

## Fact Sheet

# Arts participation: How does Australia compare to other countries?

New research from the Australia Council for the Arts suggests that Australians are as engaged in the arts as people in other countries – even countries that may traditionally have been thought more ‘cultured’ than Australia; such as Britain, Germany and France.

With the release of *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*, Australia has for the first time a complete picture of arts participation, from people attending arts events to creating their own arts experiences. Also, because the Australia Council’s survey is similar to overseas studies, arts participation in Australia can for the first time be compared internationally.

Comparing survey results between different countries is always tricky (see later), but a preliminary analysis by the Australia Council research and strategic analysis team suggests that Australians participate in the arts at least as much as, and sometimes more than, people in other countries.

### Comparing receptive and creative participation in the arts

The table below shows arts participation rates for four countries that have run surveys similar to that used for *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*. Although the data can be taken as a rough guide only, two interpretations can be made from the table:

**Table one**

**Comparing survey results between different countries is always tricky, but a preliminary analysis suggests that Australians participate in the arts at least as much as, and sometimes more than, people in other countries.**

Arts participation in selected countries			
Proportion of adults participating in an arts activity or event at least once over a 12 month period	Attending an arts event		Creative participation in the arts
	Year	%	
<b>Australia</b>	2009	<b>72</b>	<b>41</b>
England	2008	67	47
Scotland	2008	68	-
New Zealand	2005	84	50
See notes on next page			

# How does Australia compare to other countries?

## Notes on Table one:

- Great care should be taken when reproducing and interpreting this table. The data come from surveys that adopt different definitions of the arts and use different surveying methods. The comparisons are presented as a general guide for interest only, and may not definitively reflect actual differences in arts participation rates across the countries.
- All surveys measure participation in at least one arts activity across a 12 month period. Australian and New Zealand data are for people 15 years old and over; England and Scotland data are for people 16 years and over.
- Definitions of the arts differ between surveys. In general, the arts are broadly defined in each survey, and include circus arts, new media and video arts. Cinema attendance is not included in any of the data presented here, although the New Zealand survey includes attendances at film festivals. Reading is not included.
- Scottish data on active arts participation are not reproduced, as the published data includes buying books and artworks as 'creative participation', which is very different from other surveys and is likely to result in higher participation rates.
- Sources: Australia Council (2010); Oskala and Bunting (2009), Scottish Arts Council (2009) and Creative New Zealand (2008).

Availability limits the number of countries that are able to be compared in the above table: Although similar arts participation surveys have been undertaken in other countries, including the USA, Ireland, and across Europe, data from these surveys cannot be reproduced here because published sources do not contain comparable statistics. References to these other surveys are included in the list of references at the end of this fact sheet.

Comparative data is, however, available on arts attendance rates across a wide range of countries from the International Social Survey Program. Data from this survey is explored in the next section.

## Interpretations of the results

### 1. Australian arts attendance rates are comparable to those in Scotland and England, and a little below New Zealand.

The difference between Australian and New Zealand results may be due to different definitions: the New Zealand survey includes attendances at film festivals (though not films generally), which are not counted in the Australian survey.

### 2. Creative participation in the arts appears to be lower in Australia than in England and New Zealand.

Again, differences may simply be due to differences in the surveys. But it is interesting to note that the gap between attending and creating is wider in Australia (and New Zealand) than it is in England

Could the surveys be telling us that Australians are more comfortable with watching other people creating than they are with creating art themselves? Simple comparisons such as those in the above table cannot answer this question. But they do provide signposts for possible issues in how Australians engage with the arts, ideas for further analysis, and possibly how to improve arts engagement in Australia.

## Notes on making international comparisons

There are many hazards in comparing survey findings between countries, particularly when comparisons are based on data from different surveys. Different surveys adopt different definitions of the arts, ask different questions, and are based on different survey methods. Even if international comparisons are based on data from the same survey, as in the ISSP, subtle differences can make it difficult to compare levels of arts engagement between countries.

The pitfalls in making cross-country comparisons are well documented in two key resources that we recommend to anyone wishing to compare arts participation data between countries:

- *Participation studies and cross-national comparison: Proliferation, prudence and possibility* by American academic Mark Schuster. This paper, published in the journal *Cultural Trends*, is the definitive academic review of comparing arts participation rates between countries. This journal is held in the Australia Council library [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/about\\_us/organisation/structure/research\\_centre](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/about_us/organisation/structure/research_centre)
- *Making Cross-country Comparisons of Cultural Statistics: Problems and Solutions* [[www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/arts\\_sector/reports\\_and\\_publications/making\\_cross-country\\_comparisons\\_of\\_cultural\\_statistics\\_problems\\_and\\_solutions](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/arts_sector/reports_and_publications/making_cross-country_comparisons_of_cultural_statistics_problems_and_solutions)], an Australia Council working paper which offers a 'checklist' of good practice to provide guidance for anyone wishing to compare cultural data between countries.

## Arts participation:

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### Comparing arts attendance only

The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) is an ongoing program of cross-national surveys covering topics important for social science research. In 2007 the ISSP undertook a survey on leisure time and sports, which includes questions on arts attendances. Covering 34 countries, including Australia, the survey applies a highly standardised questionnaire and survey methodology to ensure that cross-country comparisons are as accurate as possible.

The ISSP survey found that 73 per cent of Australian adults attended cultural events in their free time. This figure is very close to the 72 per cent attendance rate found in *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*.

### Table two

Arts attendance rates, selected countries, 2007		
Percent of adult population attending a cultural event in their free time at least once a year.		
Attendance rate		Countries
Very high	(80 - 84 %)	Finland, Switzerland, Norway, Latvia, Sweden
High	(70 - 79 %)	Austria, France, New Zealand, Germany, <b>Australia (73%)</b> , Great Britain, Slovenia
Medium	(60 - 69 %)	United States of America, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Belgium (Flanders), Ireland
See notes below		

The table shows arts attendance rates for 17 countries. The countries chosen have attendance rates above the international average of 60 per cent. Countries with below average rates are not listed because it is possible that the survey contains some bias (for example, by favouring developed countries or 'Western' notions of art, culture and leisure).

The table shows countries grouped into three arts attendance rate bands: medium; high; and very high. Australia is in the 'high' attendance group along with Great Britain, New Zealand, and a number of mainland European countries including France and Germany. It is in a higher group than the USA and Ireland, but below a group of northern European countries, including Switzerland, with very high arts attendance rates. The highest attendance rate measured by the ISSP is for Finland (84 per cent).

### Notes on Table two:

- Countries listed are those that had an attendance rate above the international average of 60 percent (total of 34 countries).
- The highest attendance rate was 84 percent (Finland.)
- Respondents were asked how often they attend cultural events such as concerts, live theatre and exhibitions in their free time, where free time is defined as time a person is not occupied with work or household duties or other activities that they are obliged to do.
- Source: International Social Survey Programme (2007)

# How does Australia compare to other countries?

## Resources

All web pages accessed 5 February 2010.

## Survey reports

Australia Council for the Arts (2010) *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*, [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation).

Creative New Zealand (2008) *New Zealanders and the arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation in 2005*, [www.creativenz.govt.nz/Portals/0/publications/arts-survey-06.pdf](http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/Portals/0/publications/arts-survey-06.pdf).

Eurostat (2002) *Europeans' participation in cultural activities*, The European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc967\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc967_en.pdf)

International Social Survey Program (2007) *Leisure Time & Sports module 2007*, [www.gesis.org/en/services/data/survey-data/issp/modules-study-overview/leisure-time-sports/2007/](http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data/survey-data/issp/modules-study-overview/leisure-time-sports/2007/).

National Endowment for the Arts (2009) *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, Research Report #49, National Endowment for the Arts, [www.arts.gov/research/SPPA/index.html](http://www.arts.gov/research/SPPA/index.html).

Oskala, A., and Bunting, C. (2009) *Arts engagement in England from 2005/06 to 2007/08: Findings from the first three years of the Taking Part survey*, Arts Council England, [www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Arts\\_Engagement\\_England.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Arts_Engagement_England.pdf).

Scottish Arts Council (2009) *Taking Part in Scotland 2008: Full Report of Survey Findings*, [www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/information/publications/1006111.aspx](http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/information/publications/1006111.aspx).

The Arts Council of Ireland, 2006, *The Public and the Arts 2006*, The Arts Council of Ireland, [www.artscouncil.ie/Publications/PublicandtheArts2006.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.ie/Publications/PublicandtheArts2006.pdf).

## Other resources

Australia Council for the Arts (2004) 'Making Cross-country Comparisons of Cultural Statistics: Problems and Solutions', *Australia Council Research Centre Working Paper, number 2*,

[www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/arts\\_sector/reports\\_and\\_publications/making\\_cross-country\\_comparisons\\_of\\_cultural\\_statistics\\_problems\\_and\\_solutions](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/arts_sector/reports_and_publications/making_cross-country_comparisons_of_cultural_statistics_problems_and_solutions).

International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (2002) 'International Comparisons of Arts Participation Data', *D'Art Topics in Arts Policy, number 2*, [www.ifacca.org/topic/international-comparisons-of-arts-participation-da/](http://www.ifacca.org/topic/international-comparisons-of-arts-participation-da/).

International Social Survey Program (ISSP) [www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org).

Schuster, M. (2007) 'Participation studies and cross-national comparison: Proliferation, prudence and possibility', *Cultural Trends*, volume 16 number 2; 99-196.

This Fact Sheet has been produced by the Australia Council for the Arts as part of its research project *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*.

For more information on the research and to view other fact sheets and resources, go to [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation).