

# culture Survey

## French and American Cultural Participation Elements of Comparisons 1981-2008

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### Pratiques culturelles en France et aux États-Unis Éléments de comparaison 1981-2008

Are the French and Americans as different in their relationship to culture as is often suggested? The existence of four editions of the survey on cultural participation in the United States undertaken by the National Endowment for the Arts (1982, 1992, 2002, 2008) at dates close to those of the *Pratiques culturelles des Français* (*Cultural practices of the French*) survey allows some responses to this question<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the practices studied in these two national surveys are partly identical: visits to concerts, theatres, museums and cinemas, reading books and amateur practice of artistic activities, notably, were the subject of questioning that was both sufficiently close from one country to another and sufficiently stable over time to permit a comparative analysis over nearly three decades of their level of distribution and the profile of their respective publics<sup>2</sup>.

The rates of participation in cultural life at the start of the 1980s will first be presented at national level in each of the two countries, then according to the different population categories, to compare the influence of the main social and demographic criteria (sex, age, level of education and income) in both countries. Then the analysis will cover the main trends observed during the period 1981-2008 and will endeavour to establish how far these

are driven by common dynamics or on the contrary reflect specific features of national contexts.

### THE SITUATION AT THE START OF THE 1980s

Among the numerous structural differences between France and the United States that are likely to influence the level of distribution of cultural practices there is one that cannot be ignored, taking into account the often determining role of education levels in respect of access to culture: the widening of access to higher education occurred much sooner in the United States than in France.

### A better educated American population viewing more television

The development of the higher education degree course goes back, across the Atlantic, to between the wars and the immediate post war period: numerous colleges equivalent to the French top level were then created

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1. For a presentation of the two national surveys and a summary of the difficulties inherent in any comparative analysis over time, see box 1, p. 13.  
2. For simplification, we will here designate under the term "public" everyone who declared having practised the activity concerned during the last twelve months.

and their access democratised, whereas in France, the proportion of a generation accessing universities took place much earlier still less than 10%<sup>3</sup>. The increase in bachelor's degree holders and students only became really significant in France from the 1970s and only took on a massive character in the second half of the 1980s. Consequently we note that, due to this time difference in the distribution of access to secondary and higher education, the American population was much better educated at the start of the 1980s than the French population<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, it must be remembered that the arrival of television in the home, then its massive distribution, took place much earlier in the United States. At the start of the 1980s, the majority of American homes already had several television sets and enjoyed a large number of channels: the average number of small screens per person was already twice as high as in France<sup>5</sup> and the average time devoted to programmes was distinctly higher: nearly half of Americans (46%) watched television 20 hours or more per week, against 35% of the French population. However, despite this more massive presence of television in their daily life, Americans were more numerous than the French in visiting cultural facilities.

## Higher cultural participation in the United States with the exception of book reading

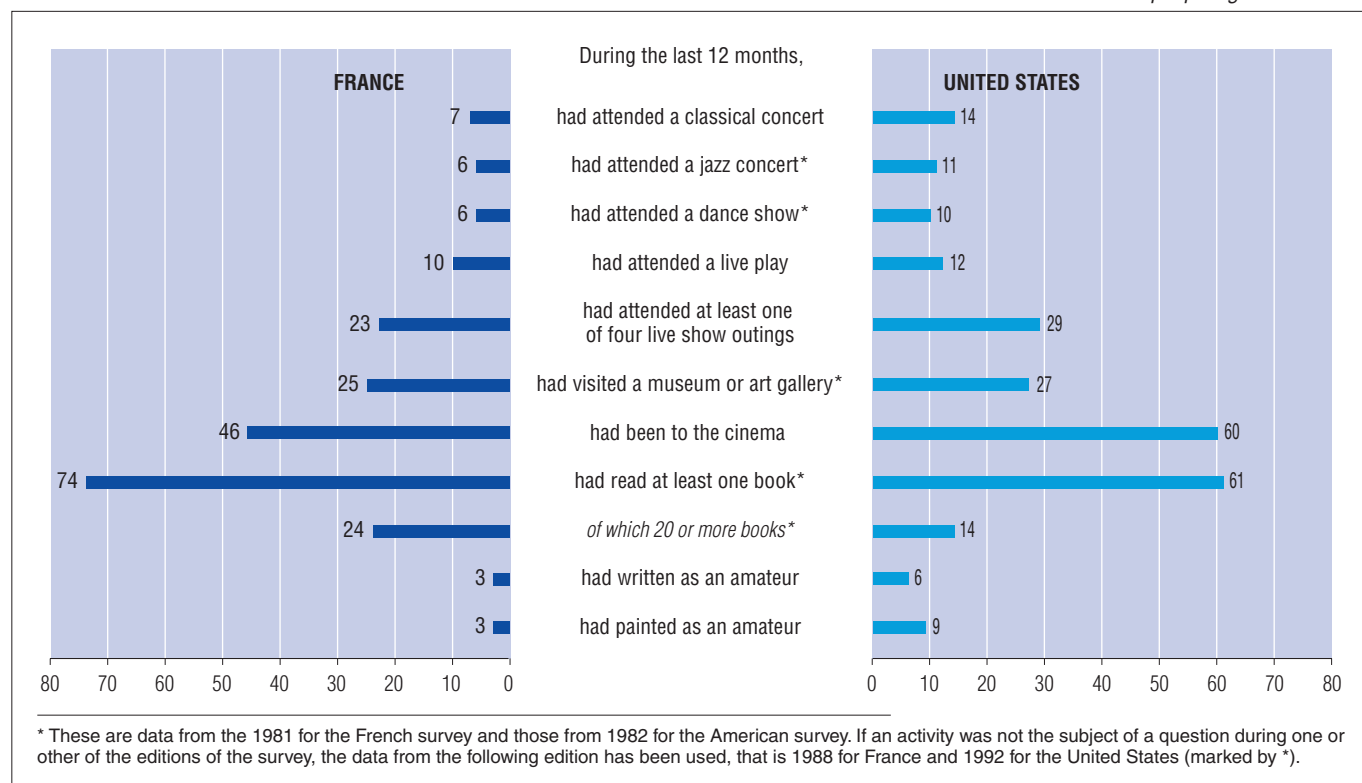
In the 1980s, the proportion of visits by Americans was greater for all cultural outings and visits: 60% of them, for example, had been to the cinema during the last twelve months, against 46% of French people, and 27% had visited a museum or art gallery against 25% of the population in France<sup>6</sup> (graph 1). They were also more numerous in having to their credit at least one of the following live show outings: classical music concert, jazz concert, dance and theatre show (29% against 23%); the proportion of them who had attended a classical music concert or a jazz concert was notably twice as high as for the French.

Similarly the distribution of amateur artistic practice was then greater in the United States: 9% of population devoted themselves to painting and 6% to writing, against 3% of the French population in both cases.

In contrast, the results for reading books were clearly to the advantage of the French: over seven French people out of ten had read at least one book in the last twelve months against six out of ten Americans, and the

Graph 1 – Distribution of cultural participation in the 1980s\*

For 100 people aged 18 and over



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

3. On this point, see Louis CHAUVEL, *Valorisation et dévalorisation sociale des titres: une comparaison France – États-Unis (Social valuation and devaluation of titles: a comparison between France & the United States)*, in A. van ZANTEN (dir.), *l'État de l'école (The State of Schools)*, Paris, La Découverte, p. 341-352.

4. The structure of the samples in the surveys *Pratiques culturelles des Français* and *Public Participation in the Arts* reflects this situation: the proportion of holders of a higher education diploma was 8% in the French population in 1981 and 38% in the American population in 1982.

5. <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>

6. N.B.: the results of the French survey presented here are different from those appearing on the site [www.pratiquesculturelles.gouv.fr](http://www.pratiquesculturelles.gouv.fr) because they apply, for reasons of compatibility with the American survey, to the population aged 18 and over, and not to that aged 15 and over.

difference between the two countries was even more spectacular for high readers, because France counted nearly twice as many people who had read 20 or more books in the year (24% against 14% for the United States).

At the start of the 1980s, the comparison of participation rates on the national scale is consequently rather to the advantage of the United States, with the exception of book reading: Americans, whilst devoting more time to television, were proportionally more numerous than the French in visiting cinemas and show venues, or practising artistic activities as amateurs.

If the profile of the different publics is compared, do the people visiting cinemas or theatres in the 1980s, those who practised and artistic activity as amateurs or read a lot of books, resemble each other on opposite sides of the Atlantic?

### American and French consumers with a very similar profile

Against the four selected criteria<sup>7</sup> (sex, age, the level of education and the income level), the American and French publics show numerous common points in all cases. This is particularly remarkable in the case of museums and art galleries where the proportions of visits in the different population categories are astonishingly close in the two countries (graph 2).

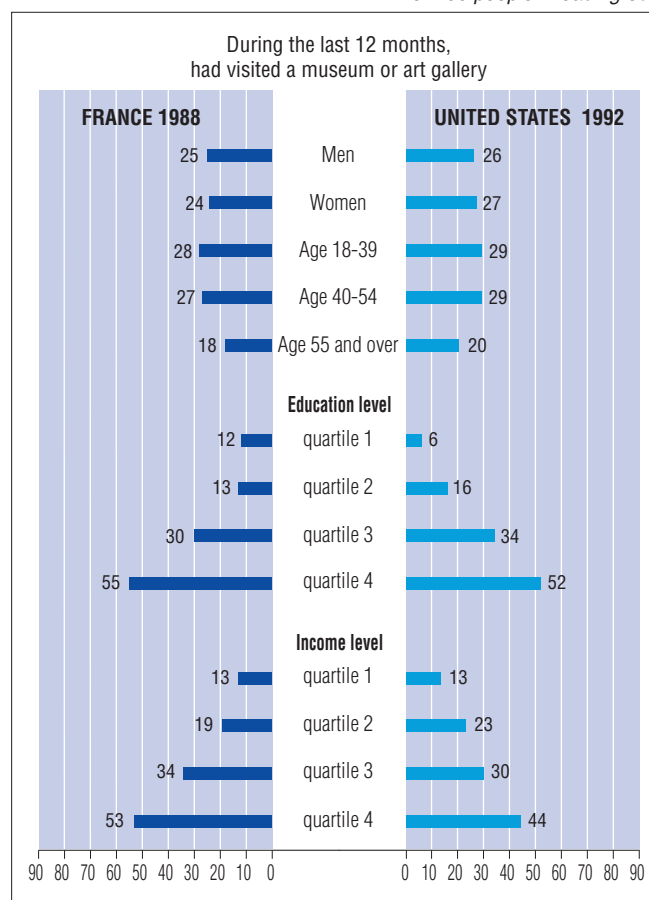
In the 1980s, the profile of the American and French publics differed little on the sex criterion: in both countries it shows a female majority for reading books and a male majority for cinema visits, and the fact of being a man or a woman had little influence on the visits to exhibition or live show venues, which are most often made as a couple or family. Nevertheless it should be noted that the feminine character of certain activities was more accentuated in the United States in the 1980s. This was the case for regular book reading but also for amateur artistic practices and certain cultural outings (classical music concerts and dance shows), fields where the differences between men and women were still not significant in France.

The different publics are also very similar with regards to age: the differences in intensity of practice according to this criterion were generally small, with the exception of reading. Proportionately fewer young Americans than their elders read books regularly, whereas it was the opposite for young French people.

Similarly, disparities in cultural practices according to the level of education were of the same nature in the United States and in France: the participation rates of the most educated were highest for outings to the theatre, cinema, museum, reading and amateur artistic practice (graph 3). In the 1980s, education level was, on both sides of the Atlantic, the criterion whose effect on regular book reading and cultural outings – was strongest<sup>8</sup>.

**Graph 2 – Visits to museums or art galleries according to social and demographic profile, France 1988, United States 1992**

For 100 people in each group



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

However, some nuances must be applied to this general observation. So, for example, the disparities related to education were noticeably greater than the United States for visits to museums and art galleries and live shows: the least educated Americans had lower participation levels than their French counterparts, whereas the practices of the most highly educated were similar in both countries, even more intense in America as far as shows were concerned.

The income related differences were roughly the same order as those relating to the education level, which is scarcely surprising taking the high correlation that links these two variables. If we reason “all things being otherwise equal”, we observe that in the 1980s, the effect of income was distinctly less important than that of education, notably in France.

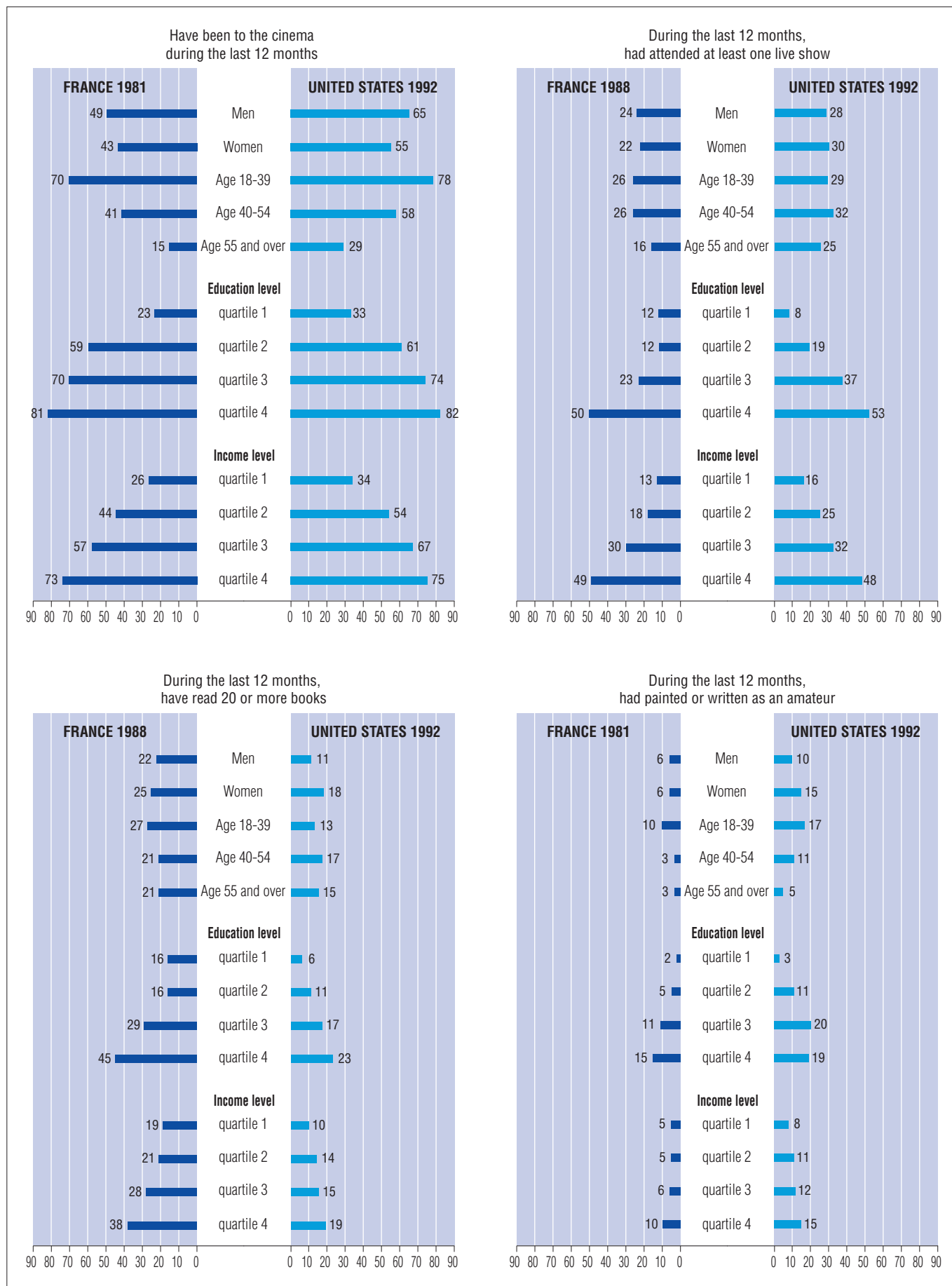
The comparison of the profile of the different publics allows an understanding of the observed differences in cultural participation between the two countries at the start of the 1980s. It notably appears that certain differences were shared by all population categories: so the French read more books, whatever their sex, age, edu-

7. With regard to the choice of these four criteria, see box 1, p. 13.

8. This observation is confirmed by “all other things being equal” type reasoning on the probability of having attended at least four live shows during the year in the two surveys and on that of being a high book reader (20 or more books in the year).

Graph 3 – Distribution of cultural participation according to social and demographic profile in the 1980s

For 100 people in each group



Source: Surveys Public Participation in the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts/Pratiques culturelles des Français, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

cation or income level, whereas, on average, the Americans devoted more time to watching television, went to the cinema more and undertook more amateur writing or painting, for identical social and demographic characteristics. Consequently, for these activities it is thus legitimate to speak of real national characteristics reflecting the general context of each country.

For other activities, the observed differences at the national scale are explained by the differences in behaviour of certain categories of population. So, for example, if cinema outings, and, to a lesser extent, those relating to live shows concern a larger part of the United States population in the 1980s, this is because these outings were both more popular (the proportion for Americans with low educational attainment or having low incomes being greater than for their French counterparts) and more frequent in older people (Americans aged 55 or over being proportionately more numerous in going to the cinema of attending a live show) (graph 3).

## CHANGES THAT ARE OFTEN SIMILAR BUT SHIFTED IN TIME

How has the situation developed during recent decades? In which cases are the observed trends identical in both countries, and in what cases do they diverge? First of all, the rates of American and French visits to museums and art galleries, which were close in the 1980s, are still so in 2008: 23% of Americans and 24% of the French have visited one during the year.

### A shared drop in book reading

Next, the general trend in book reading is the same in France and the United States: the proportion of readers has fallen since the beginning of the 1990s in both coun-

tries (graph 4). The fall has been yet more significant in France for high readers: the proportion of people who have read twenty or more books in the year has reduced by a third in about twenty years, which tends to reduce the difference from the United States where reading books occupied a noticeably lower place in the landscape of cultural practices at the end of the 1980s.

The large drop in book reading in France must be connected to the concomitant increase in the time devoted to television. In effect the French have made up a large part of their delay in audio-visual equipment in the 1980 and 1990s, whilst benefiting from a considerable increase in the range of programmes, which has translated into a large increase in their consumption: the proportion of assiduous viewers (who watch television for twenty or more hours per week) has greatly increased in France up to the end of the twentieth century, to the point from then on of approaching that for the United States, which was nevertheless much higher at the start of the 1980s (46% against 35%).

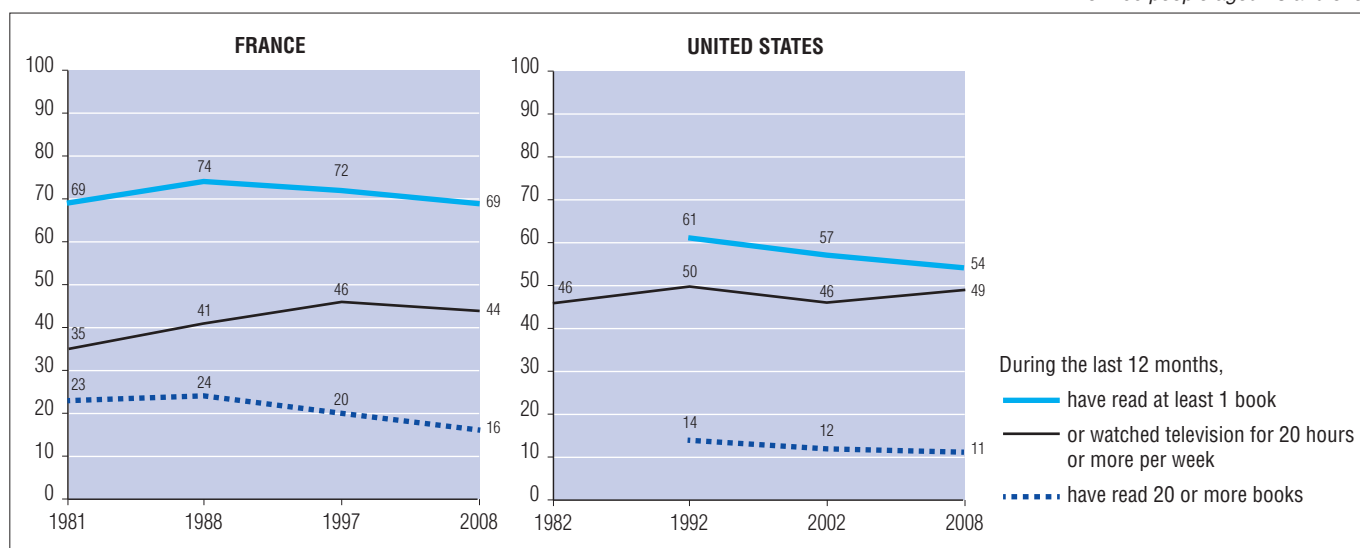
Whatever reservations can be expressed about the thesis that makes television (or the Internet for the recent period) responsible for the fall in book reading, it is difficult to think that these two parallel developments – the fall in book reading and the increase in the duration of listening to television – are completely independent, and do not represent, in France, a changeover from printed to culture to screen culture that American society had started ten or twenty years earlier.

### Converging trends...

Book reading and television consumption are not the only fields where we a parallel between behaviour in the two countries can be observed. In France, the spectacular increase in amateur artistic practices in the 1980s and 1990s has taken French participation rates to the same level as those for Americans: the proportion of

Graph 4 – Change in book reading and regular television consumption, 1981-2008

For 100 people aged 18 and over



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

amateurs tripled in our country between 1981 and 1997 for painting (changing from 3% to 10%) and doubled for writing (going from 3% to 6%) during the last decade of the 20th century. In this field too, France experienced a change that affected the United States at the start of the 1980s.

A similar convergence is observed in the case of visits to cinemas, which, after remaining stable, at very different levels, on both sides of the Atlantic up to the start of the decade beginning in 2000, then developed in opposite directions, in each of the two countries the proportion of the population having seen a film increased in France from 47% to 55% whilst it fell in almost the same proportions in the United States, so that the proportions of visits were, in 2008, almost identical on the national scale (graph 5).

### ... with the exception of dance and theatre shows

In reality the downward movement observed in the United States during the last decade in the case of cinema is more general: all American visit rates fell between 2002 and 2008 to the point of reaching levels below those for the 1980s. This is true for cinemas, but also for museums or art galleries and for the four outings to live shows (classical music concerts, jazz concerts, dance and theatre shows).

In the United States the proportion of Americans who had attended one of these four live shows fell sharply during the decade after 2000, so prolonging a falling trend that was already in progress during the previous decade. The observation is identical when we argue from the minority that is most committed to cultural outings: the proportion of Americans making three or four live show outings during the last twelve months has fallen by half (it has gone from 6% in 1992 to 3% in 2008) whereas it remained stable in France (3% in 1988, 4% in 2008).

The change was the opposite on the French side: the proportion of French people who had attended one of these four live shows (theatre, dance, classical music or jazz concerts) has slightly increased since the 1980s, essentially due to the increase in dance shows, and even more, in theatre (graph 5).

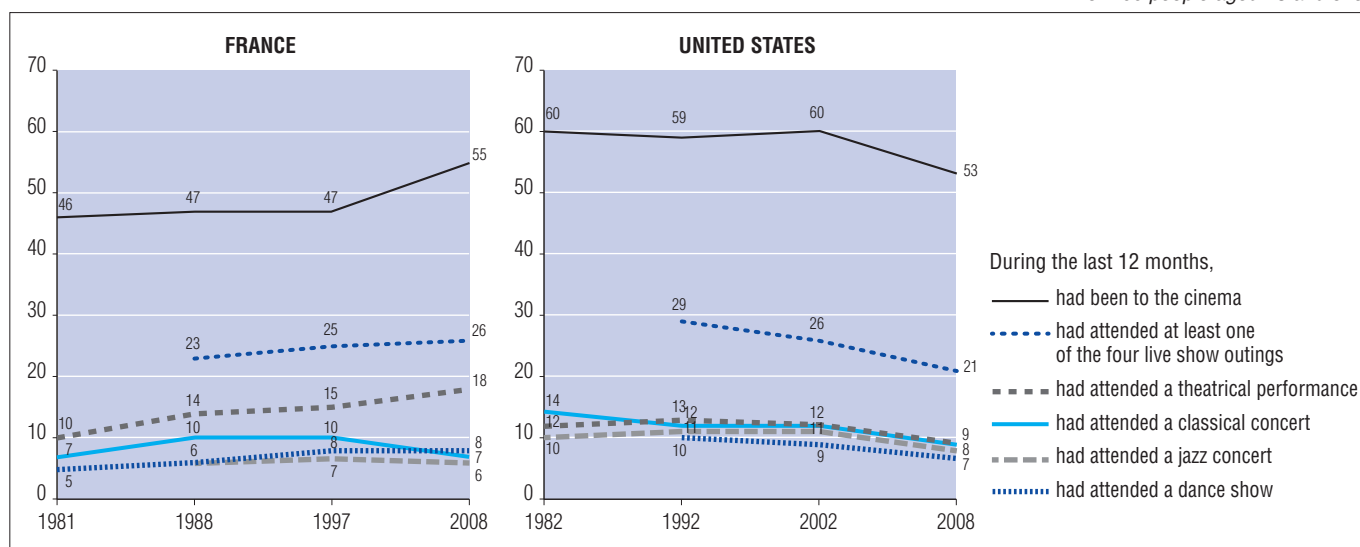
For these last two cultural outings, the change in the decade since 2000 in France is clearly contrasted with that observed in the United States: dance shows have maintained the level reached during the previous decade, and theatre has experienced a noticeable increase in its distribution (15% in 1997, 18% in 2008). The situation has thus been reversed compared to the 1980s: the rates of French attendance at choreographic and dramatic shows are now greater than American rates.

Is it necessary to see in this divergence of changes in France and the United States a questionnaire effect linked to the fact that the activities “going to the theatre” and “going to a dance show” do not correspond to exactly the same reality in each country? In fact nothing ensures that these categories are perfectly homogeneous from one country to the other, nor that they cover exactly the same reality throughout the period studied. It appears legitimate to consider that the renewal of artistic forms taking place in our country in recent years has probably led to a widening of these two categories and increased the heterogeneity of their content: development of one-man-shows, stand-up comedies and varied forms of cafe-theatre in the case of theatre, mass market dance shows, hip-hop and hybrid forms of expression borrowing from dance, the circus and music in that of dance shows. In addition, in French, the term “theatre” also presents the disadvantage of designating both a mode of artistic expression (moreover multiform) and infrastructure (into which you can go to see other things than a theatrical representation).

In this respect it must be emphasised that musicals, which experienced a certain revival in France since the

Graph 5 – Change in the distribution of cultural outings, 1981-2008

For 100 people aged 18 and over



Source: Surveys Public Participation in the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts/Pratiques culturelles des Français, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

1980s before encountering real success in the first decade of the 21st century, at least in the Paris region<sup>9</sup>, were not the subject of a separate question in the “*Pratiques culturelles des Français*” questionnaire, unlike on the American questionnaire. In 2008, 17% of Americans attended a musical in the previous twelve months (against 19% in 1992), which is a figure almost twice as high as for theatre visits (9%). As a result part of the French who attended a musical in 2008 could have declared having been to the theatre and so have contributed to increase in this cultural outing relative to the results of the 1997 edition.

Finally, it will be noted that cultural practices experienced generally similar changes in both countries since the 1980s, often with a delay in France. The only real divergence concerns outings to the cinema, theatre and, to a lesser extent, dance shows, for which the visit rates have increased in France at the moment where they show a marked fall in the United States.

## AGEING PUBLIC AND CULTURAL INEQUALITIES

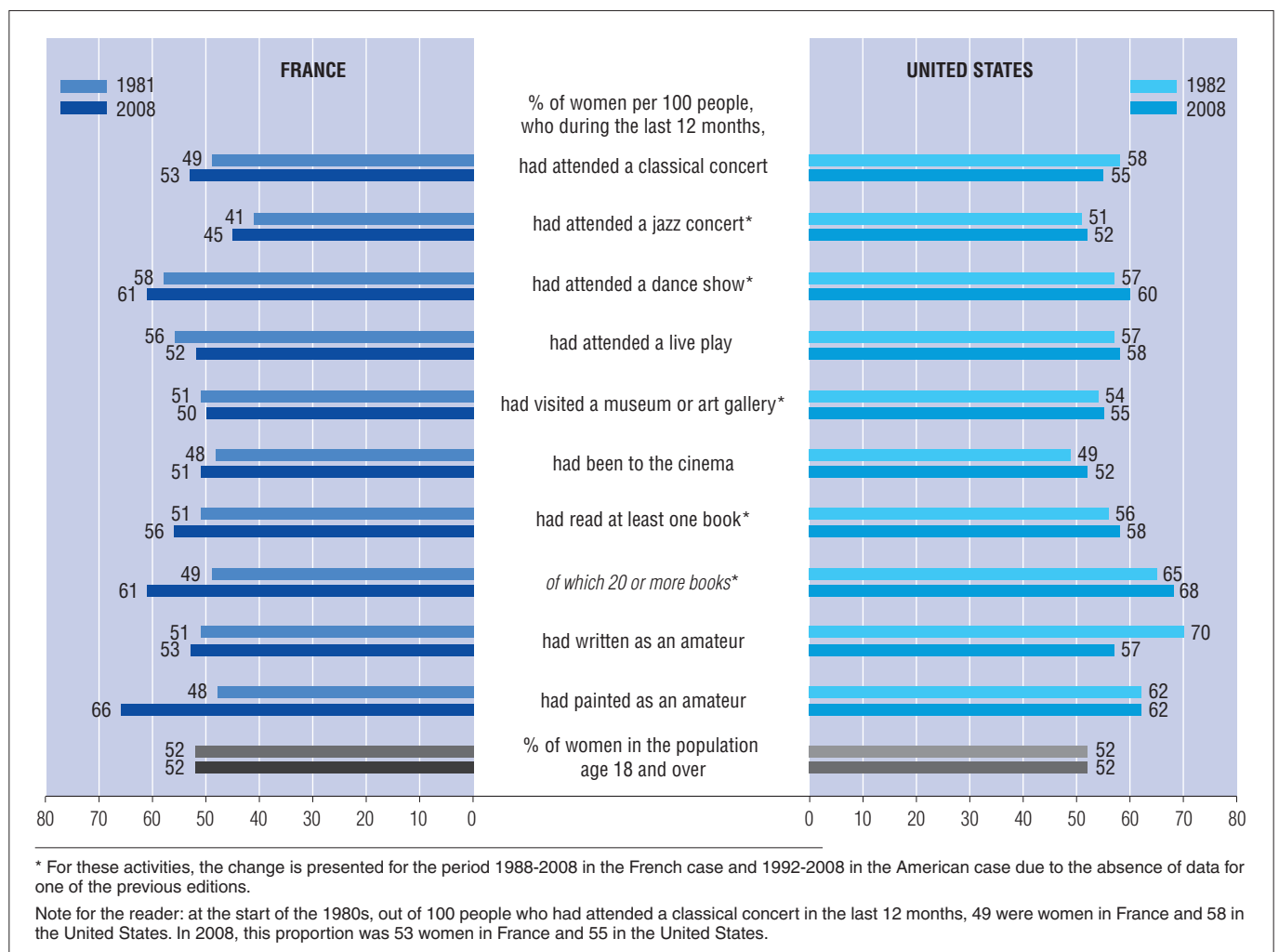
We will now leave the global level for that of population categories defined by the four selected criteria by asking to what extent the profiles of the different publics have changed on both sides of the Atlantic since the 1980s.

### Later feminization in France

In the United States, in the 1980s women's participation level was generally greater than for men: they made up about two thirds of the public for amateur writing and painting, and regular reading and were a large majority in the public for classical music concerts, dance shows and theatres. Only the cinema public was an exception, showing a slightly masculine profile (graph 6).

The relative importance of women was then in general less in our country: for example they only made up

Graph 6 – Change in the proportion of women in public according to cultural activity, 1981-2008



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

9. See Xavier DUPUIS and Bertrand LABARRE, “Le renouveau du spectacle musical en France” (“*The renewal of the musical show in France*”), Paris, Ministry for Culture and Communication, DEPS, coll. “Culture études” (Culture survey), 2013-6, November 2013.

41% of the public for jazz concerts and less than half (49%) that for regular reading in the 1980s. Since then the French situation has approached that in the United States: all the publics for the activities studied, with the exception of theatre visits, have become feminized in France, and women have become a large majority for regular book reading and practising amateur painting.

Taking into account the determining role played by the education level in cultural participation, the feminization movement observed in France partly reflects educational progress in the last few years, of which women have been the main beneficiaries. Furthermore it is not forbidden to think, with reference to the situation in the United States, where the widening of access to higher education occurred earlier, that this movement will continue with generational renewal. Certain publics, in fact, continue to present a more feminine character across the Atlantic. This is notably the case for high book readers, the public for theatres and that for jazz concerts, which alone remain with a male majority in France (45% women).

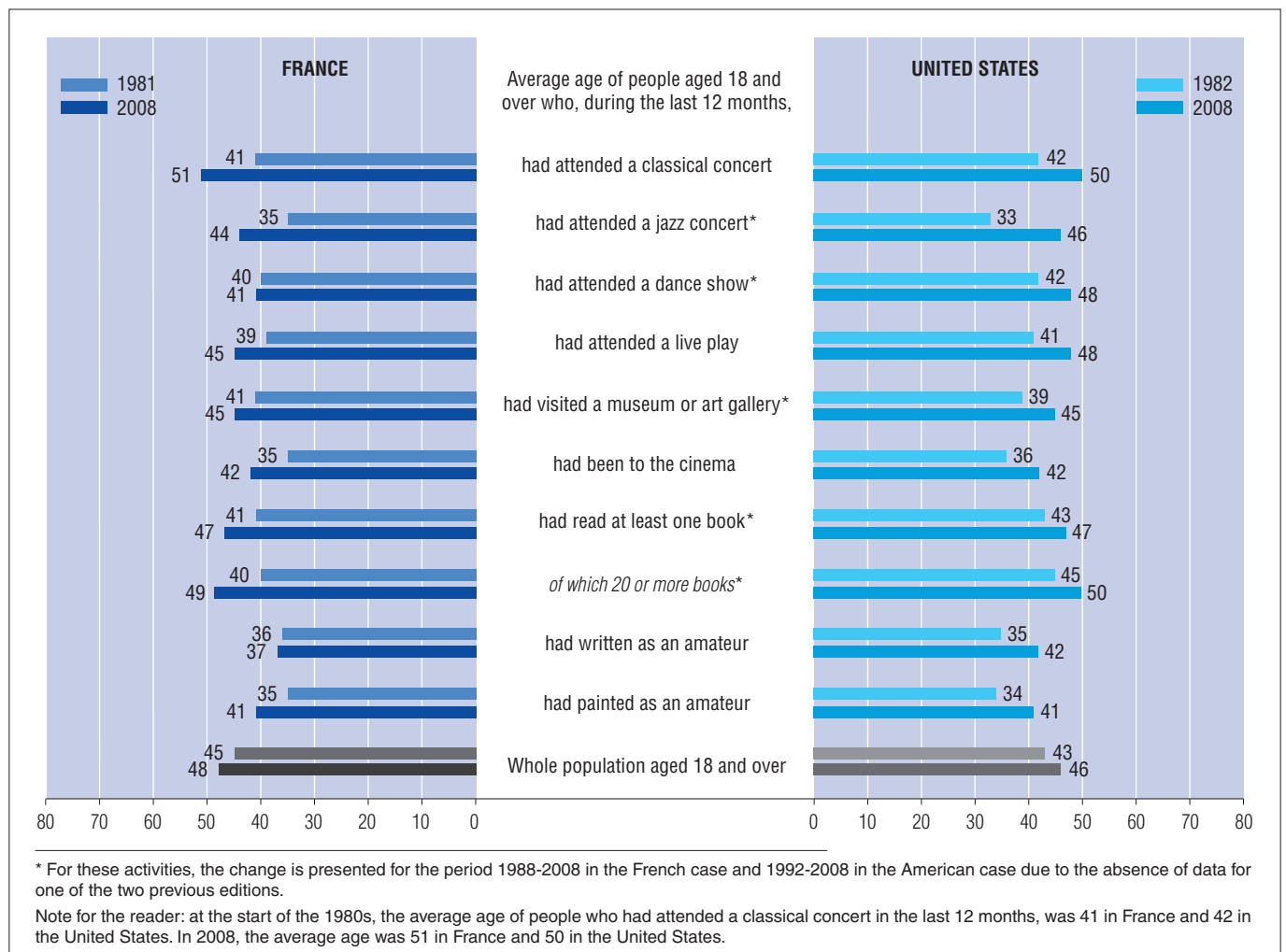
## A marked ageing of the public in both countries

In the 1980s, the public profiles for the age criterion were fairly similar on both sides of the Atlantic: with the exception of regular book reading, for which the average age was slightly higher in the United States, and regular television consumption, for which the young American generations as a whole showed themselves distinctly higher television viewers than their French counterparts, the average age of users was essentially the same (graph 7).

This is still the case in 2008 because both countries have experienced an ageing of the different publics of comparable amplitude, in most cases greater than that of ageing of the two national populations.

This similarity in changes means that the activities whose public have the highest average age have remained the same in France and the United States: visits to classical music concerts and regular book reading. It is the same for those for which the public is younger than the general population: practising amateur writing or painting and cinema visits. The only significant difference

Graph 7 – Change in the average age of public according to cultural activity, 1981-2008



Source: *Surveys Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication



between the two countries concerns dance shows, for which the average age of the public is seven years less in France (41 against 48 in the United States). In fact this is the only activity in our country that has escaped the ageing process; in all other cases, the ageing is greater than or equal to that of the general population, notably in the case of classical music concerts (+ 10 years) and jazz concerts (+ 9 years), for which the public has aged even more in the United State (+ 13 years).

How do we explain this general ageing of the public? Above all, it reflects the current engagement level of older people, which is greater than that for their elders in the 1980s for all the cultural activities studied. Certainly, young people remain proportionately more numerous in practising amateur writing or painting, going to cinemas, or, in France attending dance shows, but the differences compared to older people are now less. Moreover, the ageing movement is, in some cases, amplified by the disengagement of new generations. This is notably so for regular book reading in France and explains why the ageing of the public concerned is more marked there than in the United States, but also for the four cultural outings in the United States (in France, only attendance at classical music concerts has experienced a fall among people aged under 35).

## A fall in the participation of the most educated in both countries, with the exception of live shows in France

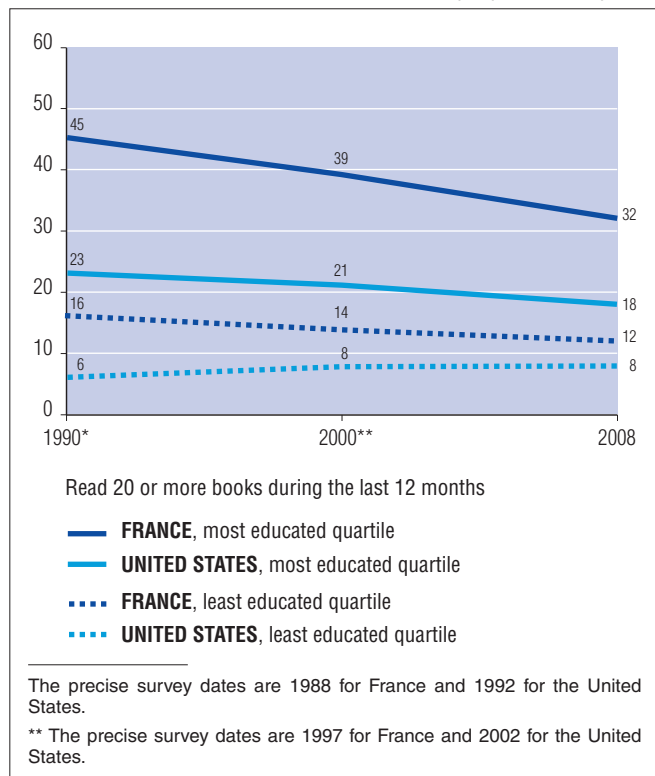
The changes that have occurred among educated groups constitute another remarkable change. In both countries regular book reading has reduced among the most educated quartile, particularly in France where the practice was distinctly higher at the start of the 1980s: in twenty years the proportion of high readers in our country has fallen from 45% to 32% (graph 8), which produces an alignment of the French situation with that of the United States.

In the United States the proportion of people visiting cinemas, museums or art galleries and live show premises has also reduced among the most highly educated quartile. This particularly clear disengagement in the first decade of the 21st century contrasts with the change in behaviour of their French counterparts, whose visits, have, on the whole, increased during the same period. Certainly, attendance at classical music concerts by the most highly educated quartile has fallen in France, but that for other forms of live show has rather increased, so much that the general propensity of the the most highly educated to attend a live show has slightly increased since the start of the 1990s (graph 9).

The changes are less spectacular in the least educated quartiles for both regular book reading and outings to live shows, due to their lower initial level. However,

**Graph 8 – Change in regular book reading according to education level, 1988-2008**

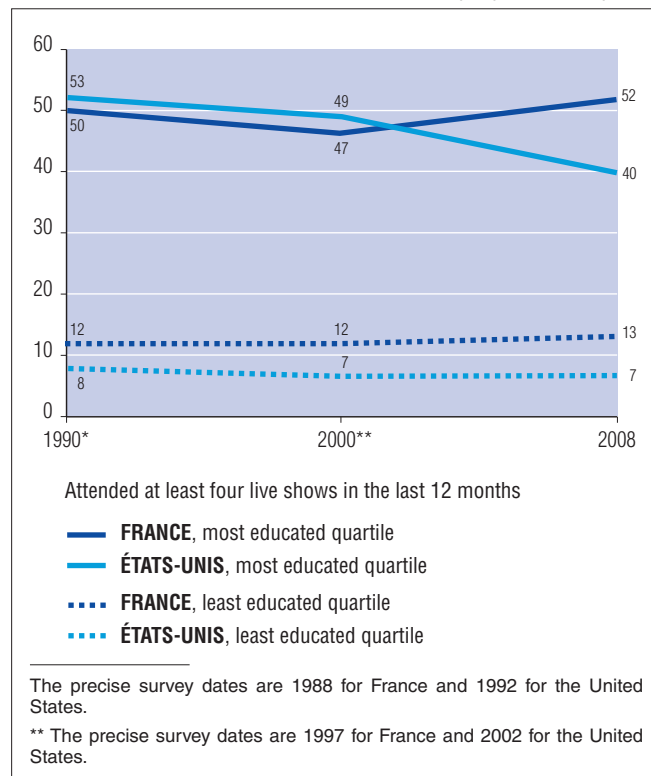
For 100 people in each quartile



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/  
*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

**Graph 9 – Change in regular outings to live shows according to education level, 1988-2008**

For 100 people in each quartile



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/  
*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

regular book reading has reduced in France in the most educated quartile in almost the same proportions as in the least educated quartile, so much that the difference between the two populations has remained generally stable; in contrast, regular reading activity has been maintained in the least educated American quartile, contributing to reducing the difference between the most and least educated across the Atlantic.

If education related disparities are of the same order in both countries with regard to reading books, those related to attendances at live shows remain higher in the United States: the ratio between the two education quartiles is, in the United States, of the order of 1 to 6 whereas it is only 1 to 4 in France, in 2008 as it was twenty years earlier.

### Income related differences becoming entrenched in the United States

With income level we will proceed as we have done with education level by comparing the behaviour change in the two countries for the richest and poorest quartiles.

The general trends in book reading are identical to those observed on education level: the reduction in high readers is general and its size is particularly large in the richest French quartile, whose reading level is now close to that of its American counterpart (graph 10). Due to the significant fall that occurred in the decade following 2000, the difference between the richest quartile and the

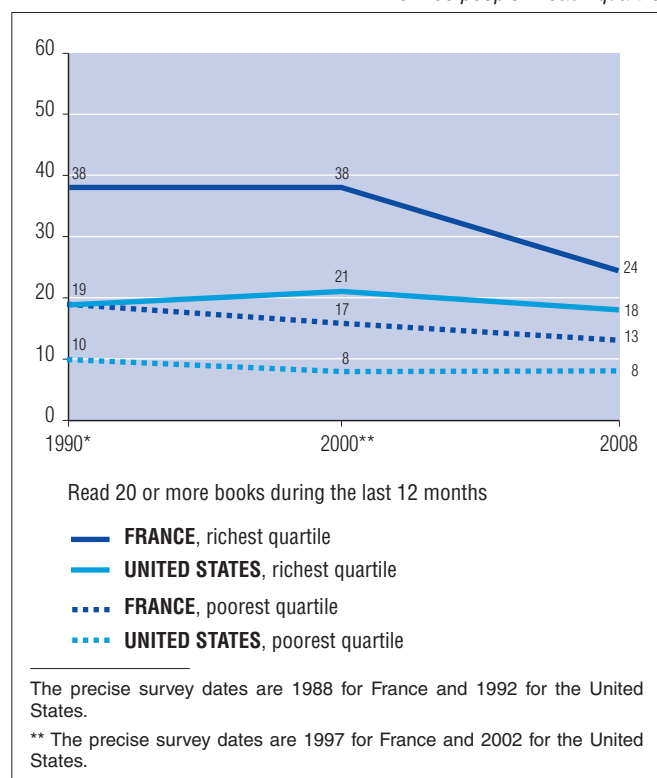
poorest has slightly reduced in our country, the reverse of the United States where it became slightly more accentuated.

In relation to live shows, the general trend is rather to a fall in both countries, but it does not take the same form (graph 11): the attendance rate for the richest quartile has regularly reduced in the United States, whereas it has experienced a “bell shaped” change in France due to a significant fall in the decade following 2000. This fall, which is verified for the four live show outings, appears to indicate a recent change in attitude to culture of part of the elite with more economic capital than cultural capital, that can be close to that for regular book reading in the same circles. In fact it is remarkable to note that the change in the richest quartile completely diverges from that in the most educated quartile, whose attendance at live shows increased during the decade starting in 2000. Should this double movement be seen as an increased differentiation of the cultural practices of French elites, which reflects a reinforcement of the polarisation between those whose resources are mostly of economic type, and those who have more cultural capital than economic capital?

As for the people in the poorest quartile, their propensity to attend live shows has changed in the opposite direction: it has clearly increased in France whereas it has reduced in the United States, noticeably in the decade starting in 2000.

**Graph 10 – Change in regular book reading according to income level, 1988-2008**

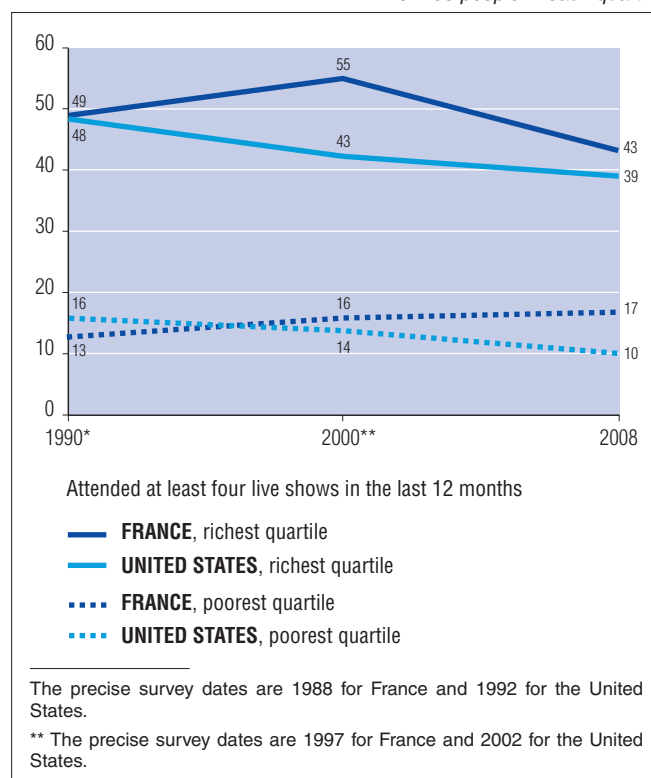
For 100 people in each quartile



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/  
*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

**Graph 11 – Change in regular outings to live shows according to income level, 1988-2008**

For 100 people in each quartile



Source: Surveys *Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/  
*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

Taking these various changes into account, the differences between rich and poor with regard to access to live shows are attenuated in the Hexagon due to the disengagement of the most well off, and, to a lesser extent, increased participation by the poorest, whereas these have clearly increased across the Atlantic, notably in the decade starting in 2000.

### **A general attenuation of the differences between France and the United States**

At the start of the 1980s participation rates in cultural life were relatively close in both countries, however, there was an advantage for the Americans in television viewing, visits to cultural establishments and amateur artistic practice, and a distinctly greater French engagement in the book reading field. Over the past three decades, these differences between the two countries have lessened due to a double phenomenon.

On the one hand certain changes result in a relative “Americanisation” of French cultural practices: French television consumption has greatly increased during the period whereas their interest in book reading (notably regular) has declined and their commitment to amateur artistic practice has increased. In each of these cases the cultural behaviour of the French population has approached, with a delay, that of the Americans.

On the other hand, the distinct fall in cultural outings in the United States during the decade after 2000 has contributed to reducing the differences that existed between the two countries at the start of the 1980s: the levels of visits to cinemas, museums and art galleries, classical music concerts and jazz concerts, initially greater than in the United States, are now very close. The only significant difference in 2008 concerns the theatre where attendance is twice as great in France (18% against 9%).

It remains to understand what constitutes the only real divergence observed between the two countries: the distinct fall, during the decade after 2000, of cinema and live show places in the United States, which contrasts strongly with the increase at the same time in visits to these same places on the French side, particularly for theatres and dance shows.

Several complementary hypotheses can be envisaged.

### **Virtues of the French model or delay effect?**

First of all it is possible to evoke the economic and financial crisis at the end of the decade starting in 2000 by considering that its effects might have been less massive in France and that its impact on cultural practices was consequently smaller. It appears to be difficult to question that the increase in inequalities since the 1980s has been distinctly more accentuated in the United States than in France<sup>11</sup>, which is confirmed by several results of the comparative analysis: so it can be observed that differences between rich and poor in respect of cultural outings became entrenched across the Atlantic in the decade after 2000, at the moment where they were reducing in France.

Taking into account the difficult economic context of the decade starting in 2000, it is also possible that the cost of cultural outings, which is often described as being higher across the Atlantic than in France, could be another element of the explanation. Is it true that an outing to the cinema, the theatre or a concert or a visit to the museum is more costly in the United States where the prices charge have experienced a higher rise during the last decade? It is difficult to answer this question with any assurance, for lack of a real comparative analysis of the price scales compared to the differences in purchasing power, but several items encourage the giving of a positive response: the average price of concert seats (for all types of music) is higher in the United States<sup>12</sup>, and similarly an opera seat<sup>13</sup> or entry to a large museum<sup>14</sup> is more expensive in New York than in Paris if the current prices in several large establishments are compared. Consequently it does not appear thoughtless, based on these few clues, to admit that the entrance prices for cultural infrastructure is generally higher in the United States and that this item could have a significant influence on the attendance to live performances given the difficult economic and social context of the decade after 2000.

Finally, a recent report published by the *National Endowment for the Arts*<sup>15</sup> indirectly tends to confirm the idea of a greater impact of the economic crisis in the United States on cultural practices. This report establishes a link between the decline in cultural outings observed in the decade after 2000 and the progressive disinvestment in artistic education in public schools and private courses during the preceding decades, substantiating the idea that the fall in visits to cultural places is,

11. The recent work by Thomas PIKETTY, *le Capital au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2013 (*Capital in the 21st Century*, Harvard University Press, 2014), is explicit on this point, notably when graphs 8.1 (p. 429) and 8.5 (p. 460) in the book are compared.

12. On average it was 47 euros (\$60,68) in 2012 in the United States according to the Pollstar reference statistics (<http://www.pollstar.com/>; [http://www.pollstar.com/news\\_article.aspx?ID=802058](http://www.pollstar.com/news_article.aspx?ID=802058)) whereas the mean price of a ticket is 32 euros in France in 2011, according to the statistics of the “Centre National de la Chanson, des Variétés, du Jazz” (*National Singing, Variety & Jazz Centre*) ([https://www.cnv.fr/sites/cnv.fr/files/documents/PDF/Ressource/stats\\_diffusion/ElementsStatiDifSpec2011.pdf](https://www.cnv.fr/sites/cnv.fr/files/documents/PDF/Ressource/stats_diffusion/ElementsStatiDifSpec2011.pdf)).

13. According to a study that compares the prices of the Metropolitan Opera and the Paris Opera (<http://www.opera-gouvernance.fr/fr/les-themes-abordes/opera-paris-compare/donnees-comparatives.php>).

14. The price of a full rate ticket for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa, New York) was thus 19.35 euros (\$25) in 2013, when the price of a full rate ticket to the Georges-Pompidou centre was 13 euros. Entry to the Metropolitan Museum of New York is in principle free (but with a recommended donation of about 19 euros, or \$25), whereas the full price ticket for the Louvre is 12 euros.

15. N. RABKIN and E.C. HEDBERG, *Arts Education in America: What the Declines Mean for Arts Participation*, National Endowment for the Arts, Research Report #52, 2011 (<http://www.nea.gov/research/2008-SPPA-ArtsLearning.pdf>).

at least in part, an indirect effect of the reduction in budgets devoted to culture as a result of the crisis.

We thus accept the idea that American cultural policy is, in general, more sensitive than ours to variations in the economic activity of the country and that the impact of the crisis on cultural outings has been stronger in the United States. Such a viewpoint implicitly leads to crediting the French political model with numerous virtues: not only has it allowed the worsening of economic inequalities to be limited and its social effects reduced, but it could also have continued to support the dynamism of cultural outings by maintaining, in a difficult economic context, the efforts of the “French style” cultural policy in favour of the range and diversification of audiences.

However, another interpretation, distinctly less optimistic for us, the French, is possible in the face of the divergence of recent developments in cultural outings. How can we not fear, in fact, that the decline observed in the United States during the decade starting in 2000 foreshadows the phenomena that will occur in our country in a few years?

The comparative analysis does not rule out this idea<sup>16</sup>, in so far as it fairly generally supports the hypothesis according to which the behaviour of the French tends to align with that of the Americans with a time delay: several structural or technological developments that took place earlier in the United States – notably the widening of access to higher education and the distribution of television among households – have seen their effects produced later in our country.

From such a viewpoint the recent fall in cultural outings in the United States could appear as the result of a double phenomenon. On the one hand, the positive effects of the increase in education on cultural participation will be exhausted across the Atlantic, whereas they continue to act in France, where the population born before the war remains with few educated and where each succeeding generation is on average more educated than the previous. On the other hand, the earlier distribution of the Internet in the United States has led across the Atlantic to changes in behaviour that are still imperceptible or of small size, in 2008, in our country.

The diffusion of multiple devices with online access took place earlier in the United States: the proportion of online users was, at the turn of the century, twice as high across the Atlantic (about 20% of the French population were connected in 2000 against 40% in the United States). Since then, France has made up this initial delay, notably in the upper age groups<sup>17</sup>, without however reaching the same level of intensity of usage in all categories of the population: so, for example, 34% of Americans aged 55 and over connected everyday or

almost in 2008 against 16% of their French counterparts. Given these differences, it is reasonable to believe that the earlier diffusion of the internet in the United States is at least in part responsible for the drop in attendance to live arts performances. Has the recent multiplication of screens not produced a situation analogous to that a half century ago when the faster equipping of American households with television sets created a competition with use of free time that was unfavourable to reading books, that can be partly held responsible for the low proportion of high readers in the American population in the 1980s?

The first results of the survey that the *National Endowment for the Arts* conducted in 2012 do not provide convincing response to this question. In fact, if during recent years part of the Americans have found the way back to cinemas, and if the general falling trend observed in 2008 appears to have been checked, visits to art museums and live show locations have not started to rise again: they remain, in all cases, less than the levels at the start of the 1990s, and downward movement observed in younger generations has continued in the case of theatres or museums and art galleries.

The question of the effects of the development of the internet thus remains open. It will be necessary to await the next edition of the “*Pratiques culturelles des Français*” (French cultural practices) survey to know more... ■

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16. The results of the last Eurobarometer on access and participation in culture can also feed this hypothesis by bringing out a general fall in visits to cultural infrastructure over the period 2007-2012, in France as in all the twenty seven countries surveyed ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_399\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_399_en.pdf)).

17. In 2012, 60% of French people had used the Internet daily with a clear catching up in the higher age ranges because the average age had risen from 35 and a half in 2007 to 41 and a half in 2012. Vincent GOMBAULT, “L’internet de plus en plus prisé, l’internaute de plus en plus mobile” (“*The Internet more and more prized, the surfer more and more mobile*”), *INSEE Première*, June 2013, n° 1452.

## Box 1 – Difficulties of a comparative analysis over time

The comparative work from which the main results of presented in this study come combines the difficulty of an international comparison and that of an analysis over time<sup>1</sup>. Comparing the results of the survey in time and space supposes that several conditions are met: first, the survey arrangements, if not identical, must be sufficiently close not to generate excessively large biases, and the formulation of the questions relating to the activities that the comparison covers must be sufficiently homogeneous from one country to another and stable over time; finally, the differences observed from one country to another must be able to be analysed from common explanatory variables (in terms of age, educational level or income, for example) whilst including the specific characteristics related to the demographic, social, political, and economic context of each country that are likely to have an influence on cultural practices.

### Description of the two studies

On the French side, the “*Pratiques culturelles des Français*” (“*French cultural practices*”) survey was undertaken on five occasions (1973, 1981, 1988, 1997 and 2008) among a representative sample of the French population aged 15 and over. For each edition the representativeness of the sample was ensured by the so called quotas method and the interviews were done face to face at the homes of the people questioned<sup>2</sup>.

On the American side the *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* survey is the main provision for the observation of cultural practices in the United States. This survey was controlled by the *National Endowment for the Arts* on four occasions, between 1982 and 2008, on representative samples of the American population aged 18 and over: it was undertaken in 1982 and 1992 by the *Census Bureau* as an additional module in a larger survey, the *National Crime Survey*, and by the *Bureau of Labor Statistics* in 2002 and 2008 as an additional module for the *Current Population Survey*. In all cases the sampling method was random and, in 2008, the surveys took place by telephone, the interviewers could also accept responses from a relative of the person being questioned<sup>3</sup>.

The methods of collecting information are thus distinctly different from one country to another, as is the population surveyed, which has led to the removal of the 15-17 year old population from the French survey.

### Activities selected for the comparison

The comparative analysis covers all the activities appearing in the questionnaires of the *Pratiques culturelles des Français* and *Public Participation in the Arts* in identical form (or very close). Of course, this does not guarantee that the content of these activities is exactly the same in both countries or from one date to another in the same country, from which arises the double question that has guided us throughout the analysis: is the content covered by the comparison actually the same in both countries? Has this same content not changed between the two survey dates in one country or another, or both?

The table below presents the list of activities selected by specifying the exact formulation of the questions in each questionnaire, knowing that the question covers, for all activities, practice over the last twelve months. The question number refers to the last edition of each of the surveys.

FRANCE	UNITED STATES
<u>Visits to classical music concerts</u> Q70B: “Still from this list, which are those that you have actually done in the last twelve months?”: “go to a classical music concert”	<u>Visits to classical music concerts</u> Q3A: “With the exception of elementary, middle, or high school performances, did you go to a live classical music performance such as symphony, chamber, or choral music during the last 12 months?”
<u>Visits to jazz concerts</u> Q70B: “Still from this list, which are those that you have actually done in the last twelve months?”: “go to a jazz concert” <i>Remark:</i> this question did not exist in 1981 (jazz concert was combined with rock concert).	<u>Visits to jazz concerts</u> Q1A: “With the exception of elementary, middle, or high school performances, did you go to a live jazz performance during the last 12 months?”
<u>Visits to dance shows</u> Q70B: “Still from this list, which are those that you have actually done in the last twelve months?”: “go to a dance show” <i>Remark:</i> from the 1997 edition, this is specified as “classical, modern or contemporary dance” (folk dances are the subject of another question).	<u>Visits to dance shows (ballet or other type of dance)</u> in the last twelve months Q7A: “With the exception of elementary, middle, or high school performances, did you go to a live ballet performance during the last 12 months?” <i>Remark:</i> did not exist in 1982 (only ballet).
<u>Theatre visits</u> Q70B: “Still from this list, which are those that you have actually done in the last twelve months?”: “go to the theatre to see a play played by professionals”	<u>Theatre visits</u> Q6A: “With the exception of elementary, middle, or high school performances, did you go to a live performance of a non musical stage play during the last 12 months?” <i>Remark:</i> the SPPA questionnaire also asks about musical stage plays, a category that does not exist in the French questionnaire.

1. See Olivier DONNAT, “Pratiques culturelles, 1973-2008. Questions de mesure et d’interprétation des résultats” (*Culture practices: Questions of measurement and interpretation of the results*), Paris, Ministry for Culture and Communication, DEPS, coll. “Culture méthodes”, 2011-2, December 2011.

2. For more methodological details and to view the questionnaire, see [www.pratiquesculturelles.culture.gouv.fr](http://www.pratiquesculturelles.culture.gouv.fr)

3. To view the questionnaire and find out more about the comparability of different editions of the survey, see <http://arts.gov/art-works/2012/taking-note-updating-public-record-arts-participation-america>

## FRANCE

Museum or art gallery visits

Q75B: "Still from this list, during the last twelve months have you?"

"Visited a museum"

"Visited an art gallery"

*Remark:* did not exist in 1982 (no question on art galleries) then was the subject of two separate questions in the 1997 and 2008 editions.

Cinema visits

Q70A: "Have you been to the cinema during the last 12 months?"

Amateur writing practices

Q84: "During the last twelve months, have you practised the following activity for your pleasure: writing poems, novels or romances?"

Amateur plastic arts practice

Q84: "During the last twelve months, have you practised the following activity for your pleasure: painting, sculpture or printmaking?"

Reading books

Q66: "Approximately how many books have you read during the last twelve months, taking your holiday reading into account?" Excluding professional reading and books read to children.

Regular book reading: twenty or more books during the last twelve months

Q: see previous question.

Regular television viewing: twenty hours and more per week

Q36a/b: "On average how much time do you watch television?"

*Remark:* the question distinguishes the weekend from the rest of the week and allows the person interviewed to choose the reference period (day or week).

## UNITED STATES

Museum or art gallery visits

Q9A: "[During the last 12 months,] did you visit an art museum or gallery?"

Cinema visits

QC2a: "During the last 12 months, did you go out to the movies?"

Amateur reading practices in the last twelve months

Q14a: "With the exception of work or school, did you do any creative writing such as stories, poems, or plays during the last 12 months?"

Amateur practice of the plastic arts during the last twelve months

QC13a: "During the last 12 months, did you do any painting, drawing, sculpture, or printmaking activities?"

Reading books

Q12A: "With the exception of books required for work or school, did you read any books during the last 12 months?"

*Remark:* only from 1992.

Regular book reading: twenty or more books during the last twelve months

Q12B: see previous question.

*Remark:* only from 1992.

Regular television viewing: three hours and over per day

QC1a: "Approximately how many hours of television do you watch on an average day?"

*Remark:* 20 hours/week in France is compared against 21 hours/week in the United States (3 times 7).

**The descriptive variables**

It is known that each country uses partly different criteria to describe the people surveyed: so for example, the ethnic membership criterion (*race, ethnicity*) always appears in a prominent place in American questionnaires, whereas the social and professional category is a central reference in France that does not exist across the Atlantic.

Taking these difficulties into account, only the four following variables have been selected to characterise the profile of the people surveyed: their sex, age, qualification level and household income level. If age or sex do not pose any particular difficulty, it is not the same for qualification and income levels, which are not immediately comparable from one country to another, but also from one date to another, due to structural changes, like the increase in education, for example.

For a statistical cancellation of the effects of structure, it appeared most relevant to argue on qualification and income criteria from the quartiles by comparing the change in cultural practices of the highest qualified 25% of people (or the richest) and the least qualified 25% (or poorest) in both countries.

This method, which comes down to change the qualification level over time to take account of their relative devaluation, does not permit the populations to be divided into perfectly equal quartiles. So it would be more exact to speak of quasi-quartiles whose relative size has changed through the editions of the two surveys in the following way:

	FRANCE				UNITED STATES			
	1981	1988	1997	2008	1982	1992	2002	2008
<b>Proportion of total population</b> ( <i>in %</i> )								
Highest qualified quartile	24	28	31	24	21	21	26	29
Least qualified quartile	17	30	18	25	25	27	15	13
Richest quartile	18	15	20	22	31	20	23	19
Poorest quartile	25	27	30	33	17	25	28	27

Source: *Surveys Public Participation in the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts/*Pratiques culturelles des Français*, DEPS, French Ministry for Culture and Communication

## Box 2 – The surveys by the National Endowment for the Arts

The studies department of the *National Endowment for the Arts* (NEA), located in Washington D.C., produces numerous statistical surveys on culture in the United States. The main results of these surveys are summarised in the research reports that appear on the NEA Internet site: <http://arts.gov/publications>

In these statistical surveys, the *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (SPPA) occupies a special place. The SPPA, which explores the cultural practices of Americans since 1982, is one of the main surveys by the NEA, which repeats it very regularly. The main results of the last SPPA survey (2008) can be found on the SPPA website: <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/2008-SPPA.pdf>

Moreover, a new survey was undertaken in 2012, for which the first results have been recently published: <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/highlights-from-2012-SPPA.pdf>

The SPPA databases, and many others, can be freely downloaded from the *Cultural Policy and the Arts National Data Archive* (CPANDA) website: <http://www.cpanda.org/cpanda/data>

## Further reading:



CE-2011-7

### Cultural Practices, 1973-2008 Generational forces and social inertia

December 2011, 36 p.

The retrospective analysis of the five editions of the *Pratiques culturelles* (Cultural Practices) survey conducted since the early 1970s has highlighted some major trends in the evolution of cultural practices, such as the huge increase in listening to music and the increasing prevalence of screen-based culture, the fall in reading of printed matter, the boom in amateur artistic practices and increased attendance of cultural establishments. It draws attention to the scale of renewed cultural practices, their feminisation and ageing audiences, whilst also reiterating that the generational forces linked both to the diversification of supply (both public and private) and to the profound transformations in French society often have to compromise with those forces hindering the process of democratisation.



CM-2011-2

### Cultural Practices 1973-2008 Issues of measurement and the interpretation of results

December 2011, 12 p.

The *Pratiques culturelles des Français* (French cultural practices) survey has been carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Communication since 1973 and measures penetration rates within the French population of the main forms of access to culture. Comparing thirty-five years' worth of sociological surveys conducted at ten-year intervals requires several methodological precautions to be put in place before data can be analysed. One must consider structural changes in society at demographic, economic and social level, and also identify the effects of era, generation and supply. Furthermore, cultural practices themselves and, more generally, means of accessing culture have changed over the last thirty five years, influenced particularly by technological innovations. Finally, this document revisits the interpretation of the processes often used in analysing the evolution of cultural practices, such as feminisation, elitisation or democratisation and juvenilisation.



CE-2009-5

### French Cultural Participation in the Digital Age Summary 1997-2008

October 2009, 12 p.

First published in 1970s, The Ministry of Culture and Communication's Cultural Practices survey has been the main barometer of French behaviour in the area of media and culture. Over a decade on from the 1997 results, those published in 2008 shows the impact of ten years of change wrought by the booming digital and internet-based culture: the increasing power of screen culture, the declining popularity of television and radio among the younger generations, declining daily newspaper and book readership and developments in content production.

Available to download from: [www.pratiquesculturelles.culture.gouv.fr](http://www.pratiquesculturelles.culture.gouv.fr)

## ABSTRACT

*The French Ministry of Culture and Communication and the US National Endowment of the Arts regularly conduct national surveys (Pratiques culturelles des Français and Survey of Public Participation in the Arts) to track changing behaviour in the general population in the fields of culture and media.*

*A comparison of the results of these two surveys, which have been published in roughly similar periods since the early 1980s, gives a comparative study of the level of dissemination of cultural practices and their respective public profiles which spans almost three decades.*

*In the early 1980s, the American population, whilst being much more avid consumers of television, had a higher overall level of cultural participation, except in the area of book reading. The profile of cultural consumers in terms of age, sex, level of education and income was fairly similar on both sides of the Atlantic.*

*The changes observed in each country over the course of the following decades are often similar, although they occur later in France (e.g. increasing consumption of television, decreasing book readership, increasing amateur artistic practices). The only main disparity concerns outings to the cinema, theatre and dance performances, for which attendance figures rose in France during the 2000s, at a time when they were showing a marked decline in the USA.*

*Relative changes in the profile of cultural consumers are often similar: we observe an increasingly female and an increasingly older public, whilst reduced participation on the part of the highest-educated has also been seen in both countries, although with a marked disparity between the richest and poorest in the USA which is not seen in France.*

## RÉSUMÉ

Le ministère de la Culture et de la Communication français et le National Endowment of the Arts aux États-Unis réalisent régulièrement une enquête nationale (*Pratiques culturelles des Français* et *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*) pour suivre l'évolution des comportements des habitants dans le domaine de la culture et des médias.

La confrontation des résultats de ces deux enquêtes, dont les éditions sont, depuis le début des années 1980, relativement proches dans le temps, permet une analyse comparative sur près de trois décennies du niveau de diffusion des pratiques culturelles et du profil de leurs publics respectifs.

Au début des années 1980, la population américaine, bien que plus téléphage, avait un niveau général de participation culturelle supérieur, à l'exception de la lecture de livres. Le profil des publics culturels en termes de sexe, d'âge, de niveau d'études et de revenu était relativement proche de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique.

Les évolutions observées dans chaque pays au cours des décennies suivantes sont souvent semblables mais interviennent plus tard en France (augmentation de la consommation de télévision, baisse de la lecture de livres, progression des pratiques artistiques en amateur). La seule véritable divergence concerne les sorties au cinéma, au théâtre et aux spectacles de danse, dont les taux de fréquentation ont progressé en France dans les années 2000, au moment où ils accusaient un recul marqué aux États-Unis.

Les évolutions relatives au profil des publics sont également souvent analogues : féminisation et vieillissement des publics, recul de la participation des plus diplômés s'observent dans les deux pays, avec toutefois une accentuation des écarts entre les plus riches et les plus pauvres aux États-Unis qu'on n'observe pas en France.

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