

Press release

SCIENTISTS OF INTERNATIONAL REPUTE INVITED TO MILAN BY BRACCO FOUNDATION TO EXPLAIN WHY CULTURE AND WELLBEING ARE A WINNING COMBINATION

Cavalli Sforza, Keyes, Bygren, Ticini and Gray have demonstrated, through surprising scientific studies, the positive impact of cultural participation on the health and wellbeing of citizens. The event, attended by European, Italian and Milanese institutions, was organised by Bracco Foundation, under the sponsorship of the IULM language and communication university.

Milan, 2 December 2011 – The use of culture improves the quality of life of the individual. This is the strong message that emerged from the International Scientific Symposium organized by Bracco Foundation under the sponsorship of the IULM University of Milan and in cooperation with the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Museum of Science and Technology.

Population studies conducted by scientists around the world have shown that cultural consumption impacts on the life expectancy of every individual, and that those who rarely enjoy cultural events have an increased risk of mortality. Furthermore, especially with regard to older people, the rate of hospitalization and medicalisation diminishes for those who attend numerous cultural events. “Leisure activities,” said Lars Olov Bygren from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, “even help prevent or delay serious disorders such as cancer and Huntington's disease.”

Other studies have shown that engaging in cultural activities also directly affects our level of overall satisfaction, decreases anxiety and reduces the risk of depression. In other words, culture is a blessing that nourishes the mind and slows down aging.

Armed with this scientific basis, in recent months Fondazione Bracco has led a field research with the aim of evaluating the influence of cultural activities on individual psychological well-being. The results of this statistical survey carried out by DOXA for Bracco Foundation, in collaboration with the Municipality of Milan, were presented at the Symposium by Enzo Grossi, Scientific Advisor of the Foundation.

“The survey, conducted using an instrument called the Psychological General Well-Being Index, revealed many surprises,” said Enzo Grossi. “The aim of the study conducted on the Milanese population by Bracco Foundation was to explore the relationship between lifestyles and individual psychological well-being, with particular regard to cultural access, in order to provide an estimate of the impact of cultural participation on the subjective perception of well-being. Very often, culture is deemed irrelevant, or at most mere entertainment, useful as a distraction. Few could imagine that cultural participation actually has more of an impact on our well-being than a range of other variables such as income, age or employment.”

The average state of psychological well-being of the Milanese population tended to be higher than that registered in similar studies throughout northern Italy. It is interesting to note that only 6% of those interviewed admitted to a cultural consumption equal to zero, compared to the Italian average value of around 10%. This is yet another confirmation of the fact that Milan is a lively cultural city. Placing cultural and leisure activities in decreasing order of importance in terms of the perception of psychological well-being, women indicated the opera, museums, reading and the theatre (in decreasing order) as the most important cultural activities, while men listed museums, classical concerts, art exhibitions and the theatre.

The Foundation's study also provides guidance for institutions in setting new welfare and social policies, so that these may take into greater account the impact of so-called leisure activities on the health of citizens.

“The approach to medicine we wish to promote with this scientific conference is one that does not merely consider the presence or absence of disease,” said Diana Bracco, Chairwoman of the Bracco Foundation. “As has been proven by the many accounts of our distinguished guests, health also depends on how human beings live in their local context and how they participate in society. In fact, some countries are starting to consider fully-fledged cultural welfare policies. It is also worth remembering that over the next 10 years, 80% of our medical knowledge will change, and therefore also our way of preventing, diagnosing and treating diseases. The practice of medicine is undergoing a revolutionary paradigm shift, evolving increasingly from being merely *reactive*, i.e. waiting for a disease to occur before intervening, to being *proactive*, i.e. intervening actively on the promoting factors and causes before the disease develops.”

The Symposium - attended by the international scientists Luigi Luca Cavalli Sforza from Stanford University, Luca Francesco Ticini from the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, Corey Keyes from the Emory University in Georgia (USA), Lars Olov Bygren from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, and Selena Gray from the University of the West of England in Bristol - were split into two sessions.

The morning session, moderated by Antonella Delle Fave, focussed on the role of culture and quality of life in the formation of individual psychological well-being, addressing the issue from different angles, and giving particular emphasis to the presentation of case studies. The afternoon session - opened with speeches by Diana Bracco, Chairwoman of Bracco Foundation, and Fiorenzo Galli, Director of the "Leonardo da Vinci" National Museum of Science and Technology in Milan, which hosted the Symposium - provided concrete information and practical elements for the definition of programmes and actions in the territory, based on the success stories presented during the first session. During the afternoon, institutional representatives took the stand: Lara Comi, Vice-Chairwoman of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee of the European Parliament, Chiara Bisconti, Milan City Councillor responsible for Wellbeing, Quality of Life, Sports and Leisure, and Antonio Tomassini, Chairman of the 12th Committee on Hygiene and Health of the Italian Senate. The session was moderated by Pierluigi Sacco, professor at the IULM University of Milan.

Under the sponsorship of



Bracco Foundation develops, promotes and disseminates cultural, scientific and artistic expressions as means of improving quality of life and social cohesion. To this end, the Foundation promotes valorisation of the national cultural, historical and artistic heritage, and also develops environmental awareness, promotes scientific research and protection of health, supports education, training and professional development for young people, and organises welfare and solidarity initiatives to contribute to the collective well-being.

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