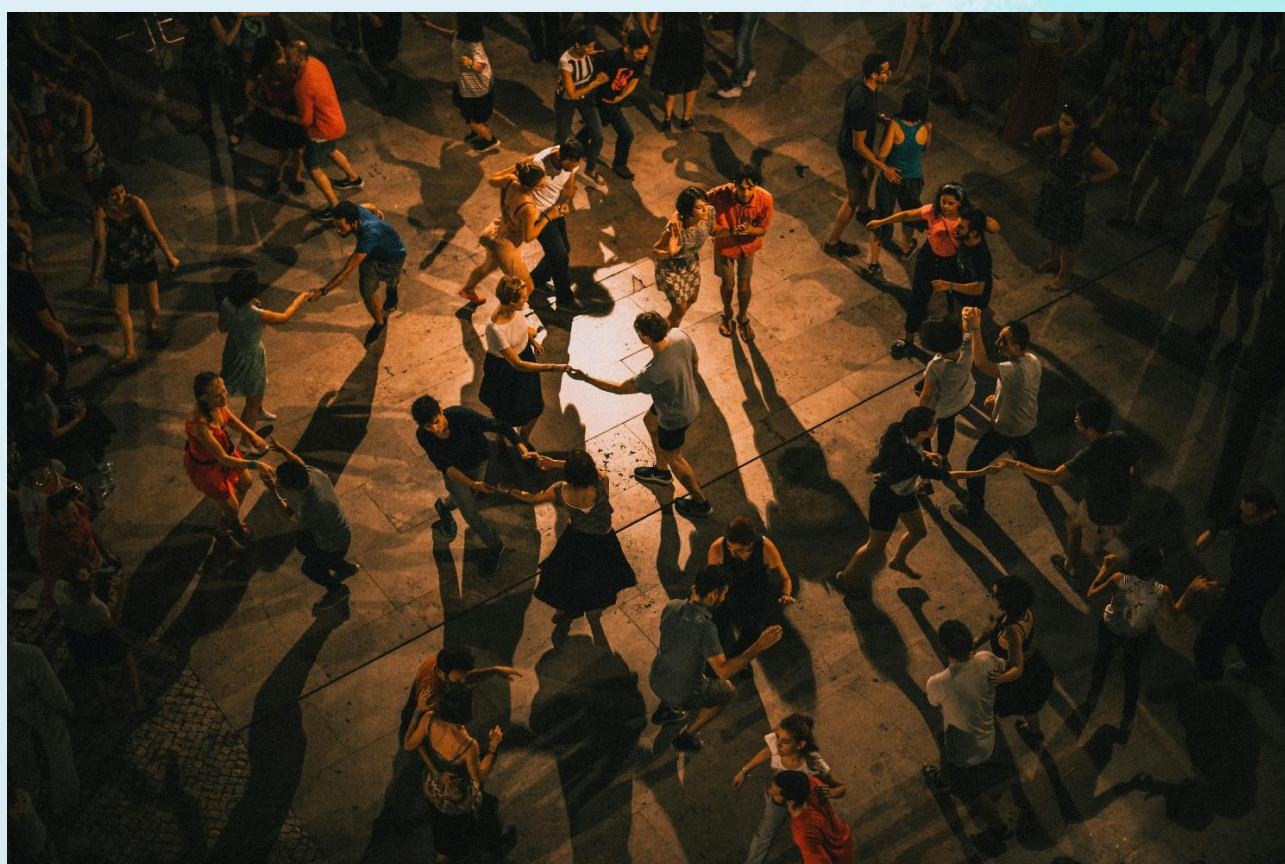


Evidence brief: a framework of the determinants of arts and cultural engagement

July 2024



Introduction

This briefing describes key headlines from the Social Biobehavioural Research Group's research into the determinants of arts and cultural engagement. The findings here are summarised from our research paper: *"fRAMework of the Determinants of Arts aNd Cultural Engagement (RADIANCE): integrated insights from ecological, behavioural and complex adaptive systems theories"*. We encourage reading this paper, [available online](#), in full before using findings to develop policies or services.

Headlines

- Arts and cultural engagement (ACEng) is ubiquitous across human cultures. But some people are more likely to engage than others.
- Previous initiatives have attempted to address barriers to ACEng at individual levels (considering characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position). However this is an oversimplification, and addressing individual barriers alone is unlikely to improve rates or equity of ACEng.
- A new framework “RADIANCE” conceptualises more than 30 determinants of ACEng within a dynamic multi-level system, offering a more contextualised approach and advanced our understanding of barriers people may face.
- This framework can be applied by arts and cultural organisations, policy makers, funders and other stakeholders to help ensure that all those who wish to engage in arts and culture can.

Background

Arts and cultural engagement (ACEng) is ubiquitous across every human culture since at least palaeolithic times. Furthermore, over the past few decades there has also been a growing body of research demonstrating the **social and cultural value of ACEng**, including for education, criminal justice, society, health, and wellbeing.

However, ACEng is currently **unevenly distributed**, demographically, socio-economically, geographically and politically. This inequality in engagement actually goes against human rights identified by the United Nations General Assembly to ‘participate in the cultural life of the community’ and ‘to enjoy the arts’. In fact, disparities in access to the arts could also be **exacerbating health and social inequalities**.

Our research therefore explores the following crucial questions:

1. What are the “determinants” of ACEng? I.e. the factors that act as facilitators or barriers to people’s engagement; and

2. How can they be optimised to ensure that arts and culture, and all their benefits, are accessible to everyone?

Moving beyond individuals

Current efforts to understand differences in ACEng have **largely focused on individual or “downstream” characteristics** such as age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position. In this oversimplification, other factors operating at neighbourhood or societal levels have often been overlooked and therefore opportunities for meaningful change in rates or equity of ACEng are limited.

Research from a wide range of disciplines can help us to understand predictors of ACEng with more nuance, including **larger ‘upstream’ social, societal, economic and political factors**. For example, psychologists have shown the influence of education, childhood experiences, parental background and personality on interest and engagement in the arts and urban geography research has identified how the location of cultural facilities and distribution of arts employment can affect engagement patterns.

To date, this work has largely occurred in silos and as a result risks failing to acknowledge the complexity of the whole system. To respond to this need, our research aimed to synthesise existing knowledge on determinants of ACEng into one **interdisciplinary theoretical framework**. You can read more about our methodology in the [full paper](#).

RADIANCE: a new framework

In the RADIANCE framework we have identified **more than 30 different factors that can act as determinants of ACEng**, depicted below.

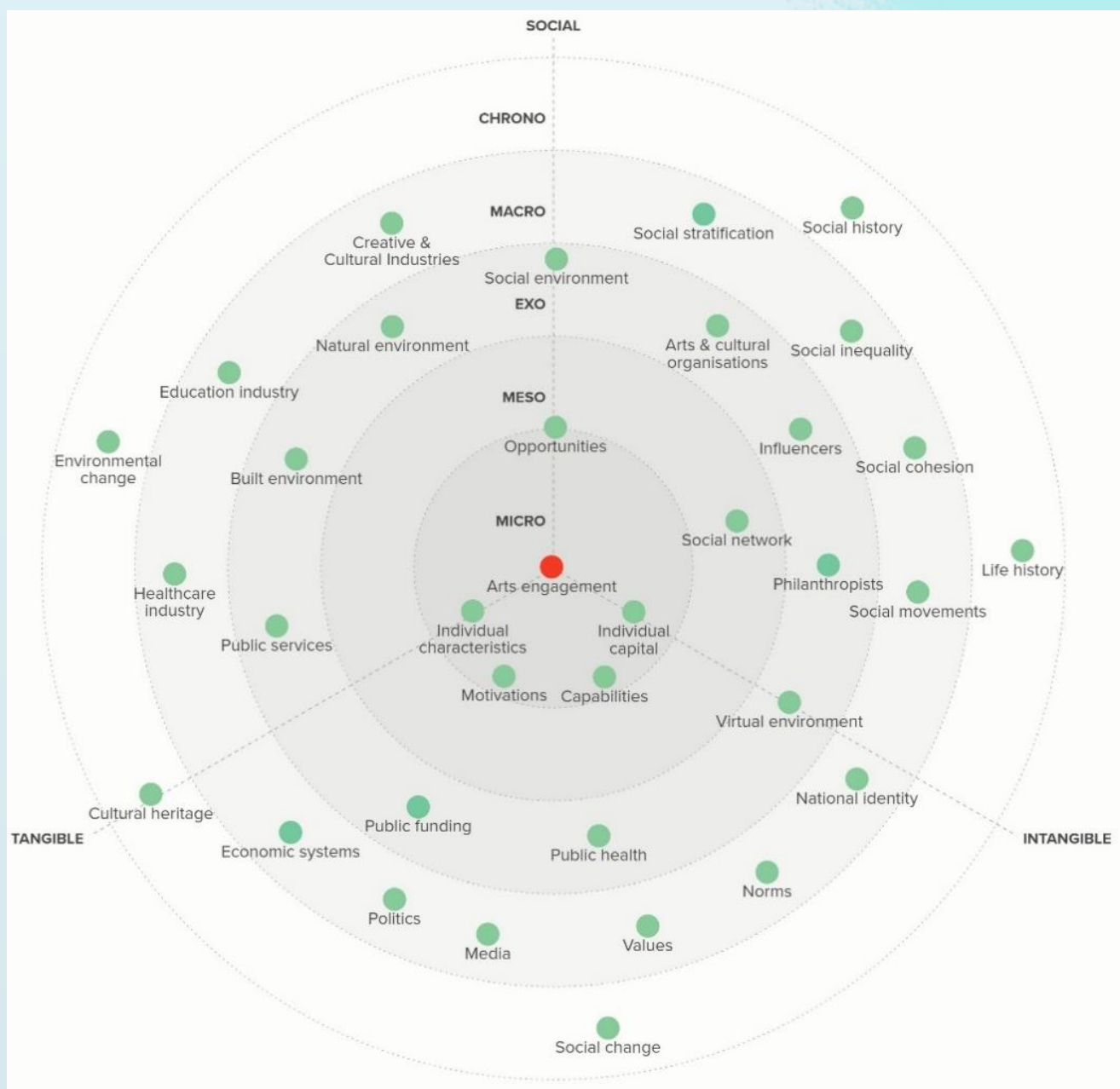
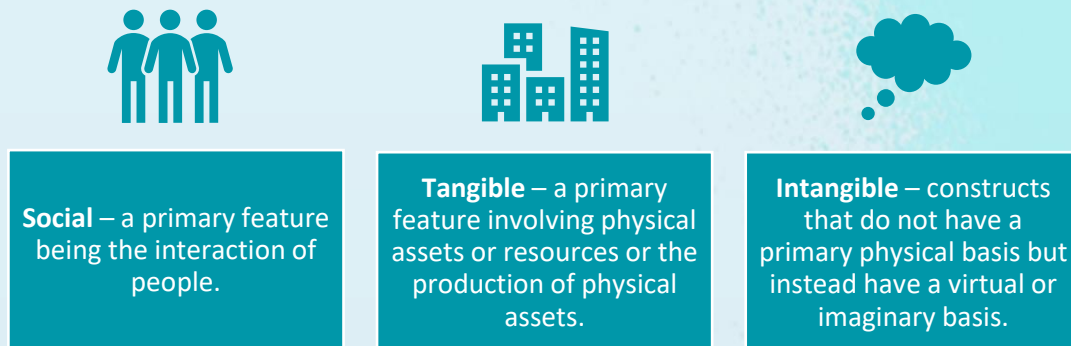


Figure 1: The RADIANCE framework of determinants of arts and cultural engagement.

The determinants in the framework can be broadly categorised in to the following three areas:



Importantly, these factors also exist on multiple different levels. This means whilst some work at the individual level, others are much larger - operating across societies and lifetimes.



Microsystem: A person's immediate environment, including day-to-day interactions and interpersonal relations.

Mesosystem: "A system of microsystems" e.g., how school and home interact to create a mesosystem.

Exosystem: Microsystems interacting in ways that affect the individual, but do not contain them e.g., the neighbourhood.

Macrosystem: The culture and social structures individuals are situated in.

Chronosystem: Developments that occur across the lifetime.



Take a look at our [interactive visualisation of the RADIANCE framework online](#) to explore the determinants in greater detail and read their definitions.

When using the RADIANCE framework it is important to keep in mind several considerations:

- Each **individuals' experience of ACEng will be unique** and the relative importance of different determinants will vary.
- Determinants also **interact with each other dynamically** and may result in effects which are not linear or directly proportionate. RADIANCE deliberately does not include causal arrows between different factors as insufficient work has currently been done to demonstrate which factors should be linked and which direction these arrows should go.
- Factors within the model are not discrete or static, so determinants of ACEng will always be **evolving over time**.

Case study: Audience development initiatives in the arts

One common approach to try and increase ACEng has been to focus on audience development, for example through **initiatives reducing ticket prices to arts experiences**. However, these schemes have had limited success. RADIANCE can help us to understand why.

Schemes offering reduced ticket prices focus primarily on certain parts of the RADIANCE framework, including individual behaviours (**capabilities, opportunities and motivations**) and needs or the practices of **arts and cultural organisations** such as marketing, ticketing practices, commissioning and programming.

In isolation, these schemes risk failing to account for many other relevant factors we can see in RADIANCE. For example, **economic systems** could influence how much leisure time people have available for arts and culture, and the **built environment** could influence whether people have venues or transport easily available to them. This means that, in spite of cheaper tickets, people may still be prevented from engaging with arts and culture due to other barriers.

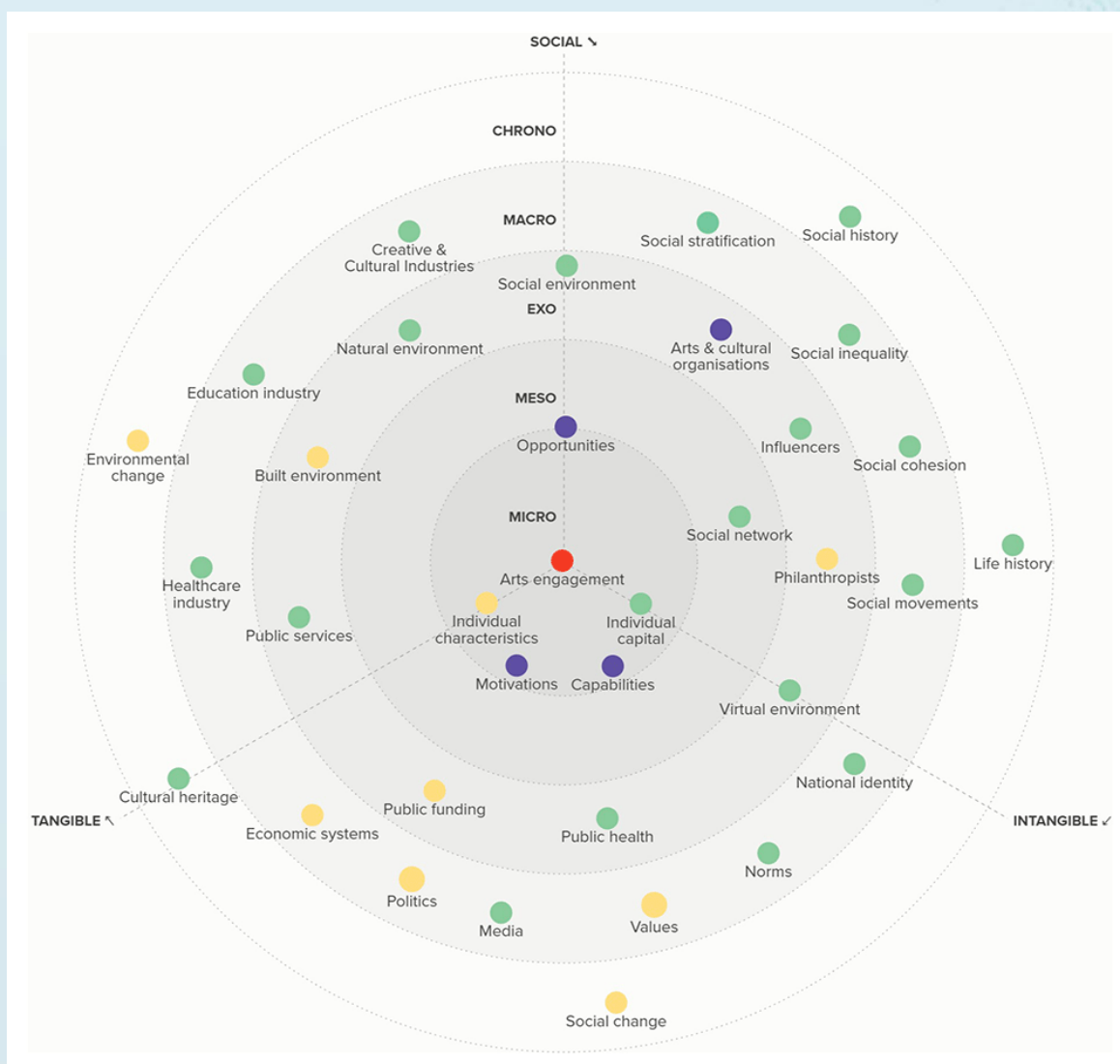


Figure 2: Example factors considered in some audience development initiatives (shown in purple), and some of the wider factors that needed to be taken into account to increase ACEng but were not (shown in yellow).

Implications for policy, practice and research

The RADIANCE framework presents a usable model which supports with articulating, understanding, and explaining the determinants of ACEng. The main implications are threefold:

1. Enhancing arts and cultural engagement

While past work has focused on individual characteristics as determinants of ACEng (e.g. age, gender or wealth), RADIANCE shows that it is not these characteristics but rather how these characteristics influence individuals' capabilities, opportunities and motivations that is important. In other words, **even in areas of high social deprivation, individuals can engage in the arts if they are given appropriate support and resources.**

Insights from behavioural change can help policymakers and practitioners to provide this support. For example, the [behaviour change wheel](#) (a tool for identifying and designing behaviour change interventions) shows that psychological capabilities can be enhanced through educational initiatives (e.g. providing information about how to engage with local arts and cultural activities) and training (e.g. providing lessons or workshops to develop artistic skills), while automatic motivation can be enhanced through enablement (e.g. making activities affordable or free) or modelling (e.g. running public campaigns showing role models engaging). These proposed interventions draw in other meso-to-chrono-level factors, demonstrating how addressing barriers in a meaningful way can't just occur at individual levels.



Reflection exercise: Think about an arts or cultural activity that you are involved in, professionally or personally. How have you tried to increase engagement in the past? Which factors on the RADIANCE framework did this address? Which factors were missing and how could they be acknowledged in future initiatives?

2. Monitoring arts and cultural engagement

Additionally, RADIANCE can be used to develop more **indicators of barriers and enablers of ACEng at a national and international level.** This will support accountability to track and improve ACEng rates globally as well as help continue to develop our understanding of relevant determinants.



Reflection exercise: How might the factors in the RADIANCE vary in a broader international context, including low-income and global south countries?

3. Implications for researching ACEng

Finally RADIANCE has implications for research, highlighting how **experiments and observational study designs can be optimised** to remove biases that could be present if researchers aren't properly taking account of these rich determinants.



Reflection exercise: How could the RADIANCE framework inform your research design? Does it highlight any additional confounders or moderators to consider in observational research, barriers that could affect fair recruitment into trials, or factors beyond the individual that should be explored in qualitative research?



Visit the [RADIANCE page on our website](#) for a roundup of all resources relating to framework, including the full paper, online visualization, introductory animation, and recording from our launch webinar. You can also browse our wider research, resources, and training.

Contact

Social Biobehavioural Research Group
Department of Behavioural Science and Health
University College London
1-19 Torrington Place
London WC1E 7HB

sbbresearch@ucl.ac.uk • www.sbbresearch.org • [@UCL_SBB](https://twitter.com/UCL_SBB)

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