

Culture makes us happy in life but not at work, study shows

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Analysis suggests that playing a musical instrument can improve life satisfaction. Credit: Nottingham Trent University

A study into the impact of culture on wellbeing has shown that engagement in arts, culture and sport can increase life satisfaction and overall happiness, but has no effect on job satisfaction.

Carried out by Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, the research looked at subjective wellbeing – an individual's self-assessment of their overall wellbeing.

Dr Daniel Wheatley, principal lecturer in Economics, and Craig Bickerton, senior research fellow, analysed data from Understanding Society, a survey which questioned members of 40,000 UK households about a range of aspects of their lives including age, income, and family situations.

Answers to questions on life and job satisfaction and happiness were correlated to those which asked about engagement in activities such as sport, visiting museums and art galleries, attending concerts, and playing musical instruments.

The analysis, published in the *Journal of Cultural Economics* , identifies positive associations between satisfaction with life, amount of leisure time and general happiness, and individuals who attend arts events, visit historical sites and museums, and engage in moderate and mild sports.

Dr Wheatley said: "Individuals who take part in sports and arts activities, for instance playing a musical instrument, reported greater satisfaction, perhaps because these activities require practice and greater personal effort.



The research looked at the impact of culture on subjective wellbeing. Credit: Nottingham Trent University

"More passive activities like visiting historical sites and museums, and attending arts events, such as concerts or the cinema, were found to have a positive impact on satisfaction. This result occurs irrespective of regularity – suggesting that it's quality of [activity](#) and the investment that people make, rather than quantity, which matters for many people."

However, apart from engagement in mild sporting activities, there was no evidence to suggest that engagement in arts and culture activities could have a positive effect on [job satisfaction](#).

Dr Wheatley added: "Employment status can be linked to low life satisfaction, likely due to constraints on leisure time caused by long working hours and commuting, but it is not the case that improving [life satisfaction](#) through cultural activities will have a positive impact on [job satisfaction](#). The positive effect linked to participation in mild sporting activities could be linked to the improvement in social networks at the workplace, but in the main the results suggest that people separate these aspects of time-use."

More information: Daniel Wheatley et al. Subjective well-being and engagement in arts, culture and sport, *Journal of Cultural Economics* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s10824-016-9270-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-016-9270-0)

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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