

Titel/Title: Cultural practices, age and the life course

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Veröffentlichungsversion/Published version: Postprint

Publikationsform/Type of publication: Artikel/Aufsatz

Empfohlene Zitierung/Recommended citation:

Simone Scherger (2009) Cultural practices, age and the life course, *Cultural Trends*, 18:1, 23-45, DOI: 10.1080/09548960802651203

Verfügbar unter/Available at:

(wenn vorhanden, bitte den DOI angeben/please provide the DOI if available)

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09548960802651203>

Zusätzliche Informationen/Additional information:

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Cultural practices, age and the life course

Simone Scherger*

Social science studies of cultural activity commonly focus on class, gender and ethnicity and often treat age as an unimportant background variable. This article demonstrates the central importance of age as a factor affecting cultural consumption, using data from the “Taking Part” Survey of England. As well as seeking to describe the main aspects of age differentiation, the article unpacks what is often called, in a simplified way, “age effects”. The socio-historical dynamics leading to the existence of age effects are examined, first theoretically, and second, through some empirical examples (doing sport, playing a musical instrument/singing, cinema, visiting exhibitions or collections of art/photography/sculpture, doing textile crafts). A number of influences are shown to account for the importance of age: health, the individual life course, the different socio-economic background of cohorts and other, more complex cohort effects. Possible interpretations of these cohort effects on cultural practices are discussed at the end of the article.

Keywords: cultural practices; cultural participation; age; life course; cohorts; generation

Introduction

On the face of it, cultural practices seem closely bound up with age – this can easily be seen when comparing the age profiles of audiences at cinema film showings and at classical music concerts. However, most social science studies of cultural activity focus on class, gender and ethnicity and at best treat age as a background variable that is rarely questioned further. This article demonstrates the central importance of age as a factor affecting cultural consumption, using one of the most comprehensive surveys of its kind ever carried out in the UK. As well as seeking to describe the main aspects of age differentiation, I will unpack what is often called, in a simplified way, “age effects”. This article examines the socio-historical dynamics leading to the existence of age effects, first theoretically, and second, by drawing on particular empirical examples. The aim of these examples is to disentangle some of the causes that constitute age effects, such as health, socio-economic position and the life course.

Part 1 gives an overview of the inter-relation between social inequality and cultural practice and discusses some of the age-related shortcomings of many recent descriptions of cultural change. Part 2 outlines the connection between age and ageing, the individual life course and social change, and how far it poses a challenge to research that aims at discerning period, cohort, and life course effects. In Part 3, some previous empirical evidence on cultural practice, age, cohorts and the life course is presented. The basis of our analysis, the “Taking Part” Survey, and the methods used are briefly described in Part 4. After providing a descriptive overview of the (← p. 23) age distributions of a larger number of cultural practices (Part 5), multivariate analyses of a selection of activities (doing sport, playing a musical instrument/singing, cinema, visiting exhibitions or collections of art/photography/sculpture, doing textile crafts) are discussed (Part 6). Part 7 stresses the plausibility of cohort effects by using some information on non-participation contained in the “Taking Part” data. The article closes with a summary and conclusions which pick up some of the arguments used in discussions around recent changes in cultural participation and raise possible policy implications.

Part 1: Cultural practices and social inequality

Class rather than age has always been the main focus of research dealing with cultural practice. Cultural participation and lifestyle in almost every form is strongly influenced (but not determined) by one's economic, social and cultural resources, as classically shown by Bourdieu (1979). Having grown up with parents of a higher socio-economic class, having enjoyed a higher educational qualification, working in higher occupational classes, being wealthy and having friends from better backgrounds all have a positive effect on the extent of one's cultural participation (for a very recent overview see Bennett et al., 2008; Bennett & Silva, 2006a). One important feature in Bourdieu's and many other accounts of cultural practices is the distinction between high and popular cultures, which parallels the distinction of the classes participating in the different forms of culture, at least in France in the late 1960s.

The extent to which there is an inherent hierarchy between high and popular culture itself may be questioned (Bennett & Silva, 2006b, p. 90) – there are no definitive criteria for discerning the different levels of such a hierarchy and the position of particular activities in the hierarchy of appreciation can be different depending on social context and time. It is certainly useful to widen one's gaze and to also look at more "popular" cultural forms because important cultural shifts can only be properly understood with regard to a wider array of cultural forms. In this way simplifying accounts of an overall decline in cultural participation can be avoided.

In the contemporary British context, important social boundaries are not only or even mainly to be found between highbrow and more popular cultural forms of participation, but more importantly between participation and non-participation. This connects to the debate on omnivore cultural orientations where the argument is that higher classes tend to indulge in many different forms of cultural practice, whereas those of the lowest socio-economic background concentrate on a few popular forms or are hardly active at all, apart from watching TV (Bennett & Silva, 2006a, 2006b). Although details are contentious, patterns of structured omnivorousness are empirically well proven for the UK and other countries (Gayo-Cal, Savage & Warde, 2006). Age plays an important role in this discussion insofar as omnivore cultural orientations are more prevalent in the younger population and the emergence of these patterns is in part due to cohort replacement, at least in the US (Peterson & Kern, 1996). The importance of age in omnivore cultural orientations is underlined by some empirical studies (Vander Stichele & Laermans, 2006; van Eijck & Knulst, 2005), but others neglect this aspect.¹

These changes in cultural practice can be contextualized in terms of the development of a postmodern consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991; Harvey, 1989; Lash & Urry, 1987, p. 285) in which everyday lifestyles become commodified and manifold, the experience of time and space change and important shifts in class structures take place, in particular the expansion and differentiation of the middle classes (Savage, Barlow, Dickens, & Fielding, 1992). Though different in their details and in their assessment of what is driving the changes, all these approaches have in common a focus on class-related patterns, neglecting to address the dimension of age, in anything other than a cursory way. This is not to say that age does not figure at all or that the potential role of generational change is not mentioned. Featherstone (1991, pp. 34, 92), for (← p. 24) example, alludes to the role of the 1960s generation in popularizing a certain set of values and the aestheticization of everyday life, and to the possibility of cohort effects based on socialization. Even Bourdieu (1979, pp. 120, 337, 530,

555, for instance) includes the idea of cohort replacement and the different educational backgrounds of age groups in his theoretical discussion, but his empirical analyses, remarkably, treat age as a “secondary” variable (p. 116).

So, the shortcoming of these and other approaches is that they do not include age systematically, not as a substitute, but as an addition to the ubiquitous determinant of class, the interaction of both being a key to understanding social change. Moreover, age is often interpreted in a non-theorized way, without considering at least some of the more complicated explanations that might account for its impact (see, for example, Hendon, 1989; Keaney & Oskala, 2007; Roberts, 2004). A more elaborate and in-depth look at age in its influence on cultural practices can therefore provide a new perspective on the most influential accounts of social change (Harvey, 1989; Lash & Urry, 1987, p. 285; to a smaller extent Featherstone, 1991), and can show the micro basis of these macro changes. Individuals born at different times and being of various ages during different historical moments form cohorts (in a purely analytical sense), and socio-cultural change as it is described here and elsewhere would not be possible without the constant replacement of older cohorts by younger ones. Therefore it is important to discuss observed changes at the level of individuals forming cohorts (and possibly generations). This also fits Featherstone’s call for the “consideration of the production of lifestyle tastes within a structured social space in which various groups, classes and class fractions struggle and compete to impose their own particular tastes as the legitimate tastes” (1991, p. 87). Age groups (cohorts, generations) are part of these struggles that do not have to take place consciously. Thus, a closer inspection of age can be seen as completion of Bourdieu’s (1979) framework rather than a contradiction to it.

The relation between cultural practice and social inequality can change, but of course the elements of this relation can change, too, i.e., the inventory of cultural practices on the one hand and the structure of social inequality on the other. Thus, the changing significance of different cultural practices is also connected to the constantly changing distribution of cultural, social and economic resources. Shifts in the composition of a population with respect to their resources, as the increasing inter-generational upward mobility in the cohorts grown up after the Second World War until the 1980s (for more detail see Goldthorpe, 1987, 2004; Heath & Payne, 2000; Noble, 2000), can change the importance of particular cultural practices. At the same time there was a general increase in affluence across all cohorts, a period effect, particularly connected to the economic boom of the 1960s.

Changes in the “inventory” of cultural practices do not only include the emergence of new practices, but also other changes on the “supply” side such as the extension of certain cultural offerings or the differentiation, restriction or expansion of addressed audiences. Neither supply nor participants of cultural practice determine the course of changes; they affect each other reciprocally and are at the same time influenced by a whole set of other circumstances.

Part 2: Age, individual and social time

Age denominates individual “movement” through time. Individual age itself is a multi-dimensional construct, including the physical, psychological and the social processes of individual ageing,² with age relating to specific points in these processes. Chronological age that is given in years is the attempt to summarize these processes in a socially manageable way (Kohli, 1986; Schmeiser, 2006). Chronological age measured in calendar years is an

historically recent construct whose omnipresent use in modern societies is the result of a long spread and institutionalization.³ Age has become a major dimension of social integration and social division. (← p. 25)

The role of age as an important dimension of social integration is discussed under the heading of the life course. One of the key features of the modern life course is age as a *continuously changing* characteristic of individuals. Kohli (1986) calls this the “temporalization” of the life course – the life course and related institutions (for example the education system, labour market and welfare system) deal with the problem of the individual passing through different ages. Sometimes, particular cultural practices can be linked to certain transitions and phases in the life course thus constituted, but mostly, cultural practices are indirectly connected to the different stages. Certain ages may be closely connected to certain life course stages and transitions, but they are not the same. By the age of 30 many women have their first child, but being 30 is not identical to being a parent. Chronological age, taken as an indicator of ageing, and the socially constructed life course must be distinguished.

However, age and the life course are not only connected to individual, but also to social change. Individual life courses are at the same time a consequence of and a motor of social change – social change unfolds via individual life courses. Changed or new cultural practices do not only spread across different social groups, starting in small precursor (“*avant garde*”) groups and diffusing in certain patterns further across social classes, though not necessarily affecting everyone. New practices also spread *within cohorts* – they are taken up by more and more people during their lives – and *across cohorts*, younger cohorts often being more susceptible to new practices. This latter idea of social change through cohort replacement competes with the former that stresses the impact of period effects affecting all cohorts more or less uniformly at the same time (Alwin & McCammon, 2003). Such period effects can be caused by economic crises, wars or less salient characteristics of the socio-historic context. As with ageing effects, period effects emphasize the individual’s ability to change during one’s life, whereas the focus of cohort replacement is on individual stability (p. 29). The validity of cohort and period effects depends on which aspect of social change is investigated (for empirical examples, see Alwin & McCammon, 2003); in most cases elements of both, cohort replacement and period effects, will operate at the same time. Cohort replacement will work mostly unconsciously, i.e., without the different cohorts being aware of their differences to other cohorts. Many age differences for instance in cultural practice may be (in part or completely) traced back to the different socio-economic background of the age groups, but in the view of most cultural participants, this still remains above all an age difference. Under special circumstances, cohort replacement and the take-up of new cultural practices by younger cohorts lead to the formation of generations, i.e., self-conscious groups of persons who have been socialized by the same events at about the same time in their lives and who therefore share a common worldview (Mannheim, 1928/1997).⁴ The life course regime itself can change and thus affect cultural practices. The increase in healthy life expectancy, changes in important employment transitions like the first job or retirement, can add to the explanation of age differences in cultural practices.

Cohort and generational effects on the age patterns of cultural practices must carefully be distinguished from period effects, from the impacts of individual (physical, psychological, social) ageing and other processes connected to the latter. Often it is difficult to establish what exactly is inherent to ageing processes and what is “just” connected to ageing but does not belong to ageing processes *per se* – ultimately, this distinction is a matter of definition. For

example, old age is connected to increased susceptibility to many diseases that in principle also afflict younger persons. Knowing the exact physical condition of a person reduces age effects to a small remainder (Evans, 2003, p. 19). Because of the continuing increase in healthy life expectancy, the character of old age, however, changed considerably in the last century. This affects the cultural participation of older people in a significant way.

Individual lives and social change unfold in the same temporal dimension and can therefore not be discriminated without difficulties. With cross-sectional data it is, for instance, a challenging (← p. 26) task to decide if the higher religious participation of older people is a result of their growing up in times when religious participation was more common and self-evident, or a result of their individual ageing, implying that they have religiously participated less in their youth (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 32). Another explanation of such patterns can be selection effects (Evans, 2003) – those surviving are more religious than others, possibly less convincing in this example.

It should be noted that since this empirical analysis only deals with cross-sectional data these problems cannot be solved here (for some statistical solutions see Glenn, 2003). Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind the complexity of the – at first glance simple – dimension “age”. In the following, nonetheless, age effects will be unpacked insofar as the differences between age groups will be separated from the effects of gender and health, of education, class and income, and from the effects of different occupational and familial life course stages. Remaining age effects could be an indicator of cohort or generational differences.

Part 3: Age and socio-cultural participation – empirical evidence so far

Although it is included as a basic dimension in almost all empirical explorations of participation the category age is rarely scrutinized in more depth, not least because longitudinal data on the subject are mostly missing. This having been said, the individual position in the life course, for instance connected to education and employment, to the family situation or to getting older in general, has often been demonstrated to have an impact on cultural participation, although it is not very strong.

Full-time employment (in contrast to part-time employment, being a student or retired) and the existence of (small) children seem to constrain time for many activities (Sturgis & Jackson, 2003; van Eijck & Knulst, 2005, p. 521), except those connected to the children, whereas the transition into the “empty-nest” phase can go together with increased activities (Andreasen, 1991). Only rarely, a positive effect of singlehood in comparison to being married or cohabiting can be found (Sturgis & Jackson, 2003; van Eijck & Knulst, 2005, p. 521) possibly because an interaction with gender is very plausible. The evidence for the effects of being long-term ill or unemployed on cultural participation is contradictory and depends very much on the practice looked at. The transition into retirement is mostly characterized by a continuity of cultural practices, good health allowing. Rarely are new activities taken up, and only some, such as activities done at home and walks, are intensified (Bickel et al., 2005, p. 148; see also Attias-Donfut, 1986; Cutler & Hendricks, 1990; Long, 1987). In general and independently from retirement, activities outside the home and those requiring physical activity decrease with age, in contrast to activities carried out at home and/or of moderate physical intensity. Solitary activities even tend to become more important with age (Cutler & Hendricks, 1990, p. 173; also Keany & Oskala, 2007; Stebbins, 2000, p.

15). In the Swiss study by Bickel, Lalive d'Épinay and Vollenwyder (2005), old age, retirement and related cohort effects take centre stage. Besides some effects of retirement, the authors find a cultural change with regard to leisure and a “democratization” of leisure cultures. Some studies use repeated cross-sectional evidence to show changes in cultural participation patterns over time, thus applying a “quasi-longitudinal” approach. The findings concerning age are often discussed explicitly in terms of cohort differences (as for example by Bille, 2008; Knulst & Kraaykamp, 1998; Kolb, 2001; Vander Stichele & Laermans, 2006; van Eijck & Knulst, 2005); others (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Fisher & Preece, 2003; van Eijck & Bargemann, 2004) describe possible explanations of changes that can be understood in terms of cohort effects, despite not being explicitly discussed as such. One common finding in various countries (The Netherlands, Canada, the US) is the declining interest in highbrow cultural participation and also in some other fields such as reading. Even where participation in highbrow (← p. 27) activities is found to be stable, a trend of ageing audiences is observed (for instance Kolb, 2001), which exceeds the ageing of the respective population. All these empirical studies show clearly that even if the existence of cohort effects can be proved, this is not really an answer to the questions of when and how social change takes place. Rather it is a more exact version of the question, with the substantial mechanism of change still being uncertain. Possible reasons for the trends are discussed in more detail under “Summary, Discussion and Conclusions”.

Part 4: Data and methods

This article draws upon the data of the “Taking Part” Survey of England. This survey, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Arts Council of England and other cultural agencies, aims at giving comprehensive information on participation in arts activities (e.g., playing a musical instrument or painting), attendance in arts events (e.g., cinema or classical music concerts), in sports, heritage culture, museums, libraries, archives and in other fields. Additionally, the survey contains information on the socio-economic position of the respondent, his or her social origin, residential area and much more. The data have been collected in approximately 28,000 interviews in 2005 and 2006 (some questions are only asked to parts of the sample). They comprise a representative sample of the English population outside institutional accommodation from age 16 on (for more information and results see Aust & Vine, 2007; Williams, 2006). In all descriptive findings presented in the following, the data have been weighted to reduce the bias from non-random non-response. All case numbers are unweighted, as are the multivariate analyses. The “Taking Part” data concentrates on activities actually engaged in. For each event of cultural attendance, activity of cultural participation, sport etc., respondents have been asked whether they have carried it out in the last 12 months (“In the last 12 months, have you done any of these activities?” and then a list for the respective area is shown). If yes, the next question asks for the frequency and gives a choice of four or five categories as answers.⁵

This article concentrates on individual factors influencing one's cultural participation and disentangles these in their relation to age. This cannot be done comprehensively: broader and less highbrow activities are only covered by the question for free time activities (for instance DIY, gardening, going to pubs, puzzles and games, shopping, eating out). These data are first too general to be taken into account, and second they were only answered by a quarter of the sample.

Because of the cross-sectional nature of the data, the outlined interplay of different factors in age differences in cultural participation cannot be demonstrated in detail. Neither can longitudinal changes be observed directly. Instead, the significance of age, compared with other sociodemographic variables, will be emphasized here. This article focuses on the socio-economic composition of cohorts and on the individual life course, as captured by work status, partnership status and parenthood.

In a first overview the age distributions of a large number of different activities are described. All calculations are only based on the incidence of practices, i.e., whether someone has carried out the respective activity in the last 12 months or not (or, in the case of different kinds of sport, in the last four weeks). The frequencies of the activities are not included; analogue calculations using these frequencies would, in most cases, result in a similar picture. For the further analysis, five examples of cultural practices are selected: first, sport (including activities such as walking and cycling if they are not only for purposes of getting to places), second, playing a musical instrument (for own pleasure, in rehearsals or to an audience) or singing (in a rehearsal or to an audience),⁶ third, watching films at the cinema or another venue, fourth, visiting an exhibition or collection of art, photography or sculpture and fifth, doing textile crafts such as embroidery, crocheting or knitting. This selection of examples aims to cover activities as different as possible, in particular with regard to their relationship to age. Logistic regressions have been used to model (← p. 28) the complex relationship between cultural practice, age, gender, health, socio-economic position (education, occupational class, income) and some life course variables (labour status, children in household, partnership). The variables are included in a stepwise fashion in order to observe how far the influence of age changes or not through their inclusion. All models have been checked for multicollinearity. As the variable on subjective health, the socio-economic variables have been summarized. Income, a grouped variable, is used as a linear influence after checking its linearity.

Part 5: The importance of age for cultural participation

Age is one of the most important influences structuring cultural practices. Almost all activities addressed by the “Taking Part” data show a specific age pattern. Those that do not show such a pattern are activities that only a small minority of the respondents engages in – with an even bigger sample an age pattern might become clearer.

The following examples illustrate some typical age patterns, based upon the question of somebody having carried out the related activity in the last 12 months or not. The two most frequent age patterns relate to activities that are carried out with decreasing frequency across age groups and to those showing first an increasing, then a decreasing incidence. Figure 1 shows four examples of practices that are done most often by the youngest respondents and least often by the oldest ones: sports, playing a musical instrument, watching films at cinemas and going to music performances other than those of classical music. Still, the starting levels of these examples of activities are quite different: whereas a majority of respondents have done sport or some kind of recreational physical activity at least once in the last four weeks or have been to a cinema film in the last 12 months, only slightly above 10 per cent of all respondents play a musical instrument. The two most popular activities (sport, cinema) display a particularly strong age gradient.

Figure 2 shows some examples for the second frequent pattern – a reversed U-shape which is in most cases relatively flat and whose peaks are different according to activity: respondents aged 45 to 54 are the most frequent visitors to exhibitions and art galleries, among those aged 55 to 64

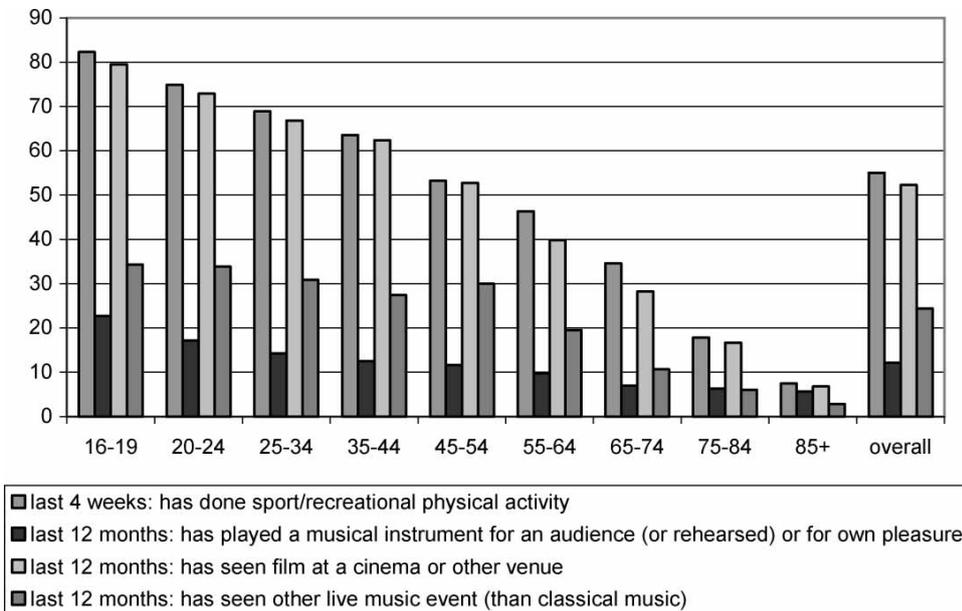


Figure 1. Examples of activities decreasing with age (weighted frequencies, unweighted $n = 28,096$). (← p. 29)

are those who read most for pleasure,⁷ visitors to classical music concerts and to heritage sites. The figure finally also includes one of the few activities that comes close to a pattern increasing with age: textile crafts. But even this one becomes a bit less frequent in the very oldest, which occurs in almost every practice observed.

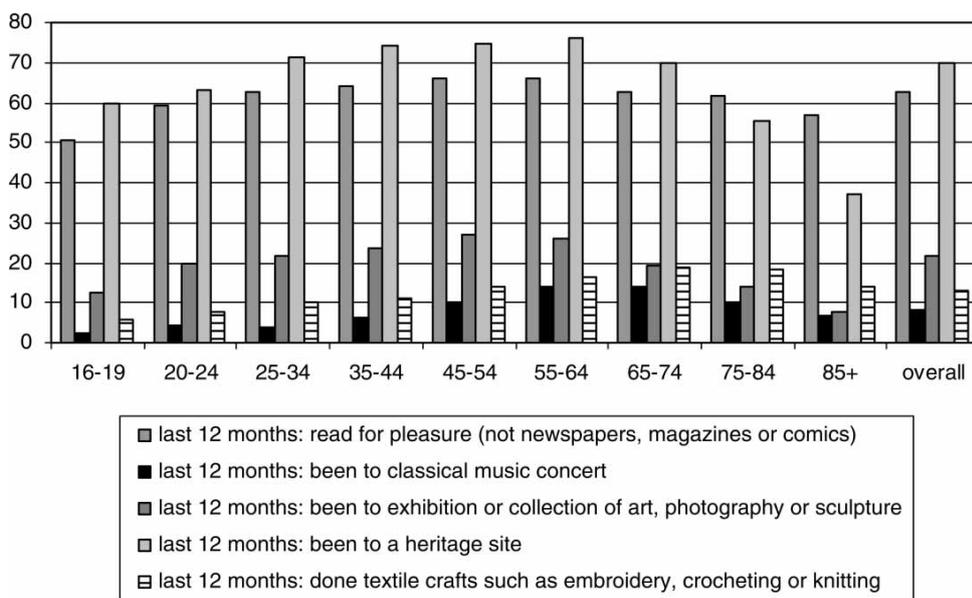


Figure 2. Examples of activities first increasing, then decreasing with age (weighted frequencies, unweighted $n = 28,096$).

All patterns different from those two most important ones only apply to a small number of activities reported in the survey. The activity that comes closest to being evenly distributed across different ages is watching TV. At least 80 per cent of respondents within each birth cohort report watching TV as a free-time activity. When it comes to actual watching – one question asks for the amount of time spent watching TV per day – the numbers are even bigger and the non-watchers form a disappearing minority of not more than 3.5 per cent within the early 20s, and less in all other age groups. However the category is too general insofar as, of course, the actual programmes watched vary a lot by age.⁸

A few other activities, in many cases those carried out by a small minority, are distributed across the age groups in a very unsystematic, changing way, as for example going to jazz concerts or cycling – but even these decrease in the very aged. Finally, a kind of (flat) U-shape could only be found once: the only practice that younger respondents and older ones have in common is watching soaps on TV. Table 1 summarizes these descriptive results without showing all activities included in the “Taking Part” Survey.

Differences and similarities between different cultural practices can be traced back to underlying dimensions, i.e., characteristics shaping the practice of these activities. Some of these dimensions have already been mentioned: for instance the (questionable) hierarchy of practices (highbrow vs. lowbrow), how far physical or mental health and well-being are required and whether special abilities are necessary to practice the activity. Furthermore it makes a difference whether a practice is carried out alone or must be carried out together with others, whether one has to leave one’s own home for it, whether something is done outdoors or indoors and what kinds of (material, temporal, social) organization and equipment are required. The dimension of organization and equipment implies many factors connected to the effort that is necessary to engage in a (**← p. 30**)

Table 1. Age patterns of different activities.

	Examples
Decreasing with age	<p><i>Free-time activities:</i> spend time with friends/family (but rather small decrease), listen to music, go to pubs/bars/clubs (peak in 20 – 24), sport/exercise, play a musical instrument, go to cinema, play computer games, Internet/emailing</p> <p><i>Last 12 months:</i> made films or videos as an artistic activity, film at cinema or other venue, rehearsed or performed in play/drama (with smaller peak in 55 – 64), painting, drawing, printmaking or sculpture, photography as an artistic activity (nearly evenly distributed until 55 – 64, then decreasing), other live music event, played a musical instrument to an audience (or rehearsed), played a musical instrument for your own pleasure, written any stories or plays, written any poetry, been to a library (only slight decrease)</p> <p><i>Last 4 weeks:</i> sport/recreational physical activity, most of the special kinds of sports asked for (for example swimming indoors, cycling (to get to places), tenpin bowling, any jogging or similar, football (outdoors))</p>
Inverted U-shape (first increasing, then decreasing)	<p><i>Free time activity:</i> days out or visits to places, eat out at restaurants, DIY, gardening (peak 65 – 74), arts and crafts (peak 65 – 74), visit museums/galleries (peak 55 – 64), theatre/music concerts (peak 55 – 64), opera/operetta (peak 55 – 64)</p> <p><i>Last 12 months:</i> visit museum or gallery, exhibition or collection of art, photography or sculpture, craft exhibition (no crafts market), bought any original works of art for yourself, classical music concert (peak 55 – 64, 65 – 74), ballet (peak 55 – 64), read for pleasure (not newspapers, magazines or comics) (but only slight decrease beginning with 65 – 74), bought a novel or book of stories, poetry or plays, been to event connected with books/writing, been to event including video or electronic art, been to a place of historic interest (peak 45 – 64), been to an archive centre (peak 55 – 64)</p>
Increasing with age	<p><i>Free-time activities:</i> read (with slight decrease in oldest), puzzles and games, attend/member of a society/club (but decrease in last age group), gamble</p> <p><i>Last 12 months:</i> textile crafts such as embroidery, crocheting or knitting (but decrease in last group)</p>
U-shape (first decreasing, then increasing)	<p><i>TV programmes:</i> soaps (lowest: 45 – 54)</p>
About evenly distributed over all age groups	<p><i>Free-time activity:</i> watch TV (slight increase in oldest), shopping (but decrease in oldest)</p>
Less systematic shapes	<p><i>Free-time activity:</i> academic study (under 1% in all age groups),</p> <p><i>Last 12 months:</i> jazz performance (peaks 20 – 24, 45 – 54), contemporary dance, sang (not karaoke) to an audience (or rehearsed) (peak 16 – 25, slight second peak at 45 – 54)</p> <p><i>Last 4 weeks:</i> any cycling (health, recreation, training) (two peaks, 16 – 19, 35 – 44), attended a sporting event (two peaks at 15 – 19, 35 – 44)</p>

certain activity. Concrete specifications of all these factors result in the particular opportunity structures of an activity that make it more or less easy to carry it out. And, of course, the relevance of the different characteristics can change over time.

Many of these dimensions are connected to one's age and position in the life course without being determined by them. The most striking example is the increasing incidence of physical illness and frailty with higher age. Whereas it is plausible that health accounts for much of the (← p. 31) age-related decline in later life, earlier in life other factors are likely to be more important. Another factor is household and living arrangements typical for different times in life – children usually live together with their parents, young adults often live alone, in a certain age many couples have children in their own household, and at very high ages the proportion of people living alone increases again. This influences one's cultural practices in a profound way.

The various characteristics of a practice and the influences discussed in the first part of this article always work together in shaping the typical distribution of an activity within the population and compared with other activities. Intertwined with the more concrete influences, there might be socialization influences that lead to younger people not engaging in an activity any more because they have not grown up with it (which is plausible for textile crafts). Similarly, older persons might not be interested in a practice that only emerged when they were already older (which would be convincing with respect to playing computer games). But these effects will only rarely appear in a pure form and might even be invisible because other factors work in an opposed direction. Most age patterns will be the result of a unique interplay of all these forces. For the further analysis, five examples of cultural practices are selected: sport, playing a musical instrument or singing, going to the cinema, visiting an art exhibition and doing textile crafts. This selection of examples aims to cover activities as different as possible. Whereas the three first activities are most important in the youngest age groups and least important in the oldest ones, visiting exhibitions or collections of art is a typical example of an inverse-U-shaped activity, and the textile crafts are more frequent in older respondents, with only a slight decline in the very oldest.

One fifth of the sample does not engage in any of these activities, a little less than 30 per cent only in one or two activities, and around 15 per cent in three. Only approximately 5 per cent carry out four or all five of the named practices. The average number of the activities carried out decreases linearly across age groups, starting with around two among those aged 16 – 19, and being less than one in the oldest age group (all descriptives are weighted).

The most widespread among these activities are watching films at the cinema or other venues and sport/physical activity. Among the respondents who only do one of these, sport is the most frequent one (45 per cent), followed by watching films at the cinema (about one third). Two thirds of persons who are active in two of these fields watch films at the cinema and do sport. Among those having participated in three of these activities, cinema, sport and visiting art exhibitions is the most frequent combination.

Part 6: Multivariate analysis

The first step in the analysis involved a simple logistic regression with age. The dichotomous dependent variable of the model distinguishes those who do not participate in an activity from those who do so. Logistic regressions are a way of determining whether the independent variables have a non-accidental influence on the odds of being a participant or not (controlling for the other variables, respectively). The coefficients that are given in Tables 2, 3 and 4 are the exposed values of b , i.e., odds ratios. In the case of Table 2, an odds ratio above 1 means

that the respective category of the independent variable increases the probability of participating in the respective activity, whereas an odds ratio below 1 indicates a lowered probability of engaging in the activity, always in comparison to the reference group of those aged 85 or older. The value of Nagelkerke r^2 gives the explanation power of the model and furthermore, the number of the cases included is given at the end of each table.

As expected, all age differences seen descriptively are significant (Table 2). For sport and watching films at the cinema or another venue, age seems to be particularly important, with very high odds ratios for the youngest age groups. The comparatively intense participation of (← p. 32) the very youngest (and the following) age group can in part be explained by the fact that many of these respondents are still in school where doing sport and making music (and also visiting exhibitions) is part of the curriculum. In fact, at the beginning of the questionnaire respondents are asked not to include activities connected to school, work or studies in their answers, but the subsequent repetition of this instruction is only included in a second version of the questionnaire and may therefore have been forgotten or neglected by nearly a quarter of the sample. We need to bear this in mind when interpreting the results.

Table 2. Logistic regressions with age.

	Sport/ physical activity	Play musical instrument/ sing	Film at cinema	Exhibition/collection of art, photography or sculpture	Textile crafts
Odds ratio (exp. β)					
Age group (ref.: 85+)					
16 – 19	57.87***	4.41***	47.87***	1.76**	0.39***
20 – 24	30.72***	2.98***	32.53***	2.70***	0.57***
25 – 34	24.35***	2.50***	25.98***	3.16***	0.71**
35 – 44	20.62***	2.22***	23.08***	3.94***	0.84
45 – 54	13.83***	2.17***	15.00***	4.66***	1.00
55 – 64	10.06***	1.77**	9.06***	4.52***	1.30*
65 – 74	6.54***	1.24	5.50***	3.12***	1.39**
75 – 84	2.70***	1.07	2.77***	2.00***	1.32*
Nagelkerke r^2	0.16	0.02	0.18	0.02	0.02

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Note: $n = 28,096$.

Table 3. Logistic regressions with age, gender and health.

	Sport/ physical activity	Play musical instrument/ sing	Cinema	Art exhibition/ collection	Textile crafts
Odds ratio (exp. β)					
Age group (ref.: 85+)					
16 – 19	37.77***	3.10***	35.30***	1.18	0.46***
20 – 24	21.57***	2.24***	24.25***	1.86**	0.57***
25 – 34	16.90***	1.87**	19.42***	2.19***	0.74*
35 – 44	14.67***	1.69**	17.64***	2.80***	0.88
45 – 54	10.11***	1.68**	12.09***	3.52***	1.20
55 – 64	7.88***	1.45	7.63***	3.61***	1.58**
65 – 74	5.23***	1.03	4.76***	2.62***	1.79***
75 – 84	2.40***	0.98	2.61***	1.85***	1.58**
Gender (ref.: male)	0.56***	0.64***	1.15***	1.06	29.84***
General subjective health (ref.: very good)					
Good	0.70***	0.79***	0.81***	0.70***	0.97
Fair	0.42***	0.62***	0.53***	0.46***	0.88*
Bad	0.22***	0.44***	0.30***	0.27***	0.80**
Very bad	0.14***	0.23***	0.22***	0.17***	0.41***
Nagelkerke r^2	0.22	0.04	0.20	0.05	0.26

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Note: $n = 28,068$. (← p. 33)

In the next step (Table 3), gender and health are included into the model, which increases the explanatory power in all activities. In fact, most of the age differences become smaller. Nonetheless, health or gender do not lead to the disappearance of age effects, with only small exceptions. The reduction of the age effect is by far the greatest for sport and physical activity (from an odds ratio of around 57 to around 37 in the youngest age group). For textile crafts which can be done at home and sitting in an armchair, the negative health effect is the weakest, namely around 0.8 for those with bad and 0.4 for those with very bad health – but even here the health differences are mostly significant. In the case of textile crafts, the age effects become even stronger in the oldest age groups, which points at the fact that the oldest persons are engaged in textile crafts to a comparatively strong degree, considering their worse health.

Table 4. Logistic regressions with age, gender, health, occupational class, education, income and three life course variables.

	Sport	Instrument/ sing	Cinema	Exhibition	Textile crafts
	Odds ratio (exp. β)				
Age group (ref.: 85+)					
16 – 19	38.92***	2.02**	29.41***	1.67	0.50**
20 – 24	19.93***	1.23	16.79***	1.88*	0.60*
25 – 34	13.40***	1.01	10.83***	1.88*	0.78
35 – 44	11.44***	0.97	9.67***	2.97***	0.97
45 – 54	7.44***	0.89	6.55***	3.40***	1.34
55 – 64	6.02***	0.80	4.86***	3.60***	1.59**
65 – 74	4.09***	0.66	3.83***	2.88***	1.63**
75 – 84	1.92**	0.71	2.26***	2.24**	1.65**
Gender (ref.: male)	0.59***	0.62***	1.33***	1.24***	31.17***
General subjective health (ref.: [very] good)					
Fair	0.61***	0.88*	0.77***	0.78***	1.00
(Very) bad	0.38***	0.70**	0.56***	0.58***	0.88
Educational qualification (ref.: none)					
High	2.04***	4.33***	2.80***	8.23***	2.02***
Middle	1.88***	2.79***	2.27***	3.72***	1.80***
Low	1.50***	2.00***	1.79***	2.22***	1.41***
Occupational class (NSSEC) (ref.: routine/manual)					
Managerial/professional	1.35***	1.81***	1.61***	2.09***	1.13
Intermediate	1.26***	1.40***	1.38***	1.59***	1.13*
Never worked/not classified	0.94	1.21*	1.03	1.56***	0.96
Individual income (grouped)	1.05***	0.98*	1.07***	1.06***	0.94***
Work status last week (ref.: paid work, full-time)					
Paid work, part-time	1.29***	1.29***	1.23***	1.54***	1.12
Looking for work	1.17	1.35*	0.91	1.16	1.11
Student	1.36**	1.53**	1.22	2.00***	1.12
Looking after home/family	0.79***	0.97	0.72***	1.14	1.16
Long-term sick/ill	0.75**	0.91	0.65***	0.87	1.05
Retired	1.17*	1.01	0.85*	1.41***	1.43***
Being married/cohabiting (ref.: not)	1.05	0.93	0.97	1.00	1.16**
Having own children under 16 in the household (ref.: not)	0.99	0.84**	1.06	0.68***	0.83**
Nagelkerke r^2	0.25	0.10	0.27	0.22	0.28

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Note: $n = 22,213$. (← p. 34)

The gender effect is particularly strong for textile crafts – compared to men, women’s odds of doing a textile craft are heightened by a factor of nearly 30. There is no clear gender effect for art exhibitions. Whereas men tend to participate more in sport and making music (and women have a lowered odds ratio of around 0.6), women go slightly, but significantly more often into the cinema (odds ratio of 1.15).

In the next step (Table 4), occupational class, education, individual income and some variables regarding the individual life course are included.⁹ The age cohorts differ significantly with regard to their socio-economic background. For example, around two thirds of the respondents who are 75 and more years old do not have any educational qualification, and more than 40 per cent among them carried out routine and semi routine occupations during their working lives (or never worked – this also includes non-classified respondents). In the age band of 25 – 34, in contrast, the proportion of those without educational qualification is only slightly more than 10 per cent, and that of the lowest occupational class only a good third.¹⁰ For income, the same tendency can be observed.

By including these variables, the case number is reduced, which may cause minor changes in the outcomes of the model. Including all three socio-economic variables might seem excessive but this produces the greatest possible openness of the model. In most studies and for most cultural activities, education has the biggest effect on the pattern of participation. However, occupational class and wealth must be included to obtain a more complete picture of social inequalities in activities, particularly for the older population where large numbers do not have much formal educational qualification so that occupational class and levels of wealth may additionally discriminate.¹¹

Concerning the position in the individual life course, first, a variable indicating the individual position in the employment career is included, in order to differentiate age effects as such from life course effects. People working full time are differentiated from those working part time, from respondents looking for work, from students, from those looking after home and family, from those who are long-term ill, and from retired persons.¹² Second, the information is included whether the respondent lives with a partner or not. Third, those who have own children under the age of 16 in the household are differentiated from those who haven’t.

Again, most of the age differences become smaller, and in the case of playing a musical instrument or singing almost all lose their significance, only the contrast between the youngest and the oldest is still significant, with an odds ratio of two. In other words: most of the age differences in this activity are explained by the different socio-economic backgrounds of the birth cohorts (as a step in between which is not presented here shows, the three life course variables do not change the outcome of the other variables very much).¹³ Concerning art exhibitions, the difference of the very oldest reference group compared to the younger age groups is reduced to a value below two (respectively disappears for the very youngest).

In the case of textile crafts the changes are only small, and for the oldest respondents the coefficient has even become (slightly) higher (1.65). That means: socio-economic background does not play a big role in doing textile crafts, and taking into account their under-average socio-economic position, the 75 – 84 age group is quite engaged in these activities.

In general terms, the socio-economic variables show clear tendencies. Education increases the probability of being active in all the domains – for respondents of the highest educational background, the odds of participating are at least increased by a factor of two. In the case of

active music participation and art exhibitions (second and fourth column) the coefficient even amounts to four and eight, respectively. The least steep (but still significant) educational gradient can be found for sport and textile crafts. Occupational class is in principle similar, but much less weak. Additionally, for textile crafts there is only a difference between the routine/manual and the intermediate classes, with the latter being slightly more probable to knit, sew, do embroidery etc. For the managerial/professional classes, the same co-efficient is not significant. (← p. 35)

For income, finally, the outcomes are somewhat different. In the cases of sport, cinema and art exhibitions, respondents of higher income groups are significantly more likely to be active than those of lower incomes. For playing a musical instrument and textile crafts there is a reverse effect. A higher income is connected to a lower probability of playing a musical instrument, singing or doing textile crafts. Corresponding models using the categorical version of the variable (i.e., nine income groups) show that this effect is small but robust in the case of textile crafts, where it is only the very lowest income group and the very highest that have a significantly higher respectively lower probability of knitting, doing embroidery etc. In the case of singing or playing a musical instrument none of the single categorical effects is significant, with the lowest income group (earning nothing to £2,500 per year) being close to a significant positive effect. Nonetheless it seems quite probable that this is because of a life course effect that has not been adequately captured by the variables included.

Many categories of the employment variable are significant. Being a student and working part time are connected with higher probabilities of all activities, with the exception of textile crafts. Compared to full-time employees, students and part-time employees have larger or more flexible time budgets and better opportunities to do sport, play an instrument or sing, watch a film or go to an exhibition. Whereas looking for work surprisingly increases the odds of playing an instrument or singing by a factor of 1.35, looking after home and family and being long-term ill both lead to a lower participation in sport and in watching films at the cinema (co-efficients around 0.7). Being retired, finally, has positive effects on doing sport, going to exhibitions and doing textile crafts, but a slightly negative effect on watching films.

Being married or cohabiting only influences the odds of doing textile crafts positively by the (small) factor of 1.16. Having sons or daughters under the age of 16 in the household significantly lowers the probabilities of playing a musical instrument and singing, of visiting exhibitions and of doing textile crafts.

Taken altogether, including these variables leads to a visible increase in the explanatory power of all five examples. By far the greatest increase relates to exhibitions or collections of art, photography or sculpture. Considerable increases can be found for cinema and playing a musical instrument/singing, and small ones for sport and textile crafts. The socio-economic variables are the major factors in these increases, especially education, as an extra step of analysis, which is not presented here, shows. The life course variables only add to the explanatory power to a very small extent (of mostly less than 0.01 points in Nagelkerke's r^2).

Altogether, in particular sport and watching films are connected to individual life course positions, the same applies (to a lesser extent) to playing musical instruments/singing and visiting exhibitions. Textile crafts are somewhat particular in that they are only influenced by being retired and being married. There are no substantive changes in explanatory power following the inclusion of the life course variables. An increase is only visible for watching films and art exhibitions; for the others, there are some negligible increases in the third

position after the decimal point. Age and hence probably some kind of cohort explanation still play a very important role in the case of sport and cinema, and a considerable role with regard to art exhibitions and textile crafts.

Part 7: Using contextual information: reasons for non-participation

As discussed by Alwin and McCammon (2003, p. 32) additional contextual information can help to assess how far period, ageing, life course and cohort effects are at work and what exactly may be causing cohort effects. The examination of the historical development of the cultural practices described above is a necessary complement to the argument presented here but cannot be carried out exhaustively in this article. (← p. 36)

However, the “Taking Part” Survey includes a further source of information which might be useful herein. Additional to their actual participation, respondents are asked why they participated in certain (single) activities (one activity in the field of arts participation, and one in arts attendance are chosen for the follow-up questions, if several activities are carried out), what could encourage them to participate more (if they had indicated that they do something rarely), or why they did not participate in certain areas at all. For all of these questions, more than one answer was possible. With the exception of the question regarding encouragement they were asked openly and without pre-coded categories. If they had given more than one reason, respondents were asked to indicate which reason was the most important.

Of course these answers only give a subjective impression of why people would not attend certain events or participate in certain activities. Furthermore, the answers will be influenced by effects of social desirability. For example, it might be easier to cite a more concrete barrier to participation (which could indeed exist) than admitting that one is not interested in cultural activities, finds them boring or does not have the ability to understand them in a manner that makes them enjoyable. This assumes that there is a kind of hierarchy of barriers with regard to their legitimacy. The reasons for not doing something were asked for sport, visiting museums, visiting libraries, using archives, visiting heritage sites and, apart from that, for the whole areas of cultural attendance and cultural participation, which included 15 – 20 activities or events respectively. The answers to the latter can only be very general because the reasons for not going to exhibitions of art, to plays or dramas, street carnival or “other” music events (i.e., non-attendance) might be very different, as might the reasons for not singing, playing a musical instrument, doing crafts or writing poetry (i.e., non-participation).

Enjoyment, relaxation or specific occasions (for instance related to one’s own children) figure as most important in the reasons for participating in certain practices and events, yet the reasons figuring second or third after these main motives depend very much on the activity that is examined. Textile crafts, for example, are not only driven by enjoyment and relaxation but also by the wish to produce things for oneself or gifts for others. When asked for barriers that hinder more frequent participation, respondents name concrete obstacles (such as transportation, costs or the local cultural infrastructure) by far most often.

Most insights can be gained from the age-specific reasons for *not* performing or attending activities and events. The single reason cited most often for not participating in art, not attending arts events and not doing sport is the lack of time. In accordance with the idea that time budgets are connected to the life cycle, this barrier is reported most often in the middle age groups (from 25– 44 or 54 years), namely by up to 50 per cent of the respondents. Other

barriers which are quantitatively much less important are the lack of facilities close by and the lack of transport. The latter becomes more important in old age, but the most important barrier to virtually all activities in old age is bad health, which is cited by up to two thirds of the very old respondents (and by more than 85 per cent for sport). There are three reasons for non-participation that cannot be related to concrete barriers and that are cited by more than just a very small minority: the categories “I am not really interested”, “it never occurred to me” and “I would not enjoy it”. Though connected to the preferences and interests of the individual respondents, these answers could indicate changing tastes or values that work beyond concrete barriers and constitute cohort effects.

Figure 3 shows the proportions of the three accounts of non-participation for three areas: visiting museums, arts attendance, and arts participation¹⁴ – the distinction of arts attendance and arts participation follows the broad classification of cultural practices that is used throughout “Taking Part”. The question on non-participation was asked to those who did not attend any of the arts events listed (except cinema), respectively to those who did not participate in any arts activity listed (except buying novels, reading, buying art), and to those who did not visit a museum in the last year. (← p. 37)

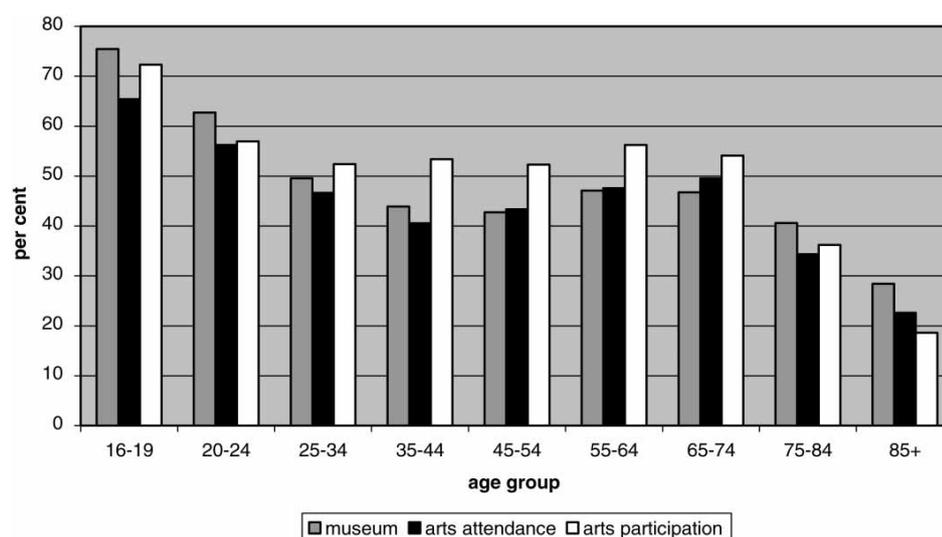


Figure 3. Sum of answers “not interested”, “never occurred to me” and “wouldn’t enjoy it” as reasons for non-attendance or non-participation (weighted frequencies; unweighted $n = 12,925$ (museums), 11,355 (arts attendance), 7,673 (arts participation))

The youngest age groups, asked for their reasons for non-attendance and non-participation, answer two to three times more often by citing a lack of interest and enjoyment in the respective (field of) activity than the oldest respondents. Even if this is (in part or completely) an effect of social desirability, with the younger respondents being more frank about their motives and the older non-participants having more concrete pretexts at hand, this could confirm the idea that the younger cohorts are less inclined to consider the cultural practices asked for in “Taking Part” as valuable as such. However, these patterns are only an indicator of the existence of cohort effects working beyond the socio-economic differences between cohorts; nonetheless, this corresponds to the findings and conclusions of other researchers (Bille, 2008; Kolb, 2001; Peterson et al., 1996). Of course, these answers could also stem from life course effects, with the younger being more ready to show a counter-attitude to

established forms of culture. In this case, they would cite the named reasons for non-participation less often when they get older. Finally, the bulge of the distribution around the age of 55 – 74 (see Figure 3) would have to be explained in this context as well.

Summary, discussion and conclusions

In conclusion, the majority of cultural practices (except TV and some activities carried out at home) are less often carried out by the oldest persons. There are also significant differences in engagement between the other age groups. Besides age and health, individual socio-economic status has a significant influence, affecting most activities in a positive direction. The individual life cycle, in particular the labour status and the existence of younger children, have a mostly significant impact on cultural practices too. Part-time employees, students and retired people seem to benefit from their less tight time budgets, although these influences are not very pronounced and do not include textile crafts.

Apart from these common tendencies, the cultural practices investigated differ in their profile: sport and cinema are particularly popular among the youngest, whereas visiting art exhibitions (**← p. 38**) and carrying out textile crafts are more frequent among older respondents, but again less frequent among the very oldest. Women are less active with regard to sport and active music participation. In contrast, they go more often to the cinema and to arts exhibitions than men, and, unsurprisingly, are much more likely to do textile crafts. The latter are also the only activities for which bad health does not exert a negative influence.

After taking into account socio-economic differences, most age differences prevail, with the exception of playing a musical instrument and singing; here only the youngest differ significantly from the reference group of the oldest. The differences between the age groups are particularly strong for going to the cinema and for sport. For these two activities, but also for visiting art exhibitions and for textile crafts, some form of cohort explanation seems plausible, assuming that no important age or life course influence has been overlooked.

Making a clear distinction between age, cohort and period effects has only rarely been attempted in the field of cultural practices. Bille (2008), for instance, distinguishes age, cohort and period effects on the basis of repeated cross-sectional inquiries in Denmark, which she treats as a “quasi-panel”. Despite this problematic methodology she yields interesting results; for most of the activities she investigates (cinema, newspaper reading, classical concerts, art museums and exhibitions, sports and exercise, library visits) age, cohort and period are all effective at the same time, although to different extents.

But even if the methodological question of distinguishing the impact of age and cohort remains unresolved, contextual information helps in discussing the possible reasons for the changes, especially the decline in highbrow participation. Additional observations can serve to explore the plausibility of these theories even if they may not be directly proven. At least four kinds of arguments are discussed when trying to establish the conditions under which recent changes in cultural participation, especially the decline in highbrow activities, could happen.

The first possibility discussed in this context are the inequalities structuring cultural practices themselves. The decline in highbrow participation is all the more surprising as larger parts of the population than ever before possess the cultural and economic resources that are necessary to participate in this field. Nonetheless, increased inter-generational mobility could lead to the

professional and managerial classes being from more diverse backgrounds than ever before and cultural standards “soften”, i.e., the demarcations between high and popular culture become less clear and strict. At the same time, the “status-payoff” of highbrow cultural practices would decline (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Whereas the second part of the argument remains speculation, the first does not stand empirical test, at least not for The Netherlands: there, the most mobile cohorts are those who also participate most in highbrow culture (van Eijck & Knulst, 2005) – they form a kind of “highbrow rearguard” (van Eijck & Bargemann, 2004). Additionally, the impact of class on cultural participation of whatever kind does not decrease over time (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; van Eijck & Bargemann, 2004).

The second possibility relates to the field of cultural practices itself. The ways of spending one’s leisure time have multiplied and now form part of a market which is highly competitive; in particular, home entertainment and TV are often mentioned here (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Knulst and Kraaykamp (1998) demonstrate, though specifically with respect to reading and again for The Netherlands, that this is particularly plausible as a socialization effect, with younger cohorts having grown up with higher levels of TV consumption than older ones. Nonetheless, period effects of the diffusion of TV in broader parts of the population can also be seen in their data.

They also cite increasing time pressures in daily life as a reason for changes in cultural participation which is the third possible explanation. Knulst and Kraaykamp (1998) refer somewhat less convincingly to the dissolution of gender roles as being the origin of these time pressures, but other possible reasons can be easily found, for instance increased pressures because of high labour (← p. 39) market competition, geographical mobility etc. This argument also fits some of the “materialistic” arguments on the emergence of postmodern culture (Harvey, 1989, for instance). Again, this is plausible as both a cohort and a period effect, with the latter possibly being more important.

The fourth kind of explanation cited as a possible reason for decreasing cultural participation especially in the highbrow field is connected to the idea of different cohorts being socialized differently. As the least common denominator this refers to a change in values and attitudes which particularly affects the cohorts born after the Second World War in comparison to their parents. This cultural change is described as “democratization” (Bickel et al., 2005; DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Vander Stichele & Laermans, 2006), as movement towards “multi-culturalism”, “greater inclusivity” (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004), or “anti-authoritarian mood” or as a tendency to “self experience and self development” (Vander Stichele & Laermans, 2006). It leads to a decreased (or at least more balanced) appreciation of highbrow cultural practices and tastes in comparison with more popular forms of culture. Whereas Bickel et al. (2005) show for Switzerland that democratization is limited to certain activities (especially sport) and does not include highbrow culture, Kolb (2001, p. 19) is more specific and suggests that younger people are less or not at all attracted by the very traditional, unemotional and formal setting of classical music concerts. Following Kolb, it is not so much the classical music itself that puts off younger people (and similarly ethnic minorities) from classical music concerts but the context in which these take place (for a commentary on Kolb see Preece, 2001; see also Peterson, Hull & Kern, 2000, and Peterson, Sherkat, Huggins Balfe & Meyersohn, 1996, on which her argument is partly based). A parallel argument could be applied to art exhibitions, although the settings in which they take place and the tastes they are able to satisfy are perhaps more varied.

This last argument, suggesting that value changes through cohort replacement play a vital role in the decline of highbrow cultural participation (and also in other fields of study¹⁵), fits the data presented here. This claim seems to be the most challenging in terms of its empirical demonstration because none of the available data sets include enough information on socialization experiences during the respondents' youth.

Whereas these four different explanations may account for the decline in highbrow participation, and thus persisting age differences in visiting art exhibitions, applying them to the other examples of persisting age effects (sport, cinema, textile crafts) is trickier. In the case of textile crafts, socialization into the practice of doing them will play a central role, probably also connected to the change of traditional gender roles of which the practices of knitting etc. have been a part. Moreover, and over and above the impact of health, very old people become more home oriented in their leisure time anyway, so this could add to the age effect and even lead to an intensification of these kinds of activities.

For sport, some variations of these arguments might be applicable. Bickel et al. (2005), though for an earlier point in time and for Switzerland, find "democratization" in the field of sport, by which they mean that the practice of sport is less and less dependent on socio-economic position. In this sense the practice of sport has become more self-evident in the younger cohorts. This may also be associated with the ideal of self-development mentioned earlier, which has played a bigger role in the socialization of younger cohorts, or with the greater pressure concerning ideal body images circulated by the media (which might in turn be seen as a potentially repressive aspect of post-modern capitalistic culture requiring a high degree of self-discipline).

The case of cinema is perhaps the most difficult one. Cinema can be seen as a relatively cheap and easily consumable practice and is very successful in competing for the (young) audience's attention, and this can in part be because highbrow practices have become much less attractive. Cinema is, not dissimilar to TV, a very broad category, and even within the more popular field of commercial Hollywood cinema there is a whole range of genres addressing different sub-groups. Films are also very successfully advertised in other kinds of media and (← p. 40) connected to other advertised products, and in particular in recent years new advertising strategies via the internet have emerged. Having been under commercial pressure for a longer time than most highbrow cultural practices, the film industry is perhaps more flexible in adapting its strategies to young audiences who in turn become more and more estranged from highbrow cultural practices with every new cohort. At the same time, other channels of consuming the products of the film industry, as for example TV and DVD, may be more attractive for older people. Nonetheless, longitudinal data is necessary to control for life course effects. So far, there is no study indicating that now young cinema users will become enthusiasts of classical music when they get older.

Only a more long-term and longitudinal observation of these age and cohort differences can answer the question of what exactly causes the decline of some (mostly more highbrow) cultural practices and the success of others. Different dimensions of cultural activities, such as the social dimension or the channels of consumption, may affect the age groups differently. The mixture of life course, age, cohort and period influences will be different for each activity looked at, so that differentiation is absolutely necessary. As the question "What are they doing instead?", posed by a US report dealing with the problem (Peterson et al., 1996), already implies, the inclusion of a broader range of activities is necessary to gain a more complete

picture and to not overstate the decline in cultural participation. At the same time, the inclusion of the history and context of each single cultural practice must be considered further, and other kinds of activities, such as volunteering, must be included as well.

The findings of this article have a whole range of policy implications and it is difficult to draw an overall picture that could easily be used for informing policy. It should have become clear that there are more barriers to cultural participation than class alone, and that class itself is a more complex issue because it interacts with age. The reasons why a 60-year-old person does not go into the cinema are different from the reasons why a 20-year-old person does not do so. The life course perspective, in particular, offers helpful insights into the reasons why different age groups participate differently. Current transformations, for example concerning later life, have had and will have wide-ranging consequences on cultural audiences: for example, the recently increasing average age of retirement (reversing previous trends) and the growing proportion of retirees who work may have an impact on the cultural practices of people in and beyond retirement age. Changing balances of work and life, lifelong learning and the connected expectations of people towards different phases of their life will shape the age- and class-related patterns of cultural and social participation in future. Life course patterns and cohort differences interact so that there are different typical patterns for different cohorts, as for example regarding retirement or male and female patterns of participation in the workforce.

These and other cohort differences result in different participation patterns of the age groups. Only a more thorough analysis could establish if there are systematic differences between different generations of cultural consumption, such as between those who are born before the Second World War and those born after the Second World War, the babyboomers, or between those born before and after the 1970s. The identification of generational patterns of cultural consumption and their roots will be helpful in determining future developments in the cultural field and possible points of action to influence them.

Generational patterns of consumption might not or not only be connected to substantive cultural practices but also to different ways of consumption – for example the typical cinema today is very different from what it was in the 1950s. For concrete measures to increase participation in certain fields, all dimensions of the respective practices must be considered as possible starting points, the “setting” of the respective activity, concrete barriers such as transport and costs but also barriers connected to the interests and abilities of potential audiences. As Kolb (2001) suggests, for instance, the setting of classical music concerts can be changed. However, if it is (**← p. 41**) true that most of the generational differences are caused by the socialization of the respective cohorts, it becomes more difficult to influence them when they get older. From this perspective, actions aiming at younger people seem more promising. Of course, the case is different for more concrete barriers that only appear later in people’s life course and that prevent them from pursuing activities they had already done before. For example, practical support and a more flexible organisation of work would be beneficial to enable full-time employees, (young) parents or people who are long-term ill to participate more culturally.

For more concrete conclusions that could inform the policy practice, either a focus on specific activities or types of activities is necessary (as, for example, highbrow cultural consumption, cinema etc.) or a concentration on particular types of people, in particular specific age groups, and their consumption profiles. For the long-term planning of cultural services, the closer

inspection of changing life course dynamics, the diversity in the socio-economic background of the cohorts, cohort replacement and generational shifts is essential.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mike Savage, Niamh Moore, Elizabeth B. Silva and the three anonymous reviewers for their very useful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

Notes

¹ Nonetheless, many other details are contentious because of the general formulation of the hypothesis – these details depend on the precise definition of omnivorousness and the object looked at (taste or participation, exact cultural field: music, theatre, literature etc.), the country looked at etc. (see for example Warde, Wright, & Gayo-Cal, 2007).

² This differentiation is an analytical one – physical, psychological and social ageing cannot be observed as such.

³ In sociological dictionaries, handbooks and textbooks in the English language, the category “age” is mostly used in an uncritical way, as a quick overview shows. Age as a social construct itself is not considered directly, in so far as “age” does not figure as a keyword, but only derived composites, such as “age-set”, “age-group”, “ageing”, “age stratification” and (in one case) different dimensions of age (chronological/physiological/social . . . age) (Jary & Jary, 2000, p. 9; Macionis, 2005, pp. 129, 382; Marshall, 1998, p. 9; O’Donnell, 1997, p. 445; Reading, 1977, p. 13).

⁴ The differentiation between the notions of cohort and generation cannot be discussed in detail here. With Mannheim, the formation of a generation can be seen as potential consequence of the experiences of a cohort (see also Alwin & McCammon, 2003), or put otherwise: not every cohort is a generation, but every generation originates in a cohort.

⁵ Moreover the data contain a very general question concerning free time activities (“I would now like to ask you about the things you do in any free time you have. Please look at this list and tell me the number next to each of the things you do in your free time.”). As this question is only asked to one quarter of the respondents, is relatively indeterminate and the possible answers overlap with other questions, these results are only used in the descriptive overview. With one or two exceptions, the same applies to the detailed questions on TV programmes, which deal rather with taste and interests.

⁶ The dependent variable on playing a musical instrument or singing is a composition produced out of two original variables.

⁷ When asked if reading for pleasure was among their free-time activities, the respondents give slightly different answers in that there is nearly no decrease in the oldest anymore. Therefore reading is shown as an activity with increasing pattern in Table 1.

⁸ In the “Taking Part” data, there is no TV programme without at least a tendency concerning the age distribution. Asked for the kind of TV programmes they watch and given a number of categories, older respondents say more often that they watch news and current affairs/politics programmes. In contrast to that, reality TV is very popular among the youngest, but not among the older respondents. Some programmes are most watched by those aged around 40 or 50, as for example programmes on science, business and home/DIY. (← p. 42)

⁹ The education variable is summarized as follows: “high” education contains higher education and professional or vocational equivalents; the “middle” category includes other higher education below degree level, A Levels, vocational level 3 and equivalents and trade apprenticeships; the category “low” comprises five or more GCSE/O Level grades A* to C, L2 equivalents, GCSE/O Level grade A* to C (less than 5 A* – C), L1 equivalents and other qualifications with unknown level. The reference group is formed by those who left school

without any formal qualifications.

¹⁰ Respondents younger than that have on average lower educational qualifications, occupational positions and income, because some of them have not yet finished their education completely.

¹¹ Previous checks have shown that there are no serious problems with collinearity although these variables are of course related. The general linear influence of income has been checked before in a more detailed model, and the health variable has been further summarized.

¹² The groups of those in full-time or part-time paid work also include those who are away from their job temporarily, who wait to take up a (already agreed) job and who are temporarily ill. Students also imply the respondents who are in a government training scheme, and looking after home and family also comprises those who do unpaid work. All these special sub-groups are very small.

¹³ As a step in between which is not presented here shows, the three life course variables do not change the outcome of the other variables very much. They only partake slightly in the reduction of age effects, especially in the case of watching films and the youngest age groups. For sport and art exhibitions, including the life course variables as a last extra step (into the full model) leads to a slight increase of age differences in comparison with the model only including the socio-economic differences but no life course variables. This points to the fact that, taking into account their life course position, the younger cohorts should participate more.

¹⁴ The broader category of visiting museums refers to a question different from the category “exhibitions or collections of art” analysed in the models; the latter is included in the question for arts attendance. In spite of the broader audience of museums in general (also including history and science museums, for instance), both categories are quite similarly distributed. Arts attendance refers to all sorts of arts events, but cinema is excluded from the questions for reasons. In a similar manner the categories of reading for pleasure, buying novels, and buying pieces of art, though asked before, are not included in the questions for motives of arts activities.

¹⁵ In studies with a focus on other fields of social change cohort replacement figures even more important. Well-known examples are Inglehart’s thesis (1971, 1990) of a change in predominant political values particularly through cohort replacement and Putnam’s “Bowling Alone” (2000), dealing with civic engagement. In Inglehart’s argument, growing affluence is the central power in bringing people to believe more in “post-bourgeois” than in “acquisitive” political values, but this pattern spreads unevenly across classes, beginning in the affluent and well educated ones. For Putnam, the decline in civic engagement and social capital is the result of generational change and a number of period effects, such as TV, work pressures and sprawl (2000, p. 284). Well aware that generational change is only one step on the way to explaining the changes, he tries to figure out why the generation before the babyboomers has been engaged to such a high extent in comparison to their “disengaging” children. In his eyes, the most important reason was the Second World War, which led to a boost in all forms of civic engagement and organizations (p. 267). Both Inglehart’s and Putnam’s explanations are speculative insofar as they cannot prove directly the mechanisms they assume are the causes of the changes they describe. However, their discussion of contextual information fits their data well.

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