

Living near museums and galleries is important for overall cultural engagement

Home > Impacts of arts and culture > Neighbourhood impacts of arts and culture

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Summary

A great deal of research has shown how cultural engagement is shaped by education, social class and ethnicity. However, much less attention has been given to the accessibility and appeal of cultural facilities themselves. This paper used a combination of methods to ascribe an 'accessibility index' to all residential areas in London, based on residents' access to 205 different museums and galleries in the capital. Statistical analysis of data from the Taking Part survey showed that the accessibility and appeal of cultural institutions in people's neighbourhoods did indeed affect their likelihood of attending any museum or gallery in London (especially for people from ethnic minorities and those with lower levels of education).

Those living inner London are most likely to attend museums and galleries

Using data from Google, the research looked at how accessible and appealing museums and galleries were within each neighbourhood in London. Major institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum were considered to be highly accessible and highly appealing. Obviously, the large concentration of institutions like the V&A in central London meant that those living in the inner boroughs were more likely to attend museums and galleries. This remained true, even after all other factors (such as education and income) were held constant.

Geographically unequal funding may help to explain differences in attendance

In general, previous research has shown that increasing cultural engagement results from improvements in people's education and changes to their cultural tastes, especially when this occurs through being taken to museums and galleries as a child. However, this research shows that a paucity of cultural assets in people's local neighbourhoods will also affect the likelihood of them attending museums and galleries.

Keywords

gallery UK museum neighbourhood London survey

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