**Researching the social impact of arts and disability: Applying a new empirical tool and method**

**Abstract**

This paper has a twofold focus: to establish a method of assessing the potential social impact of arts and disability projects, and to apply this method to ten such projects. It does so by using a newly developed ‘ripple’ model that conceptualises social impact in terms of the development of active citizenship on the part of all participants over time. The model identifies ten factors (program activity, welcoming, belonging, program social values, individual social values, program networks, individual networks, skills and creativity, program wider social impact, and individual wider social impact) which evolve through four progressive stages. The original model is empirically adapted for application to arts and disability projects. Qualitative data was collected in the form of interviews, surveys and media reports across ten case studies, each representing a major arts and disability project offering a professional outcome for an external audience. The qualitative data was coded to provide a simple scoring tool for each case. The results support the application of the ripple model in this context. Furthermore, findings indicate three critical conditions which enable projects to generate considerable positive social impact beyond the individual; ensemble in nature; project embeddedness; and networks and partnerships.

**Keywords:** active citizenship; arts; disability; social capital; social impact

**Introduction**

Measuring the social impact of the arts has been problematic with the economic impact of the arts taking precedence methodologically and empirically ([Reeves, 2002](#_ENREF_47)). Additionally, examining the issue from an arts and disability perspective is almost invisible in the literature. Matarasso’s ([1997](#_ENREF_33)) ground-breaking work on the social impact of the arts has provided a robust understanding of the social impact of the arts with some limited insights into the arts and disability space. The arts has historically been an area for people with disability to involve themselves where employment has been denied. Their involvement in the arts has had multiple predications including a diversional therapy activity to engage people, more mainstream medicalised therapy (e.g. mental health), leisure and social role valorisation ([Bendle & Patterson, 2009](#_ENREF_9); [Heenan, 2006](#_ENREF_26); [Wolfensberger, 2000](#_ENREF_64)). Yet the arts have become alternative spaces and places for people with disability to claim voluntary, periodic and full-time employment ([Victorian Office for Disability, 2010, p. 51](#_ENREF_61)). On this continuum of engagement the outcomes have been important for people with disability for increased social participation and a sense of belonging that are generated by these alternative spaces and places ([Hall, 2013](#_ENREF_24)). However, little has been understood about the social impact that they generate for people with disability, the organisations that provide opportunities, the funding bodies, and those third-parties (organisations and individuals) who become exposed to the creative process of art making.

In Australia there have been recent evaluations and reports on arts and disability. They have focused on areas such as service needs ([Service Skills South Australia, 2013](#_ENREF_54)), participation and employment ([Victorian Office of Disability, 2010](#_ENREF_62)), access to the arts ([Accessible Arts & Australia Council, 1999](#_ENREF_1)), and leadership ([Australia Council For The Arts, 2014](#_ENREF_3)). This increased focus on the industry sector comes at a time of radical change in policy and service delivery for people with disability through the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). As with all policy change, understanding the outcomes of policy change requires clearly articulated understandings of measuring baseline participation, impacts and outcomes. However, the social impact of disability arts projects at the individual and project level has not, until now, been explored.

This paper seeks to establish a means of researching the potential social impact of these arts programs. It does so by using a newly developed model that conceptualises social impact, not in terms of value for money or social return on investment (though they may also occur) but in terms of the development of active citizenship on the part of participants with disability and their immediate connections, as well as the short and long term social impact ripple effects of that development over time. In this paper, social impact is defined as “the generation of increased (or decreased) levels of social, cultural and human capital within the constituent communities in which an organisation operates” ([Onyx, 2014, p. 12](#_ENREF_41)). This model is applied to 10 case studies, with each case representing a major Arts and Disability Partnership Project (ADPP) offering a professional outcome for an external audience in mainstream artistic venues and spaces. The projects cover a variety of artistic mediums including performance, visual art, and multimedia and movie production. Projects involved a partnership with some or all of the following: disability service organisations, disability arts organisations, arts organisations and professional artists.

**Reconceptualising social capital and social impact**

Social impact is itself a difficult and fuzzy concept to define. One way to understand this phenomenon is through an analysis of the effects of social capital. Well-being and community cohesion are core components of social capital. When social capital is present in an area, town, group or organisation, a series of beneficial outcomes are evident including education, reduction in crime, a sense of place, increased well-being that extend beyond financial and economic improvements ([Halpern, 2005](#_ENREF_25); [Onyx & Bullen, 2000](#_ENREF_42); [Putnam, 2000](#_ENREF_45)). [Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993, p. 67)](#_ENREF_46) defined social capital as “those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions”. In following this approach they suggest that communitywide civic health is the result of maintaining and enhancing community cohesion and collective action, which is the basis of social capital.

‘Bonding’, and ‘bridging’ aspects of social capital are the core concepts that are most discussed in conceptualising and elaborating on social capital ([Putnam, 2000](#_ENREF_45); [Woolcock & Narayan, 2000](#_ENREF_65)). Trust is central for bonding to occur, where intense, multidimensional connections, shared values and time are required for trust to build around areas, towns, groups or organisations. The individual and the interpersonal relationships require values to create a sense of identity, shared experiences to create an interdependence to support each other and for a sense of belonging to emerge amongst the group. However, as others note not all social capital provides positive benefits where belonging can sometimes lead to reinforcing dysfunctional behaviour in enclaves where others become excluded rather than benefiting from the social interactions ([Portes, 1998](#_ENREF_44); [Tonts, 2005](#_ENREF_59)).

While bonding is more easily understood there is a complexity to bridging where connections are made between family and friends networks to other individuals and groups beyond the initial setting in areas, towns or organisations. Bridging has a role at both the personal level for individuals and in broader community development in areas, towns and organisations ([Woolcock & Narayan, 2000](#_ENREF_65)). Bridging is said to have three key purposes: facilitate interactions between different sociodemographic groups (for some leading to upward mobility see [Lock, Taylor, and Darcy (2008)](#_ENREF_31)); to develop bridges between networks where there are said to be holes or blockages; and to gain access to resources and information not available in the original setting in question. Yet, as with individuals, groups whether that be within areas, towns or organisations, require trust to be developed over time for the bridging to move beyond weak engagements to develop strength, formality and resilience ([Schneider (2009)](#_ENREF_51). Empirical studies are clearly showing that both resources of bonding and bridging are essential for well-being to flourish at the individual and collective levels ([Edwards & Onyx, 2007](#_ENREF_16); [Leonard & Onyx, 2004](#_ENREF_30); [Putnam, 2000](#_ENREF_45); [Schneider, 2009](#_ENREF_51)). As will be outlined in this paper the proposed model of social impact, builds on this framework of bonding, belonging and bridging through examining the social relations of the projects, the individuals and organisations involved, first amongst their family and friends, and then through networking to other groups and beyond.

At the core of social capital are the relationships between individuals and central to human relationships is the assumption of reciprocity ([Buunk & Schaufeli, 1999](#_ENREF_12)). Reciprocity goes beyond ‘one good turn deserves another’; it is about the expectation of giving and gaining in relationships in both tangible and intangible ways. However, the stigma of disability ([Goffman, 1963](#_ENREF_23)) is about dependence, ‘special needs’, and being ‘othered’ ([Barnes, 1992](#_ENREF_5)) all of which undermines and overshadows the expectation of reciprocity. Whilst this is less of an issue for bonding social capital because of the nature of those close relationships, it is a significantly limiting factor in bridging and networking social capital.

In examining the foundations of social capital, it has been noted as a way to gain prominence in a social area ([Bourdieu, 1986](#_ENREF_10)). Bourdieu’s (1986) sociological examination of the capitals and their relationships has been one of his enduring contributions. In discussing the role of the capitals, he suggests that these are not separate but interconnected where under certain circumstances one capital may lead to the transformation or conversion into other forms of capital. Not surprisingly he observes that economic capital is strongly connected to the primary source of power and wealth. In the privileging of economic capital, he observes that other capitals are mainly useful in so far as they may be ultimately convertible into economic capital. Others note the interdependencies between capitals, the importance for each capital in its own right and for the links and interdependencies between each other. This is nowhere more evident than the nexus of social and human capital. For example, Bourdieu’s explanation of institutional cultural capital is similar to what others identify as human capital. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), define human capital as including skills, competences and qualifications that can contribute to an individual’s opportunity across capitals ([Schuller, 2007](#_ENREF_53)). Schuller goes on to argue that it is the interdependency and direct link of social capital to human capital in particular that makes it so important. Without this link to other capitals, the full potential of social capital can never be realised. Hence, while individually they are important in their own right, they are enhanced and magnified to a certain extent by the cumulative presence of the other capitals.

**Contextualising social impact in the arts and disability**

Matarasso’s ([1997](#_ENREF_33)) ground-breaking study was arguably the first significant empirical investigation of the social impact of the arts generally. From Matarasso’s work, six broad research themes were identified , which included for example, Local Image and Identity (a sense of place and belonging, local distinctiveness) and Social Cohesion (connections between people and groups; intercultural and intergenerational). Matarasso’s work led to a number of other significant studies and reviews that reinforced, developed and built upon, these six themes. Moreover, it led to examining theoretical approaches to social impact and social impact methodology, which have been incorporated into the current study (e.g. [Belfiore, 2002](#_ENREF_8); [Clements, 2007](#_ENREF_14); [Galloway, 2009](#_ENREF_21); [Hutzel, 2010](#_ENREF_28); [Merli, 2002](#_ENREF_37); [O'Neill, 2009](#_ENREF_40); [van den Hoogen, 2014](#_ENREF_60)). With respect to arts and disability, this body of work made limited reference to outcomes for people with disability including contribution to the disability movement, attitude change and as a site for an individual’s improved confidence.

Outside of social impact studies, other studies note that art can be one vehicle for challenging disability stereotypes ([Amado, 2014](#_ENREF_2); [Barnes, 2008](#_ENREF_6)). There is a growing body of evidence that participation in the arts and community-based arts projects in general provides other benefits such as improvements in educational standards ([Bamford, 2006](#_ENREF_4); [Fiske, 2000](#_ENREF_20); [Hunter, 2005](#_ENREF_27)), personal health, social capital, tolerance, and cross cultural understanding ([McQueen-Thomas & Ziguras, 2002](#_ENREF_36); [Mulligan et al., 2007](#_ENREF_38); [Myer, 2002](#_ENREF_39); [Rogers & Spooks, 2003](#_ENREF_49)). Additionally, such participation has been shown to develop creativity and economic development ([Robinson, 1999](#_ENREF_48)).

Art is also a gift to its audience ([McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004](#_ENREF_35)) and a step to reciprocity in potential relationships and bridging social capital. Human capital in this context highlights the creative skills and abilities of those with (dis)ability. While not discussed in the same terms as social, human and cultural capital, [Hall (2013)](#_ENREF_24) identifies the importance of people with disability having an underlying need to belong as all humans do with others for a common cause. In his exploration of two separate arts organisations he notes the importance of embodied and emotional expression as a foundation for individuals feeling that they belong. Yet, the move from social exclusion to individuals and groups feeling included and belonging is intrinsically linked to the artistic creative process that creates a space and place in which people with disability (intellectual disability in Hall’s two cases) gain trust through the development of their artistic endeavours and their interpersonal relationships. What is most interesting about Hall’s study is that he recognises the importance of an exclusive place to develop a sense of belonging through the creative process before venturing and risking (as all artists do) gifting to others in inclusive nondisabled public spaces. The current study looks to build on Hall’s work to examine what constitutes social impact from an individual and project perspective from this starting point of people with disability having a sense of belonging.

**Applying a new social impact approach to active citizenship**

As identified in the literature, “social impact refers to the generation of increased (or decreased) levels of social, cultural and human capital within the constituent communities in which an organisation operates” ([Onyx, 2014, p. 12](#_ENREF_41)). Social impact is an ongoing process where the capitals are dynamic and part of ongoing complex social processes and relationships in the areas, towns, groups and organisations in which they exist (Bourdieu, 1997). Hence, we are researching how the generation of cultural, social and human capital occurs and the impacts that it has on others within and outside of the original location of the activities.

It is now possible to apply the insights from social capital theory to the phenomenon of social impact. These insights have led to a generalised conceptual model of social impact, the citizenship or ‘ripple model’, as developed by ([Edwards et al., 2015](#_ENREF_18)) and [Onyx (2014)](#_ENREF_41), involving a series of hypothesised propositions that will now be outlined. Applying these to the field of arts and disability as will be done in the research design. It is possible to hypothesise the social impact of arts projects within a disability community as being shaped by the following criteria ([adapted from Onyx, 2014, pp. 14-15](#_ENREF_41)):

1. “The generation of social impact is an ongoing process within the communities in question. It is not an all or none affair, but involves several distinct aspects or phases which are causally related.
2. Social impact begins with the development of bonding social capital within the project itself. It’s development depends on the extent to which the organisation provides a welcoming climate for individual members and thus the extent to which those members feel included, with a sense of personal belonging and trust ([Edwards, Onyx, Maxwell, & Darcy, 2012](#_ENREF_17); [Onyx, Kenny, & Brown, 2012](#_ENREF_43)). Bonding social capital is a necessary precondition for the generation of further effects ([Edwards & Onyx, 2007](#_ENREF_16)). To the extent that this occurs, then wider impacts become possible.
3. An important aspect to the generation of social impact is the development of social and citizenship values as a direct consequence of the organisational practices. These values will vary, but are likely to include a sense of community and the importance of working together. This may reflect what [Latané (1996)](#_ENREF_29) described as the emergence of cultural capital.
4. Organisational practices enable the development of personal skills and knowledge (human capital), and the development of wider social networks, both within and beyond the organisation (bridging social capital). There is an interdependent development of both social and human capital ([Schuller, 2007](#_ENREF_53)).
5. A wider contribution may then occur beyond the organisational structure of the arts project. This may involve the creation of broader networks and connections outside the immediate organisational structure. It may include effects within a wider public audience. Much depends on the wider reputation that the organisation develops over time within the broader community. Bourdieu’s (1986) symbolic capital plays an important part.
6. Impact occurs *both* at the level of the individual member *and* at the level of the organisational structure of the arts project. Impact depends both on the culture of the project, as [Schneider (2009)](#_ENREF_51) suggests, but also on the response of the individual members. The networks that are formed relate to organisational networks as well as individual networks. Contributions to the wider community are made by the organisation as an organisation as well as by individual members. Organisational policy counts, but not completely.
7. To the extent that the organisation is embedded within a wider arts community (and probably *only* to the extent that it is so embedded) then the social impact will continue to strengthen, and indeed may reverberate back into the organisation, thus strengthening its internal impact in an iterative fashion. That is, to the extent that the organisation is able to contribute to a stronger arts community, then the community will support and strengthen the organisation. As suggested from some sport development projects ([cf. Schulenkorf, Thomson, & Schlenker, 2011](#_ENREF_52)), organisational practices will only provide wider, long term impact to the extent that the communities in question take ownership of them”.

*Turning the conceptual model into an empirical tool*

The ‘citizenship model’ ([Edwards et al., 2015](#_ENREF_18); [Onyx, 2014](#_ENREF_41)) as defined by the above criteria, was first developed and then applied to a large surf life saving organisation, nothing to do with arts or with disability. The theoretical model emerged first from the qualitative analysis of a series of focus groups. The theoretical model was then revised and tested using a statistical analysis of a large sample of questionnaire responses, the questionnaire itself having been developed from the focus group responses ([Darcy, Maxwell, Edwards, Onyx, & Sherker, 2014](#_ENREF_15); [Edwards et al., 2012](#_ENREF_17); [Edwards et al., 2015](#_ENREF_18); [Onyx, 2014](#_ENREF_41)). The detailed procedure and resulting factors can be seen in Edwards et al. (2015). The Questionnaire responses were factor analysed and subject to structural equation modelling. This made it possible to identify the major dimensions of social impact as well as the likely way in which these dimensions were causally related. The resulting outcome directly matched the conceptual criteria identified above. This statistical modelling identified clearly that there are both individual and organisational processes involved that are nonetheless interdependent. Each stage of development builds on the previous stage, in an ongoing ripple effect. The rippling has four distinct stages as identified in Table 1. Each stage includes several factors in place at both the organisational and the individual level to facilitate the active citizenship process. Multiple items aggregate into each factor. The structural equation modelling upon which the model is based suggested a good fit statistically, and, just as importantly, made sense based on the conceptual and theoretical approach undertaken by the research team involving social and human capital.

**Table 1: Stages and Factors of the Conceptual Model of Active Citizenship**

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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## Abductive Research Design

An abductive research design was chosen that involved an iterative process of analysis of qualitative case studies, and a collective case study ([Locke, 2010](#_ENREF_32)). This methodology allowed a detailed analysis of the projects within their context and across the different settings of the Arts and Disability Partnership Projects (ADPP). Essentially, the qualitative case study methodology supports the deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena ([Baxter & Jack, 2008](#_ENREF_7); [Bryman & Hardy, 2004](#_ENREF_11); [Eisenhardt, 1989](#_ENREF_19); [Stake, 1995](#_ENREF_55); [Yin, 2014](#_ENREF_66)). It also met the following four criteria ([Yin, 2014](#_ENREF_66)):

1. The research asks ‘how’ and ‘why’. In this case how and why do the ADPP create social impact?;
2. The research is not manipulating the behaviour of any of the participants and stakeholders involved in the study;
3. The contextual conditions of the different partnership projects are relevant to the phenomenon (social impact) under study; and
4. The context (ADPP) and the phenomenon (social impact) are connected and inseparable.

The operationalisation of the framework for the study of social impact for arts and disability involved transforming the insights and concepts of the statistical model of social impact to the new setting involving arts and disability projects. It was not appropriate or meaningful in this context to apply a similar questionnaire as the population under investigation was far fewer in number and was more diverse. Instead the context of the study lends itself to a qualitative methodology, to provide transcribed data from interviews, focus groups, media reports and observations. These ‘texts’ provide an opportunity to code these in terms of the major themes emerging (elaborated in the following sections). These themes were then compared with the original factors of the statistical model.

While the fit was regarded as good, it was also necessary to modify codes to suit the arts and disability context, while retaining the original conceptual content. The revised codes were then applied to each case study to provide a scoring profile of that case. While it was not the purpose to examine links between factors as was the case in the quantitative study, indirect qualitative evidence in the case study suggested that a similar staged process could be seen occurring in many of the ADPP. The final detailed coding form as derived in this way, and as used to “score” the cases is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2: Social Impact Instrument**

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

*Data sources*

The boundaries of the collective case study were:

1. 12 projects across 10 organisations of the ADPP were selected for the study. These were selected on the basis that they had received a special government grant. Table 3 is provided to give some understanding of the characteristics of the projects based on: the main organisational type; objectives of the project from an arts perspective; art form/s; location; disability types of participants; audiences; time; project life; duration; and alignment between organisational mission/project; and
2. The two-year period of the research study 2013 – 2014, which was determined by the contract agreement between the researchers and funding body.

**Table 3: Case Studies Characteristics**

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The contract between the researchers and funding body concerned the development of a methodology to measure social impact and not to conduct an evaluation of the projects. The research was approved through University human ethics research processes. The collective case study methodology provided the opportunity to engage in detail through a mixture of methodologies and data sources. These methodologies included:

* in-depth interviews with project managers, facilitators, participants, artists, audience and participating organisations’ staff members;
* focus groups with stakeholders;
* project observation;
* content analysis of audio visual material, media reports, social media, websites, internal organisational and project documents and project acquittals; and
* surveys of audience reaction to performances and people working in disability arts.

This mixture allowed for the ‘triangulation’ of data ([Bryman & Hardy, 2004](#_ENREF_11); [Eisenhardt, 1989](#_ENREF_19); [Stake, 1995](#_ENREF_55); [Yin, 2014](#_ENREF_66)). This refers to exploring the phenomenon (social impact) at the centre of the research through more than one lens or data source. It allows for the various aspects of the phenomenon to be exposed and understood ([Baxter & Jack, 2008](#_ENREF_7)). This, in turn, enhances data trustworthiness providing reliable and robust results for the confident interpretation of the social impact factors and indicators for the ADPP.

*Detailed procedure and analysis*

In-depth interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The resultant text was prepared for data analysis using NVivo software package, version 9. The text was coded by the researchers to determine emergent themes. Two researchers were primarily responsible for each case study, with the remainder of the research team having secondary responsibility for the cases through reading the artefacts, transcripts and other data (these vary for each case study). The coding process was firstly an individual process of each of the research team prior to meeting to discuss the codes that each person developed. This opened a conversation as to the trustworthiness of each code as an example of social impact and provided a basis for construct consensus on the coding across all the case studies. Audio visual material, internal documents and media reports were manually coded to the same themes which emerged from the interviews and focus groups.

*Instrument development*

Developing the social impact instrument was an iterative process (Veal & Darcy, 2014). This means that it was modified continuously as more data was gathered with the instrument continuously tested and refined. The first stage of coding resulted in many themes which, when grouped, aligned to the factors in Table 1 as developed by [Edwards et al. (2015)](#_ENREF_18). However, it was necessary to develop slightly different specific indicator items of each factor to reflect the different context of the ADPP. These are presented in Table 2 with a short description of each to assist with scoring the relevant impact factor for each of the 10 project case studies. The next step was to score each of the ADPP for the social impact factors against each of the indicators. Here, each indicator for each factor for each project was scored from 0 (no evidence of presence) to 4 (strong or overwhelming evidence). This allowed a comparative analysis of the case studies in terms of both their overall impact, but also of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each (a detailed scoring key is available on request however, these results are not the focus of the current paper).

While each project case was unique and was scored individually, using a scoring template, nonetheless a number of common themes were evident in both the individual factors and project factors. It is the collective learning from the combination of case studies that provides insights into projects with wider individual and project social impact. These are explored in terms of each of the factors followed by a summary discussion of the comparative and collective social impact.

**Findings**

There is very close connection between research design development and findings in this paper because of the iterative, abductive research process. The following section presents the summary of the collective case study in terms of the factors (as presented in Table 2) and which collectively identify the characteristics of ADPP that produce social impact.

*Program Activity*

The program activity factor is defined by programs which provide a variety of artistic activities as well as recognise and have the ability to fulfil the artistic potential of people with disability. The findings suggest that projects which score highly on program activity are those provided by supportive organisations which already are invested in accessible arts programs. It follows that these projects also score highly on the belonging, welcoming and social values factors indicating that a project which recognises and develops high level artistic skills of people with disability may also be accepting and inclusive. For example, in Case Study 8 (a Disability Recreation and Arts Organisation) the Art Directors tailored professional visual arts and digital media tuition over 12 months for artists with disability, to gain skills and networks to establish a professional arts practice. This was because they found it necessary to introduce the artists to professional artists in their particular artistic medium in order to develop and refine their skills. The workshop program that was already in practice effectively turned into a mentoring program with professional artists assisting in the development of artistic skills of PWD.

When we started the […] group we tried to make it like it was not exclusive, but you needed to sort of show a dedication to art making and a drive to … wanting to produce artwork and wanting to have exhibitions as well. And maybe go on residencies and work with mentors and stuff. (Art Director)

In general, projects which do not score as highly tended to be more community arts focused, do less to develop the skills of people with disability or do less to create an environment which is safe and comfortable. They also struggle to create impact beyond the participants themselves. While Case Study 1 was run by an arts organisation, it brought together people with disability from three regional towns and its main objective was community orientated rather than professional development. Participants directly benefited from their ad hoc involvement in artistic workshops and performing to friends, family and the disability community.

## Welcoming

Welcoming is a program factor which involves organisations with hospitable people in a safe and inviting environment and that accept people with a range of disabilities. High ratings on this factor may be reflective of already having “community” or “corporate” knowledge of disability arts established within the organisation. Location is important. High rating projects have participants who are familiar with the environment, space or place as it has been used for a similar purpose before. There are existing relationships and there has been evidence of trust already built up in these relationships. The ensemble nature of Case Study 4 (Arts Organisation) was such that all individuals who were involved with the theatre group through workshops and performances felt welcomed by the group and the theatre as a whole. The activities were undertaken in a setting, which is safe and inviting for participants and all members. While the program is slightly exclusive, in that ensemble members needed to have a passion for performing and writing, it does not discriminate against the types of abilities or age of participants. It just so happened that the interest generated a response by people with Down Syndrome only.

Reflecting on the projects which score lower on this factor, it was found that they were newer collaborations which can take longer to establish a welcoming environment (because the core people may not have known each other). Some of these projects are also often run in arts organisations which have less understanding of the group dynamics and less familiarity with people with disability as artists. One such project was an art installation which was creatively developed by a partner organisation to the Case Study 5 (Local Government) organisation. In this process people with disability were rarely involved in the development of the installations. Instead, the completed installations were displayed at public events and participation, by all members of the public including people with disability, was encouraged. As a result, the project did little to create a welcoming environment for participants.

## Belonging

Belonging is an individual factor indicating trusting friendships amongst a group of supportive people with common goals. There was evidence that all ADDP strived for a common purpose giving a basic level of belonging and some feeling of acceptance. Projects which rated highly did so because participants generally knew one another prior to the project which meant there had been an investment of time to build trust with other participants and facilitators. From the outset, inclusive collaboration was key to the development of a larger scale theatre production in Case Study 9 (Disability Services Organisation). This was an organisation which had already run a series of smaller projects with the participants and had developed their trust. All of the actors and facilitators sat in circular formation at the beginning of each workshop and spoke openly about their ideas for the performance. This space was safe and inviting for all. Additionally, the participants were able to make friends with others and the facilitators which had occurred over the previously funded projects

Yeah we made friends. I had a lot of friends doing it with me and this felt like I could share my thoughts with them and they could share their thoughts with me, and their feelings and how they’re feeling and how to react to the way they’re feeling. You act in a good way, because once you respect that person you’ve got to keep that respect in the circle. (Actor)

Those projects which rated quite low on this factor had fewer opportunities for participant and facilitator engagement and the developing of relationships, often because the project duration was shorter. The projects were generally one-off projects with little certainty of further development due to the lack of available further funding or having a vision of where the next step will take place. A prime example of this was in Case Study 6 (Arts Organisation). The Art Director used the funding for an end-of-year performance, which included a professional sound crew, videographer and performance program. People with disability from a range of places were encouraged to attend and perform. The remainder of the funds were used to set up weekly art (visual and performance) workshops. It was noticeable that the workshops were designed with the intention of fostering interest in art and performance rather than developing the artistic abilities of people with disability. This is a subtle but important difference particularly in relation to creative process. The participants with disability who were involved did not discuss their involvement in terms of the development of belonging and social values. These seemed less well-developed than in other projects. For example, there was little evidence of new friendships formed between participants.

## Program social values

The social values (program) factor indicates a program which challenges stereotypes of artists with disability; is designed to treat them fairly and is run by people who are passionate about their work with artists with disability. Generally all programs were seen to treat people with disability fairly and respectfully. The programs which rated highly in program social values had a fundamental belief in the importance and value of disability arts in the broader arts landscape. These programs, facilitators and artists really saw participants as artists in their own right and incorporated the contribution of people with disability in the creative development process. This was most evident in the case study projects with professional artistic objectives. For example, Case Study 10 (Community/Arts Organisation Alliance) involved actors with a disability working with an able bodied film crew to create a short film. It succeeded in its intent to ‘raise the bar’ to a more professional level for actors with disability. The script was developed from the workshops in which the actors shared their experiences of people with disability, challenging stereotypes. The film crew also learned much, with one commenting:

It was the most harmonious shoot I’ve ever had the pleasure to be involved with. There was so much respect, goodwill, good humour and rapport and some lasting friendships were forged in the short space of time spent together. (Film Crew Member)

These projects also rated highly on welcoming and belonging which demonstrates a strong link between projects which welcome and those which are designed to treat people with disability equally. The organisations running these programs are generally disability service providers (with extensive interest in the arts) or have extensive experience with disability art. They also are very supportive of the programs and may provide additional support in terms of funding, venues and staff. It follows that those programs that score lower on this factor are less committed to supporting people with disability as artists.

## Individual social values

The social values (individual) factor points to the individuals feeling respected and able to show and develop their skills. The participants felt like they are given knowledge to appreciate the value of art and are encouraged to understand their lives in an aesthetic way. Programs which rated highly on this factor had individuals who saw themselves as artists and felt recognised and supported in that role in the projects. Generally these programs are orientated towards professional development of artists and target the wider arts audience. The visual arts mentoring program designed in Case Study 8 (Disability and Recreation Arts Organisation) helped some participants not only became committed to each other and the organisation, but through their skills development came to see themselves as artists. Artists began to take ownership of their work and their artistic future such as exhibitions and launches. The Art Director explained:

One girl, she’s been coming for years. And the nature of the work, I could just see personally the potential of that in book form. But she often, over the years, has been someone who would turn up late and can be quite – actually there’s another girl, both of them had a tendency to be late or unreliable, and since participating in the workshops they’ve been on time, they just seem so much more engaged, and I’m hearing that from their families as well. And they amazingly participated in the book launch, and they’re both quite shy introverted people. And they spoke to like a crowd of people, they were reflective about their practice, they’re now more confident about how they want their work to develop in the future. (Art Director)

Projects which scored lower on this factor appeared to have less professional arts outcomes, were more leisure orientated and were displayed to audiences made up of a known disability community and family and friends of the artists. These projects also scored very low on the skills and creativity, belonging, and individual networks factors. Case Studies 5 and 6 are both case in point as has been explained earlier, both did little to engage people with disability in an ongoing capacity to develop their artistic skills.

## Program networks

The program networks factor refers to a program which is able to link with many partners to create relationships which benefit artists with disability. It was found that some organisations needed to network externally (with sponsors, specialists etc.) to complete the program while for other projects, they were embedded in organisations which already had the venue, the audience etc. Projects which networked externally with mainstream providers rated more highly on this factor and generally were less professional than those which needed to network less, because the latter type of project was run by an organisation capable of completing these projects in-house. However some professional organisations were also able to develop external networks within the wider mainstream arts field, thus enhancing the experience for participants with disability. For example, in Case Study 3 (Arts Organisation) an initial collaboration was made between the Artistic Director [AD1] of a regional theatre company and an Artistic Director of a metropolitan theatre company. The latter spoke about how she came to be part of the production:

[AD1] rang me and he said “hey, do you want to meet this [group]?” And really, that was the genesis … it was a very, very good match. He did a really fantastic job of match-making us”. (Artistic Director)

The production was performed by a mixed abilities music group who were already together prior to the project commencing. This partnership not only allowed the production to tour to Sydney, but it also provided additional support, both creatively and financially throughout its development.

## Individual networks

The individual networks factor is characterised by artists and participants with disability being able to form new relationships and professional networks for future artistic endeavour. High rating projects were so because the individuals with disability had been involved in the program over a long time as part of established/ongoing and professional practice. It is the time and focus of the programs that enabled individuals to form useful professional relationships. There are many examples of individuals partnering with mentors and professional artists to develop their skills. Individuals felt like they belonged to a wider group of professionals in these types of projects and were supported to appreciate the value of art and artistic expression. For example:

I always like working with other artists, especially my mentors as I learn new things which makes my art more professional. My mentors always listen to my ideas and what I want to achieve with my stories and illustrations and then they suggest ways to make it better. They do this in a way that I am always included in the creative process and in this way the process always remains fun. (Artist, Case Study 8)

In projects which scored low on this factor the individuals were given fewer opportunities to network with professionals or develop their own artistic or other professional skills.

## Skills and creativity

The skills and creativity factor indicates people with disability developing individual, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills through their involvement with the project. In an arts context, this is a value-added arts version of human capital of the projects. The results show that projects which rated highly on skills and creativity engaged individuals who were already highly skilled, ambitious, experienced in creative expression and committed to developing their art further. These programs were more professionally focused, welcoming and had strong social values. Moreover, they had the ability to provide opportunities for higher-level skills and creativity development through bringing in specialist art mentors and in some cases focused on the business skill development of the artist with disability. While every project showed evidence of artists with disability developing a sense of self confidence and enhanced creative capacity, Case Study 7 was a unique example. This project was created to develop the artistic skills of school students with and without disability. The artistic director brought in five emerging artists with disability to develop their creative and artistic skills to deliver/facilitate these programs in the future. This in itself created a sustainable model for the project. One explained that:

I had a transformative experience being part of a unique project, first project of this kind. I was constantly inspired by the artist, at first I thought the responsibility of leading a workshop was beyond me. I have learnt a multitude of skills, I can bring those skills from other disciplines into the field I am most comfortable in. The most exciting thing was seeing individuals grow in different classes – one person would respond beautifully to painting, another to movement, and to see that growth was one of my most favourite things. (Facilitator)

Projects which scored lower on this factor also scored lower on belonging demonstrating the importance of relationships to the enhancement of teamwork, communication, creativity, skills and confidence.

## Program wider social impact

The wider social impact (program) factor is defined by a program which engages with the local and arts communities, potentially changes awareness of disability art and is allowed to develop further than its initial intended audience. This wider engagement often includes arts professionals who have not had previous experience with disability and who gain a new found respect and understanding of the artistic contribution that their colleagues make. These projects also forged new grounds with respect to the social networks they bridged from the disability or arts will to other organisations; and the mainstream spaces, places and venues that they colonised with a disability presence. For example, in Case Study 2 the reputation of the partner organisations (DSO and Arts Organisation) was enhanced in the wider disability community, arts community and local geographic community, including local schools. This was acknowledged by participants and audience members:

“I think one good thing is it’s helping the wider community find out the truth about people with disabilities. Just because a person’s got a disability that does not mean to say that they are no good for society. (Actor)

I attend all performances at IPAC if I possibly can as well as those at Wollongong Town Hall. This was VERY well done and insightful into the lives of those coping with differences from the general population. It was an informative and entertaining afternoon. (Audience Member and Season Ticket Holder)

Within the projects there was evidence of social impact which transcended the direct ‘performance audience’. Several projects received attention on local and national radio. For others, the original project extended into mainstream and ongoing live performance through either one-off or travelling commercial theatre productions regionally, nationally and internationally (eg. Case Studies 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9).

The findings suggest that wider social impact appears to be difficult to achieve in a short timeframe. Therefore, projects which were embedded in existing programs scored more highly on this factor. There appear to be many contributing factors to wide social impact including a long gestation period and a commitment to continue the project beyond the initial scope. However, more importantly it is about the ability of the program coordinators to leverage opportunities with local and social media to gain presence in the local and arts communities. Generally projects which scored highly also scored highly in all of the other factors showing that it is important for a project to have a welcoming environment, well developed social values, good networking skills and facilitated skill development, in order to maximise the possibilities for wider engagement.

## Individual wider social impact

The final factor is the individual wider social impact which is defined as people with disability being recognised in the wider community, feeling like valued community members and advocating accessible arts. The wider recognition and respect extends beyond immediate family and facilitators to the wider disability community of service providers, professional artist collaborators, and ultimately to the broader public. These artists developed mainstream media and social media profiles through their own efforts as well as the efforts of the project managers to communicate more broadly about their abilities. Several individual artists within five of the case studies were able to develop their own professional careers with prospects of future paid events. More importantly, they became advocates for their work and peers as illustrated by one of the actors in Case Study 4:

We want to be seen and heard and given a voice and we want to be seen and heard and giving a voice through the arts. So that way we don’t have to be isolated and be invisible. And the reason why I come to [the group]… (is) I really enjoy the group and working for [Arts Organisation, Case Study 4] and working with my other colleague and we work together as a team, side by side. (Actor, Case Study 4)

The artists with disability are also able to use their new skills in other areas of life including the gaining of employment (permanent and temporary), involvement and exposure to new opportunities. The findings show that while this is an individual measure, individual wider social impact can only happen if the opportunity is created for the individual to meet, speak and interact with people who are interested in their art and to extend their current networks. Projects that scored highly on this factor were in programs with positive social values where the goal of the organisation was to create impact and push the boundaries of disability art.

## Discussion

Much of the literature on social impact and disability and the arts discusses the positive effects that participation in the arts has on those with disability, usually at an individual level ([Barnes, 2008](#_ENREF_6); [Carawan & Nalavany, 2010](#_ENREF_13); [Schleien, Brake, Miller, & Walton, 2013](#_ENREF_50); [Taylor, 2005](#_ENREF_58); [Watts & Ridley, 2011](#_ENREF_63)). Certainly this research has confirmed that there is a profound and positive social impact on the participants, both individually and collectively. The citizenship model provided the tools that allowed identification of what this social impact was, and how, in broad terms, it comes about. It also allowed the identification of the profile of this impact for each of the ADPP, in terms of the contributing effect of both the individual participants and the organisation/s supporting the project.

The citizenship model points to the ultimate impact as ‘contributing to the community’. Some of the arts and disability literature ([Amado, 2014](#_ENREF_2); [Barnes, 2008](#_ENREF_6)) also points to impacts on the wider community, or the general public, or more vaguely on ‘others’ as noted in the case studies. However, the model as it stands does not specify who these ‘others’ are, nor does it identify exactly what kind of impact occurs. What our findings do suggest is that measures of social impact must look beyond the participants themselves, to identify specifically which stakeholders are impacted and in what way. In this, we are taking the perspective of the project and people with disability as agents of change. They, through their art and the gifting of it (Hall, 2013) create a social impact on others. This relationship is usually reciprocal in that the impact experienced by others also feeds back and supports the impact experienced by the participants. However, the participants are the subjects, not the objects of this impact.

Our research begins to address this gap in several ways. For each project there is a network of stakeholders. There is specificity about these ‘others’ in that they differ for each ADPP. For example, in one project one of the key ‘other’ stakeholder groups consisted of children without disability within the primary school where the project took place, who knew the children with disability and observed their performance. Indirect evidence suggests that the experience considerably broadened these children’s understanding and acceptance of what people with disability can do as opposed to what they cannot. In this, and several other projects, the parents formed another meaningful stakeholder group. In several ADPP, the parents expressed surprise and delight, even astonishment at what their sons and daughters had been able to achieve, so focused had they been on concern for their child’s disability that they simply did not see the positive artistic potential. Perhaps even more important was comments from managers of disability organisations that they could see the potential of incorporating more of this kind of ‘serious art’ within their own organisational agenda. Stebbins (1994, 2000) has written extensively about the relationship between serious leisure and various cultural practices. Part of his work has extended to the arts and disability ([Stebbins, 1994](#_ENREF_56), [2000](#_ENREF_57)) and the concept of ‘serious art’ fits well to describe the pattern that emerged in the findings.

In other projects there were specific stakeholder groups related to the mainstream arts industry; technical professionals who worked with the participants as technical support, mentors, collaborators or co-performers. There is direct evidence that this stakeholder group was hugely and positively impressed by their experience in working with the people with disability, although they had to work differently in this context. Several mentors in different projects reported that they had learned a great deal from the experience and would welcome the opportunity to work with people with disability as colleagues, and artists again. In a sense, working with artists with disability seemed to be able to extend the boundaries of creative expression in new ways. The experience of working on the projects gave professional art workers a new lens in which to understand people generally and artistic endeavour.

As Hall (2013) notes, through performance, artists with disabilities are gifting and become connected to the nondisabled community and are recognised for their efforts. Nonetheless, resources, public presence in spaces and places, and greater community awareness are required to create the circumstances in which social capital, particularly bridging, networking and linking, can increase. This begins with belonging leading into social inclusion and so often people with disability who were excluded and isolated in private spaces now become included in mainstream artistic venues. It is from public performance in mainstream spaces, places and venues that both the individual and project social impact as a foundation to ‘ripple’ to other areas of society spatially and attitudinally.

The traditional measure of arts performance impact is through some kind of audience response via attendance numbers, spontaneous audience reaction or formal audience surveys. The research collected audience survey responses from several performances/exhibitions, and again found a positive response overall, though with some mixed reaction. In general we found that ordinary audience members, those not already connected people with disability found the performance interesting, and better than they would have expected. We can point to small positive attitude changes towards people with disability and their artistic capacity, a better understanding and acceptance of who they are and what they can do. Yet, with all art this was dependent upon the perception of the quality of the performance, sculpture, zine or comedy sketch. The performance of artists with disability, and in some cases their co-collaborating performers, was variable as all art may be.

The arts has its own rich traditions of projection beyond the project to the general public; critical commentary public broadcasting. Yet, arguably the projects with ongoing impact included those which used their own documentary making skills, brought in other production companies to make documentaries or were commissioned to make documentaries about their projects. For a number of ADPP, this involved online social media access to interviews, performances and behind-the-scenes engagement. For example, one project involved an extended television broadcast deal.

In this research we have begun to unpack the importance of social impact through a series of quite specific stakeholder groups. Like the basic citizenship/ ripple model ([Edwards et al., 2015](#_ENREF_18)) which was adapted for this study, the stakeholder network also ripples outward from the core group of participants. In this research we have identified the following impacted groups:

1. The core group of participants (with and without disability);
2. Family and friends of participants;
3. Disability support staff, specifically carers and organisational managers;
4. The arts professionals working with people with disability, and especially the role of mentors;
5. The wider arts community;
6. The immediate viewing audience; and
7. The extended audience, i.e. those who hear about or see a later production or view an exhibition, social media broadcast or public broadcast.

*The critical conditions for social impact*

This study extends previous work by [Hall (2013)](#_ENREF_24) and [Matarasso (1997](#_ENREF_33), [2003)](#_ENREF_34) by demonstrating the value of the ADDP to cultural participation and the critical conditions necessary for social impact to occur. Social impact has a far greater reach if individuals feel welcomed in the organisation and feel as though they belong, thus confirming the basic propositions of the citizenship/ ripple model ([Edwards et al., 2015](#_ENREF_18); [Onyx, 2014](#_ENREF_41)). Belonging and welcoming are the most important parts to the model because they alone ensure the sustainability of the programs and subsequent projects. The following three components of the ADPP were found to be critical in achieving social impact that ‘rippled’ out to the community: the ensemble nature; project embeddedness; and networks and partnerships.

* Ensembles working together to achieve common goals, underpinned by trusting relationships was a fundamental component of teamwork within the ADPP. This working together provided the foundation of the participants bonding and belonging. The trust was between all members including people with disability, facilitators and professional artists. Yet, there was another dimension to trust and that was the understanding of each member of the ensemble's abilities. Each artist needed to understand and appreciate the others they were working with and their associated disabilities and abilities. Many of the projects exhibited countless examples of understanding the ‘other’ that led to increased trust and creative development. People who were overlooked or invisible in other parts of life, made profound contributions to the creative process through the nature of an ensemble, the temporal nature of the creative process and the opportunity to risk contributing their ideas, examples and creativity with others.
* The extent to which the ADPP were embedded within organisations or in organisational collaborations is essential. The embeddedness of the program recognises the relative importance of art in the lives of people with disability. It provides a continuity of program where the project could be used to enhance what has already been on offer or, as a number of projects did, augment and extend offerings beyond what they normally would have been able to provide. If art is not regarded as core business within a disability service organisation then the project may not be as likely to be sustained into the future. Similarly, if the program is embedded within a larger, mainstream professional arts program it is far more likely to have an enhanced impact.
* Across the ADDP it was evident that networks and partnerships made the projects not only possible but also successful. It was through the networks that a greater set of resources could be accessed. These resources ranged from communication channels and methods for bringing the opportunity to people and interested people to the projects, to highly specialised professional skills. The final product, be it an exhibition, film or theatre production, was delivered to mainstream audiences as part of mainstream arts offerings.

**Conclusion**

The research, while important in its own right, is also important in demonstrating the relevance of social impact to accessible arts projects. It is possible to empirically measure the levels and extent of that impact. In this, the most difficult of fields to penetrate, we were interested in identifying what impact, if any, people with a disability could make through their involvement in an artistic program. To do so required a reconceptualisation of the concept of social impact itself. The social impact in this context, as in others, refers not to the accumulation of financial return on investment but on the much broader development of social, cultural and human capital and the rich potential that these capitals can provide for future outcomes. Social impact, so conceptualised is an ongoing process which begins within the immediate project and its organisational host(s). To the extent that a welcoming culture is created, then individual participants feel a sense of belonging and can develop trusting and supportive relationships enhanced by working together to achieve common goals. As confidence grows, so too does the possibility of strong social values, new connections and enhanced artistic and life skills. Ultimately this then ripples out to impact the wider community of external stakeholders and the general public.

In this research it was necessary to rely on predominantly qualitative methods of data gathering, and the use of expert assessments of each of the identified factors of the social impact model previously developed. There was no single source of relevant data. However, the resulting analysis demonstrates that it was nonetheless possible to create specific measurable indicators of each factor within the model. The use of this approach was able to provide a rich insight into the multiple levels of social impact that the ADPP created. Of course, the research generated many new questions to be pursued, especially concerning the specificity of impacts involving a variety of different stakeholders. Follow up research is required to extend this understanding of social impact and identify coherent measures of it. This will provide the basis of ongoing research to expand and further develop the model. But clearly, this model of social impact has enormous potential in the future measurement of artistic programs, including those for people with disability. It also provides clear and practical implications for future successful projects, ones that engage the critical conditions of ensemble, embeddedness and networks.

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