

Grundtvig Art-Age project / The Netherlands

YOUNG AT HEART - the enjoyment of older participants in the amateur arts

In a province of the Netherlands, North Brabant, a survey was carried out amongst an orchestra of amateur musicians and an organisation where amateurs participate in the visual arts. The questionnaire was aimed at finding out why older people participate in the arts, what the importance of this is for them and about the learning process. It was decided to put together qualitative questionnaires that would be able to form the basis for later, more in-depth interviews or a large-scale written/digital survey.

A total of 20 questionnaires were returned completed, 15 of which from musicians and 5 from visual artists. Of these visual artists 2 also participate in music and 1 person also takes part in creative writing.

The questionnaire was completed by 13 men and 7 women, in ages varying from 50 to over 85; most people were between 61 and 80 years of age, of whom in turn most were aged between 71 and 75.

Nationally the percentage of female participants in the amateur arts is actually higher; namely 58% compared with 42% male amateur art participants.

One person, the one under 55, still works, whereas the rest are retired. Five of the 20 respondents do volunteer work.

All but 2 of them feel perfectly healthy.

When did these people start participating in the arts and have they continued to do so throughout their lives?

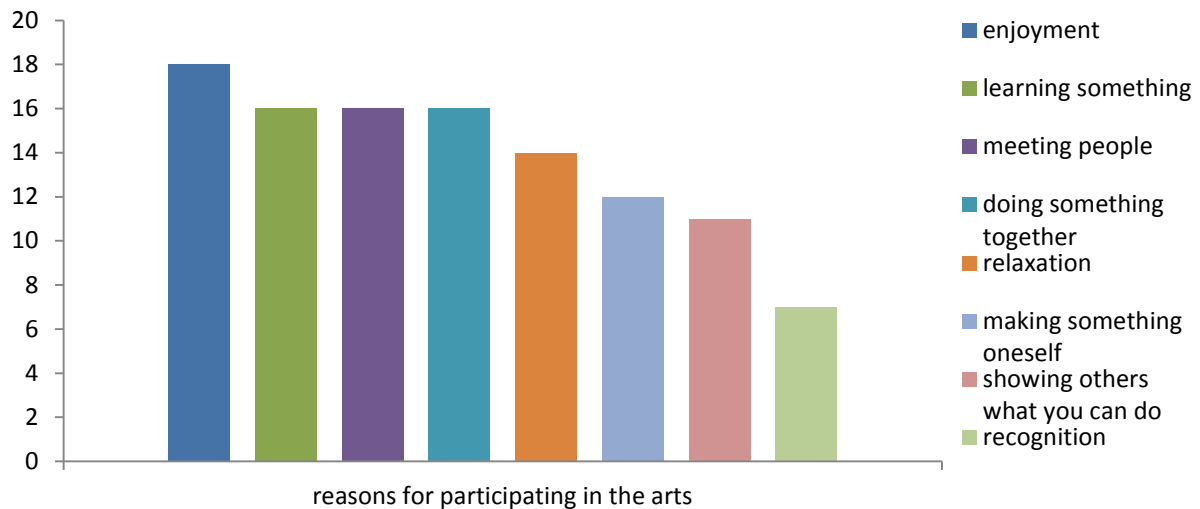
Almost half, 9 people, started to participate in the arts as children and continued to do so throughout their lives. Six started as children, stopped and then started once more, sometimes in a different art form. Three started when they were adults and only 2 when they were a fair bit older. The great majority, namely 15 people, had participated in the arts as children.

Why do people participate in their chosen art form?

One man explained that his parents made him learn to play the piano; it was only at a later age that he enjoyed making music. For practically everyone enjoyment is the main reason for their participation in the arts. This was followed by wanting to learn and becoming better at their chosen art form, meeting people with the same interests and the pleasure of doing something with others. Relaxation also scored highly. Showing other people what you can do was considered somewhat less important.

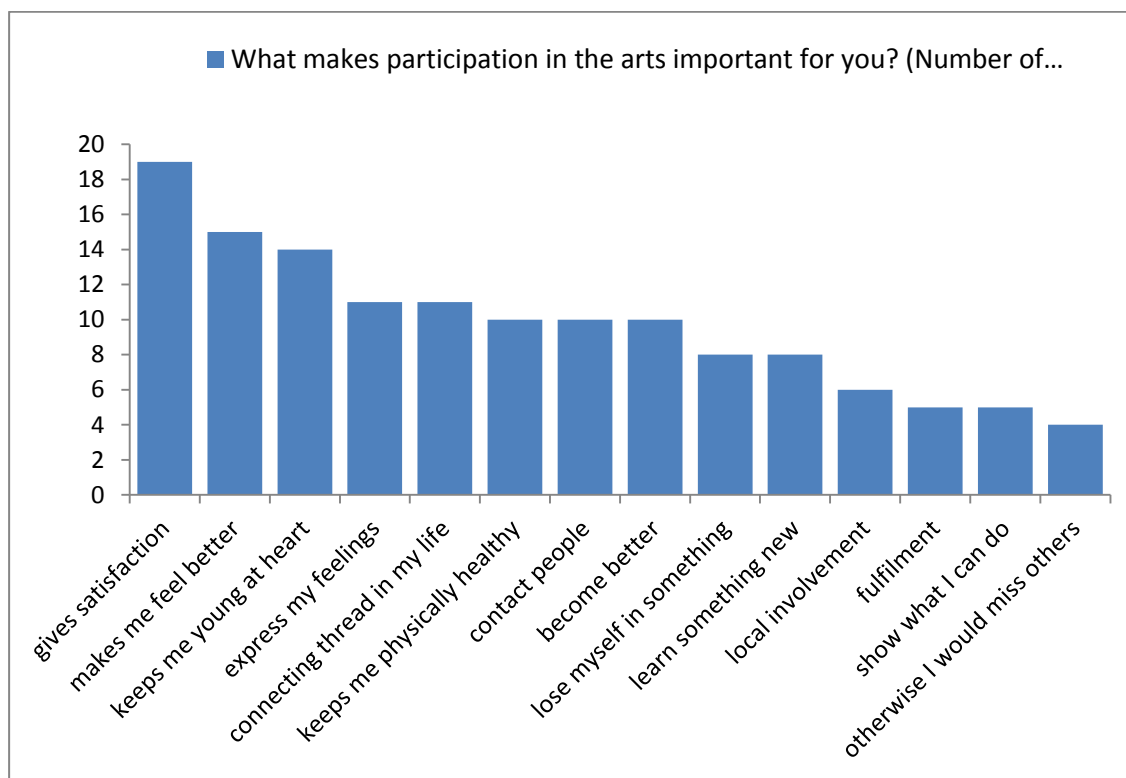
In a survey conducted amongst 2000 amateur artists enjoyment also scored the highest. Relaxation was named as the second most important reason (Monitor Amateurkunst 2013, LKCA).

The below bar chart shows the extent to which the respondents considered the reasons suggested as important (more than one reason was possible).



One question was 'Why do you play music, sing, paint, dance, do creative writing, act or do artistic photography (or some other form of art)?' The answers to this question would probably indicate more why people are participating in the arts now rather than the reason they actually started. Other research shows that children rate the reasons for participating in the arts differently, such as finding 'showing others what you can do' important. We would also like to know why people start participating in the arts at an older age. This therefore overlaps the next question, namely what importance does participation in the arts have at the moment.

To the question what makes taking part in visual arts or playing music so important for the person, we received the following answers.



Making music or painting gives satisfaction to practically all participants (19 of the 20). Most of them also indicated that it makes them feel better and keeps them young at heart.

Many also mentioned the positive physical effects. This scores as high as wanting to be better in their chosen form of art. Becoming better doesn't necessarily mean wanting to learn something new, but most people do consider that important or somewhat important.

For many the contact with other people is also important. Not everybody felt it increased the involvement with the local community. This is in line with the question regarding volunteer work: $\frac{1}{4}$ of this group selected this, compared with $\frac{3}{4}$ who did not. Expressing one's feelings through their art form and 'lose myself in something' is important for approximately half of the respondents. This therapeutic effect, however, is not considered important for the other half.

For 11 of the 20 respondents, participation in the arts is an important connecting thread in their lives, but not everybody also referred to it as fulfilling something in their lives.

Have these participants in the arts been stimulated by their environment in taking part in the arts?

Only 3 people mentioned their parents. Here, too, most people answered this question based on the present. Who stimulated them now to participate in the arts? Many had participated in the arts when they were young, and their parents probably played a more important role in this then. These are aspects that can be examined better in an interview.

The majority, namely 13 people, said that it was

their own idea. This was the case for all of the participants in the visual arts. For 2 of the musicians partners had played a role in the decision and for 2 their friends and family. In 1 specific case the person started art to help him deal with a bereavement.

People were asked what they learn from playing music or painting.

It comes as no surprise that 16 of the 20 participants noticed an improvement in their artistic skills. Furthermore, for 11 of the 20 people their participation in their artistic pastime helps them in their personal development and to express themselves in a creative manner. 10 of the 20 respondents developed a better sense for moods and emotions. Working better together was considered a benefit by 8 of the 20 respondents; this is not surprising considering the number of orchestra musicians that filled out this questionnaire. Further details are given in the table below.

What do you learn from participating in the arts? (more than one answer is possible)

I become better in my chosen art form (music, painting, dancing, acting, etc.)	16
I learn to express myself in a creative manner	11
I can express myself more poetically	1
It contributes to my personal development (as a person)	11
I have developed a better sense for moods and emotions	10
I learn to work together with others better	8
I have developed my taste and opinion regarding artistic quality	6
I have begun to think more about the arts	4

How do people learn to become better in their chosen art form? was a follow-up question.

Everyone practices at home.

In addition, all the musicians rehearse in a group.

5 of the 15 musicians also take lessons.

3 of the 5 visual artists take lessons and 2 of the 5 take part in occasional workshops.

Also 2 of the musicians take part in workshops and 1 follows masterclasses.

Only 1 musician uses the Internet.

Who is important in the learning process?

For the 15 musicians it is the conductor. And for all the people that take lessons it is the teacher.

10 of the 15 musicians and 2 of the 5 visual artists also mentioned their fellow musicians or fellow students as being important.

2 people mentioned their partner and 2 people mentioned particularly their own efforts.

Do you consider it important to (still) continue learning something through your chosen art form?

14 people consider that important, 5 people a little and 1 person not at all.

What do the 19 still want to learn?

16 people want to become better in their chosen art form, 9 people also want to learn to collaborate/play instruments better with others and 2 people would like to learn

another art form.

Do people find it more difficult to learn now than when they were younger?

Half of the respondents thought this was the case and the other half did not.

Those who said they had more difficulty learning explained that it was primarily because they were less quick (4x) and could remember less (5x). One person mentioned in particular the physical limitations regarding their movement and sight that makes learning less easy.

Are there things that actually make it better/easier for you to learn than when you were younger?

13 people did not think that learning is easier than when they were younger.

7 people however did, whereby the following factors played a role: experience and insight (5x). Sometimes experience and insight are described in more detail:

recognising the connections with other forms of art; first analysing, then practising and then playing together; being able to examine something in more detail.

Other aspects that were mentioned were motivation (1x) and time to practice (1x).

This question produces some very interesting insights that can be examined further in interviews. Also those who think that it is not easier to learn than when they were younger could be asked about aspects such as 'motivation' and 'time'. And certainly also building upon previous experiences.

People were also asked about the accessibility of the location of the lessons and the level of the lessons.

It is not surprising that this group is very satisfied about this. Considering they all participate either in an orchestra or in the visual arts this is not a representative group of older people. 18 of the 20 respondents were satisfied about the accessibility.

This is, by the way, totally in line with the national results, in which 89% of participants in the amateur arts indicated they were (very) satisfied about the accessibility of the facilities. Regarding the level of the lessons, 16 of the 20 were satisfied, with many of them feeling challenged and able to develop themselves. Conviviality scored well with 17 people. The pace of the lessons scored well with 14 people, and 14 also felt that they were trusted.

Regarding the lessons or rehearsals, could you indicate whether you are satisfied, a little satisfied or dissatisfied about the following aspects?

	Satisfied	A little satisfied
Accessibility (is the location of the lesson or practice area easily accessible?)	18	2
Level (is the level of the lesson in line with your expectations)	16	1
Pace (the pace of the lessons/rehearsals)	14	3
Conviviality	17	1
Trust (people place their trust in me)	14	1

Appreciation (I feel appreciated)	18	
Challenge (I feel challenged)	16	3
Possibility to develop myself further	15	3

N.B.

Occasionally a category has not been filled in, probably because the person concerned did not consider the category applicable or could not answer the question. For this reason the totals of the answers do not always add up to 20 in all categories. No one mentioned they were dissatisfied about any of the above aspects. It is for this reason that this answer option has not been shown in the above overview.

All participants in the arts wish to continue participating in their chosen art form as it gives them great enjoyment.

A number of people mentioned specifically wanting to continually feel challenged.

A middle-aged lady (56-60 years-old) has learnt the following lesson in life: 'My father, brother and sister died young; that is why I have learnt to do what I enjoy doing now.

You may not get a chance later on. When I am 80 perhaps then I will enjoy polishing and cleaning, but not NOW.'

Review

We did not interview a representative group of older people, as we had approached a seniors orchestra and an organisation for the visual arts to ask their students to take part in this small-scale survey. There are, for example, more men in the group than women, while on a national level the number of female participants in the amateur arts is larger.

Yet some of the results are in line with the national data, such as the enjoyment people derive from taking part in amateur arts and the desire to continue to learn. People are also satisfied about the accessibility of facilities. We do not rule out that in a year's time some facilities for participants of amateur arts may close down due to financial cutbacks, and that these views may change as a result.

As is the case on a national level, most of these amateur artists had participated in the amateur arts as children. In a follow-up it would be good to ask people who have had no previous experience in amateur arts what and who motivates them. This may provide useful information for reaching those older people who do not yet take part in the arts but would perhaps like to do so. Indications for reasons can be found in this survey such

as 'wanting to learn something (new)' or 'helping to find fulfilment' (young at heart; art for helping to deal with bereavement; social contacts). This group of respondents seems to have an inner 'drive' as the participation in the arts comes mainly from within them; for older people who have not had any experience in participating in arts, environmental factors must play a larger role.

Participating in the arts provides people with relaxation; they feel better as a consequence and it keeps them young at heart. This not only shows that art participation contributes to a person's health but it also indicates that participants in the amateur arts could adapt to old age more flexibly. These are aspects that can be examined in more detail. It could be, for example, that this helps people with the changes entailed with getting old.

As far as learning is concerned, these participants notice progress in their ability to make music or paint, and they learn how to express themselves creatively. Participating in the arts helps in their personal development. Half of them do have more trouble remembering, and with the pace. They do, on the other hand, have more motivation, time and experience. These are interesting aspects to look into further, also with those older people who indicate that they find it more difficult to learn. Perhaps they do not realize that time, motivation and experience can help them learn just as much as children or in any case learn differently than they would have as children. With a different, but not necessarily worse, result.