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Exploring the relationship between culture and well-being

Executive summary

1. Research aims and methodology

This report presents the findings from an exploratory research project that aimed to explore the links between attending and participating in arts, culture and heritage and well-being in Wales. The aims of this project were:

- To explore definitions of the arts, culture and well-being in order to facilitate research question development
- To discover if, in Wales, there are different groups who can be characterised by their relationship with the arts and culture
- To better understand patterns of cultural engagement in Wales
- To analyse the relationship between culture and well-being
- To provide new evidence about those who are more or less likely to undertake different cultural activities and the likely impact on well-being

- 1.1 The methodology of this project was specified by two main research needs. First, the need for more research on the impacts of culture, particularly on well-being. Second, a need to explore analysis possibilities with data that has been collected on the arts, culture and heritage in Wales.
- 1.2 This research used a range of methods, including: a scoping review of literature, and statistical analysis approaches which included a latent class analysis of National Survey for Wales data and a logistic regression using National Survey for Wales data.
- 1.3 The literature review was undertaken to define 'culture' and 'well-being' and further identify evidence gaps.
- 1.4 The statistical analysis method of latent class analysis was used to produce a typology of engagement with culture, which segments the population into discrete groups, each with a shared profile of cultural engagement.

- 1.5 The statistical analysis method of logistic regression was used to explore the influence of cultural activities on well-being while controlling for other important explanatory factors.
- 1.6 The following paragraphs summarise the key findings from the literature review, latent class analysis and logistic regression.

2. Key findings

Evidence gaps in understandings of culture, heritage and the arts and the relationship with well-being

- 2.1 A number of evidence gaps regarding the influence of arts on well-being were identified. Firstly, much of the evidence is focused on participatory cultural activities rather than attendance at cultural locations such as heritage sites or museum visits.
- 2.2 Moreover, much of the evidence for the impact of cultural activities on well-being is focused on specific groups. The result of this is that there is lack of large-scale, national level research. There is a gap for research focusing on society more broadly as often studies focus on those who have pre-existing health conditions.
- 2.3 Moreover, many of the projects reviewed are small scale and focused on specific outcomes rather than considering the benefits of more everyday cultural activities. Whilst it is important to explore the impact of small local interventions aiming to improve well-being, this reduces the comparability of the studies. Therefore, there is a need for additional research which may be more widely applicable.
- 2.4 While there are several longitudinal studies looking broadly at the area of well-being and culture, they have a limited focus on health outcomes such as mortality and cancer diagnoses. This leaves a gap for longitudinal research which is able to focus on the impact of cultural activities on subjective wellbeing and wider health outcomes.
- 2.5 Lastly, there is a research gap for projects that focus on culture, poverty and well-being. This is a key area, as many of the factors which are barriers to cultural access, such as disabilities, ethnic differences and being in a lower socio-economic group, also indicate low well-being (Viruell-Fuentes 2012)¹.

A typology of engagement with culture, the arts and heritage

- 2.6 The method of latent class identified four groups, each with a shared profile of their relationship with, and barriers to accessing, culture, the arts and heritage. The groups created are not wholly homogenous, however they are conceptually alike.
- 2.7 Group 1 is engaged with arts, culture and heritage. Although they are generally more engaged with cultural activities, when some members of this group do not visit museums or heritage sites they responded that it was because they have no time, they are not close enough or it never occurred to them. This group is the least deprived. They are mainly highly educated with many having degree level qualifications. They are the most likely to speak Welsh.

¹ Viruell-Fuentes, E.A., Miranda, P.Y. and Abdulrahim, S., 2012. More than culture: structural racism, intersectionality theory, and immigrant health. *Social science & medicine*, 75(12), pp.2099-2106.

- 2.8 Group 2 have little interest in the arts, culture and heritage. Overall, relatively few of them engaged with arts, culture or heritage. Those who did not visit heritage sites or museums responded that it was because they were not interested. This research did not suggest any obvious barriers to cultural and arts engagement. They are mostly owner occupiers and few have degrees. They are generally in the lower income categories, however they are generally not deprived. This group also typically reported high or very high life satisfaction.
- 2.9 Group 3 have numerous barriers to their engagement with the arts, culture and heritage. In the National Survey for Wales they state that they tend not to go to heritage sites or museums because they are too costly, or they have no one to attend with, or they cannot access them due to lack of transport. Almost half of this group have no access to a car or a van, and they tended to be both very lonely and anxious. This cluster had one of the highest smoking rates.
- 2.10 The main barrier to Group 4 engagement with arts and cultural events is poor health. In the survey, the majority of them stated the reason they did not visit heritage sites and museums was due to poor health. This group have very bad health, due to limiting disabilities, illnesses or infirmities. They are also highly deprived, with many of them living in social housing.

Exploring the relationship between attending or participating in the arts, culture and heritage and high well-being in Wales

- 2.11 In this report logistic regression is a technique that is used to estimate the likelihood of someone in Wales² reporting high or low well-being if they attended or participated in cultural activities. When considering the unique impact of cultural participation on well-being this analysis found that attending arts, cultural or heritage activities three times or more per year means that you are 23% more likely to report high life satisfaction.
- 2.12 However, this does not mean that attending or participating in cultural activities increases well-being, as this analysis does not signify causality. It is not possible to determine whether those with better well-being are more likely to attend or participate in cultural activities or if participating or attending cultural activities causes people to have better well-being. The relationship between culture and well-being is likely to be complex and iterative.
- 2.13 The impact of attending or participating in cultural activities on well-being is far smaller than other socio-economic factors. For instance, the predicted probabilities detailed in Figure 3.13 show that people in material deprivation are 67% less likely to report high well-being.
- 2.14 Each of the four areas of culture included in the survey: attending an arts event, participating in an arts activity, visiting a heritage location and visiting a museum, were analysed alongside the other factors which had been found to influence well-being. This enabled the unique effect of each of cultural activity on well-being to be explored.

² It is possible to predict the likelihood of someone in Wales reporting high well-being because the survey is weighted. For more information about survey weighting please see [The National Survey for Wales 2017-18 Technical Report](#).

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The findings of this report add to the evidence that access to arts, culture and heritage is highly dependent on intersecting socio-economic factors such as: tenure, employment, health and disability. This research also reflects prior evidence that people living in poverty have far poorer well-being.
- 3.2 The creation of a typology suggests that there is a pattern of engagement with culture that is, in part, determined by socio-economic disadvantage. The largest group, Group 1, have a higher socio-economic position and are well engaged with culture. However, the remaining three groups are less engaged. Group 2 have no clear barriers to culture, the art and heritage but stated they were not interested. Whilst Group 3, face a range of barriers from a lack of transport, to a lack of funds, which stop them from engaging. Group 4 face clear health related barriers to their engagement with the arts, culture and heritage.
- 3.3 Overall, attending or participating in a wide range of cultural activities plays a role in predicting if someone will report high well-being. Respondents who attended or participated in cultural activities were 23% more likely to report high life satisfaction. This was the case even when other necessary explanatory factors were taken into consideration.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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