, and above all of France, accessible to the greatest possible number of French people,” as stated in the Decree creating the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (July 24, 1959). Initially, it is “in the hollow of this ideological and political space that sociologists ask themselves scholarly questions” about cultural practices.⁹ (p33) The result was the book “*L'Amour de l'art*” (The Love of Art) by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel in 1966. Based on quantified measurements, this study reveals the sociological determinants of museum-going and the role played by the knowledge and recognition of socially unequal “codes” in this “love” of art, now to be put in quotation marks. Commissioned by the Ministry, the book also displays a political ambition: Not only, according to the back cover, does it aim to “subject good taste to the rigors of critical examination.” Furthermore, “[b]y highlighting the social conditions of access to cultivated practice, [the book] shows that culture is not a privilege of nature, but that it would be necessary and sufficient for everyone to possess the means to take possession of it for it to belong to everyone.”¹⁰ (p222) This first survey marked a short-lived convergence between the three logics—political, sociological, and statistical—behind these surveys, which would later separate.

The study of the population's cultural activities was to develop along two lines that were as important as they were opposed. In 1973, *Les Pratiques culturelles des Français* (The Cultural Practices of the French), the first of a long series of ministerial surveys (six since then), inaugurated the “big surveys” of public statistics, eminently proactive in that they were intended to verify the progress of the cultural democratization that was now underway. In 1979, Pierre Bourdieu published “*La Distinction*” (Distinction), which remains a reference work today, looking more generally at lifestyles by placing them in a deterministic and fatalistic relationship with the space of social positions, a far cry from the optimism of the Malrauxian ideals.¹¹ While this point of view has had a lasting influence on the “big surveys” on the topic, it also suggests the vanity of this ambition, arguing that cultural practices can only change if the social stratification, of which they are the product, is modified. These two fields subsequently evolved in parallel, while feeding off each other.

On the academic side, a veritable field of research dedicated to cultural practices and lifestyles was emerging. From the outset, it has been closely linked to the analysis of social stratification: What interests scholars is not so much art or culture (or even cultural participation) as such, but rather their hidden variations according to social milieu. This field has become internationalized and diversified with, in turn: The discovery in the United States of a growing cultural omnivorism among the elite by Richard Peterson in the 1990s, based on national statistics on the musical tastes of the American population¹²; the multiplication in 1997 of the seven cultural universes under the influence of new variables taken into account, such as age, sex or place of residence, by Olivier Donnat, the mastermind behind *The Cultural Practices of the French*, who uses the data here originally;¹³ the hypothesis of a culture of individuals marked by dissonance sketched out in 2004 by Bernard Lahire, who uses the data from this same survey in conjunction with a hundred or so interviews¹⁴; or, more recently, the integration of the cultural studies perspective by Hervé Glevarec, whose tabature of tastes makes a sharp reorientation from the verticality of the Bourdieusian model toward greater horizontality.¹⁵ Although it has become autonomous since “*L'Amour de l'art*,” following the logic of theoretical chapels and fierce debates typical of scientific fields, this field is nourished by the government surveys that they have helped to initiate.

A veritable matrix and benchmark for all the major surveys that interest us more closely here, even if it is not historically the first, *The Cultural Practices of the French* digs a different furrow. Conducted by the forerunner of Department of Studies, Forecasting, Statistics and Documentations (DEPS), the current *Département des études, de la prospective et de la statistique* located within the French Ministry of Culture, this survey is part of a public statistics rationale that is both independent and whose statistical reason is intimately linked to nation states, their birth and their political management.¹⁶ This set of surveys is characterized by an absence of overly explicit references to the sociological theory from which it derives: Responding to a political demand, they aspire to be produced according to the rules of the statistical art alone. As the product of policies, they are ultimately intended to serve as a neutral support for informed decisions, as well as for political and public debate (rather than sociological debate, incidentally). Although originally related to sociology, they must be as detached from it as possible, while still being usable by researchers, as we have seen.

This political and sociological lineage is demonstrated by the fact that the socio-demographic standard that characterizes all the “big surveys” studied, without exception, includes the trio of gender, age, and level of

education. The level of education as a determining factor—one of the key findings in Bourdieu’s *“L’Amour de l’art”*—thus constitutes a norm in these surveys. It is not only a widespread variable but also always expressed in a standard, ternary fashion, following the pattern of compulsory, secondary, and tertiary education. This variable is not insignificant; it acts as a metonymic indicator of cultural capital, determining cultural practices, a distant legacy of Pierre Bourdieu, and an indicator of the sociological roots of these surveys.

The “big surveys” of official statistics have continued along the institutional path mapped out by The Cultural Practices of the French, while accommodating changing cultural policy paradigms. The measurement of cultural participation has spread to almost all European countries, whether as a “big survey” in the strict sense of the term, or as derivatives and alternatives. Therefore, we should first define the “big survey” on the subject.

3. Definition of “big survey” in national variations

We should now define our subject, first in geographical terms. The proposed focus is on the European countries, a territory that is both circumscribed and varied, allowing for revealing contrasts.² Our population will therefore include 41 countries, consisting of the European Union (EU) member countries (currently 27), the 10 candidate countries, the four European Free Trade Association countries, including Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (UK). The list of countries covered, together with the surveys, statistics, documents, and other national websites consulted, is included in the Appendix.

In seeking to identify the national approaches that form the “big survey” of cultural participation, we are interested in which countries quantify the cultural and leisure activities of their populations. This can be achieved using methods other than a single large-scale survey. There are no solid boundaries for “big surveys” that define a survey as “big” or even a study as “survey.” The criteria, such as minimum sample size, questionnaire scope, thematic range, regularity, or historical duration, for a survey on cultural participation to be defined as “big” remain unavailable. An investigation based on several small data collections or the secondary use of data may also be considered as a “survey.” We have chosen to focus on

countries with a single survey on cultural participation of a certain scale and/or longevity, while simultaneously taking an interest in all the other scenarios in between. These national gradations and combinations are also central to our theme’s interest.

This leads us to approach our subject differently. Not all countries have a “big survey” on cultural participation conducted among their population, because there are more indirect (and less expensive) ways of approaching the question in figures. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Northern Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovakia, and federalist Germany, a “big survey” on cultural participation is thus lacking. However, the statistics offices in these countries approach this subject by compiling existing automatic counts, the number of entries, users, uses, or even sales of certain cultural establishments—typically theatres, museums, archives, libraries, bookshops, and cinemas. This way, national figures can be obtained more cost-effectively, as the collection of administrative data from the concerned institutions replaced the tedious survey of the population. However, the analysis based on socio-demographic profile is impossible as the subjects being measured are not people but occurrences, such as ticket sales and use of books, with no information on the authors of these occurrences beyond pre-existing but limited and non-uniform breakdowns (young or senior tickets in museums, for example). It is therefore impossible to describe the demographic profile of users based on these data.³ Sometimes these limitations are partially compensated for by linking them to demographic figures. For example, in Germany, the number of admissions per 1,000 inhabitants is calculated to establish the orders of magnitude.

Some countries use other types of surveys to obtain figures on cultural participation. Finland employed a “Time Use Survey” in 2021, which is designed to record the amount of time spent on media purposes or certain leisure activities, to obtain the attendance of its population at cultural institutions and events. Bulgaria has extracted some information on cultural participation from its “Adult Education Survey,” which covers the 25–64 age group. Some countries benefit from another international “big survey,” such as the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in EU countries, which has a rotating but relatively rare thematic module (2006, 2015, 2022) on social participation (or, in 2022, quality of life), with some very condensed questions on attendance at cultural

² This scope follows logically the one used by Eurostat’s European Statistical System network on Culture Task Force on Cultural Participation in its 2012 final report, in its work on surveys in this area, covering 19 countries, including Switzerland and Sweden, and which followed an initial inventory in the year 2000 of the then 15 member countries.

³ In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the figures on recorded visits are broken down by gender, but based on an estimation, a rare and even unique process in the statistics studied.

institutions.⁴ Latvia, Slovenia, Turkey, and Luxembourg, home to Eurostat, cope with this rather limited source. French-speaking Belgium also uses this module, but in addition to a “big survey” on cultural practices. Albania makes a virtue of necessity: On cultural participation, its “Culture Statistics 2022” combines data from the SILC survey with data from another “big survey” on information and communication technologies (ICTs), as well as data on entries.

In several countries, numerous small surveys, or data from different (sometimes “big”) surveys on other themes, are used to establish a quantified overview of cultural participation, albeit a heterogeneous one. An emblematic example is the *Cultuurmonitor* in the Netherlands. Compiled by the *Boekmanstichting*, an independent foundation, this long series of results presented on a very comprehensive “culture and participation” webpage is made up of data from several different sources: A biennial “omnibus” survey (i.e., made up of several themes) on the leisure activities of the population aged more than 6 years carried out by Statistics Netherlands, in collaboration with the foundation and the Mulier Institute specialized in research into sport and physical activity, figures on admissions to museums and performing arts institutions available from the statistical office, and figures from associations in the sector on cinema admissions. Cultural participation is just one of the seven themes covered by this cultural monitor, which also describes cultural professionals, financial flows, digital transformation, and sustainable development, thus favoring a broad spectrum. The Netherlands’ *Cultuurmonitor* is an example of a tool that is itself “big” for cultural participation, although there is no single “big survey” on the subject. In Austria, various surveys, whether conducted by Statistics Austria or not, provide the basis for an overview of the issue: The “Time Use Survey,” the “Household Budget Survey,” the EU’s SILC survey, and the European survey of ICT use in households. However, a “big survey” was also conducted by a research institute commissioned by the state. Portugal also combines data from several sources: A household

survey on internet use, *Inquérito à Utilização de Tecnologias da Informação e da Comunicação pelas Famílias*, with visitor statistics (particularly on heritage), and a module on cultural participation added since 2007 to its survey on adult education and training, *Inquérito a Educação e Formação de Adultos*, on 18–69-year-olds. Last but not least, in France, in parallel to the DEPS “big survey” at the Ministry of Culture, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) publishes more concise results on the cultural practices of the population using, as other countries do, the SILC quality of life module from 2015 and 2022. Moreover, the rare INSEE survey on household expenditure (the last two editions were in 2011 and 2017), and the survey on time use (*l’Emploi du temps*, conducted approximately every 10 years) also provide a better understanding of cultural practices in France through “big surveys” that are not specific to cultural participation but may encompass it.

Sometimes the “big survey” on cultural participation is embedded in an even bigger one. In Poland, the statistical office benefits from the “Household Budget Survey,” which includes cultural participation as a detailed module and repeats every 5 years. Above all, in Italy, the publication on “free time and cultural participation” (which is comprehensive, comprising 140 pages) is based on several sources: (i) The household expenditure survey to describe spending on culture—another form of cultural participation or its measurement; (ii) a survey of Italians’ daily lives during COVID-19 to describe certain leisure activities, radio/television (TV) subscription statistics, (iii) a survey of “city dwellers and free time,” and (iv) “*Aspetti della vita quotidiana*,” a monumental survey (carried out each year in 20,000 households, representing 50,000 individuals) in which a “big survey” on cultural participation is virtually imbedded. Conducted by the Italian statistical institute, *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* (Istat), the latter focuses on the habits of citizens and the problems they face every day and on themes, such as school, work, family life and relationships, leisure, political and social participation, health, lifestyles, access to services, the main cultural outings, media practices, and above all, ICT in detail. In Sweden, the publication on the country’s “Cultural Habits” is based on the 28 cultural activities contained in an even larger survey by an institute at the University of Gothenburg, Society, Opinion, Media (SOM) Institute, which aims to describe all of Sweden (according to the SOM presentation online) and therefore focuses on the habits and opinions of the Swedish population in general. This is a borderline case of a “big survey” that is considered “big” because it is part of an even larger, regular survey.

⁴ Cf. Eurostat, “Glossaire: Statistiques de l’UE sur le revenu et les conditions de vie (EU-SILC)” ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:EU_statistics_on_income_and_living_conditions_\(EU-SILC\)/fr](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:EU_statistics_on_income_and_living_conditions_(EU-SILC)/fr)) and “Income and living conditions. Modules” (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/database/modules>) (both last accessed on May 10, 2025). The questions in the SILC module relate to visits to three types of institution: cinemas, performing arts (theatre, concerts, and ballet), and cultural sites, a fairly broad category which includes historical monuments, archaeological sites, museums, and art galleries.

At other times, there is a “big survey” on cultural participation, but it is “small” in one way or another. Norway, for example, has been surveying the cultural participation of its population every 2–4 years since 1991, but with around ten activities covered, the “Norwegian Cultural Barometer” is a borderline case of a “big survey,” the results of which are only published on a short webpage. Romania’s “Cultural Consumption Barometer” is more extensive, producing large-scale publications (over 100 pages for the latest edition), although it started only in 2012. In Switzerland, for historical and political reasons, cultural and leisure practices have only had their own “big survey” since 2014, after an initial prototype in 2008, in connection with the entry into force, belatedly after several unsuccessful attempts,¹⁷ of the first federal law on the promotion of culture in 2012. Here, internet use is the subject of a separate series of statistics on the information society, while media use, already covered by private institutes, is only the subject of secondary statistics at the country’s statistics office.⁵

Some countries have a “big survey,” but without a “big” publication in the form of a completed, well-defined, extensive document (in PDF format, for example). There are also borderline cases here: In the UK, most of the results of the “Participation Survey” are only published on a long webpage, which is nevertheless called a “report” and structured as such, with appendices and footnotes.⁶ Denmark has its own “Cultural Habits Survey”—the oldest identified in this census, starting in 1964—but only publishes some of the results on a short webpage of its statistics office. Internet users are left to visit the Danish “Statbank” for their research and cross-referencing.¹⁸ This is also the case in Estonia, where the results of its “Participation in Culture Survey,” conducted regularly since 2015 among 10,000 people, are only published on the webpages of its statistical office and, in Estonian, its Ministry of Culture.¹⁹

Alongside Austria, French-speaking Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, Romania, the UK, Sweden, and Switzerland, which are already mentioned, Spain, Lithuania, and Malta also have a “big survey” on cultural participation, 15 countries in all out of the 41 studied. Ultimately, the “big surveys” on cultural

participation depict the administrative and political realities of a country, not only by their presence or absence, but also by their potential for multiplication. In Belgium, two or even three “big surveys” coexist on the subject, or at least approaches that combine the different typologies mentioned. In the Flemish Region, several questions on cultural participation are included by the Flemish statistics office in the regular “Statistics Flanders Survey,” while on the French-speaking side, the statistics office Statbel uses questions on cultural and social participation taken from the SILC’s rotating module and, last but not least, the *Observatoire des politiques culturelles* (OPC) of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation conducts a specific survey every 10 years on the cultural practices and consumption of the population in the French-speaking part of the country.

Finally, some countries lack interest in the subject. In Cyprus, tourism statistics are highly developed, but cultural statistics on the national population are lacking. Croatia compiles figures on admissions in cultural institutions. Interest has recently been focused on the rather original question of the public’s perception of the creative and cultural industries, leading to a publication on the subject.²⁰ For these countries, searching the internet for a survey on cultural participation leads to Eurostat’s cultural participation page, which, based on the SILC module, allows a comparison between countries, at least periodically and in brief.²¹ In Ireland, the statistics relate to specific aspects, such as digital household purchases of culture and travel, as well as access to the arts, culture, and sport for young people in poorer households.⁷ The present study did not yield any results for Liechtenstein or Ukraine, where no recent survey on cultural participation could be found. In Kosovo, cultural participation appears to be a new subject, an online survey being currently in progress, named “Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Cultural Activities and Intercultural Cooperation,” conducted by a non-governmental organization.

4. Organizations and methods in institutional territories

While following common statistical and methodological principles, the “big surveys” on cultural participation are marked by national differences that reflect their roots in specific territorial and, therefore, social, cultural, and

⁵ In Switzerland, however, the first national “*Mikrozensus*” on cultural and leisure behavior was conducted already in 1988 by the Federal Statistical Office with a research institute, following an initial university survey conducted in the French-speaking part of the country in the mid-1970s; though these were isolated initiatives.

⁶ In the Netherlands, the long “Culture and participation” page in the Boekman Foundation’s *Cultuurmonitor* is also structured like a paper report.

⁷ It should be noted that the United Kingdom recently conducted a survey on the cultural participation of adults in Northern Ireland: Government UK, Department for Communities, “Engagement in culture, arts, heritage and sport by adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24”, 25.07.2024 (<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/engagement-culture-arts-heritage-and-sport-adults-northern-ireland-202324>, last accessed April 24, 2025).

political realities. For the remainder of the analysis, our study population comprises the 15 countries in which a “big survey” on cultural participation has been identified, including the latest surveys available at the time of writing (May 2025).⁸

The first element to be identified is the institutional framework in which these surveys are located: The organizations conducting these “big surveys.” This institutional framework differs from one country to another, denoting a specific relationship each time with politics and cultural policies, which these surveys are, by definition, close to. The analysis reveals five institutional frameworks (Table 1).

The most common institutional framework is official statistics, which account for just under half of the cases studied in six countries. It is followed by Ministries of Culture (three countries), sometimes through an internalized statistical entity, public institutes (two countries), such as observatories, and private institutes, which are found in only one case in our population. A non-negligible group (three countries) consists of mixed configurations, combining several of the previous categories. In detail, the five categories of institutional frameworks are as follows:

(i) Statistics office: In the largest group of countries studied, the “big survey” on cultural participation is carried out by the national statistical office. In Denmark,

which has the oldest survey in our population, the survey is conducted by Statistics Denmark, in Italy by Istat, and in Estonia by Statistics Estonia. In Norway, the “Norwegian Cultural Barometer” is produced by Statistics Norway. In Poland, Statistics Poland, in collaboration with the Statistical Office in Krakow, includes a cultural module in the “Household Budget Survey” every 5 years. In Switzerland, the Federal Statistical Office conducted surveys on the population’s cultural and leisure practices as part of its thematic surveys, forming part of the federal population census system. In some cases, the survey was previously conducted by the Ministry of Culture before it became independent and was integrated into official statistics.⁹

(ii) Ministry of Culture: In three countries, the Ministry concerned is responsible, directly or (more often) indirectly, for the survey. In the UK, the survey is part of official statistics and is run directly by the Department for Culture, Media and Sports with the

⁹ The oldest survey, in Denmark, was conducted before 2018 by the Ministry of Culture, before being integrated into Statistics Denmark (see page “Cultural Habits”, <https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/dokumentation/documentationofstatistics/cultural-habits-survey#:~:text=The%20Cultural%20Habits%20Survey%20is%20an%20interview%20based%20quarterly%20survey,both%20in%20Denmark%20and%20abroad>, last accessed May 31, 2025). In Switzerland, the prototype of the current survey was conducted by the Federal Statistical Office in 2008, with funding from the Federal Office of Culture, before the survey was integrated into the general population census system in 2014.

⁸ The year after the country name refers to the year of the survey (and not the year of publication, which can sometimes be several years away).

Table 1. Institutional frameworks for “big surveys” of cultural participation in Europe

Institutional framework (number of countries)	Country (year*): Survey organization(s)
(i) Statistics office (6)	Denmark (2024): Statistics Denmark Estonia (2023): Statistics Estonia Italy (2022): <i>Istituto Nazionale di Statistica</i> (Istat) Norway (2023): Statistics Norway Poland (2020): Statistics Poland and Statistical Office in Krakow Switzerland (2024): Federal Statistical Office
(ii) Ministry of Culture (3)	Spain (2022): Ministry of Culture and Sports, Division for Statistics and Studies France (2018): Ministry of Culture, Department of Studies, Forecasting, Statistics, and Documentation United Kingdom (2023): Department for Culture, Media and Sports and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
(iii) Public institute (2)	Belgium, French-speaking (2017): Observatory of Cultural Policies Romania (2022): National Institute for Cultural Research and Training
(iv) Private institute (1)	Austria (2023): Institute for Social Research and Consulting (mandated by the Federal Ministry of Arts)
(v) Mixed configuration (3)	Lithuania (2020): Lithuanian Council for Culture, with the Ministry of Culture, commissions two private institutes, <i>KOG Institutas</i> and <i>Norstat</i> Malta (2018): Arts Council Malta, National Statistics Office (sample), and The Valletta 2018 Foundation Sweden (2023): Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (of Statistics Sweden) and Society, Opinion, Media Institute, University of Gothenburg

Note: *The year after the country name refers to the year of the survey (and not the year of publication, which can sometimes be several years away).

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (which has taken over digital policy, also covered by the survey). In the other two cases, a statistical unit within the Ministry is in charge. In Spain, the survey on cultural participation, which forms part of the official national statistics plan, is conducted by the Division for Statistics and Studies of the General Technical Secretariat from the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport based on a sample drawn by the Spanish National Statistics Institute. This is the configuration we find in France, where it is the Ministry of Culture, but through the DEPS created in the 1960s. While the survey “*Pratiques culturelles des Français*” has been its flagship product since 1973, its analyses also cover other themes—such as employment and cultural professions, financing of culture, and economics of the cultural industries—and, like an observatory, it also has a mission of documenting, disseminating, and forecasting. It should be noted that the DEPS has a mixed staff, comprising both Ministry employees and statisticians seconded and rotating from INSEE, the national statistical institute.

- (iii) Public institute: In two countries, an independent body linked to the cultural administration is in charge of the survey, while also having other duties. In French-speaking Belgium, it is the OPC of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, a government department with autonomy, which conducts a specific survey on the cultural practices and consumption of the population in the French-speaking part of the country every 10 years. At the same time, the observatory has the task of drawing up, for the area of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, inventories of other dimensions of the cultural field (institutions, professionals, etc.), compiling documentation, providing analyses and decision-making assistance on cultural policy issues, and even supporting academic research with award and grants. In Romania, the National Institute for Cultural Research and Training, affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, conducts the survey. Its objectives are to study, research, and supply statistical data in the field of culture, as well as to provide ongoing training for cultural professionals.
- (iv) Private institute: In one country within our corpus, it is a private institute that conducted the “big survey” on cultural participation, commissioned by the administrative body responsible for cultural policy. In Austria, the private institute, Institute for Social Research and Consulting, commissioned by the

Federal Ministry for the Arts, Culture, Public Service, and Sport, conducted the 2023 survey.

- (v) Mixed configuration: In three countries, the survey results were obtained from the joint efforts of several players. In Lithuania, the survey was commissioned by the Lithuanian Council for Culture, which formed a working group with the Ministry of Culture, and two private institutes, *KOG Institutas* and *Norstat*. In Malta, the 2018 survey was commissioned by the Arts Council Malta in collaboration with the National Statistics Office and The Valetta 2018 Foundation, in line with the city being named European Cultural Capital 2018.¹⁰ Finally, in Sweden, the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis in Gothenburg, in collaboration with the SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg, produces a publication on cultural participation, based on the SOM survey; the agency is part of Statistics Sweden and is mandated by the State.

Based on the list of countries that comprise each type of institutional framework, it is challenging to find an explanatory logic, whether geographical and/or political. Instead, we are struck by the diversity of the different groups: Nordic, southern, and eastern European countries, as well as more centralized or federalist countries, are found side by side. We can deduce from this that the presence in one or other of these categories of institutional frameworks is rather linked to the specific history of the “big surveys” and, consequently, of official statistics in the different countries.

Another important point is the method, which has a direct impact on the scope and representativeness of the results, but also on the costs of the enterprise; lastly, it indicates the value (or, at least, the degree of institutionalization) attached to the survey. All these studies are quantitative, and our interest is in these three elements of the method: The size of the sample, the frequency of the survey, and the methods of administering the questionnaire.

In terms of sample size, that is, the number of people (aged 15 or 16 and over, depending on the country, sometimes with an upper age limit) who responded, a wide range is observed, from 1,035 respondents in Romania or 1,125 in Malta to more than 33,500 in the UK and even

¹⁰ In 2024, the Maltese Statistical Office published a study limited to amateur practices and people’s self-perception as artists. Given its limited scope, it is not considered here. NSO Malta, *Cultural and Creative Practice Survey, 2024* (<https://nso.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/Cultural-Creative-Practice-Survey-2024.pdf>, last accessed May 31, 2025).

50,000 in Italy (Table 2).¹¹

These surveys face a dilemma well-known to statisticians. The larger the sample, the greater the precision of the results, which by definition are estimates, with a margin of inaccuracy. At the same time, the larger the sample, the more expensive the survey. Finally, the ideal or sufficient sample size also depends on the size of the overall population. The differences in sample size observed can be partly explained by the size of the country's population. It is easy to understand why Malta, with a population of 450,000 at the time of the survey,²² can be satisfied with a smaller sample than Spain (45 million population), the UK (around 67 million population), or Italy (59 million population). At the same time, the modest sample of Romania, with its 19 million population, or Austria with 9 million population, as well as the relatively large samples—around 10,000–13,000—of Sweden (10 million population) or Switzerland (9 million population), suggest that other factors, such as the means of the country and/or the degree of institutionalization of its survey on cultural participation, play a role. In this respect, it is undoubtedly no coincidence that all the large samples of around 5,000 individuals or more come from surveys housed within state structures, whether in official statistics or in the Ministry of Culture (Table 2).¹²

Another central element is the periodicity of a survey, as its aim—here as in other fields—is less to provide a single snapshot from a given year than to produce a film of cultural practices and their evolution (or lack thereof) through repetition and comparison. From quarterly (Denmark) to every 10 years (French-speaking Belgium), the spectrum is once again very broad (Table 3).

It should be noted that it is not necessarily the most frequent intervals that make the most sense; with a few exceptions (the COVID-19 pandemic being one), a frequent interval is less likely to reveal changes, even if it does allow closer and continuous monitoring of the situation. This is the approach taken by Denmark, the country with the longest-running survey of our population (1964), which has conducted its cultural habits survey of nearly 5,000 people quarterly. At the other end of the scale,

¹¹ Some of the sources indicate the initial sample; the figures given here refer to the net sample, i.e. the number of actual respondents, sometimes deducted with the response rate indicated (rounded figures). In Sweden, for example, the SOM survey was sent to 26,250 people; with a response rate of 48%, the sample of respondents was around 13,000 individuals.

¹² Sweden, which has a mixed institutional framework but where the Agency for Cultural Policy Analyses is part of Statistics Sweden, has also been included.

Table 2. Sample size for “big surveys” on cultural participation in Europe

Survey (year)	n (participants)
Romania (2022)	1,035
Malta (2016)	1,125
Austria (2023)	2,000
Belgium-FR (2017)	3,000
Lithuania (2020)	3,200
Denmark (2024) ^a	4,800
Poland (2020) ^a	6,300
Norway (2023) ^a	9,000
France (2018) ^b	9,200
Estonia (2023) ^a	10,000
Switzerland (2024) ^a	10,000
Sweden (2023) ^b	13,000
Spain (2022) ^b	16,500
United Kingdom (2023) ^b	33,500
Italy (2022) ^a	50,000

Notes: ^aSurveys incorporated into official statistics; ^bSurveys at the Ministry of Culture.

Table 3. Frequency of “big surveys” on cultural participation in Europe

Survey (year)	Frequency
Denmark (2024) ^a	Quarterly
Italy (2022) ^a	Yearly
United Kingdom (2023) ^b	Yearly
Sweden (2023) ^b	Yearly
Spain (2022) ^b	2 years
Estonia (2023) ^a	2–3 years
Norway (2023) ^a	2–5 years
Lithuania (2020)	3 years
Romania (2022)	3 years
Poland (2020) ^a	5 years
Switzerland (2024) ^a	5 years
France (2018) ^b	8–10 years
Belgium-FR (2017)	10 years
Malta (2016)	Sporadic
Austria (2023)	Single

Notes: ^aSurveys incorporated into official statistics; ^bSurveys at the Ministry of Culture.

both France (8–10 years, last survey in 2018) and French-speaking Belgium (10 years, last survey in 2017) have opted for a wide frequency, which also allows the effects of any cultural policy measures (prices, opening times, etc.) to unfold over time. Interestingly, even the COVID-19

pandemic did not affect this rhythm, which is rigid when the survey is institutionalized, with state players resorting to additional, and therefore different, one-off surveys as necessary to monitor developments during these years.¹³ Here again, we note that the short intervals are all the result of “big surveys” that are directly or indirectly integrated into their country’s official statistics, even though not all of them follow this rule. In Malta, the survey has so far been carried out 3 times at irregular intervals (2000, 2011, 2016), and in the case of Austria, the listed survey appears to have been a one-off.

A final aspect of the method that interests us is how the questionnaire is administered (Table 4). Here again, the interviewers are faced with a dilemma, which is multiplied tenfold: The response behavior is notoriously better in the case of a survey conducted by telephone (CATI) or even directly face-to-face, often using a programmed paper questionnaire rather than by paper (PAPI) or online (CAWI) questionnaire, these last two methods meaning that the respondent is alone with the questionnaire (Table 4). At the same time, sociologists have been able to demonstrate phenomena of over- and under-reporting, particularly in surveys on socially valued themes, such

Table 4. Questionnaire administration methods for “big surveys” on cultural participation in Europe

Survey (year)	Questionnaire administration method
Spain (2022) ^b	FTFI
France (2018) ^b	FTFI
Malta (2016)	FTFI
Belgium-FR (2017)	FTFI (CAPI) 2/3, CATI 1/3
Italy (2022) ^a	FTFI (CAPI) + CAWI/PAPI
Lithuania (2020)	FTFI 2,000+online 1,200
Estonia (2023) ^a	CAWI/CATI, FTFI
Poland (2020) ^a	CATI
Romania (2022)	CATI
Austria (2023)	CAWI/CATI
Norway (2023) ^a	CAWI/CATI
Denmark (2024) ^a	CAWI/CATI
Switzerland (2024) ^a	CAWI/CATI
United Kingdom (2023) ^b	CAWI/PAPI
Sweden (2023) ^b	PAPI

Notes: ^aSurveys incorporated into official statistics; ^bSurveys at the Ministry of Culture.

Abbreviations: CAPI: Computer-assisted personal interview (computer interview, usually face-to-face with an interviewer); CATI: Computer-assisted telephone interview (with an interviewer); CAWI: Computer-assisted web interview (online questionnaire to fill in); FTFI: Face-to-face interview (with an interviewer); PAPI: Paper-assisted personal interview (paper questionnaire to fill in).

¹³ In France, the Ministry has filled this gap with one-off mandates, without altering the usual rhythm of its regular “big survey,” with a smaller survey ($n = 3,025$) on “The cultural practices of the French after the health crisis” in 2021 commissioned from Harris Interactive, a polling and marketing research institute (<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/espace-documentation/rapports/Les-pratiques-culturelles-des-Francais-apres-la-crise-sanitaire-Bilan-a-la-fin-de-l-ete-2021>) and two others on “Cultural outings of the French after two years of COVID-19” in 2022 (<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/espace-documentation/statistiques-ministerielles-de-la-culture2/publications/collections-de-synthese/culture-etudes-2007-2025/Les-sorties-culturelles-des-Francais-apres-deux-annees-de-Covid-19-CE-2022-6>) and “Cultural outings and online activities of the French in 2023” (<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/espace-documentation/statistiques-ministerielles-de-la-culture2/publications/collections-de-synthese/culture-etudes-2007-2025/Les-sorties-culturelles-des-francais-et-leurs-pratiques-en-ligne-en-2023-cinema-concert-et-theatre-ce-2024-2>) commissioned from the research institute Crédoc, *Centre de recherche pour l'étude et l'observation des conditions de vie*, incorporated into its own “big survey” on the “Living conditions and aspirations of the French” conducted in three annual waves among 3,000 people. In Switzerland, the Federal Office of Culture has commissioned *L'Œil du Public*, a marketing research institute, to conduct a total of four surveys in 2020–2022 on “Cultural outings in COVID-19,” involving small samples ($n = 900$ –1,200) (<https://loeildupublic.com/etude-culture-covid/>, all last accessed May 31, 2025).

as culture, in situations of face-to-face interviewing.¹⁴ Furthermore, surveys conducted with an interviewer, which are potentially more reliable (but also more influenced), are considerably more expensive (around 5–10 times) than self-administered surveys through a paper questionnaire (where the data must, however, be entered at the end, either by hand or by a scanning system) and, above all, than online surveys to be completed alone, which, however, can lead to respondents adopting strategies to reduce response time. Table 4 shows the various methods used for administering the questionnaire in all these quantitative surveys.

Some countries, including Spain with 16,500 respondents and France with 9,200, use face-to-face interviews. This is also the case in the smaller Maltese survey in 2016. In French-speaking Belgium, 2/3 of the 3,000 respondents completed the survey face-to-face with an interviewer at home around a programmed questionnaire, and 1/3 by telephone, but it is specified that contact was always made at people’s homes before any telephone calls were made.²³ In Italy, where the

¹⁴ This is the investigator effect noted by Pierre Bourdieu in a text on “the research situation and its effects” in: Bourdieu, P (ed.). *La Misère du monde*. Paris: Seuil; 1993.

survey “*Aspetti della vita quotidiana*” (Aspects of daily life) used for cultural participation has the largest sample size studied ($n = 50,000$), an initial questionnaire is also completed face-to-face (with the interviewer using a computer) to correctly capture the socio-demographic and economic data of the household members; followed by a self-administered questionnaire on the aspects themselves, either using CAWI or PAPI. In Lithuania, 2,000 questionnaires are completed face-to-face, and 1,200 online by respondents alone, without specifying the exact method. In Estonia, too, some of the 10,000 questionnaires are collected face-to-face. Some countries rely on telephone surveys (Poland, Romania). The countries with CAWI/CATI apply the new technique—all these surveys are recent, dating from 2023 or 2024—known as mixed-mode: This consists of first offering the less expensive CAWI, and then, for a minority of the sample who did not respond readily (around 10–20%), supplementing it with CATI (telephone), notably for groups with difficulty in internet access (particularly the elderly). Sweden is the exception that proves the rule, being the only country to use a paper questionnaire, despite its large sample size ($n = 13,000$).

The random distribution in the table of the “big surveys” carried out by official statistics or the Ministry of Culture indicates that this variable is irrelevant here, as seen in the sample size as well. Indeed, it is striking to note that the CAWI/CATI group is made up almost exclusively of Central and Northern European countries (except Sweden). Whereas, the face-to-face mode (or exclusively CATI, which is a transposition to the telephone) is mainly used in surveys from Latin and Eastern European countries. It is worth noting, however, that a number of these took place before 2020. Beyond the benefits and drawbacks of each survey method, it is important for a repeated survey to maintain the same protocols to guarantee comparability. In this respect, the organizations in charge of these “big surveys” are faced with a Cornelian dilemma, given the stagnating or even diminishing resources of the public authorities, being pushed to switch to the mixed-mode: A survey mainly completed online, which is by far the least expensive, but also the least controllable.

5. The territories of cultural participation in terms of names and definitions

After the institutional frameworks for measurement and their methods, we now turn our attention to what is being measured. All the surveys studied relate to the cultural activities of the population, which have been referred to as cultural participation by a generalization of convenience, using a term that has become established at the international level, but which is questionable. However,

it is uncertain that the conception of these activities, and therefore their denomination and definition, is the same in every country. For if the measurement of cultural activities refers to a methodological process of recording and institutional registration of this process, it also implies that we grasp these activities intellectually, through a conceptual understanding, for which the title of the survey is the gateway.

The first interesting aspect to analyze is the name given to these “big surveys.” While they all deal in one way or another with the cultural activities of the population, the titles vary considerably, and their connotations indicate the differences that, beyond the shared aim of measuring cultural participation, structure these surveys. Therefore, the final Eurostat report of 2012 noted the lexicological diversity, describing the expressions “cultural practices,” “cultural participation,” and “participation in cultural activities,” a little quick as synonyms.²⁴ The different names of the 15 “big surveys” studied can be aggregated according to their keywords (Table 5).

The titles of the first group of countries are based on the terminology of “cultural participation” or “participation in culture,” titles which focus on the idea of culture and cultural activities as a factor of social integration. Nothing seems to distinguish the countries that make up these first two groups—not even the fact that the survey is part of either official statistics or the Ministry of Culture, which concerns half of these countries. The UK calls it “Participation Survey,” and the absence of the word “culture” reinforces the sense of participation mentioned: What is measured here is less access to cultural content than participation in society and, ultimately, the economy. It is almost the opposite for Norway, which has chosen to use only the word “culture” in the name of its barometer. The approach is rather focused on culture—the Statistics Norway website refers to the population’s use of various cultural activities measured by the survey, in a rather neutral, even utilitarian way.

The Romanian cultural barometer applies the notion of consumption. It is the only one to do this so openly (with Spain linking it to another term), while pointing out the keyword of the next group, practices, is not removed from a utilitarian conception of cultural activity. The Romanian case enables us to transition to the group of four countries, which place their survey in the vein of cultural practices. This is unsurprisingly the case in France, which seems to be at the origin of the term and has used it since its first survey in 1973. Far from being neutral, the notion of cultural practices is inextricably linked to the eponymous survey in the French-speaking world, and therefore to the paradigm of cultural democratization. Logically, the concept is also

Table 5. Titles of “big surveys” on cultural participation in Europe

Survey (year)	Denomination
Group 1	
Austria (2023)	“Cultural Participation in Austria”
Malta (2016)	“Cultural Participation”
Italy (2022)	“ <i>Tempo libero e partecipazione culturale</i> ” (Leisure Time and Cultural Participation)
Group 2	
Estonia (2023)	“Participation in Culture”
Poland (2020)	“Participation in Culture in Poland”
Lithuania (2020)	“Participation in Culture and Satisfaction with Cultural Services in Lithuania”
Group 3	
United Kingdom (2023)	“Participation Survey”
Norway (2023)	“Norwegian Cultural Barometer”
Group 4	
Romania (2022)	“Cultural Consumption Barometer”
Group 5	
Belgium-French (2017)	“ <i>Pratiques et consommations culturelles de la population en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles</i> ” (Cultural Practices and Consumption of the Population in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation)
France (2018)	“ <i>Pratiques culturelles des Français</i> ” (Cultural Practices of the French)
Switzerland-French (2024)	“ <i>Pratiques culturelles en Suisse</i> ” (Cultural Practices in Switzerland)
Group 6	
Spain (2022)	“Survey of Cultural Habits and Practices in Spain”
Denmark (2024)	“Cultural Habits Survey”
Sweden (2023)	“Cultural Habits”
Switzerland-German (2024)	“ <i>Kulturverhalten in der Schweiz</i> ” (Cultural Behavior in Switzerland)
Switzerland-Italian (2024)	“ <i>Attività culturali in Svizzera</i> ” (Cultural Activities in Switzerland)

Note: The names of the surveys are in the original language or, if available, in English (Sweden: online translation from Swedish). This is the name of the survey or the resulting publication. In the case of Switzerland, a distinction is made between the name of the survey in the three main national languages.

used in French-speaking Belgium, accompanied here by the idea of consumption, which is rare in this study (two countries), and also in Switzerland, where the French title of the survey is also part of this Francophone tradition.

One group of countries is focusing more on the idea of cultural habits or behavior in the Swiss German title. Both terms point in the same direction of a routine, almost

unconscious activity. This would be in line with a narrow definition of culture or cultural offerings and their use, rather than with its broad or anthropological meaning: The performance of different activities within a society would be a matter of habit, of things that are performed repeatedly without questioning. Alongside German-speaking Switzerland, we find two northern countries—Denmark and Sweden—as well as Spain, whose title is one of the only ones (along with that of Belgium) to combine the two concepts, with practices also pointing in some way to the French neighbor. Finally, the Italian title of the Swiss survey is perhaps the least connotative, referring simply to cultural activities.

Beyond the titles, the type and scope of activities covered by the “big surveys” are our study interest. Across them, implicit definitions of culture take shape. They are pluralistic. The relationship between what is considered culture and what is relegated to leisure differs from country to country: For example, sporting events, which are often covered, are part of cultural activities in some countries (as in Denmark), while in others, they are considered leisure (as in Switzerland). Moreover, culture in these surveys can be old and new, particularly for indoor (or private) activities, depending on the activities and media covered. Above all, it can be restricted or broad, in terms of external activities, also following the polysemy or rather the elasticity of a concept which, for ethnologists and anthropologists, goes so far as to encompass the whole of society. Table 6 summarizes the different areas covered by the questionnaires from the 15 countries under study along these two axes, indicating whether a limited, medium, or large number of questions covered the areas.

A first series of activities is covered by all the national surveys: Attendance at cultural institutions, such as theatres, museums, concerts of all kinds (generally including festivals), and cinemas. Libraries and amateur activities are included in almost all the questionnaires. As already noted in the first inventory of national surveys on the subject in 2012, commissioned by a Eurostat working group, “there is some consensus on the core topics that should be covered, dealing with cultural participation.”^{24(p251)} For the rest, however, it is the differences in coverage and intensity that are striking. Regarding the range of areas covered, three main categories of survey emerge, each representing a specific mapping of cultural territories.

The first group comprises four countries, characterized by questionnaires that are both fairly succinct and limited to a rather classic or traditional definition of culture. This applies to questions about outdoor activities, which focus on the institutional offer, sometimes supplemented by sporting events or gatherings, assemblies, or training

Table 6. Areas covered by the “big surveys” on cultural participation in Europe

Activities			Outdoor activities					
Survey (Year)	Cultural institutions	Amateur practices	Cinema	Libraries	Archives (separate)	Cabaret, circus, etc.	Zoo, park, etc.	Science or theme parks
Culture definition			Narrow–Large					
Austria (2023)	1		1			1		
Estonia (2023)	2	2	2	2				
Sweden (2023)	1	1	1	1				
Norway (2023)	1	1	1	1				
Italy (2022)	3		1	3		1		
Belgium-FR (2017)	3	3	2	3		3	1	3
Switzerland (2024)	3	2	1	3		1	1	
Spain (2022)	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	1
France (2018)	3	3	3	2	1	2	1	2
UK (2023)	3	2	1	3	1	1		
Denmark (2024)	3	2	2	3		2		
Malta (2016)	3	3	1	1				
Lithuania (2020)	2	3	1	1	1			
Poland (2020)	3	2	1	1		1	1	1
Romania (2022)	1	1	1	1		1		
Number of surveys	15	13	15	14	4	10	5	4
Activities			Outdoor activities					
Survey (Year)	Sports events and matches	Restaurant, friends, disco, etc.	Sport, fitness	Gatherings, associations, training, volunteering	Shopping, fairs	Fashion, fashion shows	Free time, including satisfaction	Holidays, travels
Culture definition			Narrow–Large					
Austria (2023)								
Estonia (2023)	1		1					
Sweden (2023)				1				
Norway (2023)	1			1				
Italy (2022)	1	2	3	3			2	
Belgium-FR (2017)	3	3	3	2	3			
Switzerland (2024)	1	1	1	1				
Spain (2022)	1			1	1			
France (2018)	1	1	1				1	1
UK (2023)			2			1		1
Denmark (2024)	1		3	3				
Malta (2016)		1	1	1				
Lithuania (2020)				2				
Poland (2020)	1	1		1			1	
Romania (2022)	1	1	1	1	1			1
Number of surveys	10	7	9	11	3	1	2	3

(Cont'd...)

Table 6. (Continued)

Activities		Outdoor activities				Indoor/private activities			
Survey (Year)	Satisfaction with life	National events or works	Church, religious service	Languages	National identity, citizenship	Reading books	Listening to music	Media practices (Television, films)	
Culture definition		Narrow–Large				Old–New			
Austria (2023)						1	1	1	
Estonia (2023)						2			
Sweden (2023)						1		1	
Norway (2023)						1			
Italy (2022)						2	1	2	
Belgium-FR (2017)						3	2	3	
Switzerland (2024)		1				3	2	2	
Spain (2022)		1				3	3	3	
France (2018)		1				3	3	3	
UK (2023)		3				1	1	1	
Denmark (2024)		1	1			3	3	3	
Malta (2016)		1	3	1	2	2	3	2	
Lithuania (2020)			3		3	1		2	
Poland (2020)			3		3	3		1	
Romania (2022)				1	3	1	1	1	
Number of surveys		1	8	3	1	3	15	10	13
Activities									
Survey (Year)	Press, magazines	Series (separate)	Activities at home, games	Access to news, information	Walks, nature	Video games	ICT, digital use	Date use, identification, security	AI
Culture definition			Old–New						
Austria (2023)									
Estonia (2023)									
Sweden (2023)			1	1		1			
Norway (2023)							1		
Italy (2022)			1	1	3	1	3		
Belgium-FR (2017)			3	3		1	3		
Switzerland (2024)			1	2	1	1			
Spain (2022)			3			1	1		
France (2018)			1	3	3	3	2		
UK (2023)						1	3	3	
Denmark (2024)			3	3	3	2	3		2
Malta (2016)			2		1		3		
Lithuania (2020)			1				1		
Poland (2020)			2			1	2		
Romania (2022)			1			1	2		
Number of surveys			10	5	4	4	8	11	1

Note: Number of questions in the area listed in the column: 1=Low, 2=Medium, 3=High.

Abbreviations: AI: Artificial intelligence; ICT: Information and communication technologies.

courses. This restrictive scope can also be observed for indoor (or private) activities, which are limited and only exceptionally include video games or digital uses, in Sweden and Norway. In addition to these two Scandinavian countries, there are one Central European and one Eastern European country: Austria and Estonia. In terms of survey titles (Table 5), there is little in common, with two countries referring to cultural participation (Austria, Estonia), one to culture as such (Norway), and one to cultural habits (Sweden).

The second group is the most numerous: It includes seven countries whose questionnaires are characterized by a treatment of outdoor activities that is both much more in-depth and much broader. These include outings, such as cabaret/circus, zoos, and theme parks, as well as restaurants and outings with friends, and sports/fitness. In some cases, shopping and fairs are even included (particularly in Belgium, where the focus is on strolling and window-shopping, going to flea markets and *brocantes*, trade fairs, and even supermarket shopping²³), fashion and fashion shows (in the UK), people’s cultural and landscape tourism (in Italy), as well as holidays and travel (in France). A fair number of the surveys in this group include aspects, such as the attendance of specifically national works or events (flamenco or bullfighting, Danish series or films, French variety shows, major cultural, sporting or royal events in the UK), and even religious services (Denmark), which are very rare in these surveys, as if culture could not bear to include religious themes. However, the idea of going out (including church) remains a classic one, without expanding to a broader, social definition of culture.¹⁵ Indoor activities are also dealt with a way that is both detailed and all-encompassing, incorporating new areas, such as series (in specific questions), video games, and ICT/digital use, as well as one case that details questions on the use of data (in the UK, where the questionnaire puts physical and digital engagement on an equal footing, including for the attendance at traditional institutions) and in another case the question of artificial intelligence

(Denmark). The composition of this group is striking in its great diversity: The countries represented come from almost all over Europe, with the notable exception of Eastern Europe. In terms of survey headings, this group is equally eclectic. It is nevertheless noteworthy that all three countries subscribing to the idea of cultural practices are represented here: Belgium, France, and Switzerland (French-speaking and Italian-speaking headings).

The last group is again smaller, with four countries whose questionnaires are less detailed (in terms of both outdoor and indoor activities), but more comprehensive in terms of areas than the first group. It is characterized by a broad definition of culture, with not only religious outings as a theme in two countries, but also the question of language in one and a strong emphasis on national identity and civic mindedness in the other three. In Poland, for example, folklore events/picnics, themed group/club activities, and tourist tours and rallies form part of what is measured. In Malta in 2017, according to the questionnaire and its publication, the language preferences (between Maltese, English, and Italian) of the population of this island in the heart of the Mediterranean with varied historical influences form part of the cultural participation scope as one of the chapters in the publication. However, even within culture itself, attendance at cultural institutions or events encompasses religious practices and official events. In Poland, participation in culture includes aspects, such as “knowledge of a person’s family history” and “ways to celebrate Independence Day on November 11.” In Lithuania, the focus is on the links between national culture and personal identity, and also on the links between involvement in culture and civic, social, and emotional attitudes, such as “being very proud to be Lithuanian citizens.”²⁵ The latter group is made up exclusively of Eastern European countries. The case of Romania is unique in that it is not the questionnaire itself, but its contextualization in the publication on “The 2022 Cultural Consumption Barometer,” which is broad: Its title is misleading since, far from consumption, it is a detailed publication about “Cultural Participation and Democratic Perspectives,” according to its subtitle. It is therefore the political project behind, or rather around, the measurement of cultural participation that shall now interest us, to better understand the different ways in which countries measure cultural participation.

6. The symbolic territory of “big surveys” grappling with cultural policy paradigms

Beyond the institutional frameworks, the survey methods and procedures, and the titles and activities covered

¹⁵ The Swiss survey is interesting in this respect. In this country, the survey on cultural participation is integrated into the *Language, Religion, Culture Survey* (ELRC), thus including linguistic and religious practices. The original idea was to look at everything that connects people. At the same time, the three themes are analyzed separately, with linguistic and religious practices being dealt with under demography (<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/population/langues-religions.html>), while cultural practices form part of the Office’s cultural statistics (<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/culture-medias-societe-information-sport/culture.html>) (both last accessed May 31, 2025).

by the “big surveys” on cultural participation, it is the reference frameworks, or paradigms,¹⁶ that govern the statistical measurement of this subject that are decisive. It appears that these paradigms are manifold. In a way, this plurality is already contained in the word “culture,” which is itself flexible. The cultural participation to be measured is linked to the implemented definition of culture, a multifaceted concept not limited to the narrow meaning generally given by common sense, but which extends to the broader sense held by anthropologists. In their view, culture can be conflated with the notion of civilization, and therefore with the idea of the political, social, economic, and technical development of a society. According to a now canonical definition by the British anthropologist, Edward Tylor, at the beginning of the first chapter of his book *Primitive Culture*, “Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”^{27(p1)}

For more than half a century, various cultural policy paradigms have emerged, which may also target the cultural activities of the population. The quest for audience that public authorities have embarked upon since the 1960s has been driven by different rationales that sometimes seem to clash somewhat. The different continents of this polyphonic symbolic territory orchestrate or set to music the state measure of cultural participation (Figure 1). They form a historically constituted and shared score, international even if expressed in national variations.¹⁶

To the original paradigm of cultural democratization described earlier, which emerged in the 1960s and focused on extending access to institutional and professional cultural offerings deemed valuable to as many people as possible, a second paradigm, that of cultural democracy, arose in the 1970s. It offers both a counterpoint and an extension. Faced with the challenge of expanding audiences sociologically and with Western societies advocating pluralism, this paradigm implied recognizing and respecting the cultural diversity intrinsic to countries and the possibility for different groups in

society to express their own culture, including at an amateur level. Decentralization and bringing cultural policy decisions and actions closer to the people were the key words here.

With the end of the post-war era, the emergence of neo-liberalism and New Public Management, and the growing need to legitimize public spending on culture,²⁸ a certain instrumentalization of culture began. From the 1980s onward, culture has been tasked with providing a social cement for increasingly divided societies. This is the third paradigm of cultural policies, that of social integration through culture. In international surveys, this shift from access to culture to access to social cohesion has been observed over time. It is the slow shift from “cultural activities,” a relatively neutral concept, to “participation in cultural activities” in the early 2000s, finally to “cultural participation” altogether around 2010.¹⁷ This social and somewhat lenient approach is finally stabilized at international level in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistical conceptual framework published in 2012: Under the title *Measuring Cultural Participation*, it defends this participative notion of culture that goes beyond the arts to include informal or traditional activities; a notion of cultural participation, including so-called and diffuse ambient arts participation; and culture as social cohesion, linked to aspects of well-being and citizenship. Not having access to culture means being excluded not from works of value, but from society: “without the right to participate in cultural life, individuals fail to develop the social and cultural connections that are important to maintaining satisfactory conditions of equality.”^{29(pp20,32)} This paradigm also embraces the desire for integration, or even appeasement, in Western societies that are not only

¹⁶ For a summary that provided us with important elements for the following paragraphs, cf. Duelund, P, Baltysson B and Bohlbro L. “Country Profile – Denmark”. *Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*, 2012, chapter 1 “Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments”, p. 2-5 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_full/denmark/denmark_032012.pdf, last accessed May 31, 2025).

¹⁷ This transition can be seen in the titles of the Culture Eurobarometers. In 2002, in the title of the first of them, “European’s participation in cultural activities,” the idea was introduced: Somewhat abstract but symptomatic of this transition from culture to society, to cultural activities that one no longer does for their own sake as in cultural practices but in which one participates, together with other people (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/culture>). In 2013, the wording “Cultural access and participation” was used, implying that the former serves the latter (<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/213>). The current Eurostat page is entitled “Culture statistics – cultural participation” (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Culture_statistics_-_cultural_participation) (all last accessed May 31, 2025).

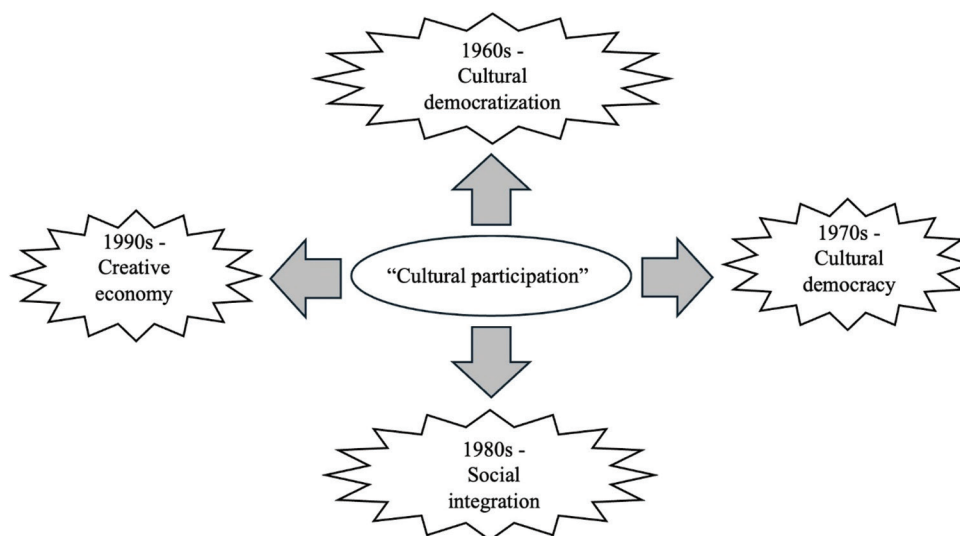


Figure 1. Cultural policy paradigms around the measurement of cultural participation

increasingly unequal, but are also faced with migration and the cultural diversification of their populations.

In the 1990s, the idea of the economic utility of culture emerged in parallel. The paradigm of the creative economy, with its host of variants—the cultural industries, creative industries, and other cultural and creative economies—becomes a structuring perspective, sometimes even in the measurement of cultural participation. Here, too, there is a shift: From an initial focus on the contribution of culture to the economy, in terms of direct or indirect impact, to culture itself as a dynamic and innovative economic sector. However, this shift in focus comes at the cost of including sectors that are promising but sometimes far removed from the traditional definition of culture, such as architecture, advertising, video games, and even, in the broadest definition of the creative economy, the entire software industry. This paradigm focuses more on the supply and production side, including the idea of encouraging the development or establishment of creative classes.³⁰ However, it also depends on demand, and therefore on the population's cultural activities, particularly the indoors (before the nomadization of devices and the spread of the internet) or private activities, by examining the consumption practices and media, and, increasingly, digital uses. Starting in the UK, with the first documentation on the “Creative Industries” published in 1998 by the British Department of Culture, Media and Sport, this approach gradually gained ground at the global level. Published in 2013, UNESCO's “Creative Economy Report” enshrines this economic, even economic, vision of culture, in conjunction with local social, political, and territorial

development objectives.¹⁸

The rise of these paradigms is less sequential than cumulative: Today, these different cultural policy models coexist and can be mobilized individually or, sometimes, in combination to give meaning to the measurement of the population's cultural activities, depending on the political agendas of the countries. The 15 “big surveys” examined more closely in this article, which are themselves the fruit of a history that is both cumulative (enlarging or adding aspects) and diminutive (reducing or eliminating), illustrate these paradigms, while also materializing combinations or interesting gaps and adjustments. To show how the “big surveys” fit into this symbolic territory of paradigms, it is necessary to go beyond a purely internal analysis of the surveys and their questionnaires, which enjoy at least relative scientific and statistical autonomy, and relate them, through an external analysis, to contextual elements mobilized at the time of publication of the results

¹⁸ See in particular: Department of Culture, Media and Sport (ed.). *Creative Industries Mapping Document*. London: DCMS; 1998 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-mapping-documents-1998>), Bakhshi, H., Hargreaves, I. and Mateos-Garcia, J. *A Manifesto for the Creative Economy*. London: NESTA; 2013 (<https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/a-manifesto-for-the-creative-economy/>), European Parliament. *Report on Cultural Industries* (2007/2153(INI)); 2008 (<https://cultureactioneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/3.-European-Parliament--s-report-the-Cultural-Industries-in-Europe.pdf>) and UNESCO. *Creative Economy Report. Widening Local Development Pathways*. Paris: UNESCO; 2013 (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000224698>) (all last accessed May 31, 2025).

and their inclusion in the cultural policy of the countries concerned.¹⁹

6.1. Cultural democratization as a persistent canon

A large number of the 15 “big surveys” studied—six in all—fall within the classic paradigm of cultural democratization. The corollary of this is a definition of culture that tends to focus on the institutional offer, the privileged place for disseminating capital works of humanity, the purpose of which is to confirm whether as many people as possible make use of it. This is the case, almost purely, in Austria. Its survey, the shortest in our sample (Table 6), is strongly focused on attendance at institutional cultural events; the subtitle of the publication is “Visit to cultural events and venues.” It is also one of the very few surveys that does not cover amateur practices, in this sense, excluding any extension toward cultural democracy. With a strong policy of offering quality, visibility, and prestige, the aim in Austria, according to a recent country profile describing its cultural policies, is the involvement and participation of as many citizens as possible in art and culture, particularly to reach more and broader strata of the population. The institute in charge of the survey detailed in its 2023 summary, under the chapter entitled “Cultural participation as an indicator of class society,” the persistence of the effect of cultural capital on attendance at institutional cultural events, in the purest Bourdieusian tradition, noting at most a Petersonian extension in terms of an omnivorism limited to the elites.²⁰ This is the perspective known in

the French-speaking world as that of cultural practices: The point of view conveyed is that there is a pre-existing supply of cultural facilities, which is a question of practicing or, according to the terminology of certain countries, using, revealing a utilitarian aspect. In Denmark, for example, the use of cultural activities is measured in a circular formula already mentioned, and in Norway, the cultural use by people is measured.²¹

A similar situation can be observed in Sweden, where the “big survey” dates back to the 1980s. Here, increasing cultural participation has been a central aim for Swedish cultural policy since the 1960s, the ideal being, echoing the Malrauxian quote, “that quality art can be accessible to all,” in particular, by widening audiences in terms of class and education background, with in recent years an increased emphasis on gender, disability, sexual orientation, or migratory background. The focus of Swedish cultural policy is on access to the artistic part of culture: The aim is to make arts and culture activities available throughout the country, which means policies intended to enhance the participation of citizens in cultural life and, particularly, in artistic activities; hence, including amateur activities, which are highly valued. This opens the door to cultural democracy. The form of the Swedish questionnaire, very compact as we saw, must therefore be understood in this highly targeted, almost utilitarian context: Studies of cultural habits are an important support for cultural policies at different levels. The Government of Sweden assigned the agency in charge of the survey to evaluate, analyze, and present the effects of proposals and measures taken in the cultural field to shed light on the situation regarding the national cultural policy objective that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in cultural life. It should be noted that the country’s cultural and migratory diversification could eventually pose challenges for this major survey: While, according to the country description already cited, “so far, cultural policy remains relatively stable,” some observers see in 2025 an erosion of consensus and increased polarization and politicization around these issues. As a result of the right-wing shift in the country’s political landscape, there has recently been a call for the establishment of a Swedish cultural canon in 2023, a refocusing on national culture that, however, has remained invisible in the country’s questionnaire from the same year.²²

¹⁹ In addition to the official statistics or agency sites and online documents already mentioned (see Appendix), the sources here (indicated subsequently in footnotes) consist of the various national reports available on the European “Compendium Cultural Policies and Trends” site (<https://www.culturalpolicies.net/>) which, managed by the Boekman Foundation until 2020 and by the Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft E. V. (Bonn, Germany) from 2021, is a reference on the subject, whether we search by country (<https://www.culturalpolicies.net/database/search-by-country/>) or among the “short profiles” (<https://www.culturalpolicies.net/database/short-profiles/>) (all last accessed May 10, 2025), mainly the chapters on “policies and programmes” concerning “cultural participation.”

²⁰ Compendium, “Country Profile – Austria”, chap. 6 “Cultural participation and consumption”; 2020, section 6.1 (<https://www.culturalpolicies.net/database/search-by-country/country-profile/category?id=3&g1=6>) and “Short profile” of Austria, 2023, 2 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_short/austria/Austria_short_01_2023.pdf) and Sora, *Cultural Participation in Austria* 2022; 2023 (<https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/dam/jcr:8fb046c7-edb8-4a21-ae94-e536ccec3dc0/Kulturelle>

Beteiligung in Österreich_Executive Summary EN.pdf) (both last accessed May 10, 2025).

²¹ Statistics Denmark (<https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/kultur-og-fritid/digital-adfaerd-og-kulturvaner/kultur-og-fritidsvaner>) and Statistics Norway (<https://www.ssb.no/en/kultur-og-fritid/kultur>) (both last accessed May 10, 2025), accentuated by author.

²² Compendium, “Country Profile – Sweden” 2016, 40

Cultural democratization is also found in another Nordic country, Norway, where this type of practice has been measured for over 30 years: In the post-war period, a considerable emphasis was laid on the democratization of culture, as arts and culture were considered both an important measure for the welfare of the entire population and as a useful tool for public education. The aim of the survey, which is also very brief, is to gather information about and to present the population's access to and use of various cultural activities, with a very classic list that includes sports events and religious or ethical meetings as well. A move toward decentralization in the 1970s aimed to give more space to amateur culture, which is also present in the questionnaire. These cultural policy objectives have changed very little over the past 20 years, when a white paper in 2003 reaffirmed the importance of public access to high-quality culture. A recent addition is the importance of freedom of expression in culture, seen as a pre-requisite for an educated and enlightened public and as an investment in democracy, but which cannot be observed in the questionnaire itself and ultimately seems to follow the classic bourgeois conception of a mainly institutional cultural offering.²³

In some countries, the paradigm of cultural democratization is sometimes questioned, without being abandoned. In Italy, as we saw, the “big survey” is included in a broader questionnaire on the population's habits, but solely focuses on traditional cultural participation. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 publication examines the changes underway in cultural participation and a possible redefinition of what is referred to here as cultural participation and leisure activities. The question is whether the recreational consumption that is said to be the sole preserve of new generations of young people means that the latter are less culturally involved

or whether, on the contrary, the paradigms and reference models for defining cultural participation have changed. Their recreational consumption, while certainly not comparable to traditional consumption, is perhaps not of lesser value?²⁴ This question, which the UK does not hesitate to answer in the affirmative, remains open here.

In another southern European country, Spain, the classic focus on cultural democratization is complemented by a marked interest in private consumption, which raises the issue of intellectual property—note that Spain is home to the EU Intellectual Property Office in Alicante. The objective of the survey, according to the publication resulting from it, is to evaluate the development of the main indicators for cultural habits and practices among the Spanish population. It is also a question of studying in depth the ways of obtaining specific cultural products subject to intellectual property rights, such as books, recorded music, video, and software. The section on indoor activities in the survey is one of the most developed in the population studied (Table 6). A 2024 document also states that access to culture and participation in cultural life remained among the prime objectives of recent Spanish cultural policy. However, things could change in Spain. It is also noted that generating demand outside the sphere of mass culture is a complex issue. By saying that the citizens' right to have their say about how the cultural life of their communities is defined gives considerable room for development, Spanish cultural policy seems to be opening a small door to cultural democracy, at least in the future.²⁵

The “big survey” of the cultural practices of the French “*Pratiques culturelles des Français*” is both a partly fantasized point of origin and, even today, the emblematic incarnation of the cultural democratization paradigm. However, the questionnaire itself can be misleading: Very broad, it begins by focusing on leisure time, holidays, and travel; this is followed by a very detailed section on board games, with 10 different genres, then on video games (again with details of genres, who people played with), TV consumption of films and “series, serials” (with 16 genres of series and around 15 titles proposed). However, even as

(https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/sweden/sweden_112016.pdf) and 2023, 48 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_full/sweden/Full-Country-Profile_Sweden_Dec_2023.pdf) as well as “Short profile” of Sweden in 2025, 3 and 7 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_short/sweden/Sweden2025_finalshort.pdf), and Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analyses, *Cultural Habits 2023*; 2024, 5, foreword (<https://kulturanalys.se/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Kulturvanor-2023.pdf>, online translation by author) and the agency's website (<https://kulturanalys.se/en/frontpage/>) (all last accessed May 10, 2025).

²³ “Norwegian Cultural Barometer 2023” (<https://www.ssb.no/en/kultur-og-fritid/kultur/statistikk/norsk-kulturbarometer>) and Compendium, “Short profile” of Norway, 2022, 6–7 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_short/norway/Norway-short-122022.pdf) (both last accessed May 10, 2025).

²⁴ Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Istat), *Tempo libero e partecipazione culturale. Tra vecchie e nuove pratiche*; 2022, 9 (https://www.istat.it/it/files/2022/09/Tempo-libero-e-partecipazione-culturale_Ebook.pdf, last accessed May 10, 2025).

²⁵ Division for Statistics and Studies, General Technical Secretariat, Ministry of Culture and Sport, *Survey of Cultural Habits and Practices in Spain 2021–2022*; 2022, 3; Compendium, “Short profile” of Spain, 2024, 3 (<https://www.cultura.gob.es/dam/jcr:4ef6fd7b-554c-45b7-a39a-71d09fd44282/synthesis-of-results-2021-2022.pdf>, last accessed May 10, 2025).

the concept of eclecticism appeared in France in the wake of its “big survey”, seemingly replacing that of cultural exclusion,¹³ the focus is still on institutional supply. It is indeed, following tried and tested terminology, the penetration rate of cultural facilities that is at the forefront, and the Ministry of Culture’s publication, *Cinquante ans de pratiques culturelles* (50 years of cultural practice), looks at the ageing of the baby-boomer generation, which is singular in its attachment to these facilities, and asks the question of the renewal of audiences for some of these activities. According to a 2023 document, the cross-cutting objective of French cultural policy remains eminently Bourdieusian: To correct recognized inequalities in access to culture and cultural institutions due to geographical, economic, and social obstacles impeding cultural participation, while also drawing on the notion of cultural rights: Equal access to culture for citizens is constitutional. While France recognizes that culture is an integral part of overall development, including social and economic development, opening up to other paradigms that have emerged in the meantime, French cultural policies aim to extend and diversify audiences. There is also an effort to foster the development of a wide range of cultural and artistic activities across all cultural fields. However, it is important not to overlook the fundamentals and to maintain a balance between what has been conceptualized as cultural democratization on the one hand, and cultural democracy on the other hand.²⁶ Here too, a door is ajar toward cultural democracy.

6.2. Cultural democracy as a rare step

Of the “big surveys” studied, only two ventured frankly into the field of cultural democracy. In French-speaking Belgium, which subscribes to the terminology of “cultural practices,” the survey, one of the two most comprehensive and in-depth (along with Denmark, Table 6), takes this step. The Danish survey is the only other one to do so. The Belgian 2017 survey, according to its publication in 2020, initially adopted the aims of the first survey of 2007 to identify the factors that lead people to participate in a cultural activity and to uncover the motivations, interests, and benefits derived from this participation, and to understand the influences and triggers that lead to cultural practice. However, the fairly broad range of the population that

emerged from the first survey as having little or no cultural practice (or at most television viewing) led to a rethink of the questionnaire in this country. The aim was therefore to investigate practices of exchange and participation more closely in the population, which take place outside cultural institutions, such as time spent strolling, shopping, being with friends and neighbors, looking after children and grandchildren, cooking, and on personal development. In other words, beyond the question grid, it was the reading grid that had to be revised. No doubt in connection with the questions on this subject that had also emerged in the sociology of culture,³¹ “new questions were therefore added to this reading grid that could be broadly described as ‘legitimist’ or normative,” and it was necessary to “rethink our questionnaire, on the assumption that we were unable to pinpoint what constituted ‘culture’ for this category of the population.”^{23(p5,6)} As the last quotation shows, this paradigm of cultural democratization, combined with that of cultural democracy, is already touching on that of social integration.

Denmark, whose survey is the oldest of the 15 studied and whose questionnaire, along with that of French-speaking Belgium, is the most comprehensive, can also be linked to the paradigm of cultural democracy. In fact, under the heading of “cultural habits” and “free time,”²⁷ the survey also covers activities described as broader, such as leisure and indoor activities, which are developed to the greatest extent in this questionnaire (Table 6): According to Statistics Denmark, “the purpose of the Cultural Habits Survey is to document the cultural habits of the residents of Denmark”, and “[c]ulture is broadly defined, as the survey covers habits within the topics of culture, media and recreational activities, for example, concerts, performing arts, cinema, literature, exercise, digital games and hobbies.” Some graphs also include indoor digital activities and, as mentioned above, attendance at sporting events under cultural activities. The scope of cultural policy may seem broad: The central division of the Danish Ministry of Culture, the Agency for Culture and Palaces, states that its ambition is to preserve, develop, and communicate art and culture for the benefit of all in society. However, social integration seems to be a prohibited area: The latest document available online describing the country’s cultural policies points out that “there is no explicit Danish policy linking the overall aim of equal access to cultural life to broader issues of civic participation, citizenship, civil society development/cohesion.”²⁸

²⁶ Lombardo Ph. and Wolff L., *Cinquante ans de pratiques culturelles en France*. 2020, 1 (https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Media/Medias-creation-rapide/CE-2020-2_Cinquante-ans-de-pratiques-culturelles-en-France.pdf) and Compendium, “Short profile” of France, 2023, 2, 8 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_short/france/France_short_10_2023_final.pdf) (both last accessed May 10, 2025).

²⁷ Statistics Denmark; the page is even called “Cultural and recreational activities” (<https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/kultur-og-fritid/digital-adfaerd-og-kulturvaner/kultur-og-fritidsvaner>. last accessed May 31, 2025).

²⁸ Statistics Denmark, “Cultural Habits Survey”

6.3. Social integration as the culture in spite of itself

Social integration as a paradigm provides meaning to “big surveys” on cultural participation presented in five countries. The fact that these are almost exclusively Eastern European countries is probably not insignificant: The question of cultural participation is undoubtedly posed differently here, in connection with a relatively recent need to reassert national identity and independence. In terms of survey titles, we note that all these countries refer to cultural participation—the word “culture” being taken in its broadest sense—and even, in the case of Romania, to democracy in its subtitle.

The first example: Estonia, where “one of the most important tasks of the state is to ensure that all Estonian residents have the opportunity to participate in the cultural activities and creative fields they are interested in, both as spectators and creators.” In fact, this citation embraces both cultural democratization and democracy (and perhaps even casting an eye at the creative economy in the process). The results of the survey “make it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of national cultural policies by describing how the population’s cultural participation and cultural consumption habits have changed,” and “[b]ased on the results of the survey, the Ministry of Culture will implement policies and activities in the fields of the arts, cultural values, integration and sport.” Integration is therefore clearly a component of Estonian cultural policy, with culture playing a multiple role: “culture increases people’s well-being, supports their ability to cope, their mental and physical health, and contributes to the cohesion of society.” Access to culture, and hence to society, must therefore logically be provided to all groups: “access to culture must be guaranteed regardless of special needs, place of residence, age, nationality, language skills, interests, abilities and other conditions.”²⁹

(<https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/dokumentation/documentationofstatistics/cultural-habits-survey#:~:text=The%20Cultural%20Habits%20Survey%20is%20an%20interview%20based%20quarterly%20survey,both%20in%20Denmark%20and%20abroad.>), Ministry of Culture, 2024, page “Agency for Culture and Palaces” (<https://slks.dk/english/>) and Compendium, “Country profile – Denmark”, 2012, 87 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_full/denmark/denmark_032012.pdf) (all last accessed May 31, 2025).

²⁹ Compendium, “Short profile” of Estonia, 2022, 4 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_short/estonia/Estonia_short_122022-formatiert.pdf) and Ministry of Culture, “Kultuuris osalemise uuring näitab kultuurielus osalemise taastumist koroonaajast” (press release), online translation by the author (<https://www.kul.ee/uudised/kultuuris-osalemise-uuring-naitab-kultuurielus-osalemise->

Lithuania even establishes a link between culture, integration, and citizenship, in a section of its survey publication dealing with “links between the issues of culture, citizenship of the public and social inclusion.” This is a strong trend that influences or even limits the measurement of certain practices in the questionnaire: Library attendance is accompanied by a warning stating that “in this survey, involvement in public library activities is treated only as social participation; therefore, this report presents the percentage of those who tend to socially participate in public library activities.” In a recent document on cultural policy, dating from 2024, what is termed the “creative empowerment” of each individual is subjected to the goal of strengthening national identity, which seems to prevail. Ultimately, Lithuanian cultural policy aims “at a creative empowerment of each and every member of society, focusing on ideas that would help Lithuania to become a modern, energetic country, embracing differences, and with a strong sense of national identity.”³⁰

Romania goes one step further, linking the population’s cultural activities with citizenship and, ultimately, democracy. The publication of the 2022 survey is entitled “*Cultural Participation and Democratic Perspectives*,” with chapters on the “effects of participation in cultural activities on the quality of life and social well-being” but also on “participation in cultural activities as one of the explanatory factors of democratic citizenship.” According to the study, the results show “that cultural consumption practices are a stimulating factor for democratic citizenship,” notably through the direct relationship between cultural participation and the “capacity to accumulate social capital through civic engagement” as well as the development of “values of openness to others, tolerance and social mobilization.” The main objectives of Romanian cultural policy include not only cultural democratization, reaffirmed here, and the encouragement of cultural tourism, but also “the desire to preserve the values of the Romanian identity and the national minorities.”³¹

taastumist-koroonaajast) (both last accessed May 31, 2025).

³⁰ Lithuanian Council for Culture, *Participation in Culture and Satisfaction with Cultural Services in Lithuania 2020; 2021*, 6, 39, accentuated by author (<https://www.ltk.lt/docs/kulturos-tyrimai/2021/06/Participation-in-culture-and-satisfaction-with-cultural-services-in-2020-Lithuania-Summary.pdf>) and Compendium, “Short profile” of Lithuania, 2024, 2 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_short/lithuania/Lithuania_short_012024.pdf) (both last accessed May 31, 2025).

³¹ National Institute for Cultural Research and Training, *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2022, 2023*, 9–10 (https://www.culturaldata.ro/wp-content/uploads/The_

Finally, Poland also makes this link between participation in culture and society: Participation in culture—understood here quite broadly “both as using the artistic offer prepared by artists, cultural entities, non-governmental organizations, made available by the mass media, and as one’s amateur creative activity,” hence with an opening to cultural democracy—is an essential element of social life and individual well-being of every human being. It is this social purpose that, without a doubt, explains the presence of activities, such as participation in parties, social gatherings, club events, attending an amusement park, or going to an arcade, a casino, as cultural activities, listed alongside more institutional outings. A section of the questionnaire on collective memory examines interest in history, knowledge of a person’s family history, and ways to celebrate Independence Day on November 11. An interesting question, the only one of its kind among the 15 questionnaires studied here, examines the features of a cultured person. The qualities suggested to respondents range from “going to the theatre, cinema” and “reading books, visiting the library” to aspects, such as “education,” “cleanliness and neat dress,” “ability to behave in any situation,” and even “tolerance for other beliefs, race, religion,” confirming a social and civic definition of culture. The qualities attributed to cultural participation are manifold, bordering on the creative economy: “research confirms that participation in culture has an impact on mood, sense of self-realization, subjective assessment of one’s health, as well as the development of creativity and innovation.”³²

In Switzerland, a country with four linguistic and cultural areas located in the center of Europe, the statistical results of the “big survey” on cultural practices are published in a way that is very close to the canons of cultural democratization.³³ The survey is then adopted by cultural policy players in the sense of the social integration paradigm, making it more complex. In the pluriannual “Messages on Culture” that have been defining

the direction of cultural policy at the national level in the country since 2012, culture is first of all presented, in 2012–2015, as an effective instrument of social integration and cohesion. Then, in 2016–2020, it also becomes an element of social peace: “strengthening involvement in cultural life should make it possible to calm social polarization and thus provide a decisive response to the challenges facing our multicultural society.” Finally, in 2021–2024, a dimension of identity is added, but including diversity, in a country where diversity is a constituent element: “those who participate in cultural life become aware of their cultural roots, develop their own cultural identity and thus contribute to Switzerland’s cultural diversity.” It should also be remembered that the Swiss survey on cultural practices is linked to the surveys on language and religion.³⁴

6.4. Creative economy as the call of the sea

Finally, in measuring cultural participation, some “big surveys”—a minority of two in our panel—subscribe to the creative economy paradigm. This paradigm tends to be used in cultural policies on the supply side, production, professionalization, or the status of artists. However, it can also become operational on the demand side, giving this term its full meaning. This is the case in Malta, albeit to a limited extent. According to the 2017 publication of the survey conducted in the wake of Valletta’s nomination shortly prior as European Cultural Capital 2018, the cultural and creative sector has become an issue in the country’s future: “when, late in 2015, Arts Council Malta launched its 5-year strategy for the cultural and creative sectors, it declared that its overall vision was to place the arts and creativity at the heart of Malta’s future.” While some of the key concepts of the creative economy (“cultural and creative sectors,” “creativity”) do not appear beyond the preface of this study otherwise devoted to the use of the internet for cultural purposes, reading and listening to music, attendance at institutions and events, and linguistic preferences (pointing toward social integration), this case is a rare example of a mainly discursive, even rhetorical, contextualization between a fairly classic survey and a rather recent and attractive paradigm.³⁵

Cultural_Consumption_Barometer_2022_full.pdf) and Compendium, “Short profile” of Romania, 2022, 3 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Romania_short-cultural-policy-profile.pdf) (both last accessed May 31, 2025).

³² Statistics Poland, *Participation in Culture in Poland in 2019*; 2020, 4, 27, 37, 79, 81, 82 (https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/en/defaultaktualnosci/3310/2/2/1/participation_in_culture_in_2019.pdf, last accessed May 31, 2025).

³³ Cf. Federal Statistical Office (FSO), page “Pratiques culturelles” (<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/culture-medias-societe-information-sport/culture/pratiques-culturelles.html>, last accessed May 31, 2025).

³⁴ Federal Office for Culture (FOC), *Message concernant l’encouragement de la culture* (“Message on culture”) for the period 2012–2015, 2782 (<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/fga/2011/455/fr>), 2016–2020, 485, 490 (<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/fga/2015/45/fr>) and 2021–2024, 3130 (<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/fga/2020/725/fr>) (all last accessed May 31, 2025).

³⁵ Arts Council Malta, *Cultural Participation. Survey 2016*; 2017, XI (<https://artscouncilmalta.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Cultural-Participation-Survey-2016.pdf>, last accessed May 31, 2025).

In the UK, we observe the most advanced and, in this extreme form, the most solitary reading of cultural participation through the creative economy grid, the cradle of which is the UK itself. However, the survey is by no means the most comprehensive, nor the most in-depth (Table 6). Soberly entitled the “Participation Survey,” its focus is broad: It measures the engagement of the population in the digital, culture, media, and sport sectors, sometimes also referred to, playing on the Ministry’s acronym, as the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and digital sectors. In addition to the Ministry’s multiple functions, its allegiance to the creative economy can be seen in the fact that engagement is systematically measured in both physical and digital terms, with an aggregate physical or digital total each time. Most countries consider digital practices to be at best a copy of, and at worst a threat to, immediate cultural practices, in line with the spirit of cultural democratization, which emphasized on confrontation with works (even if they are media-based: a film should preferably be seen in the cinema, etc.) and, more prosaically, on making the most of the costly stock of cultural facilities. The UK, however, puts these two channels on an equal footing, including for what is called here—another sign that is not misleading—the arts sector. This is a very wide sector, since it covers without further formality not only attendance at the theatre, live music or cinema, but also fashion shows, festivals or carnivals, as well as many private activities, such as reading and playing video games.³⁶ The aspects covered in the survey also go far beyond those contained in the surveys from other countries, including chapters on smart devices, 5G, digital or online training, data security, use of data, data sharing, and the management by individuals of methods of identification.

The UK survey also looks at participation in (or at least the awareness of) some of the biggest events and celebrations of the moment, such as the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, Her Majesty the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee (70th birthday), and UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK. Described as a major event, the latter, created after the referendum on Brexit by the Conservative government and after several name changes (the public reportedly nicknamed it the “Festival of Brexit”), is a pure “creative economy” event, since its aim is not only art and culture, but also to entertain and integrate the population, and

ultimately to encourage creativity and invest in regions of the UK that are usually disadvantaged in terms of cultural investment.³⁷ In line with this economic approach, cultural policy in the UK on cultural participation aims less at widening access or audiences from above or on the supply side than at stimulating greater arts access and attendance on the demand side. This is less in the sense of the cultural rights often invoked by countries, such as France, but rather by promoting an entitlement to benefit from opportunities to engage in or access culture and by empowering the vulnerable and economically deprived. Unsurprisingly, the programs or entities mobilized for this aim, “Find Your Talent, Cultural Education Challenge, Music Education Hubs, or Arts Marketing Association,” often have names reminiscent of economic semantics.³⁸

7. Conclusion

This article aimed to examine how cultural participation is measured across different countries and to observe whether national specificities underlie this syntagm that is seldom questioned. A close study of the 15 “big surveys” in Europe identified on this subject revealed sometimes considerable variations depending on their territorial location.

These differences are first and foremost observed in institutional terms. Born in the 1960s between cultural policies aimed at democratizing access to culture and the nascent sociology of art, surveys of cultural participation have gradually become autonomous, generally joining the ranks of official statistics. A significant number of these surveys are carried out by national statistical offices or mixed configurations of stakeholders. In a minority of countries, they are conducted from within the Ministry of Culture—particularly in France—and sometimes by public or, rarely, private institutes. The differences observed between surveys are then notable in terms of method. The sample size of the population surveyed ranges from 1 to 50 times, from just over 1,000 respondents in Romania to 50,000 in Italy, with most samples between 3,000 and

³⁶ It should be noted in passing that the most recently published figures show that, for the arts in 2022–2023, physical access is much higher (62% of the population) than digital access (27%), and that only 1% of people will have access only digitally, compared to (by subtraction) 36% exclusively physically (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-survey-2022-23-annual-publication/main-report-for-the-participation-survey-april-2022-to-march-2023>, last accessed May 31, 2025).

³⁷ Wikipedia, “Unboxed: Creativity in the UK” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unboxed:_Creativity_in_the_UK#cite_ref-2, last accessed June 18, 2025).

³⁸ Department for Culture, Media & Sport and Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, page “Main report for the Participation Survey (April 2022 to March 2023)” 20.07.2023/13.02.2025 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-survey-2022-23-annual-publication/main-report-for-the-participation-survey-april-2022-to-march-2023>) and Compendium, “Country profile – United Kingdom”, 2020, 79 (https://www.culturalpolicies.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf_full/united_kingdom/unitedkingdom_032020.pdf) (both last accessed May 31, 2025).

10,000 respondents. Survey frequency also varies widely, from quarterly in Denmark to every 10 years in French-speaking Belgium, although many surveys are carried out every 2–5 years. These two aspects seem directly correlated with the survey’s inclusion with a statistical office, a guarantee of regularity and solidity. Finally, there are also different ways of administering the questionnaire, with Eastern and Southern European countries preferring face-to-face questioning, while Central and Northern European countries favor online surveys.

We were then interested in the names of the “big surveys” and the range of activities covered. Behind the syntagm of cultural participation, which has now become internationally accepted and is used in around half of all cases, lie other national survey titles, referring either to cultural practices, a notion derived from the French-speaking tradition, or to cultural consumption, habits, or behaviors, implying different connotations in terms of the degree of routine or, on the contrary, agency of these activities. However, it is the variety of the practices covered that is striking. Cultural participation covers a wide range of national realities. Depending on the country, it oscillates sharply on a narrow-broad continuum for outdoor activities (from theatre to leisure, languages and aspects of citizenship) and on an old-new continuum for indoor or private practices, ranging from reading books, listening to music and practicing media to video games, ICT and even artificial intelligence.

While the big surveys enjoy relative autonomy³² as part of the official statistics field, the latter also depends on states’ need to govern by numbers.³³ To better understand all their implications, these national surveys need to be reinserted into the country’s cultural policy paradigm. These paradigms are multifaceted as they spread over the past half-century, in parallel with the growing need to legitimize public spending on culture.

A significant number of the surveys studied—six out of the 15—are part of the classic cultural democratization paradigm born in the 1960s. The “big survey” is intended to help widen access to institutional cultural offerings, particularly in France, which is home to the flagship survey of this paradigm, the “*Pratiques culturelles des Français*.” The step of incorporating cultural democracy, a paradigm that emerged in the 1970s and included amateur practices and wider cultural diversity, has only been explicitly taken by two countries, notably French-speaking Belgium, which has redesigned its questionnaire to better identify what makes culture for the majority who do not attend cultural institutions. The third paradigm, social integration, which appeared in the 1980s, inaugurates a certain instrumentalization of culture, while simultaneously following the concept’s broad,

anthropological meaning. Surveys from five countries are included here; almost all of them are from Eastern Europe, where the question of cultural participation is undoubtedly posed in different terms. Here, the “big surveys” focus on cultural participation as a factor of cohesion, citizenship, democracy, and national identity. Finally, the most recent paradigm, which emerged in the 1990s, re-reads culture in terms of the creative economy. This model, which pays more attention to the market, is mainly found in the UK, the cradle of this Anglo-Saxon paradigm. Here, the participation survey encompasses the entire population’s engagement in the digital, culture, media, and sport sectors, equating physical and digital participation, and also covering major national festivals that combine creativity, entertainment, innovation, and marketing.

Ultimately, it is only by reinserting them into the symbolic territory of cultural policy paradigms and, more generally, into a geopolitics of cultural statistics whose contours could only be sketched out here, that the “big surveys” and the cultural participation they measure take on their full meaning. Moreover, analysis of the “big surveys” in their national territories opens up a number of fundamental questions.

The first question concerns the relevance and sustainability of this subject. The inventory of the 41 European countries initially covered by the study revealed the many ways, sometimes subtle or indirect, in which most countries quantify cultural participation: By using available administrative data, such as the number of admissions to cultural institutions, by including a few questions in national surveys on other subjects, by taking advantage of international surveys containing a restricted module on this theme, or even by combining several of these sources. In this light, we might question whether these “big surveys” on cultural participation are an endangered species, destined to be replaced by smaller, targeted, and agile forms of investigation. However, the very thematic focus of these “big surveys” and the possibility of deepening them as required, as well as the ease of repeating them identically to obtain a reliable picture of the evolution of practices, seem to justify their persistence. Their longevity also confirms this, as some have been in existence for over half a century, as in Denmark (1964) and France (1973).

Another question concerns the relationship between the national and international levels. In the age of globalization, the persistence of these “big surveys” confined to a single country may be questionable, suggesting that an international approach—such as the European Culture Eurobarometer, although the latest of which dates from 2017—could, or even should, replace them. These supranational surveys, carried out according to the same

standard methodology in all European countries, enable easy international comparison for practices constituting the lowest common denominator, but that is their only usefulness. They are both too cumbersome and too superficial a tool for countries wishing to investigate the practices of their population in depth, in line with their cultural definitions, methodological preferences, survey traditions, and cultural policy objectives. Nevertheless, even if limited in scope, a regular European survey on culture would make sense, if only because there are also cultural policy recommendations at the EU level.³⁴

By definition, national “big surveys” are diverse, a feature that reflects their richness rather than posing a problem, as they focus on a single country and are mainly intended for internal use. They are useful for researchers, as we have seen, as well as the media, the interested public, and governments. This includes periods of political change: Potentially covering both cultural offerings, including major legitimate institutions, and more popular cultural forms and leisure activities, as well as broader aspects, such as citizenship, national values, and identity, these “big surveys” could also change, either in their use or in the questions themselves, during times of growing politicization of cultural policy. The recent increased polarization of the political landscape in several European countries will be an interesting test case in this regard. These “big surveys” serve and reinforce cultural policies and, ultimately, national governments, aspects that could not be explored in depth in this paper, but which could be the subject of subsequent studies.

A final question concerns the possible epistemological limits of these “big surveys.” After all, what about emerging, marginal cultures, or those that are too small or short-lived to be detected by these surveys, which are by definition conducted on a large scale? And what about the quantitative perspective itself: Should it alone be employed to describe a subject as complex as the cultural activities and engagements of different population groups? One answer lies in the very moment of creating these surveys in France in the 1960s. Alongside the “big survey” of French cultural practices, the public authorities commissioned another survey in parallel. Entrusted to Michel de Certeau, this one was on a completely different level, ethnographic so to speak, in line with the emerging cultural studies. It aimed to identify, from below, the actual and varied, sometimes diverted or even subversive uses that individuals make of a variation of cultural objects. De Certeau’s³⁵ research in the 1970s revealed the cunning consumption that creeps in anywhere, and popular reception as a welcome poaching of cultural works and institutions.

This original two-tiered approach thus appears to be a call to complete the “big surveys,” useful for describing

general trends and statistical correlations, with qualitative “small surveys” close to the users. Last but not least, they are needed to complement, but also to contradict, and ultimately, drive forward the “big surveys,” so that they can take full measure of the complex processes at work when it comes to cultural participation.

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Appendix

Looking for “big surveys” on cultural participation: national sites and documents consulted

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Notes: ^aEuropean Union countries (27); ^bcandidates countries (10); ^cEuropean Free Trade Association countries (4); *Countries with a “big survey” on cultural participation. All websites last accessed in May 2025.