CultureCase

Education (not status or class) determines arts participation

This research was conducted by **Aaron Reeves** at the **University of Oxford, UK**.

Summary

This paper seeks to understand social class, social status and education, and their relative effects on arts attendance and arts participation. The research rests on distinctions between these related and overlapping concepts. The author defines the terms as follows: social class describes one's position in the world (income, upbringing etc.); social status is a marker of one's lifestyle choices (including one's cultural habits); and education is measured through the highest formal qualification one holds. The paper reinforces what previous research has shown: that arts attendance (or 'consumption') is related to social status and social class. However, it also shows how arts participation (or 'production') is not. The key finding from the paper is that arts participation is closely related to education.

The research analysed data from three years of the Taking Part survey

Taking Part is an annual survey of cultural activity undertaken by people in England. The paper distinguishes 'consumption' from 'production'. (Elsewhere in CultureCase these two terms are defined, respectively, as attendance and participation.) Attendance includes such activities as visiting a gallery or seeing a play; participation is things like painting, or playing a musical instrument. These activities are measured independently in the Taking Part survey.

Two distinct patterns emerge from the data: one for cultural attendance and another for cultural participation

This difference may result from the fact that the barriers to becoming a participant are obviously different from the barriers to becoming an attender. Therefore “the upwardly mobile non-graduate may become an active arts consumer but not necessarily an arts participant.”

It’s still quite difficult to untangle cause and effect for arts participation and education. If elite universities select students based on extracurricular activities such as cultural ones, “then arts participation may work as a gatekeeper to greater economic rewards and social mobility.”

Keywords

class **UK** **education** **status** **survey**

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