

Arts education in Flanders

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In 2013 the Cultural Policy Research Centre (CPRC) conducted a survey on arts education in Flemish secondary schools. In order to grasp the complexity and diversity of arts education two samples of secondary schools were drawn: a representative sample of secondary schools, and an extra sample of secondary schools in metropolitan areas. The first sample allows to draw a detailed portrait of arts education in Flanders, the second sample allows to zoom in on the cultural participation and education of the less privileged groups (which are overrepresented in big cities). Based on these two samples we reached 84 secondary schools in which a total of 5086 pupils¹ completed a questionnaire on arts activities and arts education in both a school and a leisure context. Unless explicitly mentioned, the results in this paper are based on the representative sample of Flemish schools (and not the oversampling of cities).

A school survey offers the best guarantee to interview a representative sample of young people in order to collect reliable data on arts participation and cultural learning in both school as in non-school contexts. In these processes of cultural learning we can distinguish between more explicit and conscious forms of cultural learning (arts education), and less explicit or conscious forms of cultural learning (cultural socialization). Both types of cultural learning (see figure 1), we can observe in schools as well as outside school during leisure time. Also within the more explicit forms of arts education, we can distinguish different types, which we can place on a continuum ranging from very formal ways (e.g. art subjects in school and the music academies outside schools) to very non-formal ways of arts education (e.g. the cultural climate at school).

¹ In addition approximately 2000 parents, 1098 teachers and 65 principals completed a coupled questionnaire.

Cultural learning	Leisure time	School
Arts education		
Formal	Arts and music academies (DKO)	Art subjects in school (music, visual arts, ...)
Less formal	Courses, workshops, ... organized by clubs, private teachers	Workshops, excursions, ... organized at school
Non-formal	Activities organized by youth clubs, ...	Extra-curricular activities at school (drama group, choir, ...)
Cultural socialisation		
Informal	Cultural climate at home, influences of peers & parents	Cultural climate at school (e.g. cultural interest and activities of teachers)

Figure 1. Modes of cultural learning

We will start this paper with a description of arts participation of Flemish youth during their leisure time, where we pay special attention to the social inequalities in arts participation. Next, we will investigate if arts education (both within and outside school, both formal and more informal forms of arts education) can compensate for social inequalities in arts participation in Flanders.

1. Arts participation during leisure time

The survey addressed both receptive (visiting or attending cultural activities) as active cultural participation (the practicing of a creative hobby). With regard to receptive cultural activities, already at the start of secondary school career, social differences can be observed. In the first grade of secondary education², the social differences are not so big, but are already visible and -with the exception of attending music festivals and concerts- young people in the vocational or B-stream attend less such activities than pupils in the general or A-stream (see figure 2).

In the 2nd and 3rd grade, the differences are becoming more pronounced. For instance, 32% of the pupils in vocational education (BSO) have been to a library outside the school hours during the previous 6 months, while this percentage in general education (ASO) is as high as 70%. Also 35% of the pupils in general education have visited at least once a monument, noteworthy building or archaeological site over the past six months while only 12.5% of the pupils enrolled in BSO have visited such a place. Pupils in technical education (TSO) take an intermediate position.

² Flemish secondary education consists of six years, divided in three grades, starting from the age of 12. More information on the Flemish school system can be found on: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/eurydice/downloads/Structures_BEnI_2009-2010_DEP.pdf

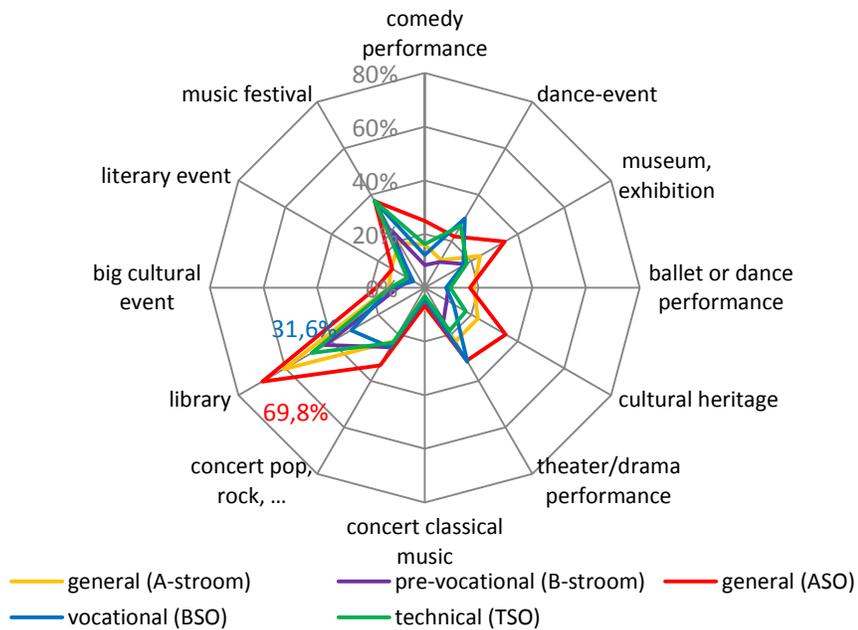


Figure 2. Receptive cultural participation during leisure time according to educational track: Percentage of pupils that has done activity during previous 6 months (representative sample)

In figure 3, the percentage of pupils that have practiced a form of amateur arts or a creative hobby during the six months preceding the survey is portrayed according to the educational track they are enrolled in. In the first grade, the differences are rather small between the pupils of the A- and B-stream. One exception here, is musical practice: in the A-stream 26% plays a musical instrument, while in the pre-vocational stream only 16% does this. Again, the differences are larger in the second and third grade of secondary education. In these upper grades 27% of the young people in ASO play a musical instrument, while this is only done by 9% in the vocational track. Again TSO takes an intermediate position.

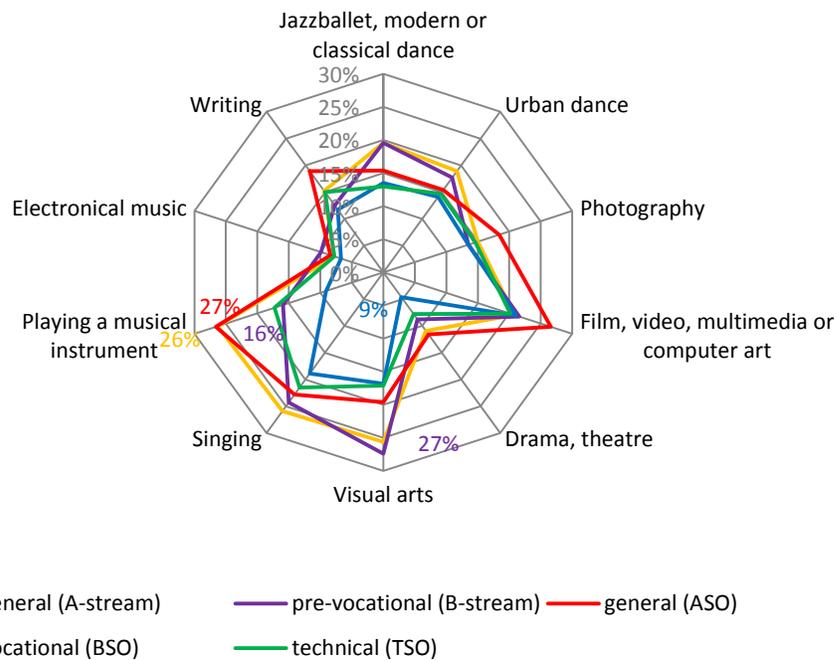


Figure 3. Percentage of pupils exercising a creative hobby during their leisure time according to educational track (representative sample)

Based on the total sample (oversampling of metropolitan areas included), we can also take a look at ethnical differences in cultural participation. In figure 4 we distinguish between three groups:

- 1) pupils with a Western-European background (their parents as well as their grandmother on mother's side are born in a Western-European country)
- 2) pupils with a Turkish or Moroccan background (at least one of their parents, their grandmother or the pupil is born in Turkey or Morocco)
- 3) and a rest-category

The third group is a rather diverse group. Therefore we will focus on the first two groups. With regard to receptive cultural participation, large and significant differences are found for all activities. Pupils with Turkish or Moroccan roots participate far less than pupils with Western-European roots. For instance, while 25% of the adolescents with Western-European roots has visited some noteworthy building or monument during the previous six months, only 11% of the adolescents with Turkish or Moroccan roots has done this.

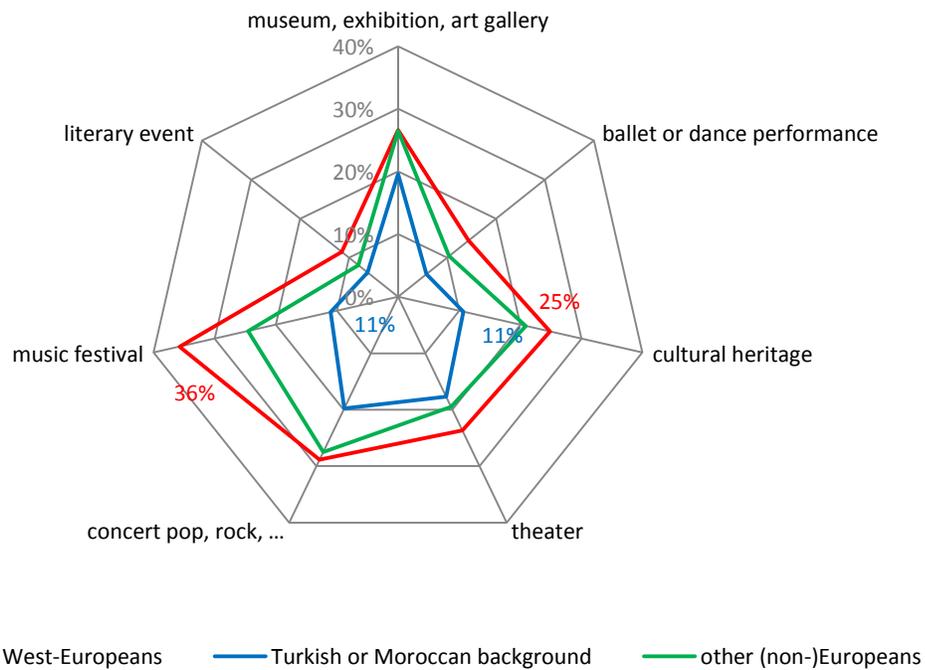


Figure 4. Receptive cultural participation during leisure time according to ethnic background: Percentage of pupils that has done activity during previous 6 months (total sample, incl. metropolitan areas)

With regard to active participation, the ethnic differences are less pronounced and even non-existent for some activities. This is for instance the case for dancing, acting and singing. The fact that there are fewer differences in this active participation may be related to the supply-side of receptive cultural activities: people of Turkish and Moroccan origin will find less concerts or performances which they feel connected to. When they sing themselves, they choose the genre. Besides, they can do it wherever and whenever they feel comfortable.

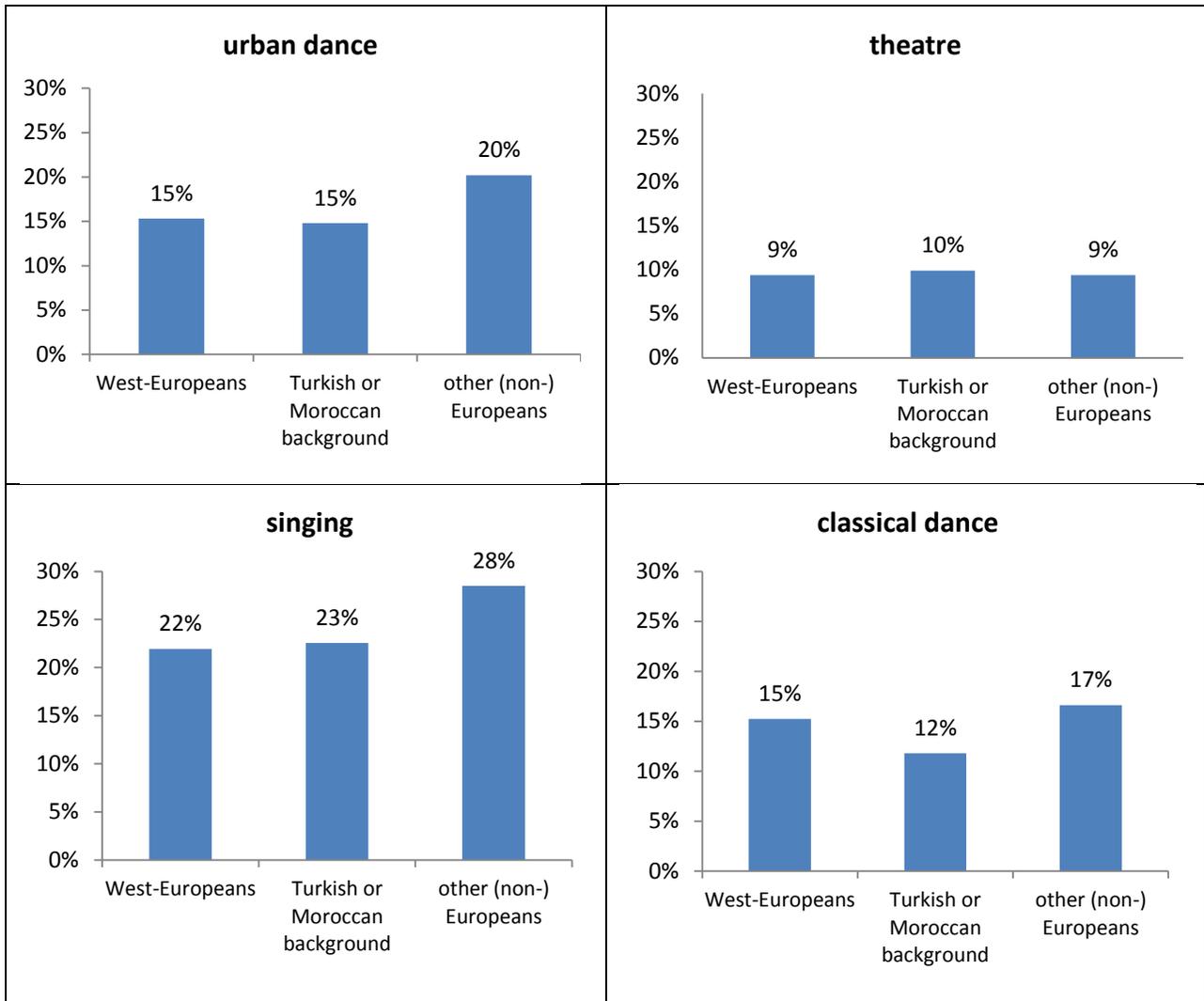


Figure 5. Active cultural participation during leisure time according to ethnic background: Percentages of pupils that have done activity during previous 6 months (total sample, incl. metropolitan areas)

2. Arts education

In the previous figures, we noticed large differences in arts participation according to educational track and ethnical background. Arts education is considered an important factor to combat social gaps in arts participation. However, it's important to make a distinction between arts education outside and inside the school context, since participation in educational programs during leisure time is always on a voluntary basis while participation in arts education in a school context is often compulsory. Therefore, we expect also large social differences in arts education outside the school³

³ The analyses show indeed similar social differences. Because of lack of space, we don't show the result here, but they are available on request.

Arts education during leisure time

The question we posed on arts education during leisure time, refers both to long-term programs as well as to one-off workshops or courses within e.g. arts academies or cultural or youth centres. In total 57% of the pupils mentioned at least one course. However the participation in arts education declines sharply with age. At the time of our survey, when the respondents are in secondary education, only 19% still partakes in arts education and we notice also a sharp decline in participation with age within secondary schooling.

Courses in visual arts seem to be the most popular courses: 29% of the young respondents indicated that they have followed or are following lessons in drawing, painting or other forms of visual arts. Also dance courses are popular, about a fifth of the young respondents has ever followed courses or workshops in what we can call "urban dance" (e.g. Hip hop, breakdance, ...) and even so a fifth has followed classical dance (e.g. classical ballet, jazz ballet, modern dance, ...) lessons. Following classical and popular (e.g. pop, rock) music lessons comes respectively on the fourth and fifth place.

Newer forms of arts participation (e.g. Creative activities with film or multimedia) are practiced by a significant proportion of young people, but few students have followed courses. To illustrate, only 4% of the young respondents have ever been taken lessons in film, video and multimedia, while 23% indicated to have practiced these creative activities during the past six months.

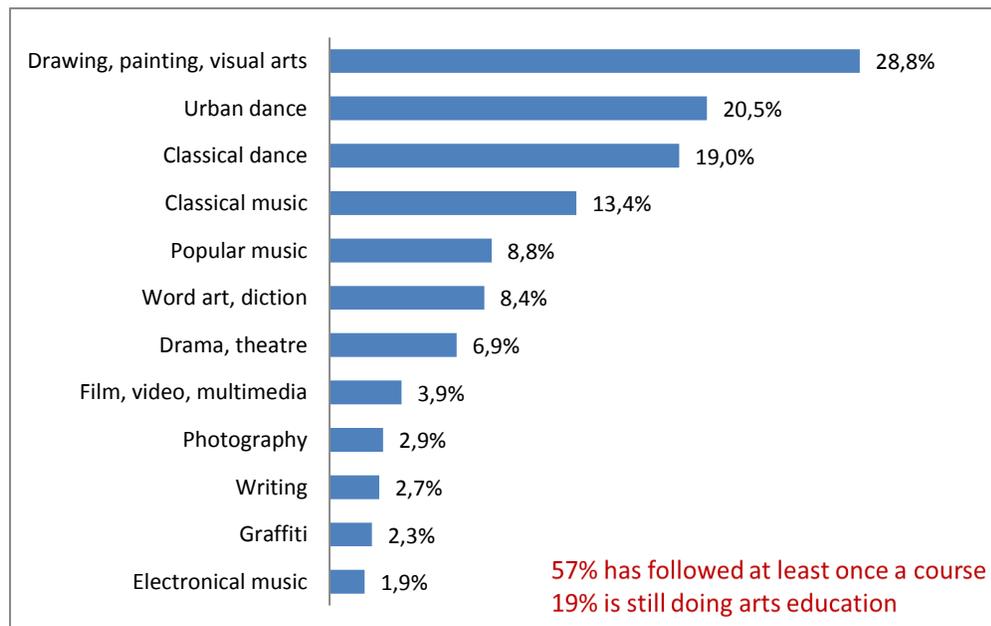


Figure 6. Arts education during leisure: Percentage of pupils that has followed or follows courses (outside school) according to discipline (representative sample)

Arts education at school

We expect a lot of schools, but can they really compensate for social background by offering arts education and can they abolish social inequalities in arts participation? In the first grade of secondary education, arts education is a compulsory course for every student⁴. In the second and third grade the proportion of pupils that follow an art course in school strongly drops. This is certainly the case in vocational and technical education, where less than half of the pupils indicates that they follow an art subject.

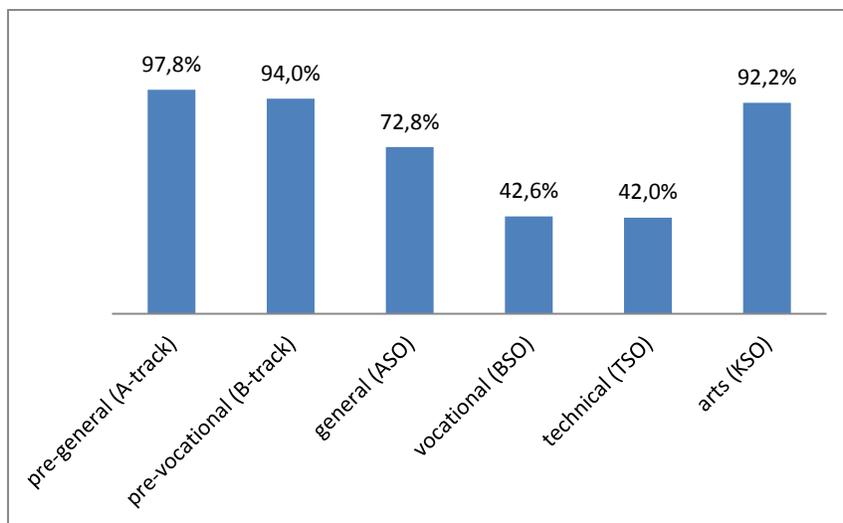


Figure 7. Percentage of pupils that indicate to follow an arts subject in school

Also the occasions to participate in cultural activities are more limited for pupils in vocational and technical tracks (figure 8). Already in the first grade, we notice that pupils in the A-stream have more opportunities in school for active cultural participation, both inside and outside the classroom. However, the differences remain rather small and we also find some differences in the advantage of the vocational students. For instance, opportunities for writing and singing are clearly more present in the A-Stream. On the other hand, opportunities to paint and draw, and work creatively with video and multimedia are more mentioned by pupils of the B-stream

⁴ Nevertheless, not all pupils in the first grade reported that they follow an artistic course. This is probably due to the different labels schools use and the fact that these labels were not all explicit mentioned in the questionnaire.

Not only arts courses are less organized in the upper school years, also opportunities for active cultural participation decline in the upper years. This decline is again steeper in the vocational track than in general education.

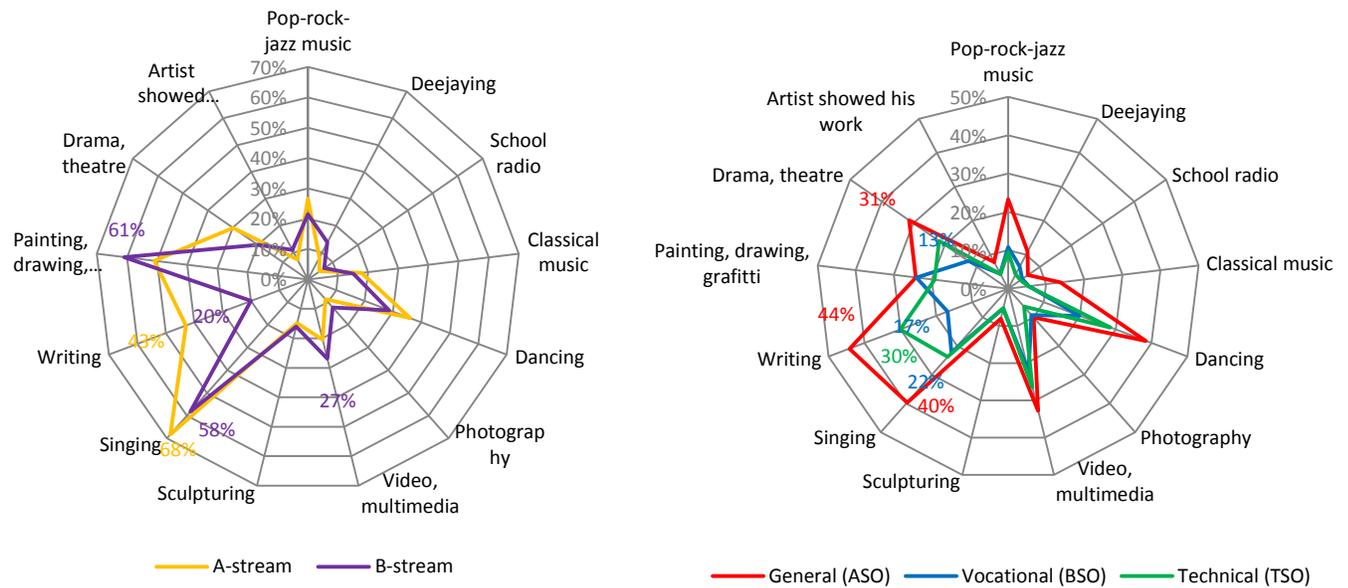


Figure 8. Active cultural participation at school: Percentage of pupils that indicates that cultural activity is organized (representative sample)

Finally, pupils were asked whether their school or teachers had organized receptive cultural activities (e.g. going to the theatre, visiting a museum, ...) for their class throughout the current school year. In general, 92% of pupils listed that at least one activity was organized in school. The most popular activities are visits to theatre or dance performances (62%), film (57%) and museums about technology, history or science (51%).

But again, we notice strong differences according to grade and track. In the first grade, pupils report more often that they have visited library and literary events, as well that projects on arts and culture were organized. In this first grade, visits to the library and films, and projects on art and culture activities are more organized for pupils in the B-stream than for pupils in the A-stream. On the other hand visits to the theatre and museums of science and technology are more arranged for pupils in the A-stream.

In 2nd and 3rd grade, we notice that pupils in the general track have far more opportunities to attend theatre performances, visit museums and cities than pupils in vocational education. Also more often projects on arts and culture are organized in their schools. Pupils in technical education usually take a middle position.

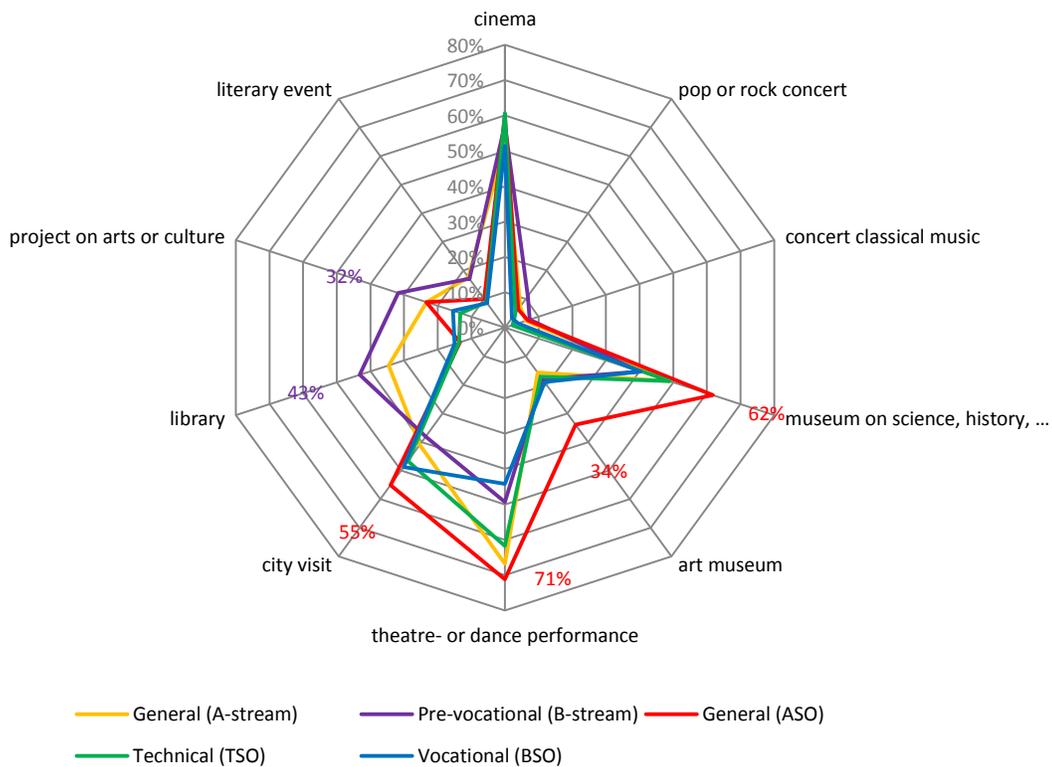


Figure 9. Receptive cultural participation at school according to educational track: Percentage of pupils that indicates that activity was organized during the current school year (representative sample)

Thus, although schools invest in arts participation and education, at this moment they still fail to bridge the social gap. Moreover, our analyses seem to indicate that schools perpetuate and even worsen inequalities. Young people from less privileged backgrounds and who participate less during leisure time are overrepresented in vocational education, where they have fewer opportunities to taste from cultural activities. So, while in vocational education more attention should go to arts participation, the reverse seems true.

It also appears that the gap between social groups rises during secondary education. In the first grade, various cultural activities and courses are offered to all educational tracks. However, in the upper years, we notice a decline in the cultural activities and courses for all pupils, but in particularly for those in vocational education.