

Museum participation in six European countries

Visits to museums are one of the most popular cultural practices. In a study, published in Dutch, I have compared cultural participation in six European countries.¹ This paper is an extract from that study. Museum visits are usually not an isolated activity, but a part of the pattern of cultural participation. People who visit museum are mostly also interested in other forms of art and culture. Therefore I will compare the visits to museums, not only to visits to monuments, that are related activities, but also to visits to professional theatre (which could be seen as an indicator of interest in traditional arts and culture) and to visits to pop and rock concerts (an indicator of interest in popular culture).

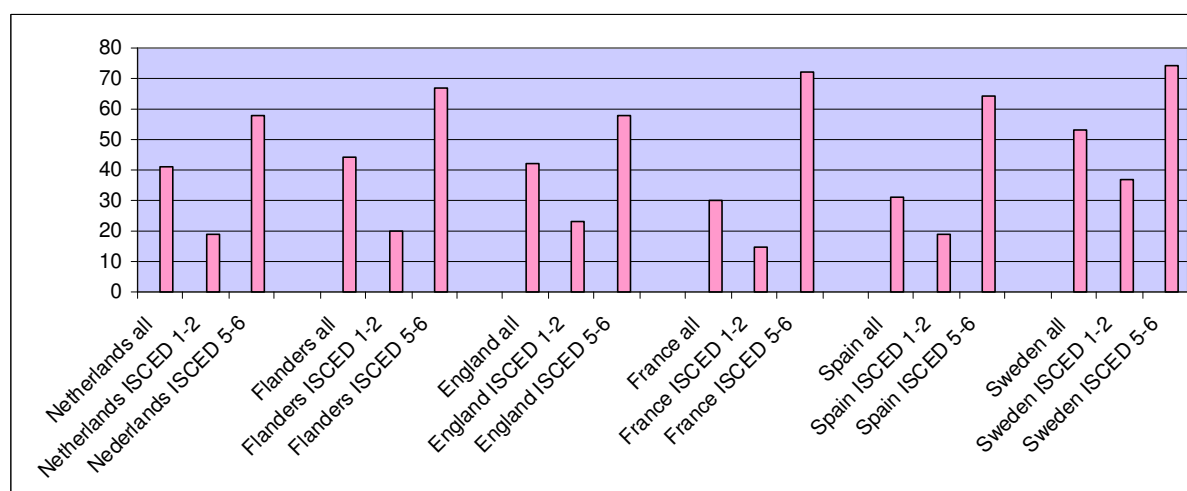
The demographic composition of the European countries compared – England, Flanders, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden - differs considerably. As cultural practices are closely related to background characteristics, such as age, gender, or educational attainment, it makes a little sense to compare only the population as a whole. The variable which shows strong and constant correlation with cultural participation is educational attainment. Therefore I present below the figures not only for the whole population of the countries, but for the low (ISCED 1-2) and high educated (ISCED 5-6) part of the population.

Sources

The comparison is based on the results of recent national sample surveys which include cultural participation. These results are representative for the population of these countries. The surveys are: England *Taking part survey* (2006/2007); Flanders *Sociale en culturele veranderingen* (2008); France *Les pratiques culturelles des Français à l'ère numérique* (2008); Netherlands *AVO (Aangevullend voorzieningengebruik onderzoek)* (2007); Spain *Encuesta de hábitos y practicas culturales en España* (2006/2007) and Sweden *Nya kulturvanor* (2006).

Visits to museums

Figure 1: Visits to museums, at least once in last 12 months in %



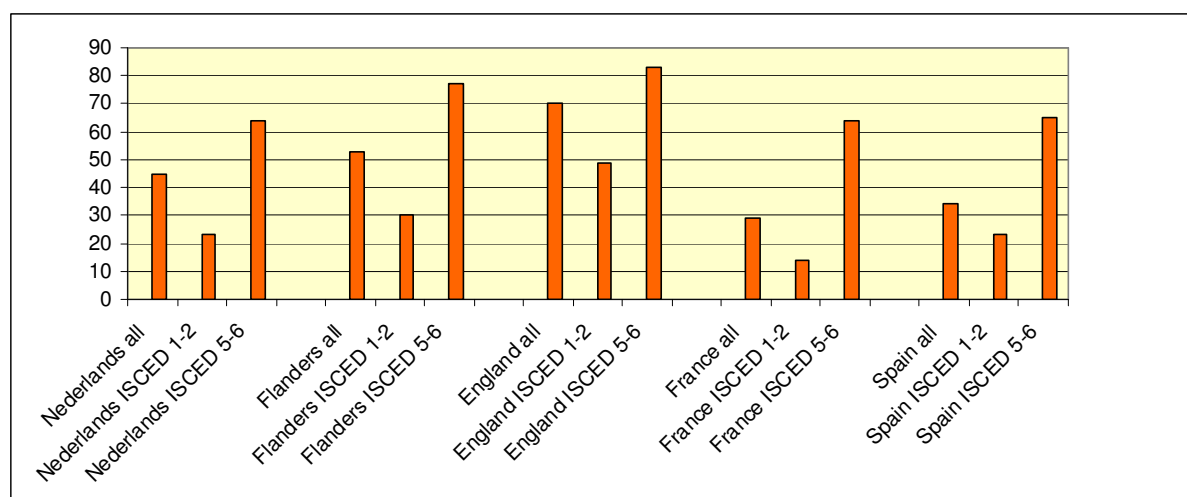
¹ Bína, V. 'Een blik over de grens', T.IJdens, M. Van Hoorn, A. Van den Broek and T. Hiemstra (Ed) *Jaarboek actieve cultuurparticipatie 2010. Bijdragen over kennis en beleid*. Utrecht: Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie, 2010. Pp. 152-165.

The Dutch, the English and the Flemish show – in general – a substantial interest in museums. Only Sweden has a higher share of the population that visits museums, at least once a year. There is a strong correlation between museum visits and education level in France, Spain and Flanders. Even if the population as a whole in France and Spain, lags behind the other countries as far as visiting museums is concerned, the high educated French and Spanish men and women show at least as much interest for museums as the high educated in the three other countries. Youngsters visit museums more often than older people in all six countries. However, the differences are not big and could thus be due to compulsory school visits.

Visits to monuments

Visiting monuments closely resembles museum visits.² Perhaps the most remarkable fact is the large interest in monuments visits in England, even among the low educated part of the population. The English apparently seem to be quite attached to their heritage. Physical handicaps put aside, age doesn't seem to play any part in visiting monuments.

Figure 2: Visits to monuments, at least once in the last 12 months in %

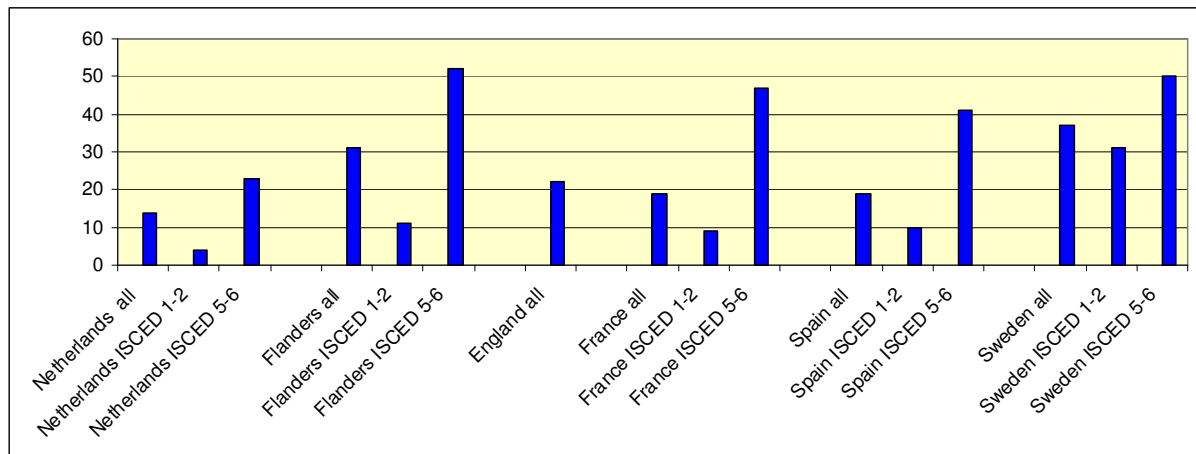


Visits to professional theatre

Visiting professional theatre is not a popular cultural practice in the Netherlands. This is true for the whole Dutch population, as well as for the low educated and high educated men and women. Although the average percentage of visitors is substantially higher in the other five countries than in the Netherlands; visiting theatre seems to be especially popular among the high educated part of the population in Flanders, France and Spain. There are at least four highly educated visitors for each low educated visitor. Sweden is an exception: the difference between low and high educated visitors is only 20%. Professional theatre is slightly more popular among younger than older people in all six countries.

² The data from Sweden are missing as the question on visiting monuments is not included in the Swedish survey.

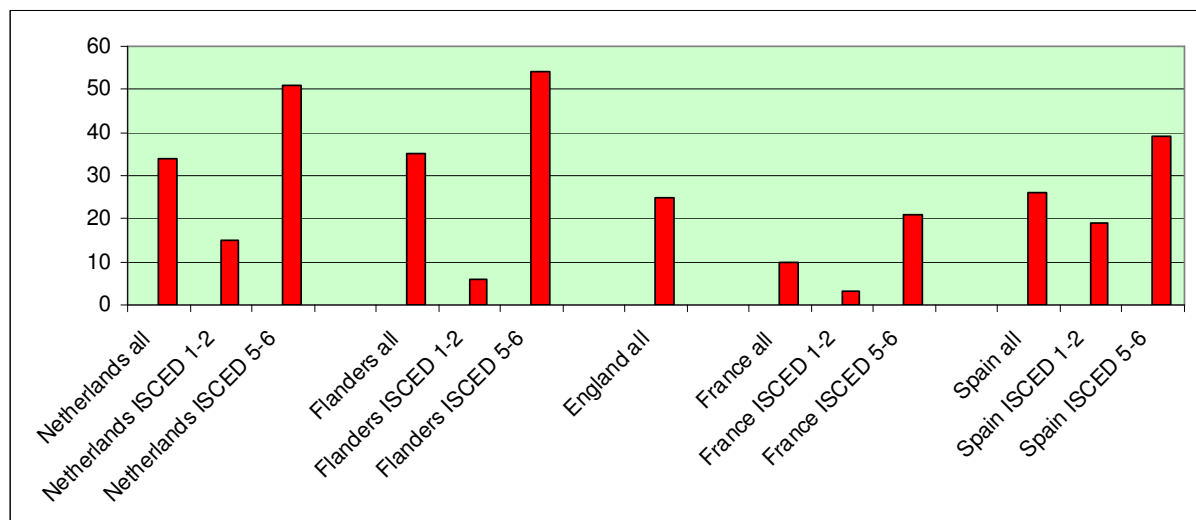
Figure 3: Visits to professional theatre at least once in the last 12 months in %



Visits to pop and rock concerts

The Flemish and the Dutch are the most interested in pop and rock concerts.³ The fact that high educated, not only in the Netherlands and Flanders but also in France and Spain, visit more concerts than low educated confirms the so called ‘omnivorisation’ hypothesis: high educated audience participates not only more in traditional arts and culture (such as museums or theatre visits) but also in popular culture.⁴ Outside the Netherlands, adolescents and young adults are the most frequent visitors of the pop and rock concerts. The Dutch, however, seem to retain their preference for certain kind of pop and rock music till old age: a substantial part of the audience consists of aging visitors.

Figure 4: Visits to pop and rock concerts at least once in the last 12 months in %



³ The data from Sweden are missing as the Swedish survey doesn't differentiate between different kinds of concerts.

⁴ R.A. Peterson and R. Kern, Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore. *American Sociological Review* **61** (1996), No. 5 pp 900-907.

Conclusion and discussion

Visiting museums is not an isolated cultural practice, but a part of the pattern of cultural participation. The background characteristics have about the same impact on museum visits as on visits of other artistic and cultural venues and manifestations. Educational attainment is the most important factor: people who have enjoyed higher education are overrepresented among the visitors of artistic and cultural events. As the level of education is strongly connected to income and the standard of living in the contemporary meritocratic society, high educated people may be considered as the social elite.

As far as cultural practices are concerned the distance between the elite and the rest of the society in Sweden seems to be the smallest. Subsequently, the access to culture in Sweden seems to be the most democratised. It would be interesting to know if this is only specific for Sweden, or if it applies to other Nordic countries as well.

The pattern of cultural participation became 'omnivore' in all six countries. The elite doesn't stick to traditional arts and culture any more, but also includes popular art forms in its menu. There is however an important difference between the Dutch elite and the elite in other countries. Pop and rock music seem to be the main dish of the high educated Dutch, while the high educated in other countries seem to retain their preference for the more traditional forms of art and culture.

Appendix

Table 1: Visits to museum, at least once in last 12 months in %

	All	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 5-6
Netherlands	41	19	58
Flanders	44	20	67
England	42	23	58
France	30	15	72
Spain	31	19	64
Sweden	53	37	74

Table 2: Visits to monuments, at least once in the last 12 months in %

	All	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 5-6
Netherlands	45	23	64
Flanders	53	30	77
England	70	49	83
France	29	14	64
Spain	34	23	65

Table 3: Visits to professional theatre at least once in the last 12 months in %

	All	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 5-6
Netherlands	14	4	23
Flanders	31	11	52
England	22		
France	19	9	47
Spain	19	10	41
Sweden	37	31	50

Table 4: Visits to pop and rock concerts at least once in the last 12 months in %

	All	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 5-6
Netherlands	34	15	51
Flanders	35	6	54
England	25		
France	10	3	21
Spain	26	19	39