

**Intrinsic Impact:**

**How Audiences and Visitors are  
Transformed by Cultural Experiences  
in Liverpool**

Commissioned by the Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium

Research conducted by Baker Richards and WolfBrown

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Eight of the leading cultural institutions in Liverpool have established a unique collaboration to ensure that cultural organisations play a significant role in the regeneration of the Liverpool City Region, and in establishing Liverpool as a world-class creative city. Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC) was established in 2007 to foster a new approach to arts in the city. LARC works with the city government and agencies in new ways and to an unprecedented degree, sharing programming, resources, ambitions and staff and mobilising a wide range of other players. Its first job was to lead the programming of the European Capital of Culture 2008, ensuring world-class events in this pivotal year.

The LARC partners recognise that the strength and impact of collaborative work has to be built on the quality and reputation of the individual organisations that form part of LARC – the strength of the partnership depends on the ability of the individual organisations to deliver an arts and cultural offer of national and international quality and reach.

When this study was conducted, Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC) included **the Bluecoat, FACT, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, National Museums Liverpool, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic (RLP), Tate Liverpool** and the **Unity Theatre**.

Together with the wide range of smaller cultural organisations and other major venues in Liverpool, LARC represents a cultural infrastructure that is among the best of any of the major English regional cities.

## Abstract

How are people transformed by arts experiences? Attendance figures and box office receipts do not tell the full story of the transformative impact of the arts. In this collaborative pilot study, eight arts and cultural organizations in Liverpool (acting together as the Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium, or LARC) surveyed audiences and visitors about the impacts of their experiences over the 2009-10 season. A protocol template was devised so that a common set of mandatory questions could be asked across the eight organisations, whilst allowing each organisation some latitude to customise its protocol. In total, 3,332 surveys were completed by audiences and visitors at 25 different programs using a mix of intercept and in-venue mail-back survey methods. Results were provided to each organisation in an interactive dashboard tool. This report discusses the range of findings with respect to audiences' 'readiness to receive' the art and the six constructs of intrinsic impact: captivation, emotional resonance, spiritual value, intellectual stimulation, aesthetic growth and social bonding. The diversity of impacts observed across the numerous events illustrates how different programs create different impacts. Results stimulated conversation about artistic programmes, audience engagement, customer service and other topics, and also helped to advance a longer arc of learning about impact assessment underway in the U.K., U.S. and Australia.

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*This report was prepared by Alan Brown of WolfBrown and Debbie Richards of Baker Richards, with input from the LARC partners.*

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## 1. Introduction

How are people transformed by arts and cultural experiences? This question cuts to the core of both policy and practice in the cultural sector. Yet, aside from talking to audience members at the interval or watching visitors as they move through an exhibition, the sector lacks an established means of assessing *non-financial outcomes*.

While much has been written about the economic, social and other *instrumental benefits* of the arts (i.e., the arts as an instrument of achieving some other end), the *intrinsic benefits* of cultural programmes have not been investigated with much regularity. One might argue, however, that without the arts' intrinsic impacts, their other benefits cannot occur. In other words, if the experience itself is unremarkable and does not create meaning for audience members or visitors, it is quickly forgotten and little benefit accrues.

We assume that audiences and visitors are different, somehow, after a cultural experience than they were when they first walked in the door. But how are they different? Is it possible to measure what happens to people in their seats in a theatre or concert hall, or as they stroll through a museum or gallery? Do different kinds of cultural experiences create different impacts?

The answers to these questions could shed new light on how arts and cultural organisations create public value, and could profoundly influence both policy and practice.

This pilot study was undertaken by LARC as a key element of its Thrive programme, funded by Arts Council England. The study complements LARC's research on the economic and social impacts of the arts and is intended to help LARC partners understand the true impacts of their work and to develop another way of defining 'success' beyond conventional measures such as income and attendance. More specifically, the study aims to:

- Reflect deeply on the audience and visitor experience and on how audiences and visitors respond to different types of arts and culture
- Develop a new vocabulary and a shared framework for talking about the transformative experiences that audiences and visitors have at arts and cultural events
- Assist curators and artistic leaders in better understanding the consequences of their programming decisions
- Complement economic studies in order to paint a more complete picture of the public value of the arts and culture
- Provoke funders of cultural organisations to think more broadly about how they define success and create impact indirectly through their funding.

To accomplish these goals, a programme of survey research was launched in autumn 2009, supplemented by an effort to gather anecdotal 'stories of impact' through interviews. Data collection efforts continued into autumn 2010 and concluded with surveying of visitors to the Liverpool Biennial.

The study continues a long arc of international research and development that is still nascent. Survey methods are still being tested, and approaches to gathering "stories of impact" are still being refined. While the findings of the study illustrate how arts and cultural programmes

positively affect people, the study was not undertaken for advocacy purposes. Rather, the study aims to directly assess the *prima facie* outcomes of arts and cultural experiences.

## 2. Context: The Search for Better Ways of Assessing the Impacts of Cultural Experiences

Historically, arts and cultural organisations have used figures for ticket sales, attendances, and ancillary spending on merchandise, programmes and drinks as “metrics of success.” At best, these are proxies for impact. They do not indicate anything about the transformative nature of the underlying experience. The search for better ways of assessing impact is ongoing in the U.K., U.S., and Australia:

- In 2010, the Scottish Arts Council commissioned a qualitative study of impact, facilitated by Baker Richards and WolfBrown, in which arts administrators interviewed audience members and gallery visitors about their experiences;
- A new handbook for surveying theatre audiences about intrinsic impacts, *Capturing the audience experience: A handbook for the theatre*, was released in 2010, commissioned by the Independent Theatre Council, the Society of London Theatre, and the Theatrical Management Association, and prepared by nef (new economics foundation);
- A comparative study of the impacts of the National Theatre’s pilot broadcasts in cinemas, in relation to the impacts of its live performances resulted in the report, *Beyond live: Digital innovation in the performing arts*, prepared by NESTA and released in 2010;
- As part of its Artistic Vitality initiative, the Australia Council for the Arts commissioned WolfBrown to develop a new audience survey tool, to be released in 2011, to assist its regularly funded organisations in assessing the intrinsic impacts of their work;
- In the U.S., Theatre Bay Area, a service organisation for theatres in the San Francisco Bay Area, received over \$200,000 in funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and other funders to pilot test a new impact assessment service with 18 theatres in six cities across the U.S., including automated online dashboard reporting, in partnership with WolfBrown.

Despite these efforts (or because of them), there is still a great deal of confusion about the role of market research and visitor feedback in an artistically-driven organisation. To what standard of customer satisfaction should arts groups be held? To whom are artistic decision-makers accountable? Where is the line between being responsive to your audience’s demands and compromising your artistic ideals?

Underlying this study is an essential philosophical debate about the role of audience and visitor feedback in an artistically driven organisation with an educational mission. Is it useful to measure what happens to an audience member or a visitor as a result of attending an arts experience? If so, what are the appropriate uses of this information, and what uses are inappropriate?

We acknowledge that it is impossible to fully understand how art works on people, because the “received impact” is inherently idiosyncratic and impossibly complex. The same work of art can have profoundly different impacts on different people, or different impacts on the same person depending on that person’s state of mind. Observing the impact of an arts experience on an

individual is like observing the footprint of a wild animal left in the sand. You can investigate the footprint, but the thing itself is too elusive to ever glimpse directly. Moreover, it is all but impossible to second-guess the intended impacts of a work of art.

Despite these limitations, the essential question of intrinsic impact remains. Should we give up, because the task is too hard, or because the topic is too sensitive? Or, should we continue trying to better understand intrinsic impact and how to assess it, in hopes of gaining clarity on the primary value of arts and cultural activities to individuals, families and communities?

In reviewing the summary of results that follows, we invite you to take a position on this important debate.

### 3. The Constructs: “Readiness to Receive” and Intrinsic Impacts

The theoretical basis for this study grows out of WolfBrown’s work for the Major University Presenters consortium in the U.S. The original study, *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance*, was released in 2007 and may be accessed at [www.wolfbrown.com/mup](http://www.wolfbrown.com/mup). In the original study, audience members were surveyed both before performances, to assess their “readiness to receive” the art, and after performances, to assess the impacts they derived from the experience. In the LARC study, the methodology was streamlined so that only one survey had to be administered after the experience. Also, the survey protocol was adapted for gallery and museum visitors in reference to a specific exhibition.

The design of the survey focused on two constructs of “readiness to receive” and six constructs of intrinsic impact:

#### Readiness to Receive

In a given audience, some people have a lot of knowledge about what they are about to see, while others have more limited knowledge. There are three constructs of Readiness, two of which were investigated in this study:

**Context:** The overall level of preparedness an audience member has for the experience, including prior knowledge of the art form and familiarity with the specific work(s) to be presented.

Example: *Before the performance, how familiar were you with the specific piece(s) or repertoire?*

**Relevance:** The extent to which the arts activity in question is relevant to the participant, primarily to identify individuals who do not normally attend the arts (not investigated in this study, but included here for definitional purposes)

Example: *How much do you agree with the statement “The people I normally socialise with go to the theatre.”*

**Anticipation:** An audience member’s psychological state prior to the experience, especially the degree to which they are looking forward to the event.

Example: *How excited were you about attending?*

## Intrinsic Impacts

The study explored six categories or types of Intrinsic Impact – the core benefits that can accrue to individuals by virtue of visiting an exhibition or attending a performance.

**Captivation:** The extent of which the audience member was absorbed in the performance or exhibition. Captivation is the lynchpin of impact – if you are captivated, other impacts are likely to happen, whereas if you are not captivated (or, worse, if you sleep through a concert), other impacts are less likely to happen.

Example: *Did you lose track of time and forget about everything else during the performance?*

**Intellectual Stimulation:** The degree to which the performance or exhibition triggered thoughts about the art, issues or topics, or caused critical reflection.

Example: *Afterwards, did you discuss the performance with others who attended?*

**Emotional Resonance:** The extent to which the audience member experienced a heightened emotional state during or after the performance or exhibition.

Example: *What was your emotional response to the performance?*

**Spiritual Value:** Being inspired, transported to another plane of existence for a period of time, or leaving the performance or exhibition with a feeling of renewal or empowerment.

Example: *Did the performance have spiritual meaning for you?*

**Aesthetic Growth:** The extent to which the audience member was exposed to a new style or type of art, a new artist, or becomes a better appreciator of art.

Example: *Did this performance expose you to a style or type of theatre with which you were unfamiliar?*

**Social Bonding:** Connectedness with the rest of the audience, new insight on one's own culture or a culture outside of one's life experience, or new perspective on human relationships or social issues.

Example: *Did you feel a sense of connectedness with the rest of the audience?*

## **4. Methodology**

The eight LARC organisations were provided with a template and asked to customise their questionnaire based on a fixed set of questions. A handful of questions were mandatory, allowing for some consistency across the cohort, while many questions were optional, allowing each organisation to focus on the impacts in which they were most interested. Generally, the surveys ran 4 pages in length, or about 30 questions. The questions were tested with a focus group of RLP attenders and also benefitted from the input of Paul Rees, Editor at National Museums Liverpool. Some small adjustments were also made after the initial pilot tests of the surveys at Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Tate and National Museums Liverpool.

Only respondents aged 18 and over were eligible to respond. Data collection was conducted by one of the following means, decided upon in consultation with the organisation as to what methodology worked best in their space and for their patrons:

For theatre performances, concerts and some exhibitions, survey packets were distributed to audiences and visitors at various events, with instructions to take the survey home and complete it within 24 hours of the visit. A paid Freepost envelope was



provided for the return of the survey. This 'take-home/mail-back' method does not require collection of surveys at the venue, thereby simplifying the process and reducing resource requirements. In theatres and concert halls, survey packages were pre-set on randomly selected seats in areas of the house where seats were sold. Calculating response rates is not always simple. At most events where surveys were pre-set on seats, the number of surveys picked up by patrons and taken home was not counted. At Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, however, surveys left behind in the venue were re-used at subsequent performances of the same production, thereby allowing for a more straightforward calculation of responses rates across the four sampled productions. In this case, response rates ranged from a low of 29% for *Hansel and Gretel* to a high of 43% for *The Glass Menagerie*. For a similar methodology employed by 18 theatres in the U.S., response rates ranged from 30% to 55%, with an average of 47%.

- A modified intercept methodology by which visitors to the Bluecoat, FACT, Tate and Liverpool Biennial were intercepted by gallery attendants, asked for their email address, and emailed a link to an online survey about their experience. Response rates are not available for this methodology, because the number of refusals was not tracked.
- At museums and galleries, survey packages were randomly distributed by hand to visitors as they left the applicable exhibition. Tate Liverpool used both the survey packages and the intercept methodology for different exhibitions. After pilot testing an on-site completion, National Museums Liverpool used survey packages. For the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival at the Bluecoat, visitors were given the choice of completing the survey on-site before leaving, or taking home a survey package. In situations where all 500 survey packets were distributed (at Tate Liverpool and at NML), response rates ranged from a low of 15% for *This is Sculpture* to a high of 36% for *Picasso: Peace and Freedom*.

Note that these response rates do not include respondents under 18 years of age, or respondents who returned their surveys after the cut-off date.

A summary of the events and exhibitions surveyed appears in Table 1, below. The survey sample was not constructed to be representative of all audiences and visitors to arts and cultural programmes in Liverpool. It should be regarded as an exploratory, cross-sectional sample of audiences and visitors at diverse events and venues. In general, respondents who returned their surveys via post tended to be more frequent attenders, whereas the intercept method tended to garner response from more first-time visitors and a somewhat more demographically diverse group.

Results should be interpreted carefully. Results from one site are not directly comparable to results from a different site (e.g., different art, different venue, different audience). Therefore, impact results are best suited for individual organisations in situations where the venue and the audience are mostly constant.

Impact scores are not good or bad, per se, but *inherently contextual*. For example, intellectual provocation may not be an intended outcome of a given work of art. In interpreting the results for a given audience, the reader should avoid pre-supposing that a given type of impact *should* be found, solely by virtue of asking the question.

All of the samples are subject to margins of error, as is inherent to any sampling method. Some of the samples are quite small (e.g. 30 or 40 responses), and thus subject to error margins as high as 15%. The largest sample size is 340, for the RLP's performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 (error margin = +/- 5%). Thus, results of this study should be considered exploratory in nature. Additionally, given that patrons were requested, but not forced, to respond to the survey, we observe an organisational loyalty bias in the data, which is consistent with other audience and visitor studies. Respondents with higher loyalty levels (usually more frequent visitors) are more likely to comply with a request to take a survey.

For the purposes of reporting results to each of the eight LARC organisations, customised graphical dashboards were prepared in Excel. Standardised graphs and tables were used to communicate results, including the ability to interrogate the dashboard on a limited number of cross-tabulations. To add valuable context, programming, marketing and other staff were surveyed as to the results they expected on key indicators, and audience results were displayed alongside figures representing staff expectations. This provided a means of discussing why audience figures diverged from expected results.

Table 1: Events and Sample Sizes

Organisation	Events/Exhibitions
the Bluecoat	<i>Sonia Boyce: Like Love – Parts One &amp; Two</i> , n=42; <i>Arabicity</i> , n=44; Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival, n=99; <i>Touched</i> at the Bluecoat, n=48 (part of the Liverpool Biennial).
FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology)	<i>Space Invaders: Art and the Computer Game Environment</i> , n=31; <i>Persistence of Vision</i> , n=45; <i>Touched</i> at FACT, n=48 (part of the Liverpool Biennial).
Liverpool Biennial	Europeasure/Scandinavian Hotel, n=29; Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, n=34; <i>The Mending Project</i> , n=33; The Oratory, n=31; <i>Touched</i> at Tate (n=46).
Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse	<i>The Caretaker</i> , n=191; <i>The 39 Steps</i> , n=210; <i>Ghost Stories</i> , n=92; <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> , n=137; <i>The Glass Menagerie</i> , n=216.
National Museums Liverpool (NML) at the Walker Art Gallery	<i>The Rise of Women Artists</i> , 3 survey periods: n=139 (on-site sample), n=76 (postal sample #1), n=133 (postal sample #2).
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic	<i>The Spirit of Christmas</i> (RLPO), n=162; <i>The Imagined Village</i> , n=144; <i>African Soul Rebels</i> , n=115; <i>Mahler's Symphony No. 2, Resurrection</i> (RLPO), n=340; <i>The Lark Ascending</i> (RLPO), n=205.
Tate Liverpool	<i>Mark Rothko: The Seagram Murals</i> , n=108; <i>Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic</i> , n=106; <i>Picasso: Peace and Freedom</i> , n=181; <i>This is Sculpture</i> , n=73. Note that Tate Liverpool's results also included the Biennial exhibition <i>Touched</i> at Tate, where the Biennials' selected protocol questions overlapped with those selected by Tate.
Unity Theatre	<i>Jiggery Pokery</i> , n=49; <i>The Friendship Experiment</i> , n=77; <i>Beating Berlusconi</i> , n=48.

## Demographic Description of the Sample

Two thirds of respondents identified themselves as the decision-maker, while 14% indicated that their spouse or partner made the decision, and 16% said that it was someone else's idea to attend. While it is impossible to know for sure, it is likely that the sample somewhat over-represents decision-makers. Since the average party size was 2.6, it follows that decision-makers constitute fewer than half of all audience members, although this does not account for joint decision-making patterns where two or more people might have played equal roles in the decision process, or Under 18s (who were not eligible to take the survey, but who were counted in the party size figures).

A summary of key demographic characteristics of the eight combined organisational samples appears in Table 2, below (i.e., unweighted blended averages). Bear in mind that these samples are not representative of all programmes offered by the eight organisations during the 2009-2010 season, and that some of the samples are quite small and therefore subject to a large degree of sampling error.

The average age of the total sample is 53, compared to 46 for the Liverpool Metropolitan District. Average age figures varied significantly across the eight organisations, from a low of 35 (FACT) to a high of 61 (RLP). On average, 63% of respondents are female, which is typical of other audience surveys we have administered. The gender distribution ranged from a high of 53% male (FACT) to a low of 30% male (Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse).

Table 2: Key Demographic Characteristics

LARC Organisation	Total N	Average Age (adults 18+)	% White	% w/Higher Education*	% In Employment
the Bluecoat	233	44	86%	70%	58%
FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology)	124	35	93%	72%	54%
Liverpool Biennial	173	41	91%	79%	57%
Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse	846	54	98%	66%	52%
National Museums Liverpool (NML) at the Walker Art Gallery	348	53	96%	70%	49%
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic	966	61	99%	69%	40%
Tate Liverpool	468	50	94%	76%	52%
Unity Theatre	174	49	98%	66%	69%
<b>TOTAL SAMPLE</b>	<b>3,332</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>50%</b>

Liverpool Metropolitan District**	338,716	46	94%	N/A	N/A
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\*Higher Education is defined as "first or higher degree or professional/vocational equivalents"

\*\*Source: ONS, 2004 Update

Since the survey sample included only adults aged 18+, not 16+, it is not possible to generate comparable figures for employment status or educational attainment at the market level,

although we do know that approximately 10.4% of all Liverpool adults have attained higher qualifications. While we cannot quantify potential bias with respect to educational attainment, arts attenders are known to have higher educational attainment levels than non-attenders from other studies.<sup>1</sup>

## 5. Findings: Readiness to Receive

This section discusses findings across the eight LARC organisations with respect to ‘Readiness to Receive’ indicators. In general, we will report results by indicator, rather than by organisation, in order to avoid direct comparisons across the eight organisations.

### Context

“Having read the programme notes from the website, my understanding of the music was enriched.”

-RLP attender

Some audience members and visitors turn up at the venue with a great deal of knowledge and background on what they are about to see, while others turn up with little context. Across all of the 3,332 respondents, 37% reported having average or below-average knowledge of the art form represented in the programme they were attending, while a majority reported above-average knowledge levels. This information can be helpful in assessing the need for educational work and interpretive assistance amongst different audience segments. Of course, the impact of an arts experience does not depend solely on the amount of context one has going into it. In fact, some people prefer to arrive at a venue with little or no information, in order to allow for the element of surprise.

20% of all respondents were attending the organisation’s programmes for the first time - a key audience development indicator. This figure varied widely from a high of 47% for the Liverpool Biennial to a low of 4% for the RLP. On average, first-timers are 11 years younger than those who attend the organization’s programmes two or more times per year (45 vs. 56 years of age, respectively). Since children under age 18 were not eligible to take the survey, these figures do not reflect young people in the audience. While a significant difference was observed with respect to age, the educational attainment levels of first-timers did not vary from that of frequent attenders.

Further analysis suggests that the art-form knowledge level of first-timers is significantly lower than that of repeat attenders (3.4 vs. 4.0, respectively, on a scale of 1= unacquainted to 5=very familiar). Arts organisations that succeed in attracting people with lower levels of knowledge about the art or artists they will see are accomplishing something important in terms of public value because they are exposing people to new experiences, and creating opportunities for personal growth. We call this *aesthetic growth*, which is discussed further in a later section of the report. Because it is so difficult to attract audiences to unknown artists and unfamiliar repertoire, it is useful to have a system in place in order to know when it happens.

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 40-61 of *From indifference to enthusiasm: patterns of arts attendance in England* by Catherine

- Consider, for example, the very different levels of context across the five Royal Liverpool Philharmonic concerts. While audiences for Mahler's Symphony No. 2 (*Resurrection*) and *The Lark Ascending* concerts reported a very high level of familiarity with the artist performing (i.e., the Phil), the audience for African Soul Rebels (a roots/world music event) reported below-average levels of familiarity with the artists who performed (1.9 on a scale of 1 to 5). As might be expected, therefore, half of the African Soul Rebels audience reported that they were exposed to a new style of music with which they were previously unfamiliar.
- All respondents across all eight organisations were asked about their familiarity level with the art-form being presented. At Tate Liverpool, for example, visitors to the exhibition *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* reported slightly higher levels of familiarity with the visual arts compared with visitors to the *Picasso: Peace and Freedom* exhibition (4.0 vs. 3.6, respectively, on scale of 1 to 5). In other words, the Picasso exhibition attracted a somewhat less art-savvy audience, which could be attributed to the popularity of Picasso, or other factors.
- Similarly, visitors to the five Biennial exhibitions included in the study reported different levels of context. Visitors to Danica Dakic's *Grand Organ* video work at the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral reported high levels of familiarity with visual art, while visitors to Laura Belém's installation, *The Temple of a Thousand Bells*, also at the Cathedral, reported lower levels of familiarity with visual art (4.2 vs. 3.5, respectively, on scale of 1 to 5).

Who prepares in advance for an arts experience? We did not find a significant relationship between the incidence of preparation and frequency of attendance at an organisation's programmes. First-timers are nearly as likely as more frequent attenders to report some amount of preparation. However, a significant relationship *was* observed between a respondent's level of knowledge about the art form and their likelihood of preparing; those with higher knowledge levels were more likely than those with lower knowledge levels to report advance preparation. This is consistent with findings from other research suggesting that audience members who prepare in advance tend to be those who are already knowledgeable about the art. The larger challenge, one might infer, lies in engaging audience members who have an average level of knowledge.

More generally, the level of preparation appeared to be somewhat higher for the performing arts compared with the visual arts. Why? While performing arts audiences typically purchase tickets in advance for a specific play or concert programme, most visitors to museums and galleries have not acquired tickets in advance and therefore cannot be contacted in advance and provided with contextual information, as many theatres and orchestras do. Of course, both audience members and visitors to museums and galleries seek out information on the web in advance of attending. Visitors to the Liverpool Biennial exhibitions were the exception to this pattern, as they tended to report more preparation.

Overall, we observed a weak but significant relationship between respondents' familiarity with the art and the strength of their emotional response to the exhibition or event, and to their overall satisfaction. A similarly weak but significant relationship was observed between a

respondent's frequency of attendance at an organisation's programmes and the strength of their emotional response, while a stronger relationship was observed between emotional response and the incidence of preparation. Those who prepare are significantly more likely to report higher levels of emotional resonance. In other words, higher levels of frequency and context *can* lead to higher levels of impact. This argues for expanded efforts amongst arts and cultural providers to contextualise their programmes. Moreover, it suggests that arts groups might try to anticipate which programmes are most likely to attract audiences with lower knowledge levels, in order to target education and enrichment efforts more carefully.

### Anticipation

"I can't put my finger on what it was that drew me to *The Mending Project*, but as soon as I heard about it, I really wanted to go and be a part of something different and creative."  
-Liverpool Biennial visitor

Achieving a high level of anticipation prior to the event is a key predictor of subsequent impacts.

As with the original impact study in 2007, we found that anticipation levels are positively correlated with captivation levels (Pearson correlation coefficient of .36). In other words, audience members who are really looking forward to an arts event are more likely to report being fully absorbed once they get there. They are also more likely to report higher levels of emotional impact and higher levels of overall satisfaction.

Anticipation level is significantly influenced by two factors: 1) whether or not someone prepared in advance, and 2) their familiarity with the art form. While the correlations are strong, we cannot know with certainty if these factors are the cause of the higher anticipation levels, or if other factors are at play. It is interesting to note that anticipation levels of first-timers are equal to those of frequent attenders.

Most people reported moderate to high levels of anticipation (mean score of 3.8 on a scale of 1 to 5 across all eight organisations). Respondents who identified themselves as decision-makers (i.e., "I made the decision to attend") reported significantly higher levels of familiarity with the art form and higher anticipation levels than those who did not make the decision to attend, illustrating how decision-makers are different from the people who come with them, and the potential role that decision-makers might play in heightening anticipation levels of those who accompany them to performances and exhibitions.

- Amongst Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse's five surveyed productions, higher levels of anticipation were reported by audiences for *Ghost Stories* (4.0) and *Hansel and Gretel* (3.9), while somewhat lower levels were reported by audiences for *The Glass Menagerie* (3.6).
- On average, looking across the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic responses, the audience for the RLP's performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 (*Resurrection*) reported the highest levels of anticipation (4.2 on a scale of 1 to 5), which compares to 3.6 for the African

Soul Rebels. As previously noted, the gap in context levels between the two audiences may help to explain the difference in anticipation levels.

If anticipation levels are associated with higher impacts, then arts and cultural organisations would be well served to focus on testing the efficacy of specific methods of heightening anticipation. For example, do theatre patrons who read a synopsis in advance of attending a play report higher anticipation levels than those who attend a pre-performance talk, or *vice versa*? Here is where marketing and education can play a strategic role in mission fulfilment. An audience's "Readiness to Receive" the programme is a vital ingredient in the recipe for impact, and, by extension, the benefits that ripple out into the community.

## 6. Findings: Impact Results

A summary of results for each of the six areas of intrinsic impact follows.

### Captivation

"I felt that we were almost a part of the play."  
- Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse attender

Captivated audiences benefit more from their investment of time and money, and communities benefit from captivated audiences because they report more impactful experiences that bond them to culture and to their community. Overall, strong statistical relationships were observed between respondents' levels of captivation and their sense of connection with the rest of the audience and their feeling that the experience was worth the investment of time and money.

- Across the five Biennial events, captivation levels hovered in the moderate range, from a high of 3.4 (on a scale of 1 to 5) for *Europleasure/Scandinavian Hotel*, to a low of 2.8 for *The Mending Project*, an interactive installation to which people brought clothes for mending, and interacted with the artist and other visitors.
- At Tate Liverpool, average captivation levels were dramatically higher for the *Picasso: Peace and Freedom* exhibition (3.8) compared to the *Mark Rothko: The Seagram Murals* exhibition (2.6).
- At Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, average captivation levels ranged from a high of 4.2 for *The 39 Steps*, a comedy, to a low of 3.6 for *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams's autobiographical portrait of a family in crisis.
- Similarly, at the Unity Theatre, average captivation levels ranged from a high of 4.2 for *Beating Berlusconi*, a popular drama about one of the greatest moments in Liverpool football history, to a low of 3.8 for *Jiggery Pokery*, a one-woman show inspired by the life and lonely death of Charles Hawtrey, one of Britain's best loved comedy actors.

What explains why some audiences are more captivated than others? Is it the quality of the art itself, the quality of the artists' performance, or the physical venue/setting, or is it the capacity

of the individual to appreciate and interpret the art? Or, is it the temperature in the gallery, the comfort of your seat, or the way you are welcomed into the hall? Surely, all of these things affect captivation. While it is unlikely that audience research will ever fully isolate the drivers of captivation, the results do raise important questions about how cultural organisations can maximize captivation levels, given the significant role they play in the larger system of benefits that emanate from arts and cultural experiences.

### Intellectual Stimulation

“I hadn't thought previously about how hard it was for women to enter the art establishment or even pursue their chosen career.”

-National Museums Liverpool visitor

“It made me confront my lack of patience listening to people who don't speak clearly (i.e., people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities).”

-the Bluecoat visitor

Several aspects of intellectual stimulation were investigated. Most of the questioning revolved around the respondent's sense of being challenged or provoked to think about an issue, idea or message, or to reflect on their own opinions or beliefs. A good amount of variation was observed with respect to intellectual stimulation, with high levels of stimulation observed for both visual arts and performing arts programmes.

- All eight organisations were required to ask respondents if the event or exhibition they saw caused them to “think about an issue or idea.” A wide range of responses were reported by Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse audiences, for example, from a high of 3.9 for Harold Pinter's drama *The Caretaker*, to a low of 2.3 for *The 39 Steps*, a comedy. Of course, provocation is not an intended outcome of every play. This illustrates one of the key challenges of interpreting impact scores: they are not good or bad, per se, but *inherently contextual*.
- At Tate Liverpool, both the *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* and *Picasso: Peace and Freedom* exhibitions caused visitors to “think about an issue or idea” at a much higher level (4.0 for both) relative to the *Mark Rothko: The Seagram Murals* exhibition (3.0). A partial explanation for higher levels of “thinking about an issue or idea” is dwell time. Those who stayed longer in the museum reported higher levels of intellectual stimulation. Visitors to the two paid-for *Afro-Modern* and *Picasso* exhibitions reported substantially longer dwell times (74% and 88% over 45 minutes, respectively) compared to the free *Rothko* exhibition, for which only 6% dwelt over 45 minutes. Scores on this indicator across the three FACT exhibitions ranged from a high of 3.7 for the *Touched* exhibition (a collection of installations exploring issues of separation and the mother's touch, part of the Liverpool Biennial) to a low of 3.0 for *Space Invaders: Art and the Computer Game Environment*.
- Visitors to the National Museums Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery were surveyed three times during the exhibition *The Rise of Women Artists*. Aggregated results were



compared by gender to test the hypothesis that women were impacted more than men by this exhibition, given its focus on women. Significant differences between results for men and women were observed across most indicators of impact, especially the indicators of intellectual stimulation. For example, in regard to the question “To what extent did the exhibition cause you to reflect on your own opinions or beliefs?” women reported an average score of 3.0 (on a scale of 1 to 5), while men reported an average score of 2.6. The difference is statistically significant. While this finding may seem easily explained by the subject matter of the exhibition and its relevance to women, similar results for women vs. men were observed at different exhibitions at Tate Liverpool. In fact, women reported significantly higher intellectual stimulation impacts than men across visual arts and theatre.

- Another question asked was if respondents discussed the event afterwards with others who attended, and if so, was it a ‘casual exchange’ or an ‘intense exchange.’ Across the 29 unique events surveyed for which this question was asked, results for ‘intense exchange’ ranged from a high of 47% for the audience for Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 (*Resurrection*) to figures below 10% for several of the Bluecoat and Biennial exhibitions. However, it should be noted that between 30% and 50% of respondents for the Bluecoat and Biennial exhibitions reported attending alone and therefore would be unlikely to report an exchange with others. On average, 28% of all audiences and visitors reported an “intense exchange” of dialogue after the event or exhibition they attended, a key indicator of intellectual stimulation. Excluding respondents who attended alone, the figure rises to 32%.
- Another indicator of intellectual stimulation is whether the audience member left the performance or exhibition with questions that s/he would like to ask the artist, director, curator, or creator of the work. Across the five Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse productions, for example, results for this indicator ranged from a high of 53% for *The Caretaker* to a low of 28% for *The 39 Steps*. At the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, figures ranged from a high of 33% for *The Imagined Village*, a folk music performance, to a low of 11% for *The Spirit of Christmas*. For Liverpool Biennial, responses ranged from 27% for *The Mending Project* (an exhibition at which visitors could interact with the artist, and, presumably, ask questions) to 50% for *Touched* at Tate Liverpool. Can arts and cultural organisations anticipate which programmes and exhibitions are likely to give rise to questions? While not all works of art raise a lot of questions in the minds of visitors and audience members, many do. Arts organisations would be well advised to consider in advance the likelihood that a given presentation will raise questions in the minds of audience members or visitors, so that proactive steps may be taken to provide opportunities for visitors and audience members to ask their questions in some format, whether mediated or not.

If one were to extrapolate these findings to the combined audiences of the eight LARC organisations and beyond, it is not unreasonable to assert that tens of thousands of Liverpool residents are having intense discussions with friends and family members, and are developing critical thinking skills directly as a result of attending arts and cultural events.

### Emotional Resonance

“The portrayal of the mother was not laboured or overdone, but totally captured the essence of the person and what was happening to her; it gave me insight into the situation my friend is in.”

-Unity Theatre patron

“The whole experience of this production was completely terrifying. I had goosebumps as soon as I walked into the Auditorium.”

-Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse patron

In addition to assessing the overall strength of audience members’ and visitors’ emotional responses (from weak to strong), several other aspects of emotional resonance were investigated, including feelings of empathy towards one or more of the artists, and the sense of feeling refreshed or renewed as a results of attending the programme. Previous research has taught us that some audiences love feeling the extremities of emotion, while others do not.<sup>2</sup>

- The highest levels of emotional resonance were observed for musical and theatrical programmes. Across the five Royal Liverpool Philharmonic concerts, audiences at the two classical concerts, Mahler’s *Resurrection* Symphony and *The Lark Ascending*, reported very strong emotional resonance (4.6 and 4.3 respectively, on a scale of 1 (weak) to 5 (strong)).
- Across the three Unity Theatre productions, the *Beating Berlusconi* production yielded the strongest emotional resonance at 4.4 (nearly as high as Mahler’s “*Resurrection*” Symphony, which is remarkable) compared to a low of 3.8 for *The Friendship Experiment*, an improvisational comedy about two friends. Across the five Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse productions, the audience for *The Caretaker* reported the strongest emotional response compared to the lowest emotional response being reported for *The 39 Steps* (4.0 vs. 3.5, respectively).
- This is not to say that visual arts exhibitions cannot generate high levels of emotional resonance. At Tate Liverpool, for example, the strength of emotional response was above average for the visitors to the *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* and *Picasso: Peace and Freedom* exhibitions (3.8 each), followed closely by the *This Is Sculpture* exhibition (3.7), while somewhat lower for the *Mark Rothko: The Seagram Murals* exhibition (3.2). Amongst the Bluecoat programmes, the visitors to the *Arabicity* exhibition reported higher emotional resonance levels (3.3), compared to visitors to the Sonia Boyce exhibition (2.7).
- Another measure of emotional resonance is the degree to which the audience member experienced feelings of empathy with one or more of the artists, performers or characters. At Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, the highest degree of empathy was reported by the audience for *The Glass Menagerie*, while the lowest was reported by

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<sup>2</sup> A Segmentation Model for Performing Arts Ticket Buyers, WolfBrown, 2007, commissioned by Major University Presenters, available at [www.wolfbrown.com/mup](http://www.wolfbrown.com/mup)

the audience for *The 39 Steps* (2.9 vs. 2.2, respectively). At the Unity Theatre, empathy levels were highest for *Beating Berlusconi* (3.5).

- With respect to “feeling refreshed or renewed in an emotional sense,” RLP figures were highest for the Mahler concert (4.4) and lowest for the African Soul Rebels (3.6). At Tate Liverpool, this figure was highest for *Picasso: Peace and Freedom* (3.6) and lowest for *Mark Rothko: The Seagram Murals* (2.8).

Again, we must be careful to interpret these results in the context of the artistic work and the curator’s objectives for programming the work. Clearly, some programmes have stronger emotional resonance than others. Our goal was to remain agnostic as to the cause of emotional resonance, since light-hearted comedy can be just as likely as serious drama to elicit a strong emotional response. As evidenced here and in other research literature, arts experiences can build a capacity for empathy and enhance levels of emotional maturity amongst both children and adults, leading to positive social outcomes at the community level.<sup>3</sup>

### Spiritual Value

“I had serious problems on my mind and although I could not altogether forget them, the performance gave me hope.”

-RLP attender

Audience members speak of having spiritual experiences, often in conjunction with musical events, but also for dance, theatre and the visual arts. They talk of “being transported” to another place, or “transcending” space and time and entering into another dimension or consciousness. It is difficult to parse the spiritual aspect of arts experiences from the captivation aspect and the emotional aspect, in a statistical sense. They were found to be closely correlated in the 2007 impact study. Again in this study, a positive correlation was observed between strength of emotional response and spiritual meaning (Pearson correlation coefficient of .51).

Two rather different indicators of spiritual value were investigated. All respondents were asked if the event they attended had “a spiritual meaning”.

- Across the five Biennial programmes, one stands out as having a higher spiritual impact: Laura Belém’s installation, *The Temple of a Thousand Bells* in The Oratory, a dramatic space in St. James Cemetery adjacent to Liverpool Anglican Cathedral (score of 3.0, on a scale of 1 to 5).
- Across the five Royal Liverpool Philharmonic concerts, it is quite interesting to note that *The Spirit of Christmas* concert (with “Spirit” in its title) yielded the highest score for

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<sup>3</sup> For an excellent overview of the benefits of arts activities, see *Gifts of the Muse, Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*, RAND Corporation, 2004, research commissioned by the Wallace Foundation.

spiritual meaning (3.8), just ahead of the Mahler “*Resurrection*” program (3.7), with its overtly religious subtext.

- The *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* and *Picasso: Peace and Freedom* exhibitions at Tate Liverpool also garnered average scores on this indicator (both 3.0), suggesting that some visitors derived a spiritual meaning from these exhibitions.

Another question was asked of respondents at a subset of performing arts events: “Did the performance leave you feeling inspired or uplifted?” While we attempted to make the questionnaire neutral in terms of positive emotions or negative emotions (i.e., seeing as how some art legitimately aims to challenge, unnerve or even offend), many audience members cite “being uplifted” as a desired outcome of arts experiences. Several of the LARC member organisations voluntarily included this question, though it was not mandatory. Results illustrate that some arts events with a spiritual meaning do not necessarily leave one feeling inspired or uplifted, while other programmes without an overtly spiritual meaning can definitely leave one feeling inspired or uplifted.

- For example, visitors to the *Touched* exhibition at FACT reported below average levels of spiritual meaning (2.3), but above average levels of feeling inspired or uplifted (3.5). A similar finding was observed for *The Rise of Women Artists* exhibition at NML’s Walker Art Gallery, with lower levels of spiritual meaning (~2.5) compared to higher levels of feeling inspired or uplifted (~3.4). However, the greatest difference between these two indicators of spiritual value was observed for the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse’s production of *The 39 Steps*. While the audience for this production reported very low levels of spiritual meaning (1.3), the production left many of them feeling inspired or uplifted (3.4), perhaps a result of the humour.
- There is one interesting anomaly – the Unity Theatre’s *Beating Berlusconi* production, which garnered a moderate score for spiritual meaning (2.9), but a much lower score for feeling inspired or uplifted (2.0). While the play may have had a more abstract spiritual meaning to some audience members, it was quite factual in nature – sad at times, and based on real events, some unfortunate – most likely not something that audiences would find uplifting.

Art is a spiritual experience for some people, whether in an overtly religious sense or in a more general sense of feeling inspired or introspective. In a way, this value is quite similar to the emotional benefits described in the previous section. In the future, we plan to combine the indicators of spiritual value with the indicators of emotional resonance, due to the high correlations and semantic difficulties of pulling them apart.

## Aesthetic Growth

“I brought a group of sixth-form students to visit the exhibition. Some found it challenging, and we had lots of discussions about what art is and where they drew their line!... Some found it moved their self-imposed boundaries.”

-FACT visitor

Aesthetic growth is a pivotal benefit of arts participation, and one that is prized by curators and artistic directors, who like to “stretch” audiences and expose them to new or different art and artists. Some audience members enjoy having their aesthetic sensibilities stretched, while others resent it. Moreover, the degree to which an individual enjoys being stretched can vary from art-form to art-form, and can change dramatically over the course of a lifetime. Of course the paradox of aesthetic growth is that sometimes people end up enjoying works of art that they never would have chosen to see (e.g., when an orchestra “sandwiches” a new piece by a living composer between two more accessible pieces, or when visitors to a museum see an exhibition other than the one they intended to see).

Several aspects of aesthetic growth were investigated. The one question asked universally of all respondents, and which yielded the widest range of responses, was, “Did the performance [or exhibition] expose you to a type or style of [art] with which you were unfamiliar?” A negative correlation was observed between frequency of organisational attendance and aesthetic growth (-.20 Pearson correlation coefficient). This is intuitive; people who attend less frequently are more likely to be exposed to something new when they do go out. For example, 56% of first-timers, on average, reported that they were exposed to something new, compared to 31% of respondents whose attendance is 2+ times per year.

- Generally, the highest levels of aesthetic growth outcomes were observed in the visual arts. Across the three Tate Liverpool exhibitions, *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* exposed the largest percentage of visitors to a new type or style of visual art (74%), followed closely by the *This Is Sculpture* exhibition (73%). This compares to 50% of visitors to *Picasso: Peace and Freedom*, and 40% of visitors to *Mark Rothko: The Seagram Murals*. Similarly, 72% of visitors to the *Touched* exhibition at Tate Liverpool (part of the Liverpool Biennial) were exposed to something new, as well as 68% of visitors to *The Temple of a Thousand Bells* Biennial installation and 64% of visitors to the Bluecoat’s *Arabicity* exhibition.
- While the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse audience for *The Caretaker* reported high impacts in other categories, only 21% of them reported that they were exposed to something new. Compare this to the 52% of audience members for *Ghost Stories*, the terrifying drama that transferred to London’s West End, who reported being exposed to something new. This finding may be a reflection of the unique form of the work itself, since the two shows had nearly equal proportions of first-timers in the audience (about 22%).
- Across the five Royal Liverpool Philharmonic audiences, the two classical music concerts – Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 (*Resurrection*) and *The Lark Ascending* – attracted veteran concertgoers (only <3% RLP first-timers), only a handful of whom reported aesthetic

growth (21% and 16%, respectively). This compares to the 50% of audiences for African Soul Rebels, who reported being exposed to something new (only 5% RLP first-timers).

- By and large, a majority of respondents to all of the surveyed events reported that they were better able to appreciate the art form as a result of attending the event in question. The figure was highest for Unity Theatre's *Beating Berlusconi* audience (81%) and the Tate Liverpool's *Picasso* exhibition (79%).
- Several LARC organisations asked their audiences if they anticipate that their experience at the programme will "make you more creative in your life, work and artistic endeavours." Above average figures for creative stimulation were reported by visitors to FACT's *Touched* exhibition (3.4, part of the Biennial), and for several of the Biennial's exhibitions, including Europeasure/Scandinavian Hotel (3.4) and *The Mending Project* (3.3). For Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, average figures ranged from a high of 3.1 on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal) for *Hansel and Gretel*, to a low of 2.2 for *The Glass Menagerie*. What was it about FACT's *Touched* exhibition, or the production of *Hansel and Gretel*, that fired the audience's imagination? Was this an objective of artistic leadership?

Much has been written over the past ten years about creativity in the workforce as a strategy for global competitiveness. If a more creative populace is an economic goal, as so many believe it must be, then what strategies are available to civic leaders to support the creative development of adults and children? Should this matter be left exclusively to the educational system, or should the arts and cultural sector be regarded as a key partner in this work? If so, what programmes and strategies can arts and cultural organisations employ to further enrich the creative development of audiences and visitors?

#### Social Bonding

"I live in an area where there are few black people, so I was not very interested in their history before I went to Tate. After I saw the exhibition, I came to think of not only their history but also the history of my own race and issues of today's world."

-TATE Liverpool visitor

"Meeting other cathedral visitors, one of whom was an asylum seeker and his story was very moving... In another environment we would not have interacted and I would not have learned about him and his suffering - very moving."

-Liverpool Biennial visitor

The sixth and final construct of intrinsic impact is social bonding. In developing the questionnaire, we sought to limit the questions to social benefits that relate directly to the art, and avoid asking about the social fulfilment associated with going out to dinner, etc., which is important, but ancillary to the art itself. All respondents were asked, "Did you feel a sense of connectedness with the rest of the audience?" In retrospect, we learned that this question does not apply very well to visitors to museums and galleries, many of whom have different experiences in the same venue, and who may visit galleries when there are no other people in

them. This is not to say that social bonding impacts are not experienced by gallery and museum visitors. The extent to which they have a shared experience, however, varies depending on their pathway through the museum, the extent to which other visitors are present, and other circumstances. In contrast, performing arts audiences typically have a shared experience in terms of what they receive programmatically.

- Among the highest scores for “sense of connectedness” was reported by visitors to the Bluecoat’s Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival (3.5 on a scale of 1 to 5), suggesting how festivals with many participatory, interactive events and activities can allow visitors to bond with each other at higher levels than programmes and exhibitions that are strictly observational in nature (e.g., a figure of 1.9 for the Sonya Boyce exhibition). Similarly, visitors to the Biennial’s Europleasure/Scandinavian Hotel exhibit reported above-average social bonding levels (3.3) compared to exhibits at other Biennial sites such as the *Grand Organ* video installation at the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral (2.4).
- It is somewhat curious that the audiences for the two RLP classical concerts reported significantly different levels of connectedness with the rest of the audience. The audience for Mahler’s *Resurrection* Symphony reported a stronger sense of connection with the audience compared to the audience for *The Lark Ascending* concert (3.6 vs. 3.1, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 5). Note also that *The Spirit of Christmas* audience also reported a comparatively high average score on this indicator (3.6). What might explain the Mahler audience’s shared sense of connectedness? While the Christmas concert may have involved audience participation (i.e., singing along), the Mahler concert most certainly did not. Does the work itself heighten the listener’s sense of connectedness with the rest of the audience? Or are situational factors at work, such as the audience size in relation to the size of the house, or even the lighting level in the venue (i.e., can people see each other’s faces during the concert)? What can arts presenters do to heighten the audience’s sense of participating in a shared experience?
- Different levels of connectedness were also reported by the five Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse audiences. Both *The 39 Steps* and *Ghost Stories* audiences reported a somewhat higher sense of connectedness (3.4 and 3.3, respectively), while the audience for *The Glass Menagerie* reported a much lower level (2.4), with the audience for *The Caretaker* reporting an average score of 2.7. Several theories may explain some of these differences. For example, *The Caretaker* was produced in a smaller, more intimate venue which may have increased the sense of connection amongst the audience. The audience’s ebb and flow of laughter in response to *The 39 Steps* may have contributed to a heightened sense of connectedness. If true, this would indicate an interesting aspect of the potential impact of comedic work. Conversely, the sheer terror of *Ghost Stories* may have contributed to the sense of bonding across the audience.

Two additional questions queried different social impacts. One question asked, “Did the performance reflect your own cultural heritage?” in an effort to ascertain alignment between the audience and the artists or work of art, or the potential for “social bonding” impacts. Another question asked, “Did the performance expose you to cultures outside of your own life

experience?” in an effort to identify the potential for “social bridging” impacts (i.e., connecting people across cultures), a complement to social bonding.<sup>4</sup>

- Two of the Bluecoat’s programmes were particularly successful in generating “social bridging” outcomes – the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival and the *Arabicity* exhibition (3.9 and 3.7, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 5). In other words, visitors to these events were likely to be exposed to cultures outside of their own life experience.
- The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic’s audience for *The Imagined Village* reported a relatively high score for social bonding (3.7 on a scale of 1 to 5), suggesting the audience for this folk music event felt a cultural tie with the performers and the music. Contrast this to the audience for African Soul Rebels, which reported an average social bonding score of 1.6. Unity Theatre’s *Beating Berlusconi* production also tapped into a sense of cultural identity (3.7) at a much higher level than Unity Theatre’s other two shows. Further analysis suggests a strong predictive relationship between the degree to which an audience member’s cultural identity aligns with the artist’s, and the strength of the audience member’s emotional response. This suggests that audiences can have more impactful experiences when they “see themselves onstage.”
- Finally, respondents at some events were asked if the performance left them with “new insight on human relationships or social issues, or a new perspective on life.” The greatest contrast was observed with the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse audience. Whereas the audience for *The Caretaker* reported a moderate level of new insight (3.5 on a scale 1 to 5), the audience for *The 39 Steps* reported a significantly lower level of new insight (1.8). Again, we must be careful not to presuppose that new insight on human relationships was an intended outcome of both of these works.

Shared experiences of all sorts bind people to the place where they live.<sup>5</sup> Arts and cultural programmes that connect members of different communities within themselves, and with each other, create shared meaning and social capital. Programmes that generate “social bonding” and “social bridging” outcomes are both important from a community development standpoint. While social capital can be achieved through a variety of activities and events that bring people together (e.g., sports, arts, shopping), arts and culture can offer “bridging” and “bonding” impacts in a cultural context, thereby providing residents with memorable experiences that *both* reinforce their identity and expand their world view.

### Summary

Figures 1 and 2 summarise seven key indicators of intrinsic impact for two of the LARC partners: Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse and the Liverpool Biennial. While this study was exploratory in nature and further data is required to make firm conclusions, the results illustrate that different arts programmes create different impacts. Note, for example, the range of intellectual

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<sup>4</sup> Social bridging and social bonding, both components of “social capital,” are concepts explored by Robert Putnam in his influential book, *Bowling Alone*, published in 2000.

<sup>5</sup> A recent U.S. study found three main factors that bind residents to their community: social offerings (fun places to gather); openness (how welcoming a place is); and aesthetics (an area's physical beauty and green spaces). See [www.soulofthecommunity.org](http://www.soulofthecommunity.org).



stimulation impacts across the different theatre programmes, and the difference in aesthetic growth impacts across the five Biennial programmes.

The results also suggest a “halo effect” in regards to some of the impact scores, in that impact results for a given programme tend to be consistently higher or lower within certain groupings of indicators. A factor analysis revealed three underlying groupings of impacts (not mutually exclusive): 1) captivation, emotional resonance and social connectedness; 2) emotional resonance, spiritual value and intellectual stimulation; and 3) aesthetic growth (singularly). This may point to some level of redundancy in the questioning and suggests that the protocol might be simplified in future impact assessment efforts.

Figure 1: Key Indicators of Impact for five Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse productions (Note: samples sizes range from 92 to 216; some of the differences illustrated in this chart are statistically significant)

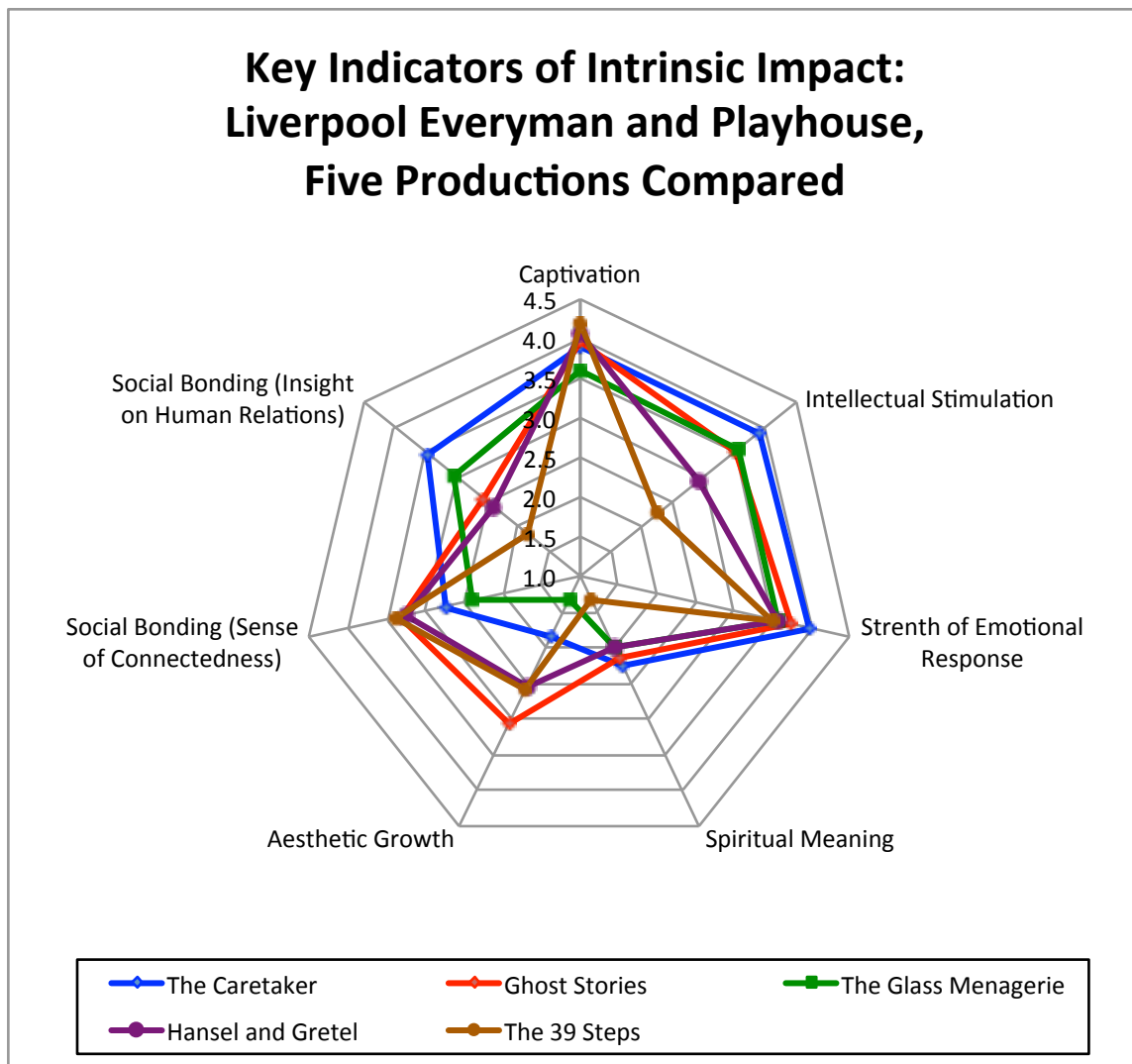
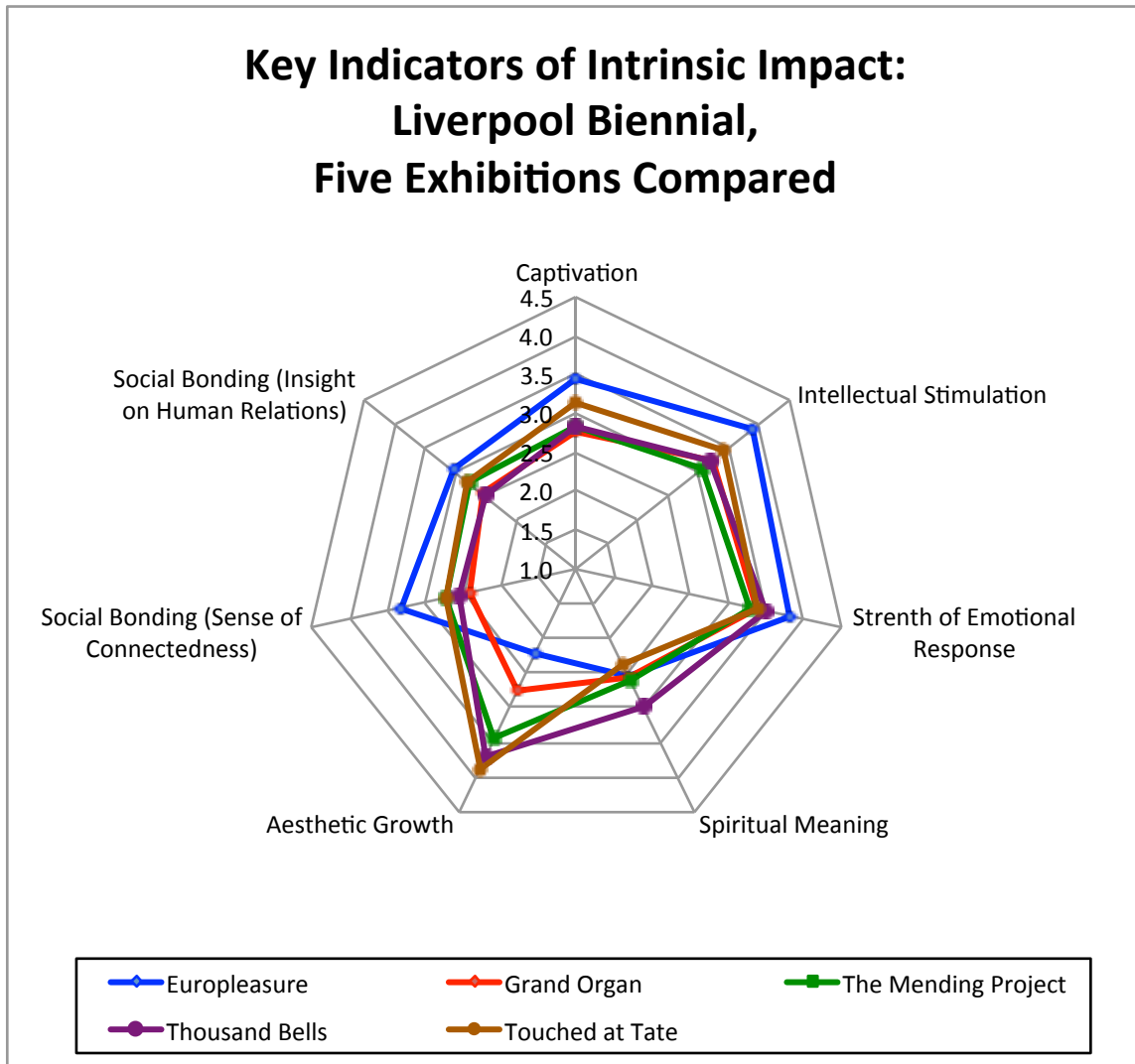


Figure 2: Key Indicators of Impact for five Liverpool Biennial Exhibitions (Note: sample sizes range from 29 to 46 and are statistically unstable; results should be interpreted with caution and should be considered exploratory in nature)



## 7. LARC Members' Experiences with the Dashboard Tool

As noted earlier, the eight LARC organisations were provided with customised graphical dashboards in Excel, using standardised graphs and tables. Individual LARC organisations have all used the dashboard, but to varying levels and for a range of different reasons. For some, the dashboard has been a useful, albeit sometimes limited, source of market intelligence. The Head of Marketing of one of the LARC organisations commented: *“The intrinsic impact dashboard has, for us, been a double-edged tool for confirming (albeit without a huge sample size or variation in show) the quality of the artistic programme (in the instances of these particular shows). Exceeding expectation and providing value for money was reflected strongly on our dashboard.”* The same organisation also commented: *“I think in some quarters we were surprised by the average age of audience, the education of the audience and how theatrically ‘trained’ they are”* but also expressed a common concern that *“we have to be quite careful about the data, however, since the sampled shows are not truly representative on a broad spectrum of the work we present.”*

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following content:

**Control Panel:**

- Shows:** A list of shows with checkboxes:
  - The Caretaker
  - The Caretaker Staff View
  - 39 Steps
  - 39 Steps Staff View
  - Ghost Stories
  - Ghost Stories Staff View
  - 
  - 
  -
- Show Granularity:** A dropdown menu set to "By Show".
- Show Partitioning:** A dropdown menu set to "Public Surveys and Staff Surveys".
- Refresh:** A yellow button with the text "Refresh". Below it, a note says "Double click the button to refresh the data".

**Table: Productions Covered in This Report:**

Productions Covered in This Report:	Date	Sample Sizes:	Surveys Included In Report:
The Caretaker	11/30/09	191	191
The Caretaker Staff View		5	5
39 Steps	1/20/10	210	210
39 Steps Staff View		5	5
Ghost Stories	2/26/10	92	92
Ghost Stories Staff View		4	4

**Logos:**

- LIVERPOOL ARTS PLAYHOUSE** (top right)
- Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium** (bottom right, inside a large arrow shape)

**Footer:**

- Impact Project Commissioned by LARC
- Dashboard and protocol © Baker Richards & WolfBrown
- Small text at the bottom: "In viewing this dashboard please be aware that the sample size will affect levels of confidence in the results. See Appendix - Margin of Error Table."

For many, the verbatim comments were particularly useful. One organisation noted that the survey “gives us a point to work from when examining our audiences to focus increasingly on systems, access, marketing and environmental rather than entirely on programme. This comes from the anecdotal and written bits “more leg room,” “Comfy seats,” “Free G&T” and my favourite gem (which has led us towards a new box office system) “I resent paying a £2.50 booking fee for an £8 ticket [purchased] at the theatre, but would not have attended if I had not been in the vicinity and so could buy the ticket.” These allow us to challenge assumptions we make about our venue to look at experiential elements not just marketing... If anything, this was the most valuable bit of it all...” For another the “Did you leave with unanswered questions...” question was particularly useful and has been used with front of house staff to promote better interpretation and change practice because “we’d never asked that sort of question before and I’d certainly be interested in adding that to future exit research we do from now on”.

At least three of the LARC organisations have used the results of the study at senior management meetings to inform and change future practice and business planning. “We discussed the results at the management team meeting. I think the number and quality of questions [about the artists and artistic works] people had was the most surprising bit. I think our adult education programme (which we were in the process of expanding in any case) will help meet some of these needs”. The flexibility provided by the dashboard has been used by one organisation to look at the levels of preparation and research, comparing the differences between visits for different types of event – “None of this is rocket science, and could be deduced by thinking about the audience. But it’s helpful to see findings in research, as they seem to ‘stick’ more with colleagues. As a result of that presentation, I’m going to present the research to the programme group next week with a view to help inform their thinking about.... related interpretation and messaging.”

The study seems to have been both useful and informative and has been used by some of the participating organisations to both examine and challenge existing practice: “In terms of programming, I have to say that we’re still a long ways from using customer feedback to inform the programming process. This was part of what the study was designed to achieve, but this is not something that will change overnight....”

## **8. Conclusion**

Overall, Liverpool visitors and audience members who were surveyed over the 2009-10 season were satisfied with the events and exhibitions they attended. On average, respondents across all eight LARC organisations indicated that their expectations were fulfilled (4.2 on a scale of 1 to 5). Moreover, 94% of all respondents indicated that their experience was “worth the investment of time and money.” This is especially encouraging given the challenging nature of some of the programmes.

Numerous challenges were encountered during the study. The data collection approach involved distributing paper surveys or capturing email addresses at a wide range of exhibitions and events, each with different constraints. For example, a reduced universe for the smaller organisations meant that even where response rates were equivalent to those of larger organisations, achieving a representative number of responses was much more difficult. Developing sampling procedures at museums was also challenging. Visitors needed to be intercepted at random whilst they were still on-site and at a point when it was clear they had

visited the specific exhibition in question. This often meant intercepting at the exit of the exhibition rather than of the gallery or museum as a whole, which required some explanation.

In general, the effort level involved in on-site survey work is substantial. When online surveying can be used, the level of effort will decrease for performing arts organisations,<sup>6</sup> but less so for galleries and museums where use of a dedicated volunteer or intern to collect email addresses is still required. More experimentation is needed to determine if the trade-offs in cost savings from online surveying will outweigh the diminished representativeness of the resulting data, and the situations in which this is a legitimate concern.

The value of impact assessment data lies in its ability to raise questions that can stimulate meaningful discussion about artistic outcomes. Why did visitors to one exhibition report more preparation than visitors to another exhibition? Why did a particular theatre production generate higher or lower levels of emotional resonance? Quantitative data, taken alone, cannot answer these questions. But, when considered along with qualitative data (i.e., responses to open-ended responses) and in light of contextual information such as the nature and extent of marketing and education efforts undertaken in connection with a specific production or exhibition, it is possible for arts organisations to gain new insight into the impacts of their programming.

By considering the impacts of their programming decisions, curators and artistic directors can gain a sharper sense of the consequences of their programming decisions, and become more purposeful in their choices. Similarly, impact results may prove helpful in reporting to funders on the outcomes of their investments in organisations, beyond simply attendance figures.

Whilst many arts and cultural organisations have procedures for assessing the quality or “success” of their programmes through internal review and discussion, few organisations have put in place a methodical system for assessing impact through the lens of audiences and visitors. This requires an institutional commitment to feedback that goes well beyond foyer conversations, and a vulnerability and openness to critical feedback that does not come naturally to many artists, curators and managers. It remains to be seen whether impact assessment will take root more broadly within the cultural sector, and what uses impact results may have amongst managerial and artistic staff and board members. It may very well be that arts and cultural organisations require a great deal more training and support than previously thought in order to answer these questions.

What is certain beyond a doubt is that audiences and visitors measurably benefit from attending the arts, in many ways. Intrinsic impact is at the core of the value system surrounding the arts. If the impact doesn’t occur at the time of the exchange between the art and the audience, then the economic, social and civic benefits associated with the arts can’t happen. This is why the quality of the experience is so important, and why investments in artistic processes and creative programming endeavours can pay substantial dividends to individuals, families and the community.

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<sup>6</sup> However, when online surveying is used, results will then be limited to those patrons with email addresses, and thus not representative of the total audience.

Quality, however, should not be conflated with intellectual or aesthetic challenge. Just as audiences benefit from challenging programmes (i.e., through aesthetic growth impacts), as the results of this study illustrate, so they also benefit from arts experiences that offer comfort, validation and hope (i.e., emotional resonance, social bridging and bonding impacts).

The LARC impact study advances a longer arc of research and development on the value system surrounding arts experiences. Focusing on intrinsic impact shifts attention to transformative outcomes in the *economy of meaning*,<sup>7</sup> not just the economy of money, and provides civic and cultural leaders with a new vocabulary to describe the *primary* benefits of arts and culture, and their many contributions to civic engagement and quality of life. The payoff from this work will come in the form of more streamlined and cost-effective methods of gathering audience feedback and from the significant benefits of engaging audiences more deeply in artistic work.

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<sup>7</sup> *Economies of Life: Patterns of health and wealth*, Bill Sharpe, 2010, International Futures Forum