

# Cultural Participation and Urban Well-being in Košice: Insights from a City-Wide Survey

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## Abstract

This study examines the impact of cultural participation on subjective well-being in an urban context through research conducted in Košice, the Slovak city which was the European Capital of Culture in 2013. By employing factor analysis and regression techniques on data obtained via questionnaire surveys, the study explores how cultural involvement influences various dimensions of well-being, including individual, community and urban aspects.

The findings reveal that cultural participation shows a modest association with certain aspects of subjective well-being, most notably social capital, personal safety and, to a lesser extent, life satisfaction; no significant association were identified for other domains, such as health and neighbourhood satisfaction. Gender and age are identified as crucial influencing factors, highlighting their importance in shaping well-being outcomes. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the relationship between cultural engagement and well-being, offering valuable insights for the development and evaluation of cultural policies. The methodology also broadens the operationalization of cultural participation through assessments of visitorship typologies and the social aspects of well-being.

## Key words

Keywords: cultural participation, well-being, urban culture, cultural policy, European Capital of Culture

## Introduction

In modern politics, culture is increasingly seen as a tool for generating social improvements and ameliorating the state of the contemporary world, with politicians fervently believing that cultural initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus can address financial, democratic and environmental crises. The expectations of creativity under neoliberal capitalism are high, but actual support for cultural policy remains circumspect and conditional upon its output in the form of social value and economic impact, requirements which result in selective support for more profitable branches of the sector. Under such conditions, the concept of the creative economy has transformed social thinking; our exchange values and the ways in which we work (Reckwitz, 2017) are underlined with an overly simplified cultural narrative (Reckwitz, 2020).

In cities, culture has become a tool for facilitating “cleaner” growth; the revitalisation of culturally promising buildings can rejuvenate neighbourhoods, but further research is needed to determine the actual endpoint of sustainable urban development and the role of culture. Well-being and quality of life are also perceived as indicators of sustainable urban development, reflecting the awareness that urban vitality is dependent not only on economic output but also on the health and satisfaction of its residents.

Contemporary research has highlighted the social and economic impacts of culture (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) but also criticised its quantification (Belfiore, 2021). The positive effects of cultural participation on well-being have been catalogued across disciplines, with different approaches noting its associations with improved mental health (Fancourt & Baxter, 2020), happiness (Ateca-Amestoy et al., 2016; Bertacchini et al., 2021; Hand, 2018), urban life (Blessi et al., 2016) and general satisfaction (Wheatley & Bickerton, 2019). The capabilities approach, originally developed by Amartya Sen and refined by Martha Nussbaum, contextualises well-being as a more eudaimonic, complex fulfilment of life (Gross & Wilson, 2018; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999) encompassing a subjective evaluation of life satisfaction and happiness in hedonistic terms (Burns, 2022; Oman, 2021).

This paper offers a fuller account of how cultural participation in the city interacts with different aspects of well-being in sustainable urban development, exploring subjective indicators (life satisfaction and health), community indicators (social capital and trust) and urban well-being (neighbourhood satisfaction and safety).

The use of multiple indicators demonstrates that although cultural participation is a vital element of urban life, its associations with well-being are complex, encompassing direct and indirect factors such as social reproduction and feelings of safety. Our analysis is based on survey data from Košice, a Slovak city which was the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2013. The issue of quality of life in urban areas is a crucial aspect of the project’s impact which remains largely unresearched, and our study thus offers theoretical and policy insights which can facilitate more inclusive urban planning.

# Background Context

## Cultural Participation and Quality of Life in Košice

Košice, Slovakia's second-largest city, is located in the country's eastern region near the borders with Hungary and Ukraine. Historically an industrial and multicultural centre, the city faces demographic challenges, with its population decreasing from 239,095 in 2017 to 223,678 in 2024, a decline primarily driven by suburbanisation, an ageing population, low birth rates and out-migration, particularly of younger, educated residents. Košice's demographic profile is currently as follows: 20.1% aged 0–17, 62.4% aged 18–64, and 17.5% aged 65 or older. Ethnically, the city is predominantly Slovak (83.7%), with minorities including Hungarian (2.5%), Roma (1.8%), Czech (0.6%), and Ukrainian (0.4%). Košice is an educational centre, hosting several universities, resulting in a higher-than-average proportion of residents with a tertiary education (SO SR, 2023).

In recent years, Košice has actively invested in cultural infrastructure and programmes, notably since its designation as ECoC in 2013 and its recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts in 2017. The city's Cultural Strategy for 2020–2027 further emphasises cultural participation, creative industries and community engagement as pillars of local development which can enhance the cultural life and well-being of its residents. Examples include projects such as “Interface”, which leveraged the transformative power of culture to address issues faced by post-industrial cities (Ganga et al., 2021); significant cultural infrastructure investments included the revitalisation of brownfield sites such as Kasárne Kulturpark, a former military barracks, and the repurposing of socialist-era housing estate structures into cultural centres (Vitálišová et al., 2019). Grassroots initiatives have also flourished, including Tabačka Kulturfabrik, a cultural centre housed in a former tobacco factory (Tajtáková & Olejárová, 2021), and Kino Úsmev, a revitalised cinema. Additionally, the city hosts prominent events such as Nuit Blanche, a large-scale public art festival (Hudec & Džupka, 2014). Košice has also invested in innovative cultural programming, cultural management education, artist residencies and international networking, which together have contributed positively to perceptions of vibrant public spaces.

## Cultural Participation in Košice

Despite significant investments in cultural infrastructure and programming, Košice's cultural participation rates remain relatively low compared to other Central European cities. According to the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor, Košice ranks 40th out of 64 cities in its population group (100,000–250,000 inhabitants) on the ‘Cultural Vibrancy’ index (EC, 2019), and while Košice has taken steps to enhance its cultural offerings, the levels of resident and visitor engagement may not yet reflect the full potential of these developments.

Data on cultural participation had been collected during the ECoC evaluation in 2007 and 2013–2014 (Hudec et al., 2015; Šebová, 2016), forming a base for potential follow-up research, and the need to update the collection of data on cultural participation was identified in the process of preparing the new cultural strategy (Fekete & Morvay, 2019; Tajtáková & Olejárová, 2021; Vitálišová et al., 2019). Slovak cultural policies have since recognised the importance of increasing cultural participation to reach European performance benchmarks (MK SR, 2023). Although Slovakia performs adequately in terms of cultural participation relative to its GDP per capita allocated to culture (Rius-Ulldemolins et al., 2019), there is still scope for improvement. National data from the Eurobarometer 2013 survey identified four clusters of cultural participants in Slovakia: occasional visitors, culturally inactive individuals, the culturally omnivorous, and popular consumers (Šebová & Révészová, 2020).

## Urban Well-being and Cultural Value

Urban quality of life was not a central focus in evaluations of the ECoC programme, and comparisons between quality of life in Košice and national trends in Slovakia are limited, likely due to the absence of granular data. Nevertheless, some comparative research has emerged. Gajdoš and Hudec (2020) examined Eurobarometer 419 data to determine that subjective well-being in Košice is relatively high, even though this perception is not strongly supported by objective well-being indicators. Similarly, Želinský (2022) found that subjective well-being tends to be higher in areas with greater urban density, both within Slovakia and across Central Europe. However, these studies did not include cultural participation variables, as their comparative design focused primarily on macro-level indicators.

Holden (2015) categorises “cultural value” into three types: intrinsic (personal cultural experience), instrumental (culture’s social and economic effects), and institutional (public value created by institutions). Over recent decades, cultural policy has predominantly focused on the economic value of culture, a reductionist approach which diminishes its public value and hinders assessments of its social impact, particularly on well-being (Ganga, 2022). Rather than perceiving culture through the classical model of growth, studies on urban sustainability and cultural participation favour empirical examples and focus on social, environmental ecological and cultural development (Meyrick & Barnett, 2020).

The cultural sector continues to recover from financial crises (Pratt & Hutton, 2013) and COVID-19 (Comunian & England, 2020), and thus any analysis of cultural participation and well-being should consider this multidimensionality and complexity, both in terms of direct and indirect relationships (Lee et al., 2021).

Studies of the social benefits of culture have approached the issue from various perspectives. Sociological approaches to cultural participation stress the value of increases in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996), while other authors note that cultural participation is connected to cultural rights and citizenship (Portolés & Šešić, 2017) and cultural democracy (Hadley & Belfiore, 2018). Social and cultural policy examines culture as a co-educating field, probing the differences between mainstream and **niche** cultural activities for social integration and status (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016; Hadley, 2021), or critically assessing the efficiency of state support for culture (O’Brien, 2014). Authors such as Belfiore (2021; Belfiore & Bennett, 2010) have addressed the drawbacks of managerial neoliberal approaches to the assessment of the values and outcomes of culture and cultural participation, while Hadley (2021) has drawn attention to this approach’s negative impact on minority voices. Cultural value can be seen in a national perspective, but this can also have an effect at the urban level (Campbell et al., 2017), both in terms of economic success and well-being (Blessi et al., 2016; Sanetra-Szeliga, 2022).

Research from arts and health further complicates the picture, cautioning against overly simplistic claims that cultural engagement leads to well-being. For instance, Clift et al. (2021) stress the need for greater methodological rigour in arts and health studies, highlighting the frequent reliance on anecdotal evidence and small-scale evaluations. Significantly, subsequent critiques suggest that such limitations are not confined to small or localised studies; even large-scale arts and health programmes have been shown to exhibit bias, including challenges related to causality, validity, and reliability (Kaasgaard et al. 2024). However, there are examples of demonstrable and measurable impacts; Davies et al. (2022) analysed longitudinal data from the Health in Men Study and found minor but positive contextual and demographic associations between arts engagement and mental well-being. Grossi et al. (2019) show that while arts participation may offer psychosocial and cognitive benefits, outcomes are often highly contextual and difficult to generalise. The WHO's scoping review (2019) similarly highlights methodological challenges in evaluating arts and wellbeing outcomes, noting difficulties in attribution, standardisation and population diversity. It also underscores the value of arts-based interventions on preventive and chronic care, calling for stronger cross-sectoral collaboration between cultural, health and social systems.

Cultural contributions to individual and community well-being are also mediated by social, institutional and environmental factors; Ganga et al. (2025) found that the social value of place-based creative well-being is most effectively realised when interventions are long-term, co-produced, and locally embedded, reinforcing the need to integrate cultural initiatives within broader frameworks of social and spatial justice.

The concept of urban well-being has emerged as a multifaceted concept that encompasses the overall quality of life and satisfaction of individuals living in urban environments (Biloria et al. 2020). Scholars have distinguished between two perspectives of well-being: subjective, based on individuals' perceptions from surveys, and objective, based on empirical factors, such as environmental quality, income and welfare systems (Viganó et al., 2019).

Urban well-being includes aspects such as physical health, social relationships, environmental quality (Zhang et al., 2018), economic stability, access to essential services, neighbourhood quality (Mouratidis & Yiannakou, 2022) and cultural availability. It is influenced by a range of factors including city planning, community development and public policy and can be used to measure whether urban areas meet the needs and expectations of their residents (Biloria et al., 2020).

Many studies examine self-reported well-being as aspects of mental health (C.-W. Lee et al., 2021), life satisfaction (Reyes-Martínez, 2022; Wheatley & Bickerton, 2019) or happiness (Ateca-Amestoy et al., 2016; Bertacchini et al., 2021; Hand, 2018). The relationship between well-being and culture also provides methodological clarity of the concepts and data procedures involved (Oman, 2021), as policy and consultancy work often makes misleading claims on the issue for the sake of political convenience (Oman & Taylor, 2018).

## Methods

### Measuring the Impact of Cultural Participation on Urban Well-being

This study explores the extent to which cultural participation is associated with subjective well-being among residents of Košice. Drawing on frameworks that consider well-being as both subjective and socially embedded (Biloria et al., 2020; Gross & Wilson, 2018), we applied a

multidimensional model incorporating life satisfaction, health perception, social trust, social capital, neighbourhood satisfaction and perceived safety (Reyes-Martínez, 2022).

This approach was informed by the four-capital model of urban sustainability, which encompasses human, economic, natural and social capital (Moeinaddini et al., 2020). While our analysis focuses primarily on social capital, future studies may consider integrating economic and environmental indicators more comprehensively. In this context, we define social capital in line with classical sociological theories. For Pierre Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to the actual or potential resources linked to mutual acquaintance and recognition networks. Robert Putnam (2000) emphasises the collective value of social networks and norms of reciprocity that foster civic engagement. James Coleman (1988) further frames social capital as a functional resource that enables coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In the Slovak context, where generalised trust is relatively low (Mrva, 2022), we adopt an inclusive definition of social trust—grounded in personal relationships, perceived reciprocity, and neighbourhood cohesion—as a proxy for broader community well-being (Agenjo-Calderón & Gálvez-Muñoz, 2019).

Existing literature on cultural participation employs various methodological approaches. Large-scale surveys typically measure frequency of participation across different event types (e.g. Eurobarometer, 2013; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012; U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation, 2019). These are often complemented by studies on stratification (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016; Warde, 2017; Warde et al., 2007), audience segmentation using psychographic profiles (Hill, 2004), and barriers to participation across sociodemographic groups (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2021). Recent work also investigates non-participation by reframing it as a latent or everyday cultural practice (Miles & Gibson, 2016; Heikkilä & Lindblom, 2022).

While much of this research supports claims that cultural participation contributes to subjective well-being, often framed through the lens of “happiness economics” (Ateca-Amestoy et al., 2016; Bertacchini et al., 2021; Hand, 2018; Wheatley & Bickerton, 2019), others advocate for more objective indicators of well-being (Burns, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Nevertheless, large-scale empirical research integrating cultural participation with multidimensional measures of urban quality of life remains limited (Blessi et al., 2016). Our study addresses this gap by applying a multi-indicator model of well-being in a mid-sized post-industrial city, contextualised by recent cultural policy and infrastructure developments.

This study considers life satisfaction as a subjective indicator of well-being. Drawing on the findings of Biloría et al. (2020), we use multiple scales to address the complexity of cultural value and quantify the impact of cultural participation on aspects of urban well-being such as life satisfaction, social capital, health satisfaction, social trust, neighbourhood satisfaction and personal safety (Reyes-Martínez, 2022).

## Survey Design and Data Collection

The survey was conducted between March and April 2023 using CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing) with a structured questionnaire designed as part of the Košice 2020–2027 Cultural Strategy. The survey builds on earlier studies conducted in 2007 and 2013–2014 (Hudec et al., 2015; Šebová, 2016), although differences in survey design preclude direct statistical comparison. The sample included 651 permanent residents, recruited using quota sampling for gender, age and city district (Table 1).

While the sample broadly reflects city-wide demographic patterns, women and younger residents are somewhat under-represented, groups which engage more frequently in cultural

activities (Šebová & Révészová, 2020). These sample characteristics may introduce a degree of selection bias.

Table 1 - Sample description

	Sample	Population
<b>Gender (%)</b>		
male	54.2	50
female	45.8	50
<b>Age Categories (%)</b>		
15-29 years old	7.2	18.84
30-49 years old	39.8	37.50
50-64 years old	32.4	22.72
65 + years old	20.6	20.93
<b>Districts (%)</b>		
Košice I	29.0	28.3
Košice II	35.4	34.5 %
Košice III	11.2	12.0
Košice IV	24.3	25.2

Source: Population of Košice, Statistical Office, 2019

There are two research questions:

*RQ1: To what extent, if at all, is cultural participation in Košice associated with subjective well-being?*

*RQ2: How do additional indicators of quality of life in the city impact cultural participation?*

In the first research question, we investigated cultural participation and subjective evaluations of life satisfaction. The four-capital theory of urban sustainability influenced the second research question, the influence of neighbourhood and social trust on well-being, and the capabilities approach (Gross & Wilson, 2018; Moeinaddini et al., 2020; Reyes-Martínez, 2022; Zhang et al., 2018). Additionally, we examine whether different types of cultural participation – such as mainstream, niche or socially oriented forms—are differentially associated with well-being indicators.

The dependent variables of quality of life were constructed as follows (Table 2). General life satisfaction was adapted from Gallup (Inc, 2023) using a 7-point scale for consistency. Additional questions assessed the quality of life in the city, social capital (European Values Study, 2017; C.-W. Lee et al., 2021; Reyes-Martínez et al., 2021), subjective assessments of health (Hansen et al., 2015) and social trust (Mrva, 2020). We also included individuals' satisfaction with their neighbourhood into the survey, as this impacts urban quality of life (Mouratidis & Yiannakou, 2022) and perceptions of personal safety (Zhang et al., 2018).

Table 2 Dependent variables

Variable name	Indicator	Question wording	Mean
QL1	Life satisfaction	<i>In general, how satisfied are you with your life on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means least satisfied, and 7 means most satisfied?</i>	5.30

QL2	Social Capital	<i>If I have problems, I have relatives or friends on whom I can count to help me</i>	6.40
QL3	Health Satisfaction	<i>I am satisfied with my health condition</i>	5.48
QL4	Social Trust	<i>In general, it is possible to trust people</i>	4.01
QL5	Satisfaction with Neighbourhood	<i>I am satisfied with the neighbourhood where I live</i>	5.76
QL6	Personal Safety	<i>I feel safe in my neighbourhood at night</i>	5.37

Independent variables focusing on cultural participation were collated in two sets. Firstly, questions regarding cultural participation outside the home examined the frequency of visits to cultural events. Secondly, respondents were asked to subjectively assess which kind of cultural visitor they believe themselves to be.

Table 3 Independent variables

Variable name	Variable	Indicator	Question wording	Mean
	Cultural participation	Typology of visitors  To what extent do you agree with the following statement? (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree)	<i>I use cultural events to spend time with family or friends</i>	2.38
			<i>I like to go to cultural events socially, with drinks and food</i>	2.24
			<i>I look for artistic value or strong emotional experiences</i>	2.34
			<i>I am interested in using culture to gain new knowledge</i>	2.37
			<i>I regularly visit some places that guarantee quality</i>	2.13
			<i>I am willing to join the cultural field as a volunteer</i>	1.35
			<i>I am pleased to discover new things and experiment</i>	2.18
	Frequency of visiting  How many times have you visited (from never to once a week, 1-6)?		<i>Classical music concert</i>	1.61
			<i>Popular music concert</i>	2.05
			<i>Theatre (opera, ballet, plays),</i>	2.09
			<i>Cinema</i>	2.28
			<i>Library</i>	1.61
			<i>Museum</i>	2.02
			<i>Historic building</i>	2.27
			<i>Galleries</i>	1.94
			<i>Art in public spaces</i>	2.32
			<i>Traditional folk events</i>	1.92
<i>Educational workshops</i>	1.58			

The questions about frequency were aligned with earlier research into cultural participation in Slovakia (Šebová & Révészová, 2020); inspired by the Eurobarometer survey (2013), the questions listed eleven classical and popular forms of culture (Table 3). The questions on visitor typology used psychographic segmentation methods (Hill et al., 2004) to analyse participation in greater depth, going beyond the concepts forms of culture associated with differing levels of symbolic capital. A reduced Likert scale with three options (from 1 (never) to 3 (very often)) was used, and the question also aimed to determine how the respondents had behaved prior to the onset of the COVID pandemic.

Regarding the independent variables, there was an apparent disparity between agreement with cultural activity statements and actual visiting behaviour (frequency). Respondents showed a moderate agreement with using cultural events for social opportunities (2.38), valuing artistic experiences (2.34) and seeking knowledge (2.37), but lower scores were found for visiting

quality-assured places (2.13) and volunteering (1.35). Statements about actual cultural behaviour showed a preference for cinema and public art (2.28 and 2.32), with moderate attendance reported for theatre, opera, ballet and visiting castles (2.09 and 2.27), while classical music, libraries, workshops and folk events were less prevalent (1.58 to 1.61). This disparity highlights the difference between general attitudes towards cultural engagement and participation in specific cultural events (Table 3).

The control variables included gender, age and education level (1 = primary, 4 = university). The average education level was high (mean: 3.41), and the average age was 50.6 years. Females comprised 45.8% of the sample. This suggests a mature, well-educated demographic with a fairly balanced gender distribution (Table 4, Table 1).

Table 4 Control Variable - Education

Name	Contents	Mean
Education	<i>Highest education attained</i>	3.41
Age	<i>How old are you?</i>	50.60

Despite the links between income and quality of life, this factor was not included as a control variable. Since 88.6% of respondents stated that they seldom or never had difficulty paying bills, the variable was not deemed significant for our analysis.

## Data Analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted in three steps using SPSS software. Firstly, a factor analysis was performed with an Eigenvalue greater than 1. Although five factors were initially identified, an inspection of the scree plot led to the selection of six factors which accounted for nearly 57% of the variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test yielded a value of 0.838, and the value given by Bartlett’s test of Sphericity was significant below 0.001. The factors were rotated using the Varimax method with Kaiser Normalization, and correlations higher than 0.5 were used to construct associations.

The factors derived from the factor analysis of cultural participation and visitor typology data were used as independent variables in the subsequent analysis. A one-way ANOVA calculation was then carried out to examine differences across control variables. Lastly, OLS regression as well as probit and logit models were performed, with all approaches yielding similar results.

## Limitations

Some inherent limitations of the study were also identified. The cross-sectional nature of the data precludes causal inference, and although the use of a quota sample enhances representativeness, selection bias remains a concern, particularly due to the underrepresentation of women and younger residents. The COVID-19 pandemic may have also influenced participation patterns and survey availability, and future studies would benefit from consistent time-series data and mixed-methods approaches to better capture the complex dynamics between culture and well-being.

## Results

The factor analysis identified six cultural participation typologies for regression analysis: *State Funded Events*, *Popular Culture*, *Accessible and Folk Events*, *Heritage*, *Interest in Culture*, and *Engagement*. (Table 5).

Factor 1 clusters canonic cultural events, traditionally more niche in nature and usually financed by the state; while Factor 2 includes popular and food-related events, usually entrepreneurial and aiming for entertainment; Factor 3 features free events that are usually held in public spaces; Factor 4 types are non-event phenomena, primarily consisting of heritage sites, while Factor 5 collates self-declared interests and Factor 6 active engagement. Building upon the knowledge presented in the theoretical section, Factors 1-4 examine the *act* of visiting different types of events, while factors 5 and 6 focus on *attitudes*. The factors differentiate the complex element of “cultural participation” into dimensions that identify the impact of aspects of culture on well-being.

Table 5 Factor Analysis Results

Factors	Name	Content	Mean	Predictor of well-being
Factor1	<i>State Funded Events</i>	<i>Visiting cultural events: Classical music concerts, exhibitions, theatre, museums</i>	1.91	yes
Factor 2	<i>Popular Culture</i>	<i>Visiting cultural events: Cinema, popular music concerts, eating out</i>	2.2	
Factor 3	<i>Public Space and Folk Events</i>	<i>Visiting cultural events: Art in public spaces, folk events</i>	2.12	
Factor 4	<i>Heritage</i>	<i>Visiting cultural events: historic buildings and libraries</i>	1.94	
Factor 5	<i>Interest in Culture</i>	<i>Agreement with claims: I use cultural events to spend time with family or friends I am looking for artistic value or a strong emotional experience I regularly visit some places that guarantee quality</i>	2.33	yes
Factor 6	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Agreement with claims: I am willing to participate in the cultural field as a volunteer I am open to discovering new things and experimenting</i>	1.76	

The One-Way ANOVA results demonstrate significant differences in well-being across education levels, age groups and genders. Life satisfaction is strongly correlated with education levels (4.418\*\*), indicating that higher education may increase overall satisfaction. Gender differences are notable in terms of social capital and trust (9.488\*\* and 12.463\*\*\*), suggesting men and women perceive social support differently. Health satisfaction varies significantly with age (14.253\*\*\*), thereby reflecting natural health changes. Satisfaction with neighbourhoods is highly gender-dependent (33.834\*\*\*), while perceptions of personal safety vary significantly with both age (8.312\*\*\*) and gender (23.668\*\*\*), highlighting the influence of these factors on well-being and indicating possible implications for urban planning and community services (Table 6).

Table 6 Results of One-Way ANOVA calculation

Indicators	Question wording	Education Levels	Age Groups	Gender
Life Satisfaction	<i>In general, how satisfied are you?</i>	4.418**	.136	3.785
Social Capital	<i>If I have problems, I have relatives or friends on whom I can count to help me</i>	2.380	.407	9.488**
Health Satisfaction	<i>I am satisfied with my health condition</i>	2.544	14.253***	.097

Social Trust	<i>In general, it is possible to trust people</i>	.291	.184	12.463***
Satisfaction with Neighbourhood	<i>I am satisfied with my neighbourhood</i>	.728	1.474	33.834***
Personal Safety	<i>I feel safe when in my neighbourhood at night</i>	.764	8.312***	23.668***

Two regression models which reveal the following links between cultural participation and different indicators of well-being were also formulated (Table 7).

### Model I.

Firstly, the link between individual well-being indicators and cultural participation was explored separately to identify individual effects on specific well-being aspects. Six models were used, each using a single well-being indicator as a dependent variable, cultural indicators as independent variables and other factors as control variables. The findings indicate that higher cultural participation is associated with higher well-being, but the relationship is not markedly significant.

Cultural participation exhibits selective associations with different dimensions of subjective well-being.

- Life satisfaction was only modestly linked to cultural participation. Attendance at state-funded art events had a small but significant positive effect ( $\beta = 0.106^*$ ), while other predictors, including education, were not significant despite differences observed in the ANOVA survey.
- Social capital showed the strongest cultural effect. Interest in culture significantly increased social capital ( $\beta = 0.165^{***}$ ), and women also reported slightly higher levels ( $\beta = 0.083^*$ ).
- Health satisfaction was primarily explained by demographic rather than cultural factors. None of the participation indicators were significant, but age was negatively associated with health satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.252^{***}$ ).
- Social trust positively correlated with cultural participation, with attendance at state-funded events ( $\beta = 0.145^{**}$ ) and female respondents ( $\beta = 0.134^{**}$ ) both associated with higher levels of trust.
- Neighbourhood satisfaction did not show significant associations with cultural variables. However, women reported greater satisfaction with their neighbourhoods ( $\beta = 0.210^{***}$ ).
- Perceived safety was positively related to interest in culture ( $\beta = 0.148^{**}$ ). At the same time, age ( $\beta = -0.129^{**}$ ) and being female ( $\beta = -0.216^{***}$ ) were both associated with lower feelings of safety.

### Model II.

The second analysis integrated all well-being indicators in each model to investigate their mutual influences. The findings indicate that life satisfaction is the only individual indicator of well-being which is positively associated with cultural participation.

- Life Satisfaction: The model's proportion of variance is  $R^2 = 0.138$ , a value slightly higher than that of the first model ( $R^2 = 0.020$ ). Life satisfaction is positively associated

with health satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.160^{***}$ ), social trust ( $\beta = 0.094$ ) and neighbourhood satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.227^{***}$ ). Participation in state-funded events remains significant but with a smaller coefficient ( $\beta = 0.097^*$ ). Control variables had no association with life satisfaction.

- Health Satisfaction: Adding the other well-being indicators increases explained variance from  $R^2 = 0.100$  to  $R^2 = 0.195$ . Health satisfaction is significantly associated with life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.149^{***}$ ), social capital ( $\beta = 0.161^{***}$ ), neighbourhood satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.092^*$ ), and personal safety ( $\beta = 0.099^*$ ). Age remains the strongest non-well-being correlate, with health satisfaction declining as age increases ( $\beta = -0.232^{***}$ ); this effect attenuates when the additional indicators are included. Cultural participation variables were not significant.

The subsequent analysis established a link between community forms of well-being (social capital and social trust) and cultural participation.

- Social Capital: Health satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.178^{***}$ ) and neighbourhood satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.130^{**}$ ) emerged as significant predictors. Interest in culture also remained significant ( $\beta = 0.112^*$ ), indicating a correlation between social capital and cultural interest.
- Social Trust: Personal safety ( $\beta = 0.157^{***}$ ), neighbourhood satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.111^*$ ) and life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.096^*$ ) all contributed significantly to social trust. Participation in state-funded events also remained significant ( $\beta = 0.116$ , indicating a positive link between cultural engagement and trust in others. Additionally, women reported higher levels of social trust than men ( $\beta = 0.139^*$ ).

The final analysis confirmed a connection between satisfaction with urban conditions (neighbourhood satisfaction and personal safety) and subjective well-being.

- Neighbourhood Satisfaction: This model explains 24.8% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.248$ ) and is highly associated with personal safety ( $\beta = 0.242^{***}$ ), life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.198^{***}$ ), social capital ( $\beta = 0.110^{**}$ ), social trust ( $\beta = 0.094^*$ ) and health satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.086^*$ ). Being a woman was associated with higher neighbourhood satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.229^{***}$ ). Cultural participation, however, showed no significant association.
- Personal Safety: Perceptions of safety are significantly shaped by neighbourhood satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.257^{***}$ ) and social trust ( $\beta = 0.142^{***}$ ). Interest in culture also contributed positively to feelings of safety ( $\beta = 0.117^*$ ). In contrast, age ( $\beta = -0.099^*$ ) and being female ( $\beta = -0.290^*$ ) were associated with lower perceptions of safety.

Table 7 Standardised Regression Coefficients

	<i>Model</i>	Life Satisfaction		Social Capital		Health Satisfaction		Social Trust		Satisfaction with Neighbourhood		Personal Safety	
		I.	II.	I.	II.	I.	II.	I.	II.	I.	II.	I.	II.
Factors - Cultural participation	<i>State-funded events</i>	.106*	.097*	-.011	-.032	-.045	-.063	.145**	.116*	.067	.025	.017	-.016
	<i>Popular Culture</i>	.025	.034	.022	.002	.035	.040	-.029	-.020	-.060	-.060	-.043	-.022
	<i>Public Space and Folk Events</i>	-.030	-.019	-.028	-.022	-.032	-.030	.060	.059	.012	.017	.015	.006
	<i>Heritage</i>	.034	.055	-.022	.003	.021	.017	.005	.022	-.078	-.062	-.082	-.064
	<i>Interest in Culture</i>	-.026	-.078	.165***	.112*	.062	.024	-.041	-.078	.083	.050	.148**	.117*
	<i>Engagement</i>	.014	.014	-.027	-.031	.038	.034	-.017	-.029	-.019	-.024	.045	.060
Control variables	<i>Education</i>	.005	.026	.036	-.007	.077	.065	-.066	-.072	-.064	-.068	.051	.069
	<i>Age</i>	.002	.032	-.011	.041	-.252***	-.232***	-.016	.019	-.015	.039	-.129**	-.099*
	<i>Woman</i>	.064	-.013	.083*	.074	-.013	-.032	.134**	.139*	.210***	.229***	-.216***	-.290***
Well-being indicators	<i>Life Satisfaction</i>				.056		.149***		.096*		.198***		-.002
	<i>Social Capital</i>		.054				.161***		.027		.110**		.044
	<i>Health Satisfaction</i>		.160***		.178***				.039		.086*		.098*
	<i>Social Trust</i>		.094*		.027		.035				.094*		.142***
	<i>Satisfaction with Neighbourhood</i>		.227***		.130**		.092*		.111*				.257***
	<i>Personal Safety</i>		-.002		.049		.099*		.157***		.242***		
	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	.020	.138	.041	.108	.100	.195	.046	.117	.068	.248	.077	.202

## Discussion

This study has addressed the research question of the extent to which cultural participation in Košice is associated with aspects of subjective well-being. The results indicate that these associations are generally modest, and in some cases not statistically significant. While certain forms of participation—particularly attendance at state-funded events and a self-declared interest in culture—are linked to specific well-being indicators such as social trust, personal safety and, to a lesser degree, life satisfaction, other indicators, including health and neighbourhood satisfaction, show no significant association. Given the cross-sectional design, these findings should be interpreted as correlations rather than evidence of causal relationships; moreover, the results must be understood within the broader context of the already high baseline levels of well-being in Košice (Gajdoš & Hudec, 2020).

### *How does cultural participation in Košice influence subjective well-being?*

Our analysis indicates that certain forms of cultural participation are modestly associated with specific aspects of subjective well-being, although these relationships are not particularly pronounced and should not be interpreted as causal. Cultural activities show limited associations with life satisfaction, perceptions of safety, and social trust among residents, but the effect sizes are small and may reflect pre-existing differences in these indicators rather than direct impacts.

These findings align with existing theories on the role of higher culture and social stratification in well-being (Bertacchini et al., 2021; Bourdieu, 1996). Specifically, we found that respondents who expressed a higher interest in culture also reported feeling safer in their neighbourhoods at night ( $\beta = 0.148$ ), suggesting that cultural engagement enhances social relationships and fosters feelings of community integration (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Reyes-Martínez et al., 2021).

Our models indicate that life satisfaction is significantly influenced by health satisfaction, social trust and neighbourhood satisfaction. Participation in state-funded cultural events remains a significant factor, although its effect diminishes slightly when other well-being indicators are included. This suggests that while cultural participation contributes to well-being, other factors, such as health and neighbourhood conditions, are also significant.

### *How do additional indicators of quality of life in the city interfere with cultural participation?*

The study also explored how cultural participation interacts with individual, community and urban well-being indicators. Health satisfaction, for instance, is positively associated with both subjective well-being and social capital, more so than with life satisfaction. Notably, satisfaction with health decreases with age, highlighting the importance of social activities in maintaining health among older adults (Yoon et al., 2020).

Our findings suggest that attendance at state-funded cultural events is correlated with higher reported social trust, particularly among women; however, the direction of this relationship cannot be established, and it is equally plausible that higher social trust increases the likelihood of attending such events.

Satisfaction with neighbourhood conditions emerged as a crucial indicator of urban well-being. This factor is closely associated with feelings of safety, subjective well-being, social capital, social trust and health satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of safe, well-integrated neighbourhoods in enhancing overall life satisfaction.

Urban well-being is negatively affected by perceptions of insufficient safety, particularly among women and older individuals. Our models show that although feelings of safety decrease with age and are lower among women, they are positively influenced by interest in culture, social trust and neighbourhood satisfaction.

Figure 1 offers a graphical visualisation of how an interest in culture and participation in state-funded events are pivotal in shaping various well-being outcomes, affecting social capital, safety, trust and, consequently, health and satisfaction with the neighbourhood, all of which culminate in greater life satisfaction. In parallel, state-funded events have a direct connection with social trust and satisfaction with life, signifying their importance in augmenting overall well-being. The model posits that engagement with culture not only enhances social bonds and personal safety but also nurtures community trust. These elements collectively fortify perceptions of health and contentment with life, underscoring the comprehensive advantages of cultural engagement.

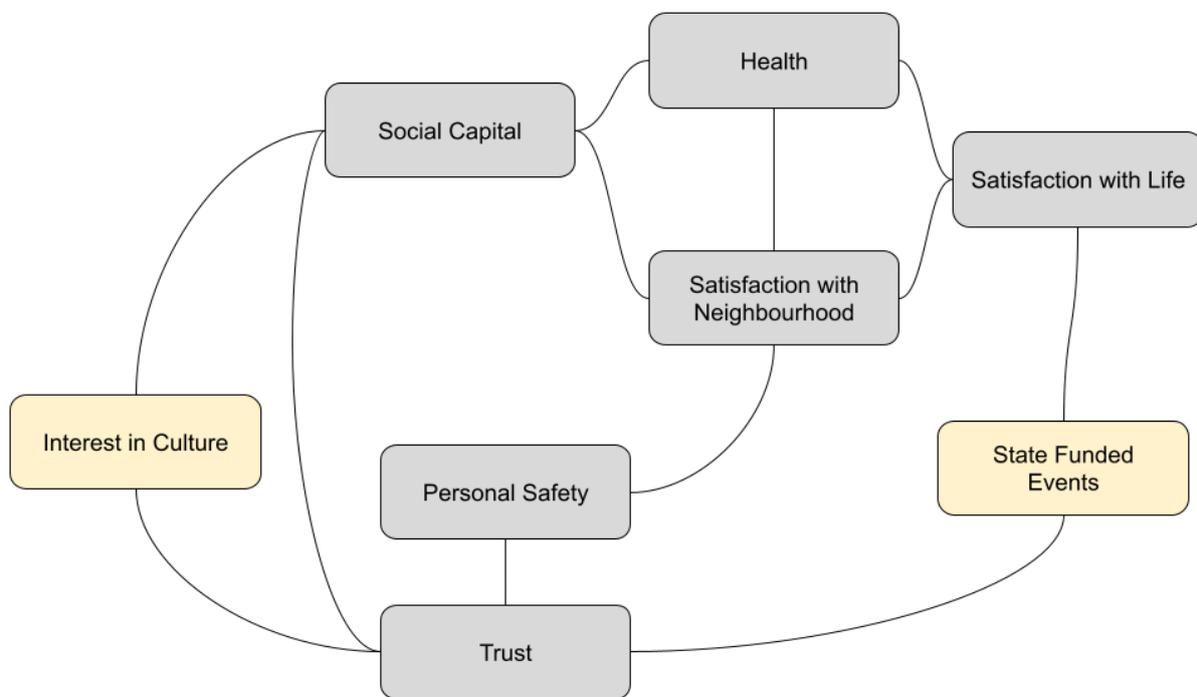


Figure 1 Schematic visualisation of associations in the models

The findings suggest that subjective indicators of urban well-being should be enhanced through further analysis of social capital, community and neighbourhood and reflect existing research on the quality of life in urban environments inspired by feminist economists (Agenjo-Calderón & Gálvez-Muñoz, 2019; Robeyns, 2017), social provisioning and capabilities theory. A thriving society is associated with societal integration, safety and a positive urban environment; these capabilities can be increased through health, community well-being, trust and safety, all of which possess a cultural element.

The study reveals two main findings regarding the impact of cultural participation on well-being. First, we identify an association between certain forms of cultural participation and higher reported social trust; however, the direction of this relationship cannot be determined, and it is equally plausible that individuals with higher social trust are more likely to participate in such cultural activities.

### *Factors predicting well-being*

The factor analysis allowed a reduced number of events to be explored in the survey, offering a more manageable portrait of personal selection of events that go beyond the dichotomy of mainstream and niche culture. In the context of well-being, there are elements of personal taste, sociability, different space of venues and levels of engagement which can play a role in this context.

Cultural participation is associated with some measures of subjective well-being; audiences of more niche, state-funded art forms are satisfied with life and are therefore more likely to participate in art forms such as the “state-funded events” which featured in the factor analysis; significantly, tickets for these cultural events are relatively inexpensive in Slovakia.

Secondly, involvement in cultural activities is associated with social capital. An interest in cultural spaces correlates with community well-being, which in turn translates indirectly into urban well-being, ensuring that local cultural policies are more sensitive to social elements and individuals’ need for socializing activities without compromising artistic quality and values. This could benefit local cultural programs and projects, which often suffer from a lack of direct justification for ongoing political support despite the widespread acceptance of their intrinsic value. While this might not directly benefit cultural policy planners at the national level, urban planning can find support for creating lively cultural spaces that can facilitate improvements in community and urban safety.

Our analysis also contributes to academic discourse on the topic by examining cultural participation using psychographic indicators (Hill et al., 2004). The study also builds on existing knowledge about the quality of cities and neighbourhoods in terms of overall urban well-being (O’Brien & Ayidiya, 1991). Social elements combine with economic structures and the physical fabric of urbanism and architecture (Sirgy & Cornwell, 2002) to encourage the development of desirable neighbourhoods. In light of this, recommendations for policy and practice should be grounded in the recognition that cultural engagement is one of many factors that may relate to well-being. Firstly, policymakers should avoid assuming that increasing cultural participation will automatically lead to measurable improvements in overall life satisfaction. Instead, cultural programmes should be integrated into wider social, health and urban strategies aimed at strengthening community well-being. Secondly, efforts to broaden participation should focus on addressing barriers—financial, geographical, and social—that may limit access to cultural activities, particularly among groups with lower levels of well-being or social trust. Thirdly, investment in cultural infrastructure and programming should be accompanied by robust, longitudinal evaluative strategies that can better assess the direction of observed associations and help disentangle causality from correlation.

Finally, in contexts where baseline well-being is already high, as in Košice, cultural policy objectives should emphasise maintaining diversity and inclusivity in cultural offerings,

sustaining existing engagement levels and fostering social connections, rather than relying on cultural participation as a primary lever for improving overall well-being.

## Conclusion

Our study reveals modest associations—both direct and indirect—between cultural participation and certain aspects of well-being in the city, but it is not clear if a causal relationship is at play. These findings suggest that while cultural participation has some influence on life satisfaction, social capital and personal safety, its impact on other well-being indicators like health satisfaction and neighbourhood satisfaction is limited. These relationships should be interpreted in light of the generally high levels of subjective well-being already recorded in Košice (Gajdoš & Hudec, 2020), which may limit the scope for detecting the wider effects of cultural participation. Gender and age emerge as significant factors in several models, highlighting their crucial roles in shaping well-being outcomes.

Our analysis corroborates several findings from earlier research, including the predicted positive associations between cultural participation and well-being, but it also points out several differences, such as the lack of a link between education and well-being, a topic which warrants further investigation.

More research is also needed into the effects of the locations of cultural venues and institutions on social capital and neighbourhood dynamics. Additionally, further studies should gather data on incomes and marginalized perspectives to understand how cultural participation relates to capabilities and well-being in less-well-represented social groups. Explorations of other determinants of safety perception, including demographic factors such as geography, ethnicity, gender, age, disability and sexual orientation, should also be considered.

Finally, the study confirms the importance of urban policies in creating inclusive, safe and culturally rich environments which can support the well-being of all citizens.

## Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The authors used ChatGPT during the preparation of this work in order to improve language and readability. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Figure 1 Schematic visualisation of associations in the model