

Sarah Ogle, Communications and Sales Director, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse in discussion with Debbie Richards, Director, Baker Richards

The impact of cultural experiences on audiences and visitors

Sarah Ogle worked at Manchester Royal Exchange, Blackpool Grand and Birmingham Rep before returning to her home city of Liverpool where she is now communications and sales director at Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse. She has helped re-build the two theatres' audiences and reputation, successfully celebrating the city's year as European Capital of Culture in 2008 and now working on a major capital project, which will see the new Everyman open in late 2013. Sarah is a guest lecturer at Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) and in 2011 was a resident tutor for the TMA's Essentials of Marketing Course at Druidstone. She has also spoken at a variety of AMA, TMA and Arts Council England events on subjects ranging from Ambassador Projects to Design and Print, Best Practice in Arts Marketing and Collaboration to Cultural Leadership. Sarah is currently on the board of the AMA and of Tmesis Theatre Company

Debbie Richards co-founded Baker Richards in 2003. The company is based in Cambridge, with a team of consultants, researchers and analysts, and in 2008 launched The Pricing Institute in North America. Recent innovations include the Revenue Management Application which is the sector's first dynamic pricing analysis and decision support tool, and IntrinsicImpact.org, in partnership with WolfBrown. Debbie's work includes consultative and feasibility studies, marketing strategies and primary research, while her principal focus is helping arts organisations to realise their financial potential. Her experience covers work in the UK, US and Australasia and recent Nordic clients such as the Royal Danish Theatre, Royal Swedish Opera and Royal Swedish Philharmonic Orchestra. Debbie previously worked as a theatre producer at Creation Theatre Company and as Marketing Manager of an arts centre. She regularly delivers lectures and training and was previously a Board member of the AMA.

This seminar looked at the way that people can be transformed by arts experiences. They looked at the process and findings of the year-long pilot study of the intrinsic impacts of arts events – How audiences and visitors are transformed by cultural experiences in Liverpool.

Transformative experiences

Sarah Ogle: This session is going to focus on a piece of work that was done across organisations in Liverpool, with a seven venues known as LARK (Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium). During this session, we will look at the process and the learning and then we will open it up for conversation with delegates.

Debbie Richards: We are going to be looking at the impact of cultural experiences on audiences and visitors with particular reference to a project which the U.S. research firm Wolf Brown and Baker Richards undertook with LARC. Alan Brown's work has attracted a lot of attention at previous AMA conferences and we are thrilled that his work has crossed the Atlantic in the form of this major project in Liverpool as well as a smaller project that took place in Scotland. Today, Sarah and I are representing a great number of people, including Alan Brown and his colleague Jennifer Novak-Leonard from Wolf Brown but also all the other member organisations of LARC, including past and present members.

For those who are not familiar with Wolf Brown's work or Alan's previous presentations at AMA conferences, the work stems from a study which was originally commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, the largest funder of the arts in the US. They commissioned a study from the Rand Corporation which resulted in a book entitled 'The Gifts of the Muse; reframing the debate about the benefit of the arts'. It is not an easy read but it includes some excellent discussion about the benefits of the arts. From that book arose the benefits framework that Alan presented at the AMA conference in 2007 and which is downloadable from the AMA's web site.

This framework considers the imprint of the arts experience at the level of the individual, the interpersonal and at community level. It sets this against the benefits that arise during an arts experience, before and after an arts experience, and then as a result of cumulative arts experiences. 'Intrinsic impact' focuses on one section of this framework, the imprint of the arts experience on the level of an individual. It is not trying to deal with the impact on a community.

In 2007 there was a report undertaken with a consortium of major university presenters researching intrinsic impact in the US. In 2008, that was presented at the AMA 2008 conference. Why is intrinsic impact work important? How do we know whether our artistic work is resonating? In the arts we have had a tendency to define our success in terms of revenue and attendance and as an industry we have lacked good metrics for mission driven but non-financial outcomes. In other words, can we understand how people are changed after experiencing an arts event?

Here is a formula:

Intrinsic Impact =
'Readiness to Receive'
+ The Performance/Exhibition Experience
+ Derived Meaning

'Readiness to Receive' is an individual's preparedness to encounter art. It takes account of the fact that every person attending an event is in a different space and that space is a factor of their context, their knowledge, their preparation for a

particular event, their familiarity with the art form or experience, the relevance of that experience and their anticipation levels.

The most recent intrinsic impact study undertaken in the US has found intuitive, if not causal, relationships between motivations and impacts. In other words, the impact outcomes that people report they have experienced tend to be the same as the outcomes they were seeking. This has really interesting implications for marketers in thinking about messaging and how we build attainable expectations of impact outcomes that can actually be fulfilled by the experience that our organisations are delivering.

So what are Intrinsic Impacts? Here are a number of constructs:

- Art as a means of feeling
 - Captivation or “flow” (e.g. a feeling of being lost in the moment)
 - Emotional resonance (a deeper felt emotion has a greater impact)
- Art as a means of learning or thinking
 - Learning outcomes
 - Provocation or being challenged
 - Cognitive dissonance (e.g. being offended)
 - Questions raised
 - Resolved to make a change in one’s life
- Art as a means of social bonding and social bridging
 - Sense of connectedness
 - Appreciation for different people and cultures
 - Reinforce one’s own identity
- Art as a means of aesthetic development
 - Aesthetic growth

It is important to understand that impacts are not good or bad per se and are inherently contextual. For example, intellectual provocation may not be an intended outcome of a particular piece of art so it is important to avoid presupposing that a given impact should be found purely as a result of the fact that we are asking about it

SO: Introduction to LARC

- LARC is a consortium of seven of the major cultural organisations in Liverpool:
 - Includes: the Bluecoat, FACT, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse theatres, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Tate Liverpool and the Unity Theatre
- Main aims
 - ‘To ensure that, by working collectively and collaboratively, the cultural sector contributes more effectively to the social and economic renewal of the city region’
 - Excellent art and culture

Liverpool is a very challenging market place in terms of deprivation, employment, education and health and so culture has not always been high on the agenda. LARC has been a driver of the renewal of the city, particularly with the celebration of the Capital of Culture in 2008. As part of that, and at the very heart of what we want art and culture to be excellent.

Here is an outline of each of the members of LARC.

THE BLUECOAT

- Liverpool city centre's oldest building, Bluecoat has evolved into Liverpool's hub for creativity over a fascinating 300 year history.
- A year-round programme of contemporary, visual art exhibitions, along with literature, music, dance and live art events.
- The Bluecoat is home to over 30 resident artists and businesses designing, making, exhibiting and selling.
- Find out more at www.thebluecoat.org.uk

TATE LIVERPOOL

- Situated at the heart of the Grade I listed Albert Dock, it is home to the National Collection of Modern Art in the North.
- A varied programme of special exhibitions throughout the year, which brings together works from national and international collections, both public and private.
- In addition Tate Liverpool also offers large displays of works from the Tate Collection free of charge and a varied programme of events, including tours, talks and family activities.
- www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-liverpool

ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC

- As well as the world class Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, classical music activity includes Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir, Rodewald Concert Series of chamber music and contemporary group Ensemble 10/10.
- Uniquely, also run a venue; the Grade II listed Liverpool Philharmonic Hall which promotes contemporary rock, pop, folk, roots, jazz and blues concerts and music projects, in addition to festivals and comedy. Built in the 1930s, the 1,790 seat Art Deco concert hall also regularly transforms into a cinema and the smaller Rodewald Suite, provides a cabaret style venue.
- www.liverpoolphil.com

FACT

- The UK's leading media arts centre, FACT (Foundation for Arts and Creative Technology) houses three galleries (showing four exhibitions per year), a café, bar and four cinema screens, run by Picturehouse and showing the best in

independent and mainstream film. FACT also runs its own film programmes, focusing on classic and art house.

- Based in the heart of the bohemian Ropewalks area of the city, and through our partner organisations and businesses help drive regeneration of the area.
- www.fact.co.uk

LIVERPOOL BIENNIAL

- The UK's International Biennial of Contemporary Art, it is the largest contemporary art festival in the UK.
- Every two years for 10 weeks, Artists make and present work in a vibrant and diverse range of public spaces, galleries, museums, and cultural spaces as well as in unexpected places, previously disused buildings, exciting locations and surprising spaces.
- The Biennial unfolds through an exciting exhibition of artworks and projects that leads to a rediscovery and reinvention of this important post-industrial city.
- www.biennial.com

UNITY THEATRE

- Dedicated to enhancing the quality of the performing arts on Merseyside by encouraging creativity, participation, innovation and diversity.
- Unity produce and collaborate regional, national and international, whilst remaining affordable accessible and relevant.
- With two studio spaces (150 and 88 seats) they work with, promote and collaborate with professional touring companies; local communities and other arts organisations.
- www.unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk

LIVERPOOL EVERYMAN AND PLAYHOUSE

- Two distinct theatres in different parts of the city, work hand-in-hand to produce a wide-ranging programme of acclaimed and adventurous theatre.
- The Company has deep roots in its community, combined with national and international creative connections.
- We work with the greatest artists and with those who have yet to discover how great they could be.
- The Everyman is currently undergoing a major redevelopment.
- www.everymanplayhouse.com

As part of LARC we were one of the organisations that bid for money through the Arts Council's Thrive programme and we got £1.34 million, one of the largest grants. It was seen as a way of carrying on the work of Capital of Culture to make sure that the legacy kept going through the arts organisations. As part of the Thrive grant, one of the aims was around research and largely it was driven by economic impact

(attendances etc.) but we also wanted to understand more about how we could use knowledge for advocacy and value.

I remember being excited about Alan Brown's presentation at the 2008 AMA conference and wanting to do it in my own organisation. With Baker Richards, myself and my colleagues were able to go back to our CEO and make the case. We were keen to look at impacts that went beyond the metrics we had been looking at and wanted

- To have another way of defining 'success' in addition to revenue, attendance numbers and media coverage
- To assess the intrinsic impact of a live performance or museum visit
- To help articulate the true impact of engaging with a cultural experience
- To help the funders of cultural organisations better assess and define outcomes

As part of this, we wanted to develop a new vocabulary to talk about the work to funders and we wanted to assist our curators and artistic leaders in trying to understand the consequences of some of their programming choices.

The methodology we used was:

- Questionnaire-based
 - Mandatory + optional questions
 - 4 pages in length, about 30 questions
- Distribution
 - Take home/mail back survey packets
 - Theatres - on seats
 - Museums/galleries - random intercept at point of specific exhibition
 - Online survey
 - (On-site completion)
- Coverage
 - 3,332 respondents across 29 events
 - 20% first time attenders

I recently asked some of my colleagues 'What would you do the same?' if we were to do it again and some of their responses were:

- It was good to be able to research a whole year of programme so felt that we got a good idea of the difference between exhibitions, and in-depth findings.
- I think the approach to the questions was good and useful.
- It was great to work on a joint project with the LARC partners for a defined period of time and for a clear purpose.

I also asked 'What would you do differently?' and some of the responses were:

- Working as a consortium was a means to get the research done (how we secured the funding) but doing the work as a consortium didn't seem to add to the knowledge we gained. I think I'd expected to gain more insight about findings across the group but that didn't really happen in the end. Perhaps I'd have been a little more realistic about that!
- A broader range of shows surveyed would have been useful, the shows offered little diversity when placed in the context of our annual programme (NB: issues of scale).

I went on to ask 'What was one thing that surprised you about the findings?' and some of the responses were:

- Not sure we had any surprises but always good to have findings that help artistic programmers think about its reception by the general audience.
- There was nothing that greatly surprised us. This was very reassuring as it showed the rest of our data (captured through other methods) and our assumptions were generally accurate.
- We have issues with the temperature of our theatre space...

I also asked 'Have you changed any of your marketing or organisational practice as a result of the work?' to which some people responded

- I think the wants/needs/expectations of the audience are now even more important to the organisation as a whole.
- I think we have taken to heart the analysis that shows the better prepared audiences are, the more they get from the experience. We are trying to find ways of improving that side of what we do.
- Yes, it's helped move 'audience' up the priority list within the organisation, and assisted in thinking about the motivations for visiting us and how we might support the needs of different visitor groups.

Overall observations about the research:

- Collaborative approach = affordable
- Length of timescale
- Issues of scale (big vs. small) – even with equivalent response rates, achieving a representative number of responses was much more difficult for the smaller organisations
- Challenges of gallery/museum intercept given the need to survey a specific exhibition
- Staff turnover
- Engagement of senior artistic staff in process and subsequent willingness to adapt
- Significant effort level involved
- Some practical change demonstrated
- Shared language emerging for conversations about our work

Questions and answers

Helen Davies, Traverse Theatre: *Can you give a specific example of what sort of programming conversations came about as a result of this project?*

SO: Our organisation specifically chose five very different productions over the two different venues that reflected different strands of our programme that we felt were starting to emerge and areas where we wanted to develop. One of the productions was Kneehigh's Hansel and Gretel which is a kind of work we were really trying to push so it allowed us to get information around those types of shows. One of the conversations was around Ghost Stories which we had produced and which has been quite a big success. It was a very different sort of theatre experience. Having some useful feedback about the impact (rather than simply 'It sold very well and people were screaming in the auditorium') was really helpful. It provided us with a structure we could consider and information we could use. It has allowed us to see the response to this kind of work and to consider whether this is something we want to take forward.

Cathy Morrison, freelancer: *Did you ever distribute questionnaires to productions that within your organisation you did not consider to be of a very high standard and if so, did this affect the impact on audiences?*

DR: It's not necessarily about poor quality. One of the concerts that the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic surveyed was their Christmas concert. It has been a long standing tradition; the orchestra play carols and the audience sings along. I think they had been having a lot of discussions internally about whether they still wanted to do this kind of concert. One thing the survey demonstrated was how strongly the audience felt about that concert, with elements of nostalgia coming through, remembering being brought to see the concert in their childhood and the emotional resonance of that concert and how strongly it scored in terms of those impacts. This made the Phil change the way they had been thinking about this element of their programme from an artistic perspective.

Sarah Boiling, The Audience Agency: *Could you share any other examples of interesting, noteworthy or surprising results that emerged from the survey?*

SO: For my organisation there was some very practical stuff. When we started doing the survey, we had not got the final bit of money to redevelop the Everyman and it was a reminder of how much that was needed. Many of the responses from the Everyman were about the comfort of the seats and the building.

Claire Zammit, Southbank Centre: *Did you ask the question about the comfort of the seats or was it something respondents chose to mention?*

SO: It was an open ended question: 'How could your experience have been improved?' Because we weren't asking about specifics, it was interesting how high up people's agendas things like seats and auditorium temperature were.

DR: In response to Sarah's question, we asked whether people left with unanswered questions and I think everyone was surprised by how thoughtful those questions were and by how deeply engaged those people were, what challenging and provoking questions they were asking. They came up with things that we would never dream of responding to in our programme texts or print. This has generated some significant thinking about how we can help audiences by answering those questions.

SO: Those unanswered questions were really surprising and thought provoking for my organisation.

Sarah Cockburn, *Forced Entertainment: How has it changed the way you deal with the 'readiness to receive' idea? How has it changed how you prepare an audience for the experience and how do you make those connections apart from the usual ways like the copy you write?*

SO: We haven't done much ourselves around that. We have more planning time coming up over the next few months so we will be able to use some of that information. I know that some of the visual arts organisations have been thinking about some of the information they have been sending, the work they've put around the exhibitions themselves etc. so there have been some very practical changes on those levels.

DR: The recent Theatre Bay area project in the US identified that a strong familiarity with the story increased anticipation and increased anticipation results in greater impact. It was interesting that reading lots of reviews didn't make a big difference, being familiar with the cast or the director didn't make a big difference but familiarity with the story did seem to make a big difference. We need to probe this further because there may be a chicken and egg situation going on but there are some interesting implications for marketers about trying to grow awareness about the nature of the experience people are coming to because they think that will help them understand what the impact is they should be expecting.

SC: *The idea of familiarity with the story is tricky for Forced Entertainment because all the work is devised, it's very avant-garde, very often there is no narrative. So it's very hard to know how to give someone enough information for them to be willing to take the risk. Are there any examples of people who have been able to communicate aspects like this for work that might be quite unusual or perceived as difficult?*

DR: Some of the more avant-garde theatres that worked in the Theatre Bay project have found that they might be concentrating on particular areas of the impact. It might be that the intellectual elements can be stronger (particularly with plays) whereas some of the other venues that are programming more comedic work or

musicals will be seeing stronger impacts on the emotional resonance. So it may be that you are not trying to look across all of the impact constructs; there may be one that is really significant for your audiences in terms of why they want to engage with you and that you can work more deeply with that.

Helen Davies, Traverse Theatre: *Were there any differences across the different countries in recent research projects you've undertaken in Scotland and the US?*

DR: Yes, but can we come back to that one as we will be covering that later?

Delegate: *Has the research suffered by having to be done over a particular time period in terms of programming available and would you have done it differently in any way?*

DR: The key thing we learned from the LARC project is that we did quite a lot of work to engage the artistic staff up front. Alan came over from the US and we presented to the artistic directors and programmers. There was also the whole process of them completing the surveys around what results they were expecting. What we didn't help with much was the conversation about the results. Now we are much more interested in that organisational reflection process and working with programmers and marketers to have that conversation. That has been the key learning for us.

SO: It would have been helpful to have had those conversations facilitated across the group. Coming out of 2008, all LARC members wanted to continue the good work being done during the European Capital of Culture year and we were trying to find a different way of looking at success. The executive directors of the group seemed to be much happier with it, it was the artistic ones that took a little bit more persuading because they felt they were being questioned about their decisions.

Andrew Burton: *Has any similar research been done on non attenders?*

DR: I can't immediately think of anything on non attenders. Do you mean the impact they would expect if they went?

AB: *Their emotional disengagement, if you like.*

DR: There has been work done at a community level that looks at how a community changes over time and this obviously would include both attenders and non attenders but I can't think of a specific project looking at non attenders.

Lis Jennings, Almeida Theatre: *Did you feed back to the people who completed the survey about the impact that it had had?*

DR: When the surveys were distributed, it said that a copy of the report would be available on the LARC web site at <http://www.larc.uk.com/knowledge-bank/>

It was optional whether they wanted to include their contact details so we were not able to email everyone separately.

Delegate: *You said the better prepared the audiences are, the deeper the impact. My organisation does lots of plays and we do have stories. But how did some of your more music based organisations pick up from that because that is not seen as narrative based?*

DR: With music we were asking a lot of questions such as 'Did you listen to a recording of the work to prepare for the concert?', 'Did you read some notes about the composer?' as well as questions about reading reviews and previews which we would have asked attenders of other art forms too. It is very different for different organisations; in some cases, we are talking about much more educationally focused activity.

Beckie Smith, Roses Theatre Tewkesbury: *A music organisation in Sheffield has been doing nice things with Spotify playlists, it's on their web site and YouTube and this gives an actual flavour of the experience.*

Delegate: *One of the original aims was for the findings to be used as an advocacy tool but did you say there wasn't enough consistency of response and that each organisation has had individual learnings but the results have not been able to be used for advocacy across the consortium?*

SO: The research has revealed some hard results but the easiest thing has been able to talk about what we do in a different way. Members of LARC meet regularly with the city council which funds all of us. It is allowing us to have different conversations about the economic impact our funded arts activity has but we are not using the results of the research collectively in the way we thought we might use it.

DR: There have been three key projects to mention since the LARC project:

- Australia Council for the Arts (artistic vibrancy initiative)
- Funder-supported capacity building in the US
- National Endowment for the Arts

Through these projects, we have seen some interesting developments of the protocols

This has included some simplification of the impact constructs. For example in Liverpool we asked separate questions about emotional resonance and spiritual value and we found the responses to these questions tend to track one another very closely so we have conflated those two questions. In Australia we experimented with asking questions about the different works within a concert format whereas at Liverpool Phil we asked about concerts as a whole but there is always a tension about what the unit of measurement should be. Also, gallery visitors may have visited different areas or floors of an exhibit so they would be answering about different experiences.

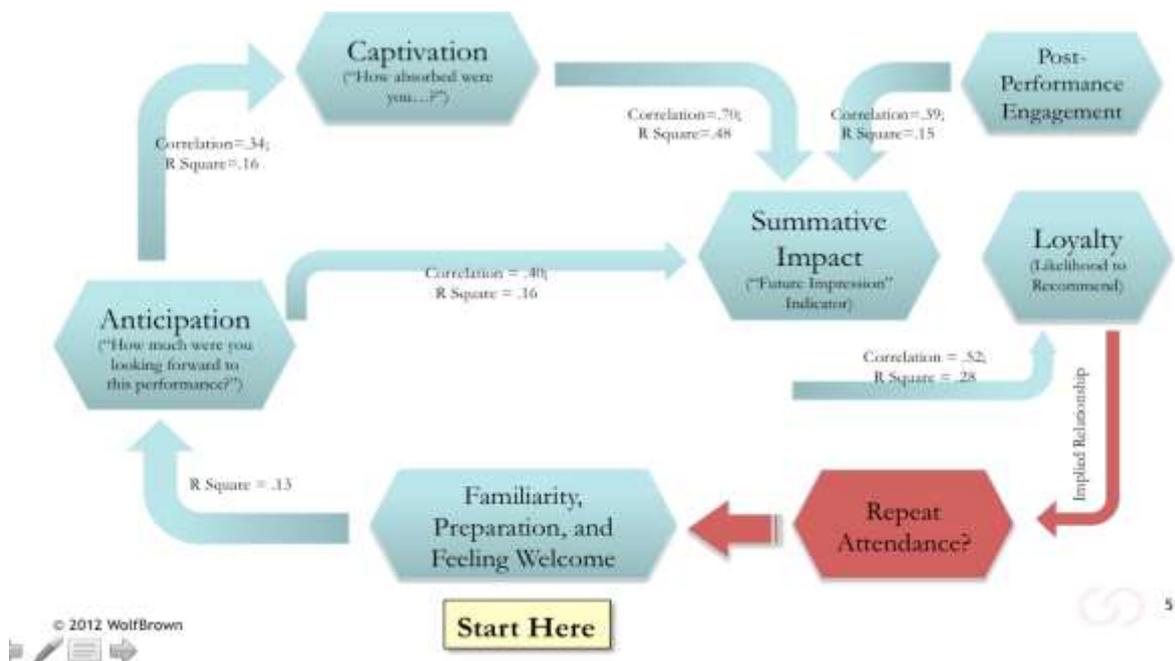
The Theatre Bay project has used solely online surveying whereas we used all sorts of methodologies in the LARC project. On the negative side, it diminishes the representativeness of the resulting data. On the positive side, it significantly reduces the effort level for each organisation involved. It also significantly reduces the cost. With the Theatre Bay project we received almost 19,000 surveys, an average response rate of 45 per cent.

Another positive about online surveying is that we have been able to improve the timeliness of reporting. The online survey results are automatically uploaded by an API into a customised dashboard for each organisation so you can come in each morning and see your results.

With LARC, we wanted to look at different ways of defining success but for the Theatre Bay project, the stated objective was “to engage individual theatres in a meaningful discussion of their impact roles” so we have learned how this work can have most impact on organisations.

I wanted to share this framework with you, concerning development of the work:

Readiness and Impact: Progression of Key Associations



The diagram illustrates the key relationship between readiness, impact and loyalty. This is based on the 19,000 surveys from the Theatre Bay area dataset.

Finally, we have a mantra in our office: ‘Interesting isn’t good enough.’ If you are going to do research, what are you doing to do as a result of having done it? Below

are a few examples of how we have been developing practical application of the work:

- Soliciting feedback in itself deepens engagement which, in turn, magnifies impact
- Organisational reflection process
 - Understanding the consequences of programming decisions in terms of impact, even in an artistically driven organisation
 - Checking impact of productions or exhibitions against goals
 - Using impact data to reflect on mission
- Developing 'impact profiles' of touring productions (use by others)
- Developing messaging to build 'attainable expectations' that can be fulfilled - patrons who arrive without some sense of what they want out of the experience are less likely to report intrinsic outcomes
- Tailoring pre- and post-engagement activities
- External reporting and making the case

Want to learn more?

AMA Conference 2008: Measuring the Intrinsic Impact of the Arts, Alan Brown:

www.a-m-a.co.uk/uploads/Event%20reports/PartThreeSeminars08ConferenceReport.pdf

How Audiences and Visitors are transformed by Cultural Experiences in Liverpool:

www.larc.uk.com/knowledge-bank/

Counting New Beans (Theatre Bay Area publication):

http://theatrebayarea.org/Membership/membership_2_ordersummary.cfm?order=100

Tools and tips:

www.intrinsicimpact.org

Questions and answers

Helen Davies, Traverse: *What were the differences between the different countries?*

DR: One of the differences that I found striking was that the response rates in the United States are higher. When we came to the UK project, we only had that US project so we expected a similar response rate. In the US the original project had 47 per cent response rate and then a 45 per cent response rate for the Theatre Bay project. LARC achieved between a 29 and 43 per cent response rate. I think this says something interesting about how US audiences engage with their arts organisations. In the US, supporting an arts organisation is part of being a good member of the community. In Australia, response rates were much more like those in the UK. We don't have enough data to be able to comment on the different levels of intrinsic impact with various art forms in different countries. For example, responses to visual arts were only measured in the LARC project. If you look at theatre, I would

say there is nothing I have seen in the US data that I find surprising but there are similarities; for example, decision makers report higher impacts. Also there is greater intellectual stimulation with plays but more emotional resonance with musicals.

Anwen Cooper, The Fun Fed: *Do you have any thoughts about the relationship between impacts and value?*

DR: In the surveys we asked 'Did you think the experience was value for money?' which had something like a 94 per cent positive response rate. Paid for attendances reported higher impacts than free attendances. In the US, single ticket buyers report higher impacts than subscribers. This is interesting and counter intuitive. It may be that frequent theatre goers and subscribers consider themselves to be very sophisticated and discerning and may be more critical due to the number of productions they have seen.

SO: For a lot of the organisations in Liverpool, we are very practically carrying on with some of the questions. Many of us are doing much more surveying so we are carrying on this work in our own small way.