

# QUALIFYING AND QUANTIFYING THE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ARTS: DISABILITY ARTS PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

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## Abstract

This paper examines a study that investigated the social impact of creative participation in NSW Arts and Disability Partnership Projects (ADDP). The primary aim of the study was to research the social impact of creative participation in AADDP. The 12 projects each comprised different art mediums, organisational partnerships, levels of involvement, and types of artists with disability. Additionally, the research study sought to determine the broad social impact that funded projects have on: artists and/or other participants with disability; organisations within the funded programs; and audiences that attend such public programs. The overall conceptualisation of social impact in this project has been guided by the *Conceptual Model of Social Impact as Active Citizenship* framework (Darcy, Maxwell, Edwards, Onyx, & Sherker, 2014; Edwards, Onyx, Maxwell, & Darcy, 2012; Edwards et al., 2015; Onyx, 2014a, 2014b), which was used by the research team in a previous study. The research design adopted an abductive, mixed method, collective case study methodology, in order to allow for detailed analysis of the ADPP within their particular contexts and across various settings. 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 members and participating organisations' employees; focus groups with stakeholders; project observations, and content analyses of related audio-visual materials, media reports, Facebook pages, websites, internal organisational and project documents, and project acquittals. Developing the social impact instrument was an iterative process, that is, it was continuously modified as more data was gathered, and the instrument was (re)tested and refined. As a consequence, 10 resultant factors and 33 indicators were identified, and each was modified to reflect both program and individual-level components of social impact. As part of the iterative and abductive process of developing factors, indicators and definitional descriptions, the study proceeded to 'score' each of the AADDP against each of the indicators. The process for developing the scoring system was directed by the principles outlined in the innovation and legacy radar frameworks (Dickson, Benson, & Blackman, 2011; Sawhney, Wolcott, & Arroniz, 2006). The rationale for this is that all populations, stakeholders and data sources need to be considered within a '360-degree' assessment of the impact of cultural participation. Apart from the social impact score for the program in individual components, a social impact network map was also developed for each AADDP showing the relative level of social impact and the rippling network stakeholders engaged.

## Key Findings

The projects varied in their degree of social impact with the highest reflecting a broad ripple of social impact and the lowest displaying limited social impact albeit very important artistic engagement for those involved. The results suggest that the programs had profound,

positive social impact on participants and their broader communities, and each project's unique radar profile indicates that social impact varies at program and individual levels. The presence of social impact was also shown to correlate with the co-existence of 10 factors, typically in the radiating ripple of social impact from the project/artist through the identified factors with their resulting social impact. Additionally, each case study's stakeholder network maps display a ripple effect, which moves outwards from the core group of participants. This suggests that, in addition to the core group of participants (with or without disability), the following groups are impacted: a. Family and friends of participants; b. Disability services, specifically carers and organisational managers; c. Arts professionals who work with people with disability, specifically within a 'mentor' capacity.; d. The broader arts community; e. The immediate viewing audience; f. The extended audience, e.g. those who hear about a production and/or see a later production, and/or view an exhibition, social media broadcast or public broadcast. Much of the literature on social impact and disability and the arts talks about the positive effects that participation in the arts has on those with disability, usually at an individual level. Certainly this research has confirmed that there is a profound and positive social impact on the participants, both individually and collectively. *However the positive impact extended far beyond the immediate participants*, The ripple model provided the tools that allowed identification of what this impact was, and how, in broad terms, it comes about. It also allowed the identification of the profile of this impact for each partnership project, in terms of the contributing effect of both the individual participants and the organisation(s) supporting the project. The paper concludes by discussing those factors that contributed towards greater social impact of the ADDP that included: 1. Social impact has far greater reach if individuals feel welcomed in a given organisation and as though they belong; 2. the relative embeddedness of projects in organisations and/or organisational collaborations is essential; and 3. across the ADPP it was evident that networks and partnerships made the projects – not only possible, but – successful from a social impact perspective.

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**Keywords:** Cultural participation, disability arts, people disability, social justice, citizenship, social impact