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Abstract

Objectives: to examine the research evidence for the contribution of cultural participation to individual quality of life; to discuss the utility of different types of QOL conceptualisation and measurement for cultural policy making.

Methods: a literature review of English language publications over the decade from 1995.

Results: there are few extant QOL studies, and very little empirical evidence to support the claims made by policymakers about culture and individual QOL.

Conclusions: The article suggests that a multi-dimensional, rather than a global, conceptualisation of QOL is best suited to the cultural policymaking context. Securing findings generalisable across all cultural forms, project types and all individuals or populations is not an achievable goal. Methodologies need to be developed and tested to understand how and why cultural participation affects individual QOL domains and these need to take into account differences in types of cultural participation, the quality of the experience, and between individuals in different social circumstances and in different life stages.

INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL POLICY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Improving quality of life (QOL) and well-being now heads the government agenda of many Western economies, with these terms often used interchangeably. The improvement of QOL – specifically of older people, children, young people and families at risk - is one of the seven ‘shared priorities’ of England’s central and local government,ⁱⁱ while in Scotland it is one of the government’s overarching objectives (Local Government Association, 2001a; Scottish Executive, 2004). The policy and funding framework of UK government is such that state funded cultural provision, like all other services funded by central government, is not only expected but required to contribute to this policy aim (Selwood, 2003). Thus the mission statement of the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is:

‘to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, to support the pursuit of excellence and to champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Based on the rationale that culture can help deliver improved QOL and local well-being – described recently as the emerging ‘therapeutic ethos’ within cultural policy (Mirza, 2005) - culture is being integrated into community planning processes across the UK (Creative Cultures, 2004:3).^{iv} Consequently, cultural policymakers, in common with their counterparts in most areas and at all levels of government, have become interested in securing evidence of the contribution made to QOL. With its ‘cross cutting’ connections, QOL is, for them, a potentially valuable tool with which to assert the place of culture as a policy ‘player’ and to advocate for a greater share of public funding (Local Government Association, 2001b).

Hence culture as a contributor to quality of life has emerged as part of the language of cultural policy discourse partly due to a top down process, but also as a result of pressure from below to help make the case for what in England is a discretionary rather than a statutory area of expenditure. Thus the Improvement and Development Agency for English local government, in the introduction to a collection of case studies, talks

confidently of the use of cultural services to 'improve the quality of life of the resident in the community.' (IdeA, 2004)

As the research was commissioned by the devolved Scottish government, the definition of culture used here is an administrative or bureaucratic one, meaning those cultural forms within the remit of the relevant central government department, in this case, film, literature, the performing and visual arts, combined arts (including festivals), and heritage. The article will review the research evidence about the impact of cultural participation, so defined, on individual QOL. It will also identify and appraise the usefulness of the distinct types of QOL conceptualisation and measurement found in this literature, and make proposals for the types of future research that are needed.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Methodology

A cross disciplinary search of the English language literature originating from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand since 1995 was carried out using a methodology modelled on systematic reviews^v. The objective was to identify articles in which the title suggested that the terms 'quality of life' and 'culture' or 'arts' were discussed conceptually or in relation to how they are defined or measured. Articles were sought in which QOL was specifically the focus of the study, rather than concepts that could be considered aspects of, or related to, QOL.

Selected Articles

The search produced a final selection of 244 articles, the majority academic although with a significant minority consisting of reports by public sector agencies or commissioned from consultants. From these a total of 17 articles were identified, 12 from North America and five from the UK. These were all, by definition, studies

specifically focused on arts and/or culture and quality of life. This article discusses the eight studies of individual QOL retrieved, the remaining articles being concerned with community QOL. These eight are drawn from a range of disciplines including gerontology (3 articles), social indicators (2), human geography (1), psychiatry (1) and health (1).

This final selection of articles reflects two of the most active and relevant QOL research areas. These are the contribution of music listening and making to QOL, a part of the growing arts and health literature (Staricoff, 2004, Michalos, 2005) and gerontology, where there is an interest in investigating the role of leisure activities in enhancing the QOL of elderly people.

Table 1: Articles selected

Reference	Focus
(1) Specific focus on cultural participation	
Burack et al (2003)	Music listening
Coffman & Adamek (1999)	Music making
Michalos (2005)	Broader arts participation
Wood & Smith (2004)	Participation in live music events
(2) Wider focus on leisure activities	
Bowling & Gabriel (2004)	QOL of older people
Kelly et al (2001)	QOL of adults with mental illness
Michalos & Zumbo (2000)	QOL of adult residents of a Canadian city
Silverstein and Parker	QOL of older people

As **Table 1** shows, of the eight studies identified by the review, just four *specifically* investigate the impact on QOL of taking part in cultural activities (Burack et al, 2003, Coffman and Adamek, 1999, Michalos, 2005, Wood and Smith, 2004). In the remainder cultural participation is not the specific subject of the research;

instead cultural activities feature amongst a broader range of leisure activities whose contribution to QOL is examined (Bowling and Gabriel, 2004, Kelly et al, 2001, Michalos and Zumbo, 2000, Silverstein and Parker, 2002). These articles are included because they meet the inclusion criteria and provide insights into the research question.

Of the four culture-specific studies, three involve listening to or making music. Coffman and Adamek's (1999) study focuses on the contribution of wind band participation to the QOL of active senior citizen band members. Burack et al (2003) study the effects of music listening on the QOL of elderly cognitively intact nursing home residents, while Wood and Smith (2004) investigate the effects of participation in live popular music events on performers and audience members, not as passive receivers but as active participants in a live event. The fourth study, by Michalos (2005), encompasses a wider range of arts participation, and looks at the contribution made to the QOL of residents in one Canadian city. The findings of each of these is discussed below.

Studies with a wider focus on leisure activities, or in one case, to activities of daily living, include research by Bowling and Gabriel with a representative sample of older people in Great Britain (2004), by Michalos and Zumbo, in relation to adult residents of the Canadian city of Prince George (2000), by Kelly et al in relation to individuals in Ireland with severe and enduring mental illness (2001) and by Silverstein and Parker in relation to older people in Sweden (2002).

SCOPING THE EVIDENCE BASE

Study Types

Broadly speaking three types of approaches can be identified in the selected articles and these are discussed in more detail later. The articles are categorised accordingly:

(I) A multi-dimensional approach to QOL, exploring the factors that contribute to individual QOL as defined by a special population, so enabling the contribution of cultural/leisure participation to be contextualised (Bowling and Gabriel, 2004; Coffman and Adamek, 1999).

(II) QOL as a global construct. This approach attempts to measure the effect of cultural participation, or participation in leisure activities more generally (including cultural activities) on QOL as a whole, i.e. as a global concept, as perceived by the respondent (Bowling and Gabriel, 2004; Michalos and Zumbo, 2000; Burack et al, 2003; Michalos, 2005; Kelly et al, 2001; Silverstein and Parker, 2002).

(III) A qualitative approach using participant observation to tap into and understand the impact of live music on well-being/QOL via the emotions. Here the positivist frame of reference of cause and effect and measurement does not apply (Wood and Smith, 2004, only).

QOL Conceptualisation and Measurement

Just two of the eight studies (Bowling and Gabriel, 2004, Coffman and Adamek, 1999) make explicit their conceptualisation of QOL. In the majority of cases conceptualisation of QOL has to be interpreted from the way in which it is operationalised, but still few of the studies care to illuminate the way in which they choose to define or operationalise QOL, or to offer a critical assessment of this (Haas, 1999, Taillefer et al, 2003, Oliver et al, 1995), the one exception being Silverstein and Parker (2002:545).

As shown in Table 2, all the studies are concerned with subjective QOL. Three of the studies operationalise QOL in terms of life satisfaction while other studies operationalise QOL in terms of other related concepts including happiness and subjective wellbeing (Michalos and Zumbo, 2000, Michalos, 2005). The others

operationalise QOL as a global entity, 'quality of life as a whole', which respondents are asked to rate in its entirety.

Table 2: QOL Conceptualisation and Measurement

Reference	Conceptualisation	Type of measure
Coffman & Adamek (1999)	Multi-dimensional, perceived QOL. Draws on QOL research by social gerontologists, in particular, Flanagan (1982).	Not measuring QOL as such, but the importance of certain factors <i>to</i> QOL; and the influence of band membership <i>on</i> issues related to QOL of older people.
Burack et al (2003)	Both multi – and uni-dimensional – satisfaction with global QOL plus a separate measure of affect. Subjective perceived QOL.	Adapted from QOL-AD measure. Rates satisfaction with 7 items on a 4-point Likert scale, combined into a total.
Wood & Smith (2004)	Unclear, but focus is on subjective emotional/social wellbeing, which is implicitly defined <i>both</i> as a contributor to and as an outcome of overall QOL.	Not applicable
Michalos (2005)	<i>Both</i> uni- dimensional (reported satisfaction with life as a whole), <i>and</i> multi-dimensional (satisfaction with a number of specific QOL domains, plus subjective wellbeing and happiness. Described as 'four plausible measures of the self-perceived quality of people's lives' (2005: 19)	Global measures of life satisfaction, overall happiness and subjective well-being, and satisfaction with 19 core items or domains of life.
Bowling & Gabriel (2004)	Explicitly 'a multidimensional collection of objective and subjective areas of life, the parts of which can affect each other as well as the sum. It is also a dynamic concept, reflecting values as they change with life experiences and the process of ageing.' (2004:3-4) Operationalised in different ways within a mixed method approach.	Within quantitative research component QOL the dependent variable, a single item global measure - a self rating of overall QOL on a 7-point Likert scale, based on SEIQoL scales (see

		2004:7)
Michalos & Zumbo (2000)	Both uni-dimensional and multi-dimensional. Perceived QOL operationalised in terms of satisfaction with life as a whole, happiness, and satisfaction with overall QOL.	2 types of single item global measure. One multi-item measure of satisfaction (15 core items or domains of life, using a 7-point Likert scale)
Kelly et al (2001)	The concept of 'global well-being' used as 'a sensible alternative (or additional) approach to measuring QOL' (citing Gill & Feinstein (1994)). A uni-dimensional concept.	Single item global measure - Cantril's ladder - which rates QOL over previous month on the rungs of a ladder -used as the dependent variable.
Silverstein & Parker (2002)	Uni-dimensional. Subjective perception of global life circumstances:	Retrospective single item global measure: 'If you think back over the last ten years, do you think your life situation has become worse, improved, or remained the same?'

In some studies global scores of QOL are produced based on a multi-dimensional conception of QOL, using responses to questions about satisfaction with a range of 'life specific' items (Bowling, 1997:113). Coffman and Adamek ask participants to list the factors they feel contribute to their QOL, and to rate the importance of each factor on a 4-point scale. Three studies use single item global measures of QOL, one uses a multi-item measure, while two studies employ both single and multi-item measures. Two studies asked respondents to assess their QOL retrospectively (Silverstein and Parker, 2002, Kelly et al, 2001).

While subjective indicators such as life satisfaction are accepted as reliable, valid measures of global QOL and are the most commonly used in many areas of QOL research (Schallock, 2000:118) the subjective well-being approach is rejected by others (Haas, 1999; Meeburg, 1993) and criticisms and caveats have been made

about its use. It is argued that individuals' cognitive sense of life satisfaction may be affected by adaptation, personality/dispositional characteristics and social comparisons (Diener and Suh, 1997:191; Keith, 2001:52; Rapley, 2003:14). There is also evidence that single item global measures of life satisfaction in particular are less reliable, causing most social well-being researchers to favour multi-item measures (Sirgy et al, 2006: 390; Haas, 1999:6). Schalock points out that global single item measures of QOL are at odds with multi-dimensional QOL theories (2000:118).

RESEARCH FINDINGS: CONTRIBUTION OF CULTURE TO INDIVIDUAL QOL

(I) Multi-dimensional approach

In terms of assessing the contribution of cultural participation to QOL *as a whole*, then studies that adopt the first approach, i.e. those which explore the factors that contribute to QOL as perceived by respondents, have a particular importance. These studies, by Coffman and Adamek (1999) and Bowling and Gabriel (2004), both adopt a multi-dimensional QOL definition. They each investigate the views of special populations about the factors that most influence their QOL and ask them to rank or prioritise these, i.e. they adopt an inclusive or 'emancipatory' (see Rapley, 2003:70) approach to determining QOL domains.

Coffman and Adamek invited their sample of senior citizen wind band members to state, in an open question, the broad issues they considered to be important to their personal QOL, their motivation for being in the band, and the contribution they believe band membership makes to a range of QOL-related issues. On a series of five point scales members were asked to rate the influence of the band on a range of 11 issues related to social interaction and musical development, empirically based items drawn from the research literature on QOL and older adults. The responses were synthesised to produce an overview of the key contributory factors to QOL. This revealed that, in terms of contribution to QOL, for many participants the desire for music making and for socialisation ranked as highly as family relationships and good health. Perhaps, not surprisingly, music

making was found to have a strong positive impact on self-defined and perceived QOL, with involvement in the band given the highest ratings, after musical outcomes, for developing friendship, socialisation and personal well-being (self understanding). However band membership was perceived as having little impact on family relationships, involvement in neighbourhood or community activities or general participation.

A similar approach was taken by Bowling and Gabriel in a large scale study exploring older peoples' definitions of and priorities for a good QOL. This was one of a number of studies funded as part of the ESRC's Growing Older research programme.^{vi} Through open ended survey questions and in-depth interviews, older people in Great Britain aged 65 years and over and living independently were asked which factors they felt contributed to their personal QOL and which mattered most. The quantitative aspect of the research rated the respondents QOL on psychological, health, environmental and socio-economic dimensions using theoretically derived indicators.

In this study cultural participation featured amongst a wide range of different social or solo activities. Of the 16 most common social roles and social activities mentioned by respondents, three were culture related (performing in an arts, drama, music group or choir; going to cultural events e.g. theatre/concerts/cinema; doing sport/exercises/dancing). Similarly, three out of 16 solo activities cited were culture-related (crafts; maintaining cultural interests in art/theatre/architecture; listening to music; playing a musical instrument alone; reading books, poetry).

The quantitative aspect of the study found that having 'more social activities' was one of the main independent indicators of self-rated good QOL that explained the variance in QOL ratings. In the in-depth interviews solo activities were mentioned by 93% of respondents and social roles and activities by 80%, as 'good things that give my life quality' (thereby ranking 4th (solo) and 6th (social) out of 10 themes influencing good QOL). When the research findings were triangulated social and solo activities were found to be one of seven important themes contributing to good QOL in older people (see Figure 1 below). By showing how multi-faceted the

concept of QOL is, Bowling and Gabriel's study demonstrates the challenge involved in isolating and empirically measuring the effect on QOL of cultural participation alone.

Figure 1: Older people's definitions of and priorities for a good QOL (Bowling and Gabriel)

- Having good social relationships with family, friends and neighbours
- Having social roles and participating in social and voluntary activities, plus other activities/hobbies performed alone
- Having good health and functional ability
- Living in a good home and neighbourhood
- Having a positive outlook and psychological wellbeing
- Having adequate income
- Maintaining independence and control over one's life

Source: based on Bowling et al, 2002

These two studies (Coffman and Adamek, 1999; Bowling and Gabriel, 2004) based on populations of older people suggest that the relative importance to QOL of taking part in culture-related activities may vary for different populations. Predictably, elders who have selected to be active members of a band, rate that highly as something that adds to their QOL. Bowling and Gabriel's study does not investigate culture specifically but provides a perspective on the place of leisure activities - including those that are culture-related – within a multi-dimensional concept of QOL and suggests that for a general population of elders cultural participation per se is likely to rate less highly than for a subset of active musical band members. It plays a role as *one type* of social and solo activity in producing good QOL.

One of the policy recommendations arising from the study was for measures to help older people maintain social activities, including the provision of good local facilities for this purpose. Several of the studies draw similar conclusions about the particular importance for older people of maintaining leisure interests and activities, and for maintaining access to these in institutional care settings. This raises questions about whether the relative contribution of cultural participation to QOL may vary across the life cycle.

Table 3: Summary of findings on cultural participation and individual QOL

Reference	Findings: contribution to QOL	Generalisable?
Specific focus on culture		
Coffman & Adamek (1999)	'relationships, a sense of personal well-being and accomplishment, and enriching recreational activities are dominant factors in defining QOL for seniors.' (p.31) and members rate band membership as contributing highly to these	No, not of wider population of older people. 'samples with different demographic profiles may find varying results about the relative influence of music making on quality of life.' (p.31)
Burack et al (2003)	No effect on perceived global QOL – either QOL items or combined scales. However unanimous expression of immediate satisfaction from music listening.	No, self selected sample, small size
Wood & Smith (2004)	Observed positive therapeutic effect on emotional wellbeing	No, specific to live music performance
Michalos (2005)	Very small positive influence: not a significant predictor of QOL	No, sample unrepresentative of city households, bias towards those interested in the arts
Broader activities including culture		
Bowling & Gabriel (2004)	Positive for social and solo activities, in which culture features (but these just one aspect of one of 7 main themes, each contributing to individual QOL)	Yes, of those aged 65+ in GB, living independently
Michalos & Zumbo (2000)	Focus on recreational activities and therefore no specific findings for arts-related activities and QOL (although these formed a minority of leisure activities included in 2 indices of sedentary activities)	No, sample not representative of city residents
Kelly et al (2001)	Focus on activities of daily life, three out of 15 of which were culture-related. Taking part in general daily life activities weakly correlated with perceived QOL. Stronger correlation between satisfaction with activities and global QOL. No specific analysis of cultural activities.	No, findings specific to a population with certain characteristics – adults with severe and enduring mental illness in one Northern Ireland health board area.
Silverstein & Parker (2002)	Focus on leisure activities with culture-related activities featuring amongst a broader range of these. Increased levels of leisure activity of any kind increased positive assessment of QOL over time.	No, authors cite cultural specificities of Swedish society and lack of precision and potential for bias in uni-dimensional measures of QOL.

(II) Global QOL approach

The second and most prevalent type of approach, adopted by six of the eight studies, involves measuring the effect of cultural participation, or participation in leisure activities more generally (including the cultural) on QOL as a whole, i.e. as a global concept. This again includes Bowling and Gabriel's study (2004), whose

research design combines different research approaches and methods. Using quantitative methods and statistical analysis these studies are searching for the best predictors of good QOL. As discussed earlier the focus of all the studies is on perceived (subjective) QOL and the dependent variables are either life satisfaction or self-assessed global QOL.

Michalos' was one of only two studies uncovered to investigate the specific impact of arts participation on individual QOL. The assistance of the local Community Arts Council was secured to develop a broad definition of the arts: 'things such as music, dance, theatre, painting, sculpture, pottery, literature (novels, short stories, poetry), photography, quilting, gardening, flower arranging, textile and fabric art' (Michalos, 2005:4). In a postal survey of households in Prince George, British Columbia, respondents were asked about the frequency and intensity of their participation in 66 arts-related activities and asked to rate, on a seven point scale, the satisfaction gained from each one. QOL was operationalised in four different ways: in terms of overall life satisfaction with life (i.e. uni-dimensional), as an aggregate of satisfaction with each of a number of specific QOL domains (i.e. multi-dimensional), as happiness, and as subjective well-being (using theory based instruments to measure these).

Of particular interest, Michalos investigated the relative effect on QOL of participation, or satisfaction with participation, in different types of arts. Statistical analysis was carried out using each of the dependent variables for QOL in turn. Satisfaction with gourmet cooking and embroidery, needlepoint or cross-stitching was found to have the strongest positive association with life satisfaction. Satisfaction with going to the movies had the strongest correlation with satisfaction with overall quality of life. Satisfaction obtained from gourmet cooking and buying works of art was the most positive influence on happiness, while hours per week singing in a group was negatively associated with happiness. Again, satisfaction with gourmet cooking and knitting or crocheting had the greatest positive correlation with subjective well-being. The meaning and policy implications of these results, as Michalos comments, is difficult to interpret.

The respondents in Michalos' study were considered unrepresentative of the city's residents in general, and their demographic characteristics suggest that they are more likely to have an interest in the arts than residents in general, and indeed many 'seemed to have a considerable interest in the arts' (Michalos, 2005:8). The findings suggest that, even for those residents interested in the arts, arts participation has little influence on QOL – operationalised as overall life satisfaction - as compared with their partners and families, self-esteem etc, from which greater levels of life satisfaction are derived. The findings were similar with happiness and subjective wellbeing as the dependent variables (2005:17). In summarising the outcome of an exhaustive and systematic process of analysis, Michalos states that 'in absolute terms, arts-related activities could only explain from 5% to 11% of the variance in four plausible measures of the self-perceived quality of respondents' lives.' (2005:19).

The only other article of this type with a specific focus on culture related activities and QOL is by Burack et al (2003). This has a standard pre- and post- test intervention design, but with no control group. The aim is to identify the effect on global QOL of providing cognitively intact nursing home residents with their own choice of music. The conceptualisation of QOL adopted is not discussed, but is implicit in its operationalisation, which is through a survey instrument using a series of close-ended questions related to global QOL based on the Quality of Life-AD measure (QOL-AD) specifically selected for use with this type of subject. Respondents were presented with a list of seven items, including physical health, energy, and interest in life (a full list is not provided) and asked to rate their 'current situation' on a four point Likert scale for each item. The scores from these were then combined, 'with higher scores indicating greater feelings of well-being.' (2003:66). Residents were also asked to rate, in a similar way, to what extent they currently felt certain emotions, for example 'depression or sadness'. This instrument was administered before and after listening for half an hour to their selection of music.

The study found no statistically significant differences between the 'before' and 'after' tests on any of the global QOL items or combined scales, although through the open questions, residents described 'positive feelings of

well-being' when listening to the music (2003:75). The authors reflect that the research process itself may have mitigated against any positive effects by reminding individuals – through the questions asked - of the frustrations and difficulties of their current situation (2003:72). They also concede in retrospect that one half hour of music listening is unlikely to have a noticeable effect on overall QOL.

The findings of these two articles therefore provide very little evidence of a significant effect on individual QOL from arts or cultural participation.

The remaining articles adopting this approach all have a focus on wider activities, of which the culture-related are a part, however the specific effect of cultural activities is not investigated by any of the studies. The special populations vary between elderly people (Bowling and Gabriel, 2004, Silverstein and Parker, 2002), individuals with enduring mental health problems (Kelly et al), and households in one Canadian city (Michalos and Zumbo, 2000). This discussion embraces only the relevant findings and/or insights provided by these articles.

Taking a population of individuals with severe and enduring mental illness, the study by Kelly et al (2001) investigated the effect on perceived QOL of taking part in 15 activities of daily living, two of which were culture related (going to see a film or play; going to the library). Not only were the sample socially isolated, they showed very high levels of non-participation in most kinds of daily activity. Using Kendall's tau, a very weak correlation was found between doing activities and global QOL ($\tau=0.17$), although a much stronger correlation was found between *satisfaction with* taking part in activities and QOL ($\tau=0.33$). According to the authors, these findings confirm those of other work suggesting that participation in activities, and satisfaction with participation, make an important contribution to good perceived QOL an effect they attribute to the positive effect of social activity on self-esteem and self-mastery (2001:142). Supporting or providing more activities, as a way of strengthening social relationships, is one policy recommendation made for improving the QOL of this population.

Silverstein and Parker (2002) investigated whether change in leisure activities over a ten year period was associated with any change in the perceived QOL of the 'oldest old' in Sweden (individuals with an average age of 81 still living independently). Fifteen different activities were enquired about. These were categorised into six domains of which three incorporated cultural activities: the culture-entertainment domain (includes going to cinema, theatre, concerts, museums etc), productive-personal growth (includes reading books, hobbies such as knitting, sewing, painting etc); and recreation – expressive (includes dancing, playing a musical instrument). Overall, while there was a decline in all types of leisure activity over time, there was considerable variability within this, 'with many older people adding as well as dropping activities over a 10-year period.'(2002:538). Levels of participation in the culture – entertainment domain dropped for 28% of the sample but increased for 19%. 24% of the sample increased activities in the productive-personal growth domain, while another 43% experienced a decline. Participation in recreation-expressive activities remained constant for 77% of the sample, dropped for 13% and increased for 10%. The study found that people who raised their levels of activity over time, whether or not the actual type of activity changed, were more likely to positively assess their QOL and this was particularly the case for people who became widowed, functionally impaired, or had little contact with family. The conclusion, for this population, is that the **type** of activity – cultural or other - is less important to QOL than the **existence** of activity in itself.

Bowling and Gabriel's (2004) study of older people in Britain found that the most important predictors of good perceived QOL in older age consistently emphasised by all the three research approaches taken were not material circumstances – actual levels of income, housing conditions or education – but psychological characteristics and outlook, health and functional status, and 'personal and neighbourhood capital' (2004:1).

Figure 2 below shows that social activities form one of these main 'building blocks' of QOL in older age:

Figure 2: Main building blocks or drivers of QOL in older age

Building block	% of variance in QOL ratings explained
People's standards of social comparison and expectations in life	6.5%
A sense of optimism and belief that 'all will be well in the end'	8.2%
Having good health and physical functioning	6.2%
Engaging in a large number of social activities and feeling supported	3.4%
Living in a neighbourhood with good community facilities and services, including transport	1.2%
Feeling safe in one's neighbourhood	N/a

Source: Bowling and Gabriel (2004:17)

Michalos and Zumbo's (2000) study looked at the effect of leisure activities on the perceived QOL of adult residents in Prince George, Canada with QOL operationalised as satisfaction with life as a whole, happiness, and satisfaction with the overall quality of life. Residents were invited to state which of a list of 54 seasonal recreational activities they participated in, 10 of which were culture related. The culture related activities were incorporated into two indexes of sedentary recreational activities. However while active recreational activity was positively related to some health dimensions, sedentary recreational activity was found to have no impact. Neither of the two indexes of sedentary recreational activity were reported as having a significant influence on life satisfaction, happiness or satisfaction with the overall QOL, although several of the 13 indexes constructed measuring the degree to which residents felt they *benefited* from leisure activities were found to have some explanatory power in relation to these.

A strong conclusion common to three of these studies therefore concerns the importance to QOL of being active and maintaining social activities, with the suggestion that cultural activity has a role to play within this, rather than a special role to play of its own (Kelly et al, 2001, Bowling and Gabriel, 2004, Silverstein and Parker, 2002).

(III) Qualitative approach

This is adopted by just one study. Wood and Smith (2004), in trying to access and understand human emotional response to live music performance, employ innovative qualitative methodologies which they describe as 'observant listening' and 'participant sensing' (2004:533). The emphasis is on understanding process rather than identifying and empirically measuring cause and effect. Approaching the subject from the perspective of human geography, their interest is in 'social well-being' and in understanding 'the ways in which emotional knowledges might change the way people think about, use, reproduce, regulate and modify the world' (2004:534). Their conceptualisation of QOL is implicit and requires some deciphering. They hypothesise a relationship between social well-being and QOL, without defining either concept, and articulate contradictory positions on the nature and direction of that relationship. In one sentence the QOL enhancing attributes of music are regarded as a way to promote social wellbeing and in another, by enhancing social well-being music is seen as a way to promote QOL (2004:541). The term social well-being is used interchangeably with emotional well-being. Despite the conceptual laxity, the study presents persuasive evidence of the positive impact of live music on individuals' emotional state. However their conclusion, that 'musical performances can tap into those emotional qualities which have the capacity to enhance people's quality of life' suggests a limited conception of QOL as either affective or cognitive well-being. Certainly they acknowledge that music has no capacity to alter material life conditions (2004:543).

'Neither musical encounters nor kindled emotions can make poor people rich, dying people live or risky environments safe. However, musical performances do contain clues about what emotional well-being is, what happiness, contentment and hope feel like, and they show how powerful these emotions can be. This, at least, is a step towards imagining knowing, even creating a different kind of world.' (2004: 544)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

So, what do these studies tell us about the usefulness of QOL as a concept for cultural policymaking? What kind of cultural QOL research is needed, and what kind of research questions need to be asked in the future?

The problem of the evidence gap

In the context of current instrumentalist cultural policy the objective of government is to assemble the 'evidence base' with which to demonstrate the effectiveness of arts or cultural 'interventions' in achieving specific policy goals. The emerging field of cultural indicators serves this purpose (IFACCA, 2005; Duxbury, 2003). While most effort in this area is being expended on community cultural indicators^{vii} attempts have also been made to develop indicators at individual level. These tend to be measures of 'social' or 'human capital', for example, measuring the impact on the confidence, self-esteem, or progression into education or employment, of participants in arts or cultural projects (Essex County Council, 2003, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2005).

But the central problem in the development of such indicators is the lack of a theory of cultural impact, itself a reflection of the scarcity of empirical research in this area (Jackson and Herranz, 2002:33; Oakley, 2004:9). As a result these types of indicators are often based on evidence of association rather than causation and subsequently fall short of the standards of 'robust' evidence required by government policymakers (Creigh-Tyte, 2003:52).

The findings of this review provide little assistance to this endeavour. The first finding is simply the scarcity of literature on cultural participation and QOL (at individual or indeed at community level). As Alex Michalos has previously observed, this is a field neglected both by cultural and QOL researchers (Michalos, 2005:1). Indeed Michalos is the author of the only article on the subject to be published in *Social Indicators Research* in its 30 year history (one of the studies reviewed here). However it is not altogether surprising given the lack of

academic research into the social impact of the arts (Belfiore, 2002; Galloway, 2006) and the relatively underdeveloped state of cultural evaluation (Creigh-Tyte, 2003:52).

It may be that this finding also reflects the decision, of necessity, to limit the scope of the search strategy. The key words used were 'arts' and 'culture', rather than specific artforms, for example, music or drama, or specific communities or population types. Ferriss has also observed, in relation to the sociology literature, the scarcity of empirical studies which use the term QOL in comparison to the vast number using terms that are components of QOL (Ferriss, 2006:373).

The second finding is that currently there is little evidence that cultural participation makes a significant positive contribution to individual QOL. **Table 3** shows that, with the exception of Coffman and Adamek's study of active musicians, cultural participation has a very small effect, or no detectable effect at all, on perceived QOL. As Michalos' study demonstrates, even for individuals with an active interest in the arts, arts participation does not appear to be a significant predictor of good perceived QOL.

The findings of studies with a wider focus show that both solo and social leisure activities constitute one important domain or constituent of QOL, as defined by research subjects. But this is just one of a number of domains contributing to QOL as a whole.

The other important finding is that taking part in social and leisure activities of *any type* can make an important contribution to the individual QOL of what are termed 'special populations'. Burack et al (2003: 74) recommend the development of recreational activities, tailored to nursing home residents' own interests and tastes, including music listening, needlework and painting, as a way to improve well-being (a term they use interchangeably with satisfaction). This accords with the findings of two other studies that increased participation over time in any type of social or leisure activity improves the perceived quality of life of older people (Silverstein and Parker, 2002, Bowling and Gabriel, 2004:20). The problem for cultural policymakers is

that the benefits of taking part in cultural activities – in terms of social relationships, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and beating isolation – may also be shared by many non-cultural activities.

Problems of generalising and measurement

The production of generalisable research results is a key requirement of policymakers (Creigh-Tyte, 2003). These studies illustrate some of the limitations of QOL research for producing findings of wider application, a difficulty which, from one perspective, is inherent in the concept of QOL. As discussed below, there are also difficulties relating to culture: in total the high degree of specificity found in cultural QOL research, both in populations, art forms, types and quality of delivery and social context do not facilitate the extrapolation of findings.

As Table 3 above shows, in five of the eight articles reviewed here the findings are not generalisable to a wider population. In some cases this is for methodological reasons, for example, either an unrepresentative, small or self-selecting sample. But conceptual issues also have a bearing. The evidence from those studies that adopt a multi-dimensional, methodologically pluralistic approach to QOL suggests that QOL is a dynamic concept, i.e. the importance placed on different dimensions of QOL varies according to population demographics and also changes over time, according to changing circumstances or life stage. Environmental and cultural factors also condition populations to hold quite different values, expectations and aspirations, important determinants of perceived QOL, which some QOL researchers believe must be incorporated into QOL measures (Bowling and Gabriel, 2004; Felce and Perry, 1995). Silverstein and Parker, for example, highlight the cultural specificity of their (Swedish) study population as a factor hindering its wider application (2002:545).

From a subjective well-being perspective global QOL measures may be a valid way of operationalising QOL, helping to overcome some of the problems of generalisability and comparability, but can we be entirely sure

what is being measured? Michalos' findings raise doubts about this. His study, reviewed here, reinforces the findings of earlier research by Michalos and Zumbo (2003) that is, by altering the dependent variable (i.e. the type of QOL measure used) the significant predictors of QOL, i.e. the research results, also change, thus:

'for example, if one had satisfaction with the overall quality of life as one's only dependent variable, one might conclude that the three arts-related indexes were simply unrelated to the quality of life. On the other hand, if one had the Index of Subjective Well-Being as one's only dependent variable, one's conclusion might be exactly the opposite.' (Michalos, 2005:14)

The problem of over determinism

Some criticism is also necessary of the assumptions often found within cultural policymaking. The idea that QOL can be standardised between individuals and across populations is a contested one, but it underlies policymakers' assumptions about cultural impact. Also problematic is the assumption that all 'cultural interventions', across all art forms, managed and delivered in a variety of ways, and of varying quality, will produce similar outcomes. The evidence of this review suggests otherwise. Instead, catching up with the more realistic concerns of other disciplines, should we not be asking whether there are particular life stages or life circumstances in which cultural 'interventions' are more likely to have an effect? (Guetzkow, 2002:21; Merli, 2002:115).

The expectations and therefore the research questions posed by cultural policymakers, while understandable in an instrumentalist framework, may be somewhat unrealistic. If the starting point is a multi-dimensional conception of QOL, with an understanding of the many other building blocks, drivers, material factors or domains that constitute QOL, then the expectation that cultural participation, acting alone, may effect change in an individual's overall QOL may not be plausible - unless a large part of an individual's life is devoted to music-making or other creative endeavour.

The effect of cultural participation on global QOL may be weak, but its effect on individual QOL domains may be stronger. As Ferriss concludes,

“Different influences affect QOL domains differently. In the search for means of improving the QOL, no single influence can be expected to impact all domains.” (2001:14).

The deployment of QOL as a global construct by these few extant studies, may possibly mask evidence of real import to policymakers. Consequently QOL may be most useful as an ‘organising theme’ or framework with which to view the varied types of social impact claimed for arts and culture (Schalock, 2000:117). Studies of ‘social impact’ have highlighted a range of benefits claimed for cultural participation – for example health and wellbeing, social inclusion, increased self confidence (Matarasso, 1997, Coalter, 2001, Reeves, 2002). As **Table 4** shows, although the authors may not have viewed these impacts within a QOL framework, they correspond closely with core QOL domains.

Table 4: Social impacts of the arts and core QOL domains

Common core QOL domains (a synthesis of Felce and Perry, 1996; Schalock, 2000; WHOQOL Group, 1995; Hagerty, 2001; Cummins, 1997)	NHS Health Development Agency (2000) impacts of arts and health projects	Coalter (2001) Impacts of arts activity
Health	Health and wellbeing	Health and well-being
Material well-being		Alleviating poverty
Social relationships/well-being/inclusion	Social cohesion	Strengthening communities, social cohesion and inclusion
Emotional well-being	Health and wellbeing	Increasing personal confidence and self-esteem
Work and productive activity		Economic impact and employment
Rights or civic well-being		
Personal development	Changed perspective	
Self-determination/ level of independence	Community empowerment/self determination	
Spiritual		
Personal safety		

Source: Galloway, 2006.

We should recall that QOL domains may be potentially neutral, positive or negative (Hagerty et al, 2001:10, The WHOQOL Group, 1995: 1405) and recent work in cultural policy reminds us that views of the negative impact of the arts have as long a historical trajectory as the positive (Belfiore and Bennett, 2006). Researchers should be critical of the assumption that cultural participation will *necessarily* produce positive effects.

However based on this assumption, a central question for cultural policymakers is whether the outcomes of cultural participation are more or less positive than those of other types of participative activity. Quantitative 'evidence' to support the relative benefit of culture is increasingly desired by local and national government officials involved in budget negotiations. The findings here are not encouraging, stressing the importance of *any* kind of activity, whether cultural or not.

Significantly, Wood and Smith's work on human emotional geography explores the distinctive attributes of live musical performance and suggests this specific form of cultural participation can engender self-efficacy or self-realisation which, they argue, can have an impact on wellbeing and QOL. This raises a number of questions for cultural researchers to explore. Are particular art forms or types of cultural activity more or less influential for QOL or specific QOL domains? How do the distinctive attributes or qualities of particular forms of cultural expression contribute to these effects? And do participatory cultural projects which 'work' have particular characteristics? For according to Mulgan:

'it is not culture per se but rather particular kinds of cultural activity that make the difference...it should not be assumed that the same strategy will work for all of these. Instead far more clarity is needed as to which problems are being solved, why and with what tools.'

(Mulgan, 2006:11)

And what about the quality of the intervention? We cannot generalise across the population but similarly we cannot assume that the cultural interventions are the same, similar or follow similar principles (Coalter, 2001).

To date neither cultural policy or QOL research has been very successful in answering these types of research questions. In the former, the field of 'social impact' is dominated by consultancy reports and 'grey literature', much of which has been subject to substantial criticism on both ideological, conceptual and methodological grounds (Guetzkow, 2002, Oakley, 2004).

Conclusion

The findings of this review demonstrate that this is an area where policy rhetoric outstrips research evidence. The findings tentatively suggest that cultural participation, while contributing to specific QOL domains, is for most people not a major determinant of good global QOL. In addition, there are currently too few studies of cultural participation and quality of life to provide a base for either policy or theory, and hence on which to develop cultural indicators at individual level.

However this article has suggested that the focus on global QOL which dominates studies of culture and QOL to date may not be the most fruitful. It proposes that a multi-dimensional conception of QOL is more relevant for current policy purposes, and recommends researchers focus on how and why different types of cultural participation contribute to specific domains of QOL. It is essential that researchers be explicit about their definition of QOL and that they adopt a critical and reflexive approach to their preferred type of conceptualisation and measurement.

Researchers need to convince policymakers that securing findings generalisable across all cultural interventions or all populations is unachievable. Future research requires comparisons between and within art forms, between cultural and non-cultural participative activities, and between individuals in different social circumstances and in different stages of life. In doing so, QOL researchers face the same types of challenges as cultural policy researchers addressing questions of social impact, and also with social researchers in many

other areas of public policy engaged with analysing cause and effect in complex social situations. More work is needed to test out methodologies capable of evaluating the effects of cultural participation, methods that can overcome some of the acknowledged limitations of the positivist experimental model (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).^{viii} The challenge is whether these studies can still meet the criteria of governments for 'robust' evidence discussed above.

Wood and Smith's study reminds us that at the heart of this QOL area is the question of cultural distinctiveness. Research which explores the distinctive attributes of cultural expression and what these bring to our lives perhaps holds the key to understanding the contribution of culture to QOL.

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Notes

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ⁱⁱ Set out in the 2002 'National Public Service Agreement for Local Government', against which targets are set for improving services. (online at http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Press_Release/shared%20priorities.pdf [accessed 19 December 2006])

ⁱⁱⁱ DCMS website at http://www.culture.gov.uk/about_us/ [accessed 19 December 2006].

^{iv} Meanwhile the notion of culture's role in improving well-being or quality of life is influential in cultural policymaking across the English speaking world including in New Zealand, Australia and Canada (see New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2006; Mills and Brown, 2004; Bittman, 2006) and underpins developments in cultural social indicators.

^v Searches were made of three electronic databases covering the medical, social science and psychology literatures (BIDS, Medline and PsycINFO), websites of key organisations and research centres, bibliography reviews and the web plus manual journal searches, posts to lists and contact with identified experts. To ensure manageability, a range of exclusion criteria were employed.^v In particular three main areas of literature were specifically excluded: the arts and health literature which had recently been reviewed (Staricoff, 2004), the urban studies/cities literature, which has a different type of focus on culture i.e. not on cultural participation as such, and the economics literature, which focuses on the concept of 'well-being.' A separate review of the economics literature was undertaken for the Scottish Executive by Professor David Bell. This is published in Galloway (2006).

^{vi} The UK Economic and Social Research Council.

^{vii} The Creative City Network of Canada provides a helpful overview of cultural indicators work internationally (see <http://www.creativecity.ca/cecc/research-directories/cultural-indicators.html>) [accessed 6 December 2006].

^{viii} This is the subject of current research by the author supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council entitled 'The impact of culture on quality of life: developing approaches for cultural research'.