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Understanding the link among cultural participation, resilience, and well-being. A systematic literature review.

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Abstract

The scientific community is increasingly aware of cultural participation's role in enhancing the well-being of individuals and communities. Our paper aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this role through a systematic literature review that follows the PRISMA approach and sets future research and policy development directions.

Keywords: *cultural participation; cultural engagement; well-being; subjective well-being; resilience*

Aim of the paper. *The prosperity of a community can be characterised as a collective advantage for all its members, indicating the attainment of sufficient economic progress and the consequent favourable perception of individuals regarding their rightful position within society, exemplified by their quality of life (Ivković et al., 2014). The concept of well-being (Ryff et al., 2021) is considered a multifaceted (D'Agostino et al., 2019) and multidisciplinary concept which embraces several disciplines, from philosophy to psychology, economics, healthcare, and education (Burr and Floridi, 2020; Das et al., 2020). It is a complex concept which involves "cognitive and emotional evaluations, driven by objective as well as subjective factors" (Addis and Rurale, 2024, pag. 3). Indeed, the existing body of literature identifies two dimensions of well-being: objective well-being (OECD, 2013) which can be seen as an outcome and a reflection of tangible living conditions, and subjective well-being (Diener, 1984;2018; Kapteyn et al., 2015) generally identified as the perception of individuals on their living conditions (Alatartseva and Barysheva, 2015). Moreover, the psychology literature distinguished between two main approaches to well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic (Ryff et al., 2021; Waterman 1993). The hedonic approach is connected to pleasant and unpleasant experiences in life, and its components are represented by life satisfaction and positive and negative effects. On the other hand, the eudaimonic approach (Ryff & Singer, 2008) includes different dimensions such as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, and personal growth which are related to the "different challenges that individuals encounter as they strive to function positively" (Ryff et al., 2021, pag. 97).*

Today, scholars have increased their interest in the role of art and cultural participation in individuals' well-being as they can be crucial for enhancing it (Fancourt and Finn, 2019; An et al., 2022). Cultural participation can be identified as a comprehensive term which has constantly broadened its scope to incorporate an evolving range of activities, driven by shifts in social and cultural dynamics (Murray, 2006). It can be seen as the act of engaging in various cultural activities (Stevenson et al., 2017) and experiences and it acknowledges the audience as an engaged conversational partner, to be consulted or included in the process of planning and crafting the cultural offerings (OECD, 2022). It can be expressed with active or passive involvement (Passaretti et al., 2023). Through active involvement, individuals directly contribute to creating the cultural experience itself, while the passive form concerns the enjoyment of experiences and content crafted by others (Grossi et al., 2011). However, the lack of a wider and more comprehensive definition obstacles the policymakers in promoting new active forms of cultural participation that can have a significant social and economic impact (Sacco et al. 2018). Several studies underline the positive impact of cultural participation on individuals' overall well-being and subjective well-being in particular (Reyes-Martínez et al., 2021;2023; Blessi et al., 2016). Indeed, although culture might not explicitly dictate life expectancy or physical well-being, its influence on individuals' well-being is significant. It can enhance resilience (Wagnild, 2009) and contribute to developing lively and thriving communities (Grossi et al., 2011). Engaging in cultural activities encompasses the diverse methods and expressions through which individuals can avail themselves of cultural artefacts and encounters (OECD, 2022).

Through a systematic examination of existing literature, our paper strives to offer a more thorough comprehension of cultural participation's impact (especially about active involvement) on individuals' well-being by answering the following research question: What is the role of cultural participation in individuals' well-being?

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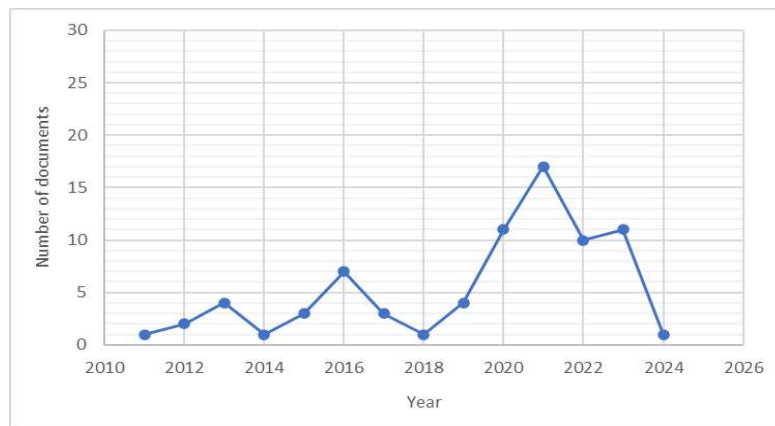
Methodology. According to Moher et al. (2015;2009), we developed a systematic literature analysis by adopting the PRISMA approach, which follows four main steps: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Such an approach proves beneficial for examining, summarising, and conceptualising pivotal themes and emerging topics, encompassing their implications for future research. First, we developed the research by adopting the Scopus search engine, from which we collected the articles. Two sets of keywords related to “cultural experiences” and “well-being” were selected and combined to conduct the research. The first set of keywords included terms such as “cultural experiences”, “cultural consumption”, “cultural engagement”, and “cultural participation” as they were related to the aspect of cultural experiences consumption. The second set of keywords was based on individuals’ well-being under cultural consumption, and it included terms such as “well-being”, “eudaimonia”, “hedonic”, and “quality of life”, Refining and combining the keywords in the two blocks allowed us to identify 281 studies.

In the second step, according to the screening criteria, we collected articles written in English that had already been published. We considered articles published in social science, business management, and psychology between 2010 and 2024 (Figure 1). The choice of including articles in the psychology field of research is related to the multi-disciplinarity of the research on well-being. Accordingly, we identified and selected 113 documents.

The third step included analysing the abstracts to ensure that only those strictly related to the topic of cultural consumption and well-being were considered. Therefore, 29 articles were excluded as irrelevant, and 84 articles remained for the literature review. Then, each author independently analysed the sample of 84 articles to ensure their eligibility according to the study’s goals. Through the full-text analysis, 8 papers were excluded as irrelevant.

In the fourth and final step, we validate each article according to the study’s goals, identify the leading research categories and trends and formulate recommendations for future studies (Bretas & Alon, 2021).

Figure 1 - Time span of articles distribution



Source: author’s elaboration on Scopus data

Findings. In this section, the authors present the descriptive analysis of the selected papers. A dedicated analysis of the 76 full articles identified was developed to ensure that only the articles related to well-being and cultural participation were included. All of them were pertinent to be examined to synthesise the results identified, presenting the interpretations associated with the paper’s subject matter. More in detail, as clearly visible in Figure 1, the majority of the scrutinised articles were published between 2020 and 2023, underlining a pick in publications in 2021, signifying an increasing interest in the topic of well-being in connection with cultural participation and experiences.

Following the Scopus database classifications, the articles were reconducted to subject areas, as shown in Table 1. The most populated categories are related to studies in social science and psychology. However, due to the multidisciplinary nature of the topic under study, several articles were conducted under the category “others,” which outlines the fragmentation of the literature and the different perspectives adopted in studying the phenomenon.

Table 1 - Distribution of the paper across areas

Type of Journal	Number of articles	%
Social science	23	30,26%
Psychology	20	26,32%
Arts and Humanities	7	9,21%
Sustainability	6	7,89%
Business, management	5	6,58%
Economics	4	5,26%
Urban Studies	3	3,95%
Others	8	10,53%
Total	76	100,00%

Source: Authors’ elaboration

The articles analysed were categorised based on their typology (theoretical or empirical) and according to the methodological approach adopted, as indicated in Table 2. Most of the articles identified conducted quantitative empirical analyses, followed by qualitative empirical and mixed-methods articles. The lack of literature review studies on the topic makes our contribution coherent and useful.

Table 2 - Distribution of the paper across research methodologies

Type of paper	Method	Number of articles	%
Theoretical	Literature review	2	2,63%
	Conceptual paper	1	1,32%
Empirical	Quantitative	44	57,89%
	Qualitative	18	23,68%
	Mixed Method	11	14,47%
TOTAL		76	100,00%

Source: Authors' elaboration

Thematic analysis. The first general evidence from the thematic analysis conducted on the selected articles confirms that participation and consumption of cultural activities and cultural engagement contribute to human/individuals' well-being in different forms, as underlined in past studies. Indeed, participation in cultural activities and frequenting cultural sites (e.g., museums, galleries, theatres, sports events, etc.) represent important elements for enhancing well-being in terms of mental illness, self-realisation and life satisfaction not only in young generations but also in older adults (Crociana et al., 2014; Tymoszyk et al., 2019).

The second important piece of evidence concerns the role of cultural participation and access to art during the pandemic. Indeed, a group of studies highlight how online engagement that was possible due to the adoption of technologies by cultural institutes and the promotion of online activities, events, etc., contributed to the enhancement of the well-being of individuals and continued producing benefits also during the period of transition back to in-person engagement (Mak et al., 2021; Anisimovich et al., 2022). Indeed, adopting technologies to bring cultural contribution to the virtual environment stimulated curiosity and transformed the interaction between arts and cultural institutes and their public underlining. Online cultural engagement in several forms has represented a fundamental tool to contrast the state of anxiety and loneliness and enhance individuals' well-being during the pandemic lowering the fear related to its negative impact (Trupp et al., 2022; Gotthardt et al., 2023). Virtual access to culture and arts stimulated people to engage online and benefit from the positive impact on their mental health and well-being deriving from that experience. The positive effects also lasted after the pandemic, especially for individuals with limited access to onsite events or activities. Indeed, virtual access favoured connectivity with other communities by enriching the in-persons' experience and encouraging a deeper connection in local culture (Caiola et al., 2023) but also demonstrating the crucial role of cultural activities and participation in arts for processing trauma (Anisimovich et al., 2022). These studies underline that if online engagement is well supported by interesting and meaningful content, it "inspires cognitive-emotional states in the viewer" (Trupp et al., 2022). In particular, the strongest predictors of engagement in arts during the pandemic are identified in age, education attainment, social support and emotion-focused or supportive coping styles and show evidence of the fact that engaging in arts activities represented for most individuals a strategy to cope with the negative emotions induced by the pandemic and to improve self-development and resilience increasing their well-being (Mak et al., 2021; Chapple et al., 2023).

The third important piece of evidence emerging from the analysis of the literature concerns the fact that having access to arts and culture contributes to building social cohesion, identity, a sense of belonging and increasing well-being (Piscitelli, 2020). Accordingly, the importance of developing adequate policies to support subjective well-being by leveraging the promotion of cultural activities is highlighted. Indeed, facilitating access to arts and supporting engagement in art and culture might enhance the subjective well-being of individuals and communities (Anisimovich et al., 2022). Moreover, culture-based public health programs and policies and the adoption of innovative strategies in designing welfare policies are described as potential fundamental tools for enhancing well-being (Crociana et al., 2014; Grossi et al., 2019). Policy development should promote engagement in arts and culture consumption at different stages of individual lives. Indeed, when engagement in art and cultural consumption begins very early in life, it is more likely to continue (Espinosa et al., 2021). However, participating in such activities correlates with increased levels of education, improved socioeconomic status, and a reduced incidence of health issues (Tymoszyk et al., 2019). Therefore, investments in cultural education and effective policies to reduce inequalities in accessing cultural activities and art consumption might foster engagement and positively impact individuals' well-being.

Research Limits. The limitations of our paper mainly relate to the criteria adopted in the selection step. Indeed, by circumscribing to specific study areas, focusing only on articles written in English, and excluding sources of evidence such as conference papers, book chapters, etc., we might not have considered other potentially relevant sources of evidence. In addition, at this stage, this paper shows some of the evidence from the analysis of the articles since the process of analysis is still under development. Moreover, this explorative study considers cultural activities in general.

We need to analyse and focus on different cultural activities and how they differently impact subjective well-being and other important outcomes.

Theoretical and practical Implications. Our paper contributes to the analysis of the link between cultural participation, resilience, and well-being. The multidisciplinary nature of the studies on well-being shed light on the necessity of better understanding the contribution derived from various fields of research and the importance of cultural participation. Therefore, the summarisation of the current literature concerning the role played by culture in increasing individuals' well-being can represent a point of departure for scholars to identify future research insights and advance new contributions. Moreover, by clarifying the role of participation in cultural activities and art in increasing individuals' well-being, it might be possible to suggest guidelines for policymakers and organisations involved in the sector. From a practical point of view, we suggest that participation in cultural events should be fuelled both online and in-person, according to the specific needs of the target markets. Given the potential positive benefits of cultural participation both for new generations as well as older people, it is important to enable virtual and traditional opportunities for target users to benefit from culture and art.

Originality/value. Few literature reviews have been conducted on the relationship between well-being, resilience and cultural participation. This Systematic Literature Review offers a broad view of those studies focusing on the impact of cultural participation on individual well-being. By considering the multidisciplinary nature of well-being, we adopted a holistic approach that considers studies in several disciplines, such as management, psychology, and social sciences. This approach allows us to have a cross-disciplinary overview of the phenomenon, collecting different elements that can be insightful to set up guidelines for policymakers and companies that work in the cultural sector aiming at improving their social impact on society and increasing individuals' and communities' well-being and resilience.

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