

INTRODUCTION

Rural Touring Handbook

FOR EUROPEAN
CULTURAL AGENCIES
& ENTREPRENEURS
IN HUNGARY & ROMANIA

A guide to creating a rural touring network in your European region

INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been produced by Take Art for the RIOTE2 project. Working with two of our partners, Shoshin Theatre in Romania, and Control Studio Association in Hungary, it has specifically been written for people and cultural organisations who wish to create a rural touring model in their own regions.

Set up in 1987 as a rural touring scheme in SW England, Take Art is delighted to share our expertise in community-based work and our knowledge of the rural touring sector.

Take Art believes
"The arts are indispensable; the arts are part of our lives; the arts are enriching; the arts are part of the educative process. Without the arts, we believe we are poorer human beings".

The aim of this handbook is to

- provide a background to the existing rural touring sector in England;
- act as a useful practical guide to organisations wishing to create a rural touring model.

"Community-based work is among the most vibrant and innovative areas of contemporary arts practice. Its unique mixture of the routine and the magical often depends on the commitment and imagination of local practitioners, performance companies and development workers."

François Matarasso

This handbook starts with a glossary of words common to rural touring in England together with their definitions.

It explains the 'essential ingredients' of rural touring, the questions you need to answer to get started and, using Take Art as a model, gives a helpful insight into both setting up an agency and making the arts activity happen.

And finally, it outlines the history of rural touring and describes how it has developed into a thriving and important part of the UK arts sector.

The handbook has been translated into both Hungarian and Romanian and is available to download, either in its entirety or by chapters from www.riote.org

INTRODUCTION

A BIT ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sarah Peterkin and Ralph Lister have both worked for Take Art for many years. Take Art is part of Arts Council England's (ACE) national portfolio of arts organisations. Founded in 1987 in Somerset, UK, we provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to experience, participate and work within the arts. Take Art is one of the UK's most celebrated rural touring agencies, running countrywide projects that focus on supporting volunteer promoters, artists, children, young people and communities.

Sarah Peterkin, Rural Touring Director Take Art, has been leading the rural touring programme in Somerset since 1996. She has a wealth of experience in community development, bridging the gap between artists, companies and volunteer promoters to bring some of the best touring work available to small rural communities who might not otherwise experience it.

"Take Art is delighted to have been invited through RIOTE2 project to share our expertise in this area. Through our partnership with Control Studio Association in Pécs, Hungary and Shoshin Theatre in Cluj Napoca, Romania, we hope this handbook can inspire cultural agencies and entrepreneurs to test rural touring in their own localities."

Co-author and Executive Director, Ralph Lister has worked at Take Art since its early days in 1989. Ralph has steered the organisation to grow from a small rural touring agency to a multi-faceted arts development organisation working locally, nationally and internationally.

"Through our new European funded work, we are looking forward to setting up a rural touring network across Europe."

Introduction from our partner in Romania

Shoshin Theatre Association, Cluj Napoca Romania is involved in the creating, developing and sustaining of artistic, pedagogical and social projects, with a special emphasis on international collaboration. Besides developing its own artistic work, Shoshin also wishes to act as an umbrella under whose auspices people from different specialities can gather and create activities bordering theatre and other art forms always keeping in mind the human aspect, the paradigm of simplicity and openness.

Shoshin's Statement:

"In Romania we have many state and national theatres as well as theatre funded by the local municipality, in other words: subsidised theatres. You can find one in every major city and small town, but the independent and alternative landscape is not sufficiently developed. Also the infrastructure of the country is really weak without good transport networks. This means that most of the rural areas are isolated from the cultural hubs of the cities, and it is not possible for them to host, nor to produce artistic activities, such as theatre, dance, etc.. The theatre field needs more diversity and more real connections with the public, the artists need more possibilities to perform, and the rural areas need improvement, more access to culture and art. With the establishment of a rural touring network in our area, in the long run these needs can be served. As an association who (partially) wants to work as an umbrella organisation to develop a more profound connection with the audience this network will be a great opportunity to fit these needs."

Rural touring in a way used to exist in Romania up until the middle of the 90's, because especially in communism all these state theatres would tour with different shows in many of the villages surrounding them. But after 'democracy' hit and the market opened up, they started looking more and more towards the big festivals and more 'high class' arts events, so now the tradition of taking theatre to villages has virtually stopped

INTRODUCTION



completely. Except for very poor quality and dubious cabaret shows which basically feed off the villages because the prairie is completely empty and abandoned.”

Csongor Köllő & Kincső Veres

Introduction from our partner in Hungary

ControlStudio Association is a small organisation for community art and adult education in Dunaszekcső, in the South of Hungary, province of Baranya. For more details see the website: www.controlstudio.hu/en. Our goal is to support young people living or studying in the region through various programmes, festivals, training, film clubs and other professional meetings.

Control's Statement:

“In Hungary there are state theatres in almost every capital city of each county. Rural touring existed in socialist countries before '89. This they called 'landscaping'. The state theatres were obliged to tour in their region and to visit small villages. This is something actors didn't like (it was not prestigious work) and the public was also

organised by institutions (schools, municipalities) to visit these programmes. After 1990 the state theatres were no longer asked to accomplish this task, however, this policy also exists today, and some of the theatres still take care of touring in their region to some small extent.

A rural touring network could support this lack of cultural offer in small villages. On the other hand, I have the vision of a network with different characteristics. For 100 years the Hungarian theatre historians have been complaining: Why does only one way of making theatre dominate this profession in our country? Compared to any other European country, why in Hungary is it only the drama based, psycho-realistic, conventional way of playing the 'normal' way of making theatre?

In my interpretation this is a deficit of democracy in the sense of a lack of diversity. A new kind of system, such as a rural touring network, offers a possibility of a real alternative for theatre makers.”

Géza Pinter

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY OF COMMON UK RURAL TOURING TERMS

CAPACITY BUILDING:	the adult educative process where individuals obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools and other resources needed to competently become volunteer rural touring promoters
CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS:	professionals employed to develop arts initiatives; people who provide circumstances, finances and logistics for the creative process to grow; people who care about communities as well as live arts performances; people who make things happen
CURATE:	to put together, with great care and knowledge, a programme of touring work that will appeal to volunteer rural promoters
MENU:	an annual brochure, curated by the rural touring agency coordinator, that gives volunteer promoters information on all the touring shows on offer, together with technical details, costs and background information on how the programme works
PROMOTE:	to liaise with a rural touring agency, to choose a show from the menu, to publicise it, to sell the tickets, to host the whole event on the night
PROMOTERS (VOLUNTEERS):	the local (unpaid) individuals who liaise with the agency coordinator on all aspects of promoting their chosen touring show in their local hall. It is important that promoters are: respected and well liked in their own localities; have an ambition to promote professional performances by building their individual and group capacity; are realistic about the amount of time they will need to dedicate to each promotion. It helps if they are well connected with their local venue
RURAL:	localities outside cities and major towns where there is a lack of performance opportunity or provision, often with poor public transport links
RURAL TOURING AGENCY:	a very specific initiative run by a 'cultural entrepreneur,' or professional arts coordinator who works with volunteer promoters to promote affordable and memorable touring performances in their own non-dedicated spaces and venues. A rural touring agency relies on forming important networks: networks with volunteer promoters; networks with companies and artists; networks with other rural touring agencies in their region or country
RURAL TOURING NETWORK:	a rural touring network is (a) the collective name for all the volunteer promoters within one agency's jurisdiction, and (b) the collective name for those agencies linked together across the UK
VILLAGE HALL:	a venue where local people can gather, e.g. a community, church hall or cultural house, school hall etc., usually run by a group of local volunteers
VILLAGE, TOWN, CITY:	in the region of Somerset, UK, for example, there are 300 villages that are small rural settlements of 300-6,000 population. Anything over 6,000 is generally referred to as a town or market town. Cities are defined as large settlements, created by a charter and usually containing a cathedral. Somerset is a very rural region with only one small city