

# Cultural statistics and the values of culture. The case of Norway

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## INTRODUCTION

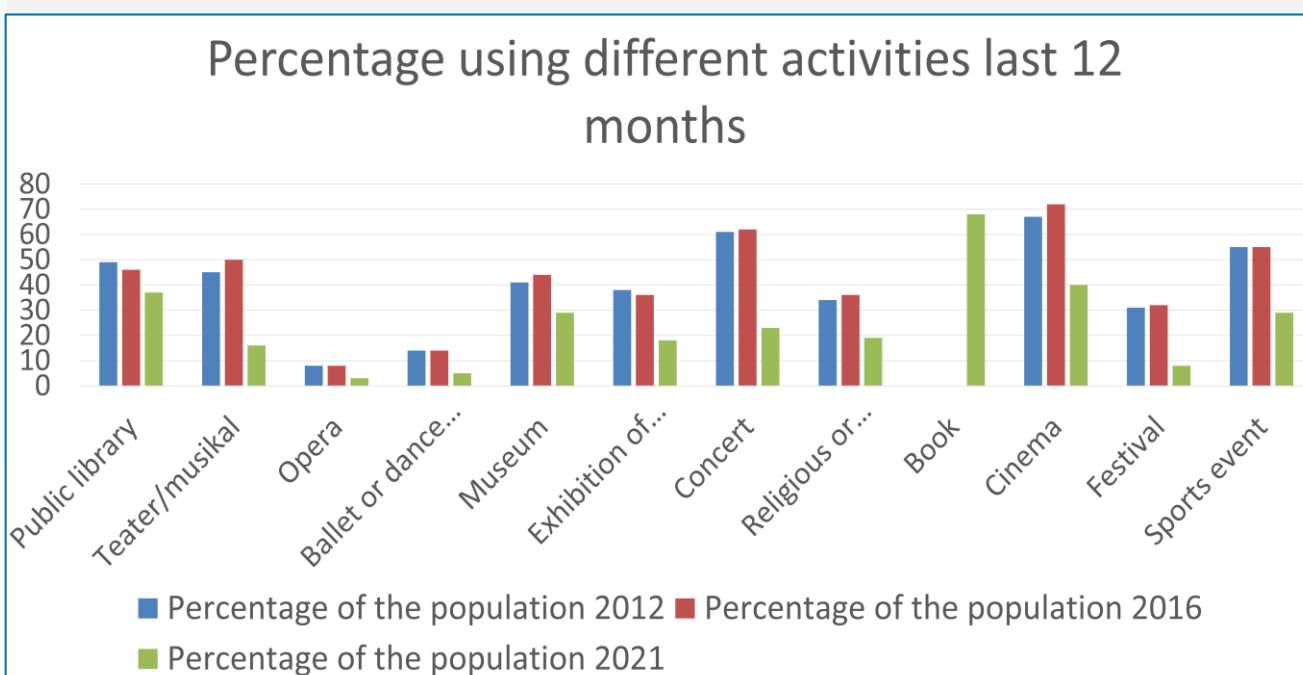
The fundamental cultural information system in Norway is managed by the national agency of statistics, Statistics Norway (SN). SN has collected, aggregated, analysed, and presented numbers to describe the cultural sector for more than five decades. These numbers have covered cultural participation and consumption, cultural production and different aspects of cultural economy. The publications from SN on culture and media consumption are key sources for policymakers at the national level, including the Ministry of Culture.

In this case, we are interested in the statistics aimed to capture different kinds of cultural participation. The primary sources for this kind of statistics are the regular studies *Norwegian Cultural Barometer* and *Norwegian Media Barometer*. These two barometers have been produced since 1991, and a continuous challenge have been to identify categories and questions that reflect the actual cultural practice in the Norwegian population. The most recent version of these publications is *Norwegian Cultural Barometer 2021*, from May 2022. The main point of these publications is to systematically measure the cultural and media consumption of the Norwegian population. A large part of these studies consists of tables and overviews of the number of visits and patterns of use of different forms of cultural and media provisions.

## OBJECTIVES

In this case study, we ask:

- What sort of values are measured in cultural statistics and how does categories and classifications affect the measuring of values?
- To what degree can statistics capture the broad scope of values attributed to cultural consumption, participation, and production?



Comparison of results from the three latest Cultural Barometers. Source: SN.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This case is based on document analysis. The primary empirical data consists of the seven editions of The Norwegian Cultural Barometer between 1994 and 2021 and selected editions of The Norwegian Media Barometer between 1995 and 2020. All reports, as well as selected datasets, are published on the website of Statistics Norway (SN). The analysis of the statistic reports, categories and attached values was complemented by an interview with representatives from SN. We conducted this interview with two employees responsible for the cultural and media barometers and general cultural statistics in Statistics Norway. The interview was conducted the day after the publication of *The Norwegian Cultural Barometer 2021*. The main topics of our conversation were the organization of their work as part of the agency, the development of surveys and statistics, including the choice of categories and questions, the measuring of quality and value, and the relationship between cultural policy and cultural statistics.



The cover of the 2022 edition of the Norwegian Cultural Barometer

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

We have systematized and summarized the different categories, and classifications in the culture and media barometers. These are of five different types:

- Category** of cultural or media expression (e.g., Radio, Cinema, Theatre),
- Sub-category** (e.g., paper/web, different audio media),
- Type of cultural provider** (including specific providers, and only applicable for selected categories, e.g., different kinds of newspapers),
- Genre** (content-based distinction between different forms of expressions, e.g., book genre, TV-show category, concert genre),
- Measurement/unit** (e.g., minutes spent, number of activities, use/non-use).

In addition, we also looked at what participant variables were included in the surveys. These were *gender, age group, education level, geographical region, level of urbanization, income level, household type and household size*.

These are the main challenges for the consumption surveys and barometers:

- To balance between relevant categories and statistical continuity
- To distinguish between media and cultural consumption
- To use classifications that make sense for consumers being surveyed

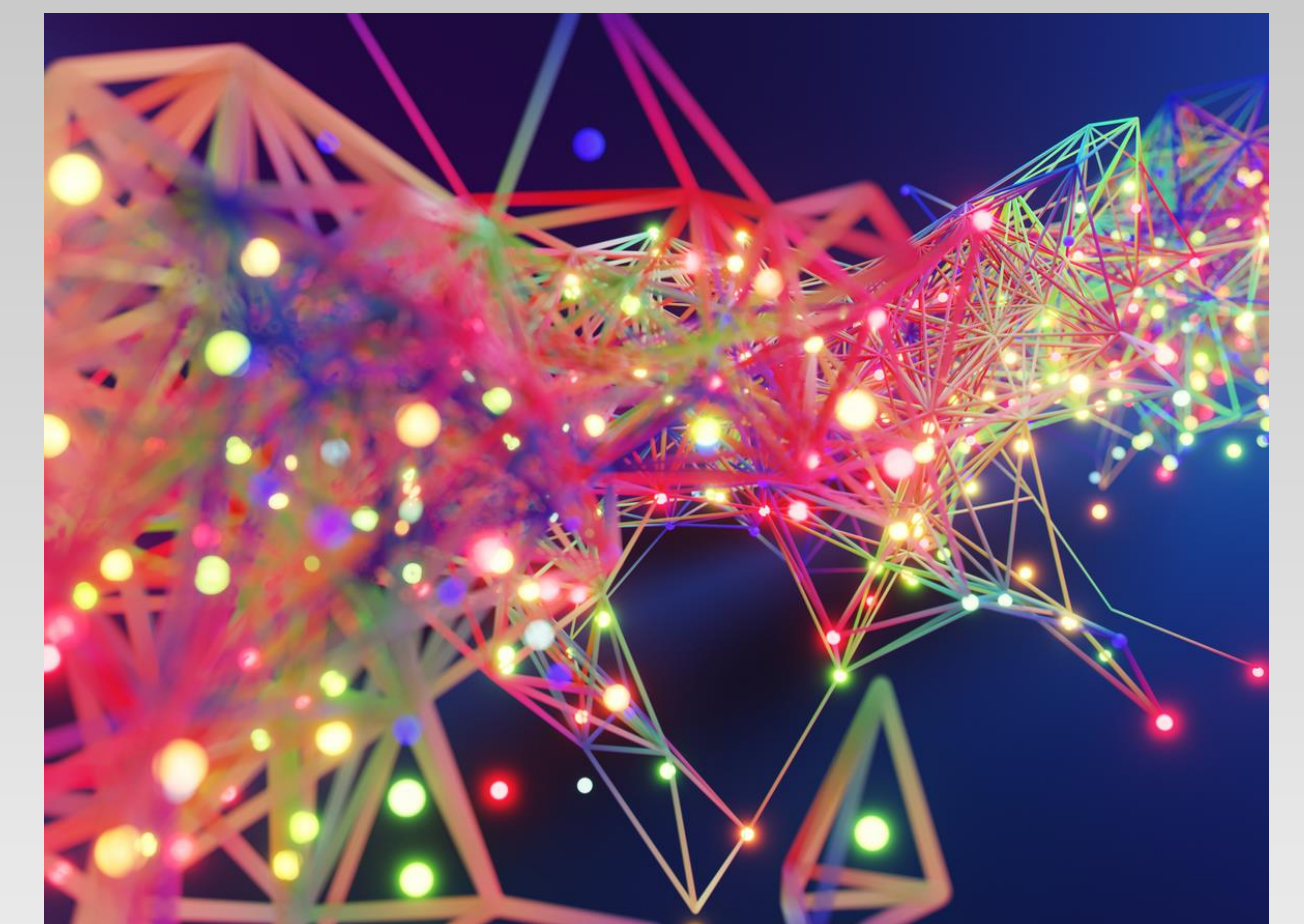
There are no explicit attempts to capture cultural values in the surveys. Implicitly, however, certain values of participation and interest are covered. This includes an implicit view of cultural consumption as inherently valuable.

There is a fundamental tension in the statistics between quantitative measurement and qualitative cultural values.

## CONCLUSIONS

Broad categories change slowly. In the cultural barometer, the main categories have been kept since the first edition in 1991. Media consumption categories and genre classifications change more frequently.

Every change of categories and questions in the two barometers is an attempt to resolve different tensions. To introduce new categories or to remove existing ones, is in effect an effort to resolve the general tension between comparative time series over time and updated relevance of questions and categories. The tension between measuring media and cultural consumption is seemingly not perceived as a tension among the people responsible for developing the two consumption barometers. Consequently, they did not see any potential problems in similar activities being surveyed in two different contexts and publications.



## POSTSCRIPT: the challenge of platform data

While publicly sanctioned measurement of cultural and media use has obvious challenges in the inclusion of digital media, there is an unprecedented level of detailed knowledge about this type of consumption. The platforms that convey content and communication facilities keep large amounts of information about the digital culture and communication habits of all of us. At the same time, the platform companies keep their big data to themselves, as it is this data that constitutes the most important value of the companies. A discussion on the transparency of or access to platform-aggregated big data will be essential for the development of (digitally) updated cultural statistics. To develop surveys of digital cultural use is, however, to aim for a moving target. Technological solutions, platforms, forms of expression and usage patterns are volatile entities.