



# **Cultural participation in Austria**

## **Visit to cultural events and venues**

Executive Summary

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## Executive Summary

In the fall of 2022, SORA was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Public Service and Sport to conduct a study on cultural participation in Austria. The study focuses on audience behaviour in cultural institutions. What is the situation regarding cultural participation in Austria? What are the barriers to attend cultural events and visit venues? How does audience behaviour differ in the various cultural sectors, and how has it changed since the Corona pandemic? The study is based on a standardized survey of 2.000 people aged 15 and older throughout Austria, conducted by telephone and online in December 2022 and January 2023.

### Cultural events as part of leisure time activities

Cultural activities are an essential part of the leisure time activities of people in Austria. 85% watch or stream TV daily or several times a week, 78% of people listen to music regularly, 34% read books regularly. Visiting cultural events or venues is a regular part of leisure time activities for 22% of people in Austria. Compared to 2003<sup>1</sup>, the share of people who visit cultural events or venues regularly has increased by 10 percentage points. That cultural activities within the home limit visits to cultural institutions cannot be confirmed. Although people with a low time budget in particular shift their cultural activities more frequently to their own homes, among older people in retirement and young people under 34, cultural activities within the home are positively related to visits to cultural events.

### Cultural participation as an indicator of class society

We did not find any significant differences between people of different social classes in the extent of their domestic cultural activities - especially when it comes to internet surfing, television and streaming services. However, the close correlation between the attendance at cultural events or venues and social status has hardly changed in recent decades. People with higher personal and household incomes are thus more often members of the cultural audience than people in the lowest income third or in households at risk of poverty. Unemployed people are particularly disadvantaged; around 90% of them also experience social exclusion through low cultural participation.

The strongest correlation can be seen to the level of formal education. While 41% of people with an academic degree attend cultural events several times a month, the figure is 26% among people with a Matura, 18% among people with intermediate degrees and 14% among people with an apprenticeship degree or less. Almost fifty years ago, these "*obstacles of various kinds*,

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<sup>1</sup> Schulz, W.; Haller, M.; Grausgruber, A. (2019): Social Survey Austria 2003

*especially of a social and educational nature*" were already noted in the 1975 National Arts Report. The close connection between educational attainment and cultural participation is still evident today due to differences in resources, especially in the extent of cultural capital: 47% of all respondents, who visit cultural events or venues regularly, say they come from a family interested in art and culture, compared to 20% of infrequent visitors and 12% of non-visitors. School does not compensate for these differences: 46% of all regular visitors say that their time at school promoted their interests in art and culture, but only 23% of all infrequent visitors and 15% of all those who do not attend cultural events or venues. In contrast to the past, people with a high level of education participate more frequently across all genres; for them, former lines of distinction between traditionally high and popular cultural offerings have dissolved or shifted significantly more than for people with lower incomes or formally lower levels of education.

### **Visit to cultural events and venues in 2022**

When it comes to the specific number of visits, 19% of people in 2022 have not been even once to one of the twelve genres surveyed, while 81% have. On average, these 81% had been to cultural events or cultural institutions thirteen times in 2022.

Slightly more than half (54%) have been to the cinema or visited a historical monument (e.g. castles, palaces, churches) in 2022. The proportion of cinema-goers has remained stable compared to the last population survey in 2007. 45% of people went to museums, compared to 54% in 2007. Pop-, rock- or jazz-concerts were attended by 34% of respondents. 27% of the population went to the theatre, compared to an average of 34% in 2007. Likewise, 27% attended a cabaret. 23% of people went to an art gallery. 20% went to see a musical, compared to 30% in 2007. Likewise, about one-fifth attended a classical music concert, the proportion in the population having fallen by 9 percentage points compared to 2007. Operas, operettas, readings and dance or ballet performances were attended by 13% to 15% of the population in 2022.

Overall, 18% of the respondents can be classified as "regular visitors" and 4% as "intensive cultural visitors". The majority of people are "peripheral visitors" (59%), 19% are non-visitors. There are indications that the cultural audience is becoming more differentiated over time: On the one hand, the proportion of those who regularly participate in culture events across all genres is increasing; on the other hand, more people seem to limit their visits or suspend them completely in some other genres.

## **Free admissions push cultural participation in Austria**

On average, free visits accounted for 29% of all visits to cultural events or venues 2022. Especially readings, monuments, dance performances and art galleries are often visited for free. There is a strong correlation to the income situation of the respondents - people in the lowest income tertile participate less often in cultural events or exhibitions, but when they do, they do so for free more often than average. If there were no free events, average participation in cultural events in Austria would drop from thirteen to seven visits per year and the share of cultural participation in the population would drop from 81% to 75%, in the lowest income tertile from 74% to 65%.

## **Changes in cultural participation since the Corona pandemic**

41% of all people say they currently have too many other worries to be interested in arts and culture, about the same number (39%) say arts and culture have become less important to them in recent years. Half of all people attended at least one of the twelve genres surveyed "somewhat" less frequently, 32% "much" less frequently than they did in 2019. This decrease in participation in cultural events cannot be compensated for by the increase in some other groups, especially in younger cohorts: 37% of people say they attended events in at least one sector more frequently in the last year than they did in 2019, including 11% who say they participated "much more frequently" than they did in 2019 - this includes those who attended cultural events for the first time in 2022. However, the changes in frequency of attendance vary from genre to genre - but the fact that more people have reduced their attendance than increased is evident for the entire range of genres surveyed.

## **Drop outs: How many said goodbye to visiting cultural events and venues?**

Nevertheless, the fear that the majority of cultural audiences withdrew in the course of the Corona pandemic cannot be confirmed, neither overall nor for individual genres such as theatre. Depending on the genre, between 11% and 18% of respondents did not attend three years later. However, if one takes into account the individual assessment of attending cultural events or visiting venues again in 2023, the proportions of those who have presumably permanently ceased their cultural activities are reduced to 8% (monuments, cinemas) to 14% (ballet and dance performances). This contrasts - depending on the genre - with between 8% (opera, operetta) and 31% (cinema) who say they will visit cultural events or venues more frequently again in 2023.

### **Older people and people from lower social classes reduce...**

In most genres, consistent trends emerge in the change over time compared to 2019. For example, older people aged 64 and more, but especially those aged 74 and more, are more likely to say they have attended cultural events or arts venues less frequently or not at all in 2022 and will not do so again. There are stronger correlations with educational attainment and income: People with an apprenticeship diploma and people in the lowest income tertile have most frequently reduced or stopped their visits.

The reasons given by most of these respondents were the need to save money and a generally lower interest in going to the cinema, theatre, other cultural events or exhibitions. Lack of time, new hobbies or the Corona pandemic were also mentioned more frequently. The latter is divided into the fact that some events did not take place in 2022 due to the pandemic, but also into dissatisfaction with the Corona regulations as well as the fear of infection with the COVID19 virus. The fear of infection kept older people in particular from visiting cultural events. Other barriers (e.g. harder accessibility or lack of accompanying persons) and a decreased liking for individual cultural offerings also play a role, but a lesser one compared to those mentioned above.

### **...younger people and the upper classes intensify their visits to culture.**

On the other hand, some people visited cultural offerings more often in 2022 than in 2019. Here, too, similar trends can be seen in most genres. Younger people up to 34 in particular have increased their visits or were in the audience for the first time in 2022. This increase in cultural participation is mainly due to younger people with high, mostly academic qualifications.

### **Motivators for cultural attendance**

Respondents themselves cite lower prices, more cultural offerings in their region, more time, and an improved range of films, concerts, performances or exhibitions as possible drivers for increased individual cultural participation. Accompanying persons are also desired more often. However, both the price argument and the demand for a better quality of the program have to be put into perspective: 40% of the respondents each - and especially those who want cheaper prices and a better offer - also say that they need more overview of the current admission prices and the current cultural offer. While personal recommendations from friends and acquaintances are still the main source of information for most people, posters, traditional media (television, daily newspapers) and in-house channels (newsletters, flyers, mailings) play a greater role as a source of information for older people,

whereas websites and social media play a stronger role for younger people. Non-visitors, however, are less likely or more difficult to activate through the above-mentioned drivers or through the communication channels surveyed; for them, other more persistent barriers to visiting culture prevail.

### **Outlook for 2023**

More respondents want to go to the cinema, visit monuments, museums and concerts again in 2023 than those who say that they will probably go less often or no more. In these genres, we can assume that cultural participation will increase again. When it comes to cabaret, theatre and musicals, both groups - those who want to go more often and those who want to go less often - balance each other out. For classical concerts, galleries, readings and dance performances as well as opera, however, more people plan to reduce their visits than conversely say they want to go more often again than in 2022.

From various group differences, four structural factors for declining cultural participation can be deduced, which are discussed in more detail at the end of the report: Firstly, the connection between age and demographic change; secondly, the continuously unequal chances for acquiring cultural capital, which the education system does not compensate for; thirdly, the role that the expectation of social exchange and togetherness when attending cultural events play as a motivator; and fourthly, the increasing risk of poverty in view of current economic developments. All these points pose major challenges for cultural policy if we want to increase people's opportunities for cultural participation and distribute them more equally.