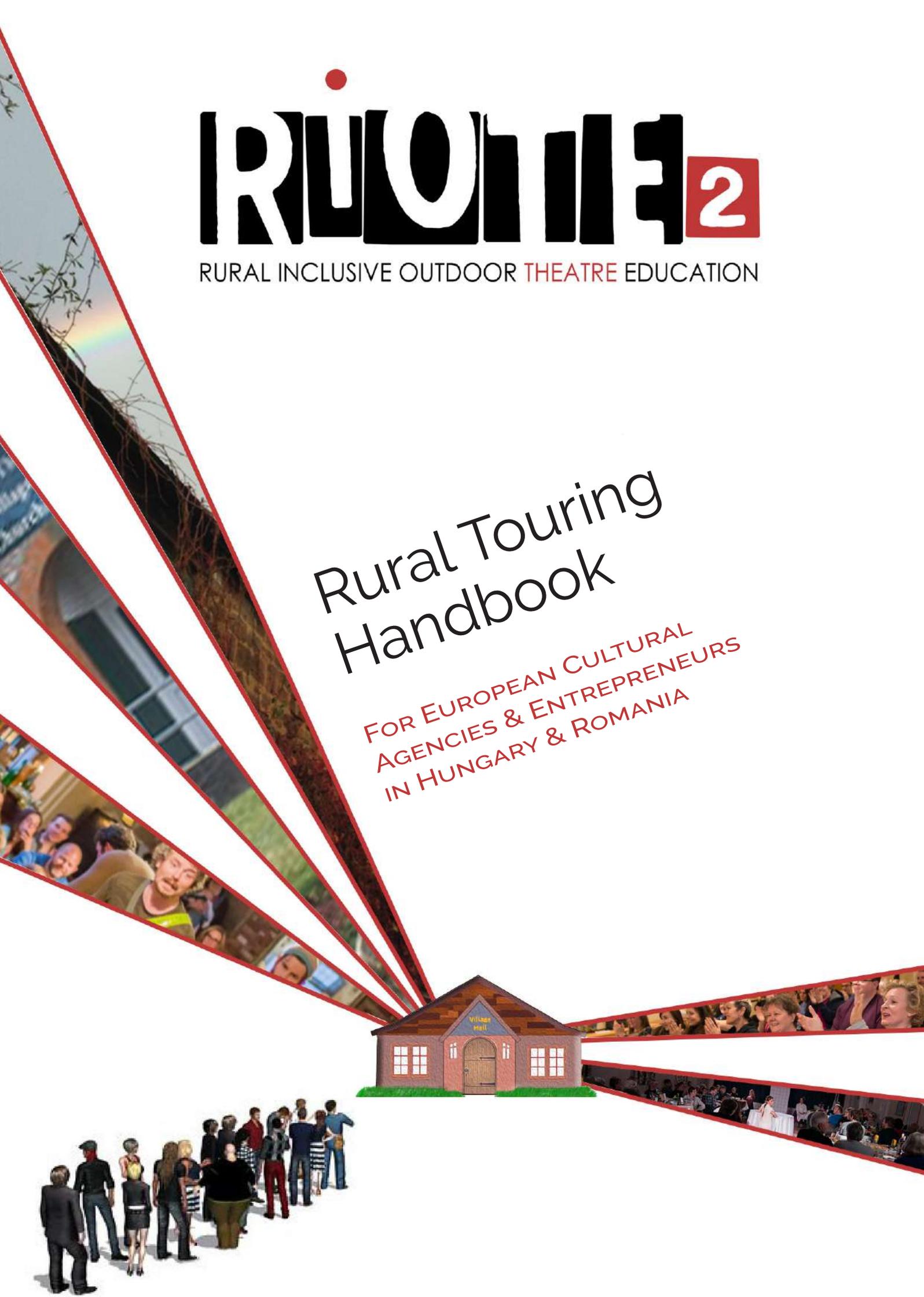


RIUE 2

RURAL INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR THEATRE EDUCATION

Rural Touring Handbook

FOR EUROPEAN CULTURAL
AGENCIES & ENTREPRENEURS
IN HUNGARY & ROMANIA



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The contents of the *Rural Touring Handbook* are believed to be correct at the time of going to press. The author cannot be held responsible for any errors, omissions or changes in the details given in the handbook or for the consequences of any reliance on the information provided.

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Rural Touring Handbook

FOR EUROPEAN CULTURAL
AGENCIES & ENTREPRENEURS
IN HUNGARY & ROMANIA



FOREWORD

Rural touring is hardly a new idea. For centuries musicians, storytellers, acrobats and actors have wandered Europe's roads in search of paying audiences, bringing news and novelty, thrills and controversy, before moving on (or escaping) to the next village. But the model of rural touring that was developed in Britain from the 1980s onwards was something else because, perhaps for the first time, it gave audiences real power in choosing what novelty, thrills and controversy they wanted. Projects in South Wales, Lincolnshire and other rural districts were established independently, and with slightly different ways of working, but they all set out to link professional performers with non-professional promoters.

The promoters were village hall committees or sometimes energetic individuals. They lived and worked in the places where they promoted theatre, music and children's shows. They shared the financial risk, knowing the importance of selling tickets. They took other risks too, bringing adventurous, even daring artists to their own communities and persuading friends and neighbours to open their minds to unexpected experiences. And they opened their homes and their hearts too, putting up actors in spare bedrooms and showing them what hospitality could mean in the countryside. The artists responded to this generosity by making better work, responding to the culture and concerns of rural people. Over decades, what emerged was not simply a new touring circuit, but a new kind of art and a new kind of audience, in which the intimacy of the hall – that common space in which people have shared stories for millennia – created experiences unlike anything found elsewhere.

Creativity, care and luck have seen the emergence of a hugely effective system that includes people living in rural and remote places in the cultural life of the nation. That inclusion is so valuable because it is based on genuine equality between professional and non-professional actors. Performer, promoter and – it must not be forgotten – the touring scheme that brings them together, have different and complementary roles. They share power and rewards: each depends on the others. As a result rural touring has never been about 'delivering', in the trite language policy-makers often use. It is a form of co-creation, not of the art (or at least not directly) but of the experiences people have through the art.

Years ago, when I first researched rural touring, I was astonished to discover just how profoundly these occasional performances could affect the life of a rural community. It happened not only because of the art that was shared, but because of how it came about; all the conversations, reflection, planning, organising and persuading on which it depended, and the shared experience that became part of a common memory. It seemed obvious that the rural touring model had profound lessons for the whole of the publicly-funded cultural sector, and it is disappointing that appreciation of its distinctive value is still so patchy. In these insecure, changing times, the need to reflect on and learn from this cultural work could not be greater.

François Matarasso
Community artist and author of *A Restless Art* (2019)

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

ABOUT RIOTE2	7
INTRODUCTION	9
GLOSSARY OF COMMON RURAL TOURING TERMS	12
CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT	13
WHAT IS A RURAL TOURING NETWORK?	13
WHY CREATE ONE	14
HOW COULD RURAL TOURING WORK IN HUNGARY?	16
HOW COULD RURAL TOURING WORK IN ROMANIA?	16
CHAPTER TWO: HOW DOES IT WORK?	18
WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF RURAL TOURING?	18
THE TYPICAL ANNUAL RURAL TOURING PROCESS	20
THE BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURING	21
CHAPTER THREE: GETTING STARTED	24
KEY QUESTIONS	24
POTENTIAL FUNDING PARTNERS IN HUNGARY AND ROMANIA	26
CHAPTER FOUR: SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY	30
TAKE ART EXPLAINED	30
STEP BY STEP GUIDE	31
• STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	31
• AIMS & OBJECTIVES	32
• KEY TARGETS	32
• FUNDING	32
• ARTISTIC POLICY	34
• RECRUITING LOCAL PROMOTERS	35
• OTHER POLICIES	35
CHAPTER FIVE: MAKING IT HAPPEN	36
STEP BY STEP GUIDE	36
• ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	36
• CHOOSING COMPANIES	37
• TIMELINE	39
• MENU LAUNCH	39
• AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT	39
• PROMOTER TRAINING	40
• MONITORING AND EVALUATION	40
• WHAT NEXT?	40
CHAPTER SIX: HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT	41
HISTORY OF RURAL TOURING	41
NATIONAL RURAL TOURING FORUM	42
REGIONAL NETWORKS	45
ARTS FUNDING IN ENGLAND	46
NATIONAL POLICY	46
OUTSIDE ENGLAND:	46

ABOUT RIOTE2



About RIOTE2

RIOTE2 is a collection of European theatre companies, programmers and film makers who are passionate about rural and outdoor performance.

We are researching diverse styles of theatre which can surprise, challenge and relate intimately to people's lives. We are interested in outdoor theatre's potential to reach new audiences who are not necessarily theatre goers.

The UK has a rural touring network which is a nationwide initiative developed over the past 40 years. It takes brilliant performances to remote communities with the help of local people. The UK is one of a few countries to have such a network and we, at RIOTE2, want to create one that reaches across the whole of Europe.

Seven companies from Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovenia and UK created Rural Inclusive Outdoor Theatre Education (RIOTE2). Funded by Erasmus+, RIOTE2 is the second half of a three year project bringing the companies together on a skills sharing programme to learn new approaches. There is also a focus on developing a rural touring model specifically in Hungary & Romania.

The partners are Broken Spectacles/Dartington Arts (UK), Control Studio Association (HU), Kud Ljud (SI), Shoshin Theatre (RO), Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo (IT), Take Art (UK), Utca-Szak (HU).

The RIOTE2 website has other useful articles and documents, e.g. *Why Don't We Do It In The Road* (a personal guide to outdoor interactive theatre) by RIOTE2 partner, Kud Ljud, Slovenia. Also this project has produced three documentary films from Control Studio Association, Hungary.

Visit www.riote.org



May Contain Food by Protein. Photo credit: Richard Tomlinson

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

CONTEXT



Brilliance by Farnham Maltings Photo credit: Shayne Shaw, Beyond Infinity Photography

CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT

WHAT IS A RURAL TOURING NETWORK?

WHY CREATE ONE?

HOW COULD IT WORK IN HUNGARY & ROMANIA?

WHAT IS A RURAL TOURING NETWORK?

At its simplest a rural touring network in England can be described as a series of physical spaces that are connected across a defined geographic area by a co-ordinating organisation. These spaces could be village or community halls, churches, schools, outside areas or the occasional volunteer-run rural theatre. The co-ordinating agency could be the arts department in a local government/council, an independent arts organisation, a venue, company or an individual cultural entrepreneur who has the interest and funding to develop such a network.

The agency coordinator curates a programme of professional touring arts work (ie theatre, dance, music, spoken word, circus etc.) and offers these performances to a network of carefully recruited local volunteers, with an ambition to promote high quality shows in the heart of their own communities.

CONTEXT



Fine Chisel Theatre. Photo credit: Paul Blake

WHY CREATE ONE?

The touring infrastructure for performers and performance companies in rural regions in Europe might not be very well developed but this will obviously vary country to country. By touring infrastructure we mean a series of technically equipped theatres or arts spaces staffed by skilled programmers who curate and promote a programme of arts events. Such an infrastructure exists in the majority of UK towns and cities, enabling companies to take their shows on regional and national tours.

However, in UK rural areas, this inevitably means that the opportunities for performing arts companies wishing to tour can be problematic. In addition people and communities living in rural areas do not have geographic access to high quality arts events and are, therefore, culturally at a disadvantage. This is especially true if these communities do not have easy access, through good and affordable transport links, to professionally run theatre venues in their local towns and cities.

This is not fair. It is a policy issue for those government bodies that espouse a cultural

aim to provide the rural population with good access to high quality cultural activity. It means that children and young people living in those areas, the future and current audiences for the arts, are not being introduced to the wonder and imaginative delights that live performance bring. It means that a new potential audience for professional performing arts companies is being denied to them, and that the economic benefit of touring more widely is not being capitalised upon. The creation of a 'rural touring agency' can help redress this imbalance.

"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."

Article 27, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

To summarise: central to success is the understanding of, and commitment to, the need for rural touring. This belief has these founding principles:

- Rural audiences have a right, as much as their urban counterparts, to access a high

CONTEXT

- quality arts programme;
- Professional companies have a right to take their work to new, rural audiences.

The imperative that drives the development of rural touring is a willingness to collaborate which can be accompanied by a sense of isolation. The benefits of creating such networks include: greater bargaining power with artists and companies when negotiating fees; sharing of resources such as lighting and sound equipment across a network; sharing good practice, knowledge and learning; and collectively raising the profile of the network.

There is no single template for a rural touring agency, only its initial viability. It requires a minimum number of spaces to create a touring circuit, with the assumption that most shows will only be performed once in each area, as a consequence of drawing on a limited potential audience. The spaces need to be within reasonable travelling proximity to enable companies to easily travel and set up for 'one night only' performances. It also means these professional companies need to develop shows that are flexible and adaptable enough to slot into this kind of touring schedule and within these logistic constraints.

Touring agencies in one area can link with fellow organisations in other areas to create a 'network of rural touring agencies'. These might sit within a region or across a whole country or they could even straddle several countries. For example, in South West England, each regional county (Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Dorset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire) work together under the umbrella of the SW Rural Touring Network.

From a national perspective, there is an even larger network, an umbrella body representing all the English rural touring agencies. This is the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF). It also has membership from rural touring organisations in Scotland and Wales. These networks are explained more fully in the following chapters.

There are a number of pitfalls when developing a rural touring agency but these can be avoided if one has an understanding of the uniqueness of the rural touring culture.

Policy:

Rural touring in England is not possible without funding support to build and underpin the infrastructure. This means making the arguments to politicians and cultural policy makers about the rationale and expressing the needs and the rights of rural communities. It also means providing them with the evidence to back up the arguments as well as proven successful models that can address the need.

Strategy:

This is the organised, structured approach to enable rural touring to succeed and thrive. It is about setting up and supporting the practical constituent parts of rural touring: the professional coordinators, the venues and touring companies. It is about developing the components of a sustainable infrastructure.

Local 'Buy In':

Rural touring depends significantly on local people, the volunteers, to become arts promoters. It is empowering to offer these individuals (or groups) choice over the events that will be taking place in their communities. The local volunteers will be instrumental to the success of a rural touring network. Their willingness to take on this role and build their capacity is vital and, therefore, the recruitment of the 'right' sort of person is also crucial.

It is important to note that many communities feel justly very proud of the existing cultural life in their village. They are almost bound to have regular church and school activities, perhaps local festivals and celebrations. The offer to become promoters and take part in this new rural touring model should be carefully approached. In Take Art's experience it is best to approach this as a 'complement' to the already rich and varied culture in their local community.

CONTEXT

This handbook focuses principally on how the English touring model has developed. It is not the only model. Others exist in France, Norway, Sweden, Wales and areas of Scotland where rural touring works differently. These are referenced in the final chapter.

HOW COULD RURAL TOURING WORK IN HUNGARY?

In Hungary, Control has run community theatre projects in Dunaszekcső with the involvement of the local community. Its aim is to develop the theatre aspect of the Weekdays/Pictures Days Festival (Képköznepok) to realise participatory theatre projects and also to invite other theatre shows for an eventual 'barter'. The neighbouring village of Dunaszekcső is Bába and another little town in the province is Pécsvárad that they would like to connect in a small regional network. The three settlements are on the line of the Hungarian Pilgrim's Way: a special initiative to set up a Hungarian rural network following a concept of what culturally or geographically connects each location.

In Hungary the aims are:

- to bring theatre shows to geographically disadvantaged villages. This might be villages (cities not excluded) alongside the river Danube in a North-South line. This would be a parallel way with the St. Mary Pilgrim's Way in Hungary: <http://magyarzarandokut.hu/terkep> Or alternatively to carry out a social-theatre project in the already existing local network in Borsod County: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borsod>;
- to connect those villages in a network, possibly along a common theme, such as geographical (e.g. Danube) or a cultural context (e.g. St. Mary Pilgrim's Way);
- to create a dialogue and a common journey with the local inhabitants through 'performance bartering' and participatory theatre projects;
- to give space in such a network more for independent theatre companies not excluding state theatres as well.

With the following objectives:

- To develop the already existing relationship in three rural settlements with local inhabitants through participatory theatre projects: Bába, Dunaszekcső, Pécsvárad;
- To start building the idea and the base of a Secret-Anthropological Theatre Festival in Zsámbék (lead partner is Zsófia Rideg the dramaturge of the national theatre and the organizer of the MITEM Festival) and the Mayor of Zsámbék;
- To find a sponsor to invite other performances to the three villages and to create the context of a possible 'theatre barter' project where both local and professional performances are presented.

HOW COULD RURAL TOURING WORK IN ROMANIA?

Shoshin has already put on theatre performances in Romanian villages. They have played or organised guest performances in culture houses, community rooms, village squares, gardens and churches. The overall reaction to them was always positive, the inhabitants were enthusiastic and curious, thanking them for the experience and wanting more. They strongly believe that in every village there is at least one person who wishes to develop more cultural activities in their settlement.

'Culture houses', most often a heritage of the communist era, can be a good foundation in terms of space for a future network. This is because almost all villages have them. Many of them have been recently renovated and are in good condition. Some are even equipped, others not. They also sometimes differ in size, but most of them are large enough for small scale productions to be held. It would be ideal for performances with a cast of up to six people. There are also the squares and church gardens. Outdoor productions with low technical needs could always be held there.

A solid and dependable financial support for

CONTEXT



these kinds of activities would also allow theatre makers to really look at rural touring as a viable market, and this in turn would challenge them to adapt and create more and more work which would suit the possibilities as well as the needs.

Currently there are disparate efforts of single organisations, or sometimes even just individuals. Hai in Sat Association has recently closed a programme which brought bits of opera to ten villages surrounding Cluj.

There have been efforts elsewhere as well, in the form of travelling performances: Bánsági Vándorszínház and Cultură'n Șură are examples.

So, one could say that the stage is nearly set, contacts have been made, steps have been taken, and there is an evident need from both the side of culture/theatre, as well as those living in the target areas. But it needs to be taken to the next level, otherwise the efforts will dissipate. This can be done with a joint lobby on the part of the organisations that have already taken on such work. And of course, it needs also the actual political will from those who have the power to decide about supporting such endeavours.

In Romania, the aims would be:

- To develop a sustainable network with motivated promoters;
- To bring professional touring performances of theatre and dance (both from state theatres and independent theatres) to rural venues;
- To start a dialogue with the audience and locals.

With the following objectives:

- To work in the Transylvanian region between the Carpathians mountain range;
- To find 5 rural settlements with 5 motivated potential promoters who are open to the idea of rural touring;
- Find out from the promoters what kind of performances these settlements would like;
- To find 10 performances which are suitable for rural touring (in terms of the theme of the performances, the genre of the performances, the number of actors, the size of the setting, etc.);
- To hold one performance in each venue in each year.

HOW DOES IT WORK?



Libraries of Lost Memories by Shoebox Theatre. Clayton-Jane-Photography

CHAPTER TWO: HOW DOES IT WORK?

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF RURAL TOURING?

THE TYPICAL ANNUAL RURAL TOURING PROCESS

THE BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURING

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF RURAL TOURING?

Rural touring is memorable, exceptional, exciting, ambitious and unique. It's also professional and not the poor relation of performances seen in dedicated venues such as theatres and arts centres. It's very sociable. It's about communities of people getting together, socialising in their own local venues whilst having a high quality arts experience.

"Rural touring matters because it does two things supremely well. First, it extends access to the arts to tens of thousands of people who do not otherwise see live performance from one year to the next. It also matters because it plays an important part in the social life of rural communities."

François Matarasso

HOW DOES IT WORK

Rural touring relies on making genuine partnerships with care between village individuals (volunteers) and a professional arts coordinator (or cultural entrepreneur) usually employed by a rural touring agency. The agency is also able to reduce the financial risk to the volunteer promoter and provide professional support and advice throughout the process.

Each side of the partnership agrees to certain agreed responsibilities. For example, these might typically be along the following lines:

The Coordinator is responsible for:

- recruiting a network of volunteer/s in rural communities with an interest in building their personal and collective capacity in order to become rural arts promoters;
- sourcing a 'menu' of professional touring performances that are memorable, enjoyable, diverse, affordable and appropriate to offer to small community venues;
- agreeing a fee with the touring company and an affordable price for the promoting group to pay towards this fee;
- coordinating booking requests to make workable touring schedules;
- making formal agreements (or contracts) with both parties;
- providing advice and support throughout the process;
- offering financial support towards the cost of the show;
- providing publicity and marketing support, such as tickets, posters, fliers, press releases;
- contracting, paying and liaising with the performance companies;
- advertising through digital marketing all performances, ie via the agency's website, Facebook presence, Twitter, Instagram etc.;
- providing online ticketing systems;
- producing and widely distributing seasonal programmes;
- attending the show on the night to offer support;

- audience research and feedback evaluation process;
- paying the touring company and invoice the promoter.

Volunteer Promoters Groups are responsible for:

- choosing their preferred performances from the 'menu' in liaison with the agency coordinator;
- booking their local venue and ensuring it complies with all insurance and licensing regulations;
- planning and promoting their event locally;
- publicising and selling tickets;
- ensuring the venue is safe, accessible, warm and welcoming to the audience;
- greeting and hosting the artists on the day;
- managing the event on the day, including front of house duties;
- introducing the show, if appropriate;
- submitting box office returns and evaluation feedback on the event;
- paying the rural touring agency the agreed fee.

The Artists/Company are responsible for:

- providing the coordinator with their publicity material, e.g. background information on both the show and the company, as well as posters and flyers;
- providing a generic press release for use by the promoter;
- making the coordinator fully aware of their technical and performance requirements;
- contacting the promoter in good time to confirm arrival time, hospitality needs etc.;
- arriving on time on the day of the show;
- performing the show as contracted;
- invoicing the agency after the event.

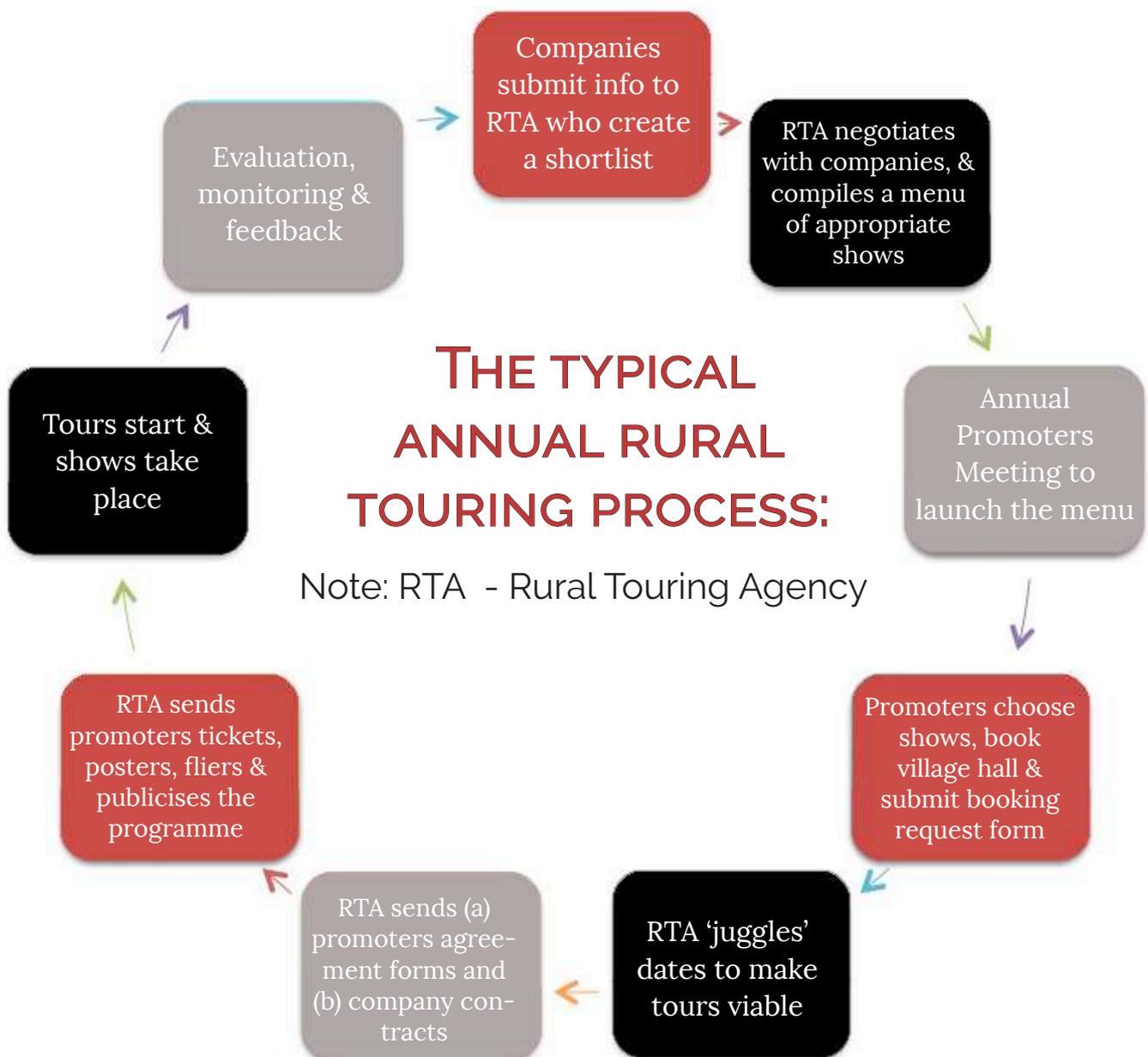
HOW DOES IT WORK?

THE TYPICAL ANNUAL RURAL TOURING PROCESS:

The typical rural touring process as shown in the flowchart below, is cyclical and well established as an effective system.

Further down in this handbook, you will find useful examples of some specific Take Art policies and strategies, such as:

- artistic policy;
- recruitment of volunteer promoters;
- methodology of selecting touring shows;
- promoter meetings;
- audience development;
- promoter training, capacity building;
- monitoring and evaluation.



HOW DOES IT WORK

THE BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURING

From the audience perspective:

Rural touring offers audiences numerous benefits. It provides live performance as a memorable and entertaining night out for audiences of all ages and backgrounds right in the heart of their communities. Other less obvious benefits include:

- Audience development: by bringing new professional touring work to new venues;
- Increasing access to the arts;
- Increasing participation in the arts;
- Offering affordable and accessible high quality live events;
- Contributing to the local economy, increasing spending in villages;
- Attracting new visitors to the area;
- Contributing to lifelong learning and education, through participatory workshop activity;
- Developing new audiences for all art forms;
- Supporting local community development and improving quality of life;
- Supporting and sustaining local facilities and venues;
- Overcoming the lack of public transport to attend theatres in towns and cities;
- Addressing government objectives such as, social inclusion, community involvement, health and wellbeing, community safety, promoting regeneration and citizenship etc..

In 2017 we asked our audiences...
What does Take Art mean to you?

"It means everything! Drama is so important, entertaining and educational...I love it."

"Opportunities to see a range of music and theatre in intimate spaces. I have enjoyed so many great performances over the years. Thank you."

"Arts delivered in rural venues, where theatre shows might not otherwise reach." "Excellent quality performances, right on the doorstep."

"Shows are always worth a gamble. Great community events...live performances and really high quality."

From the promoter's perspective:

Most of the following are personal benefits, individual capacity building, which can lead to community cohesion and improvement of the social fabric of village life:

- Developing skills and confidence of local people in the area of arts promotion;
- Developing critical response to artists' work;
- Developing marketing and event management skills;
- Building effective teams;
- Raising money for local needs;
- Building on existing activities and skills within villages;
- Enhancing community pride and sense of place, providing a focus for the community;

From the company's perspective:

There are also important benefits from the artists and companies perspective. We asked Helen Aldrich from UK RIOTE2 partner, Broken Spectacles, the following questions.

1. What are the attributes that make up a successful rural touring company?

We have had the pleasure of touring from South Devon to John O'Groats, the entire length of Great Britain through rural touring networks. We have seen some of the most spectacular countryside and met many wonderful people.

We have broken down on busy motorways, slept by campfires on Scottish cliff tops and cooked

HOW DOES IT WORK?

our dinner at sunset by stunning Highland lochs. The show you create is of course the most important factor in guaranteeing your success but the rural touring journey ahead of you is an exciting and challenging one. You, as a company will need to be resourceful in many regards when it comes to touring. Long drives have meant endless singing sessions, concocting meals in the back of vans, turns taken driving and navigating, sometimes after sleeping in obscure wild places because we had to get a weekly ferry early the next morning to a little island to perform.

These are the joys and sometimes the challenges of rural touring. The reason our shows are successful with rural touring audiences is the tone of the performance and our engagement with the audience. We use the fourth wall of conventional theatre a little when creating images in the story-telling but there is always the possibility of stepping out and ask questions, commenting or involving an audience member. The tone is one of clowning – vulnerable, playful, joyous and potentially tragic and our heroines tell touching stories physically with live music. These are tropes that often work, but by all means push the boundaries and try some thing wildly different!

2. What is the best way of marketing your show to a rural touring agency, and then to the local promoter and audiences?

Our initial point of contact was through festivals: big and small. Rural touring agencies want to see your work before they programme it and festivals provide that platform. Ask the festival organiser for the contacts of the programmers who were at the performances and get in touch with them, ask for feedback.

Once your show has been picked up, the next step is being selected by the local promoter. What are promoters looking for? This can differ greatly but the fact a community has a say in what is programmed is great because it means disappointment is rare.

We were told by Beaford Arts, rural touring organisation in North Devon that a rural touring performance is an evening event for the community not just a piece of theatre. Our first show *Head in The Clouds* was based on the life of France's first female aviator; we added a French Musette Ball at the end with live music and suggested villages accompany the show with a French meal. The show turned into a much bigger community experience with people eating, talking and dancing together. The reasons that promoters gave for choosing this show varied wildly: *'I'm a Francophile and lived in France in my twenties'*, *'We liked the idea of providing a French meal.'* Or *'we thought the Musette Ball at the end would be fun.'*

Our second show, *At Sea* was based on the story of the selkie and a North Devon school had planned to study the selkie myth that term so we had the school children sing a 'selkie' song at the beginning of the show. This meant we had one of our biggest rural touring audiences to date with parents coming who might not have normally.

3. What will be expected of you?

Versatility. No two village halls will be the same so make sure your show is spatially adaptable. Your Green Room (backstage area) will be in unusual spaces and you will find yourself warming-up in amongst the Sunday school toys and Women's Institute cake tins. You should be happy to incorporate mishaps into the show; we had a daytime power cut where all recorded music had to be replaced on the spot by our brilliant musician on the accordion. Be available at the get-in to chat with the promoter who will probably be hosting you that evening and again, at the end with the audience who will want to meet you, tell you what they thought and ask you about your work.

4. What are the benefits of rural touring from the company's viewpoint?

HOW DOES IT WORK



The David Hall Arts Centre. Photo credit: Nathan Sibley

Rural touring audiences have been some of our best. The proximity you have between performer and audience is exciting for everyone. Often audiences would not call themselves ‘theatre-goers’ but we’ve often found them more engaged than audiences in cities. When an audience enters a theatre they are entering the ‘sacred space’ of the performer but in a village hall the performers enter the villagers’ space and the dynamic is turned on its head. There is an exchange, a conversation, a dance between audience and performer.

“Being hosted in beautiful, far-flung parts of the country by extremely hospitable people certainly has its appeal but on top of this it has often brought moments of real artistic

exchange. One night was spent being taught old sea shanties by our Woolacombe host and his fellow choir members. Two years later, we returned with our subsequent show At Sea which I like to think was inspired by that evening spent singing around our host’s table.”

Helen Aldrich, Broken Spectacles,
RIOTE2 partner

Before setting up your rural touring agency and ‘making it all happen’, it would be advisable to ask yourself some key questions and to think about potential funding partners.

The next chapter will help to get you started.

GETTING STARTED

CHAPTER THREE: GETTING STARTED

KEY QUESTIONS

POTENTIAL FUNDING PARTNERS

KEY QUESTIONS

It might be useful start to spend some time answering the following questions. You should be able to summarise in a page: what your rural touring agency plans to do, including its aims and objectives, priorities and key targets. You might not have all the answers at this stage but it helps to look at the broad issues involved.

Please note both Shoshin Theatre & Control Studio Association have offered initial replies to the following questions. Their responses can be made available on request.

1. Why are you setting up a Rural Touring Network?

- Is it something you'd like to see happen in your area?
- Is it part of your job?
- Is it to meet demand? If so, can you demonstrate that demand / support?
- Does it contribute to local strategy or priorities? If so, whose?
- Is it to broaden access to the arts?
- Is it to help the artists and companies to get work?
- Is it to provide a service to a local rural community?
- Is it to build on existing activity in a more organised way?
- Other reasons?

2. What is the purpose of the Network?

- Try and describe in a paragraph the purpose

3. What are the project aims?

Elaborate on the purpose above by setting 3 or 4 key aims, e.g.

- To bring professional touring performances of dance, theatre, music to rural venues
- To create a sustainable local network of promoters and venues
- To provide a series of workshops and participatory activities linked to performances

4. What are the project objectives?

Identify the key milestones to achieve your aims above, e.g.

- To stage xxx performances in xxx venues by xxx
- To host xxx training sessions for local promoters by xxx
- To organise xxx workshops linked to performances by xxx

5. What geographical area will your network cover?

- Is it clearly defined?
- Is it easy to explain the area you are

GETTING STARTED

covering and who is eligible to take part in the network?

- Does it follow a distinct regional boundary?

6. What activities already take place in this area?

- Have you carried out a local audit of performances and activities?
- What type of performances take place?
- Who organises them?
- What are the venues / spaces?
- What times of year do they happen?
- Are there established links between venues / organisations?
- Do you know of volunteer promoters who would like to be part of this network?
- What sort of venues / spaces could be used?
- Are there existing audiences for this type of performance?

7. Who is involved or could be involved in the rural touring agency?

- Who are the organisations who might be involved in your network?
- Who are the potential funders?
- Local Authorities?
- National / Regional Arts Funders?
- Local funders? Others?

8. Have you thought about funding?

- What do you already have?
- Have you identified any other possible sources of funding?
- How much money do you need?

9. Roles and responsibilities for those involved in the network.

- Do you know how your network will be run / managed?
- What is the structure of the organisation, e.g. independent arts organisation, charity, informal group?
- Have you thought about the legal constitution or legal framework of the organisation?
- Have you thought about what you as a network will and won't do?
- Have you thought about what local volunteer promoters will be expected to do?

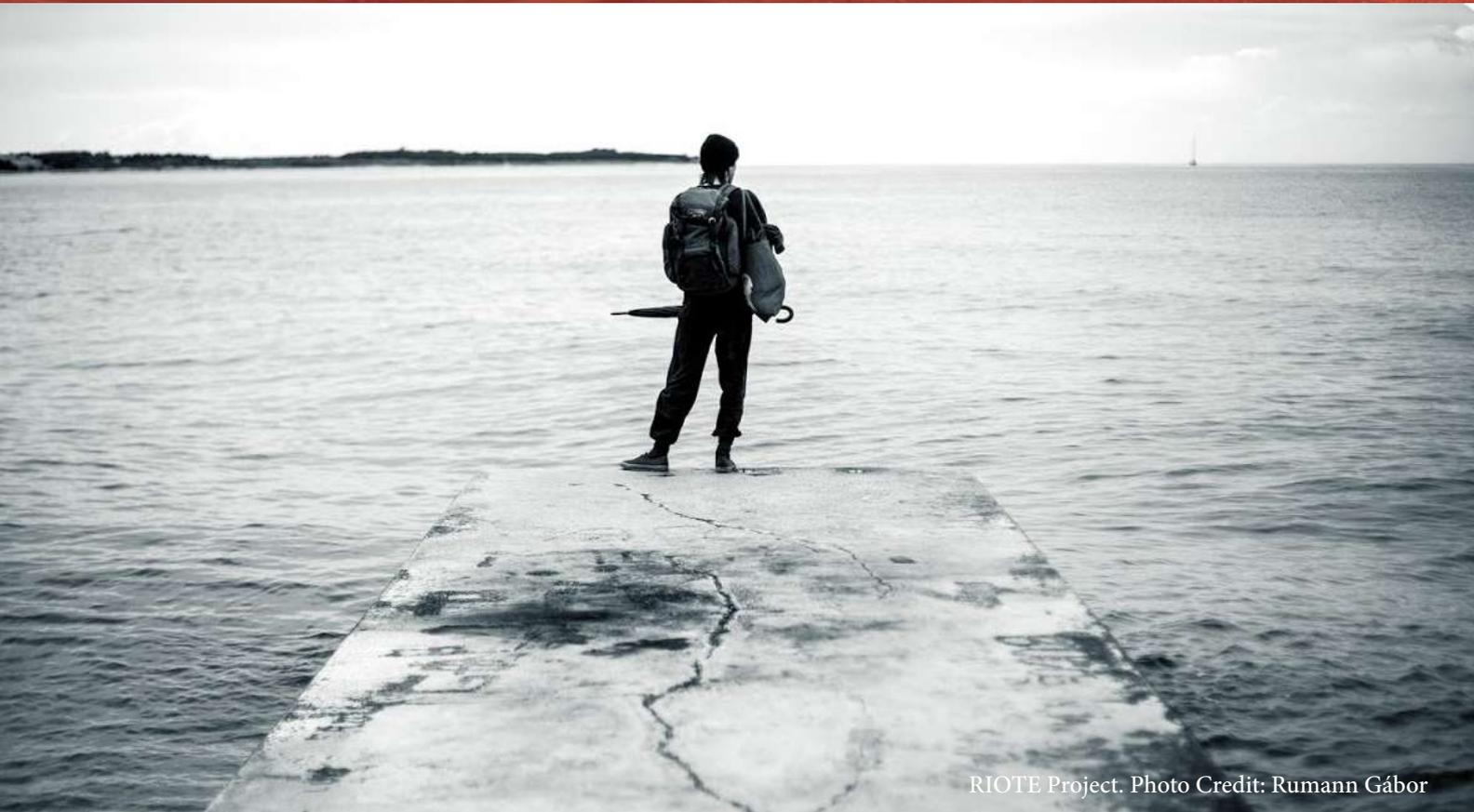
10. Do you have appropriate policies in place?

- Do you know how you are going to publicise and market it?
- Are you going to run training sessions?
- Are you going to offer workshops and educational activities linked to performances?
- Have you thought about equal opportunities, health & safety, disability discrimination policies?

11. Have you got a clear timetable for launching and running the programme?

- Do you have a fixed deadline to work towards?
- Have you broken this down into key stages?
- Are you aware of the timeline to complete each stage?
- Is the timescale realistic?

GETTING STARTED



RIOTE Project. Photo Credit: Rumann Gábor

POTENTIAL FUNDING PARTNERS

Who might be your funding partners in Hungary & Romania?

We asked our partners from Control Studio Association in Hungary and Shoshin Theatre in Romania to consider who might be the local funding partners in these countries.

HUNGARY

From Control Studio Association

To support a rural touring network in Hungary in the future, Control would need to count on the National Hungarian Found (NKA) through the project area called 'distribution'. We would also require the support of local and/or regional authorities.

Currently Control with Spec.Street (Utcaszak Színházi Alkotóközösség) are applying for a Creative Europe funded project but private

sponsors could be interested as well in the development of adult education in the Hungarian countryside.

Pro Progressione

Pro Progressione based in Budapest is an agency for cultural management. As an umbrella organisation, they support artists and partners in national and international involvement. Below Fanni Hajdú describes one of their current international projects.

"Play! MOBILE, an international cooperation initiated by four partners from Hungary, Romania, Serbia and France aims to encourage cultural participation in the micro regions of Europe. We believe that participatory-art should be accessible to everyone regardless of gender, economic status, age or geographical position. This currently running Creative Europe project of Pro Progressione, wishes to offer an alternative, making contemporary art available anywhere to anyone.

GETTING STARTED

Our project is planning to turn towns into stages and exhibition spaces or squares and streets of fiction, where anything can happen by the tools of art. The game as structure will determine the position of the viewer as an active, undetermined one, allowing them to perceive art in a non-direct way. Therefore, the international team of artists, together with locals from visited towns, will create a site-specific interdisciplinary and participatory game, which will be adopted to the partnering countries' different small settlements, thus bringing contemporary art closer to its audience. We believe that this approach will not only bring people closer to contemporary art in the remote areas, but will also generate discussion between cultural operators on the issue of access to culture.

Apart from the main partner organisations, our network also consists of local partners from each town the project will visit. These organisations are working with the local communities, in most cases realising cultural, educational and community activities, but with almost no capacity in terms of infrastructure, tools to reach new audiences and networking opportunities. By involving these associations, we are building their capacity in the implementation of an international project and giving them ideas of how to reach out outside the walls of institutions, reach new audiences and be part of a wider network of cultural institutions worldwide, thus fostering their further capacity building."

Fanni Hajdú, Pro Progressione

Spec.Street

Spec.Street (Utcaszak Színházi Alkotóközösség) was established in 2007. The central idea of Spec.Street is the educative force of theatre in geographically segregated communities.

"The main venues for our performances were the community centres, outdoor venues (as with Heroes of Hungary and the

Made in Gypsistan festival) and schools. Our programmes were funded by various bodies (UN, OSI, TÁMOP, EACEA, EMMI, NKA, NORWEGIAN FUND, ERASMUS +, VISEGRÁD FUND, MOL, EFOP, MAGNET BANK). The major danger in this multi-resource funding is that the programme often must be tailored to the actual funding expectation.

We are working in close collaborations with various public and private institutions in Borsod as the National Theatre of Miskolc, having admittance to the headquarter of the Roman- and Greek-Catholic Church, working-relation with the chief officers of Klebersberg Institution Maintenance Centre in Szerencs.

We have worked recently with the following secondary and vocational schools in Miskolc Dr Ambedkar, Debreczeny Márton, Baross Gábor, Gubody and the Abacus seated in Szikszó and Szendrő, with the primary schools Homrogd, Felsővadász, Alsóvadász, Lak, Selyeb, Kázmárk, Aszaló, Méra, Forró. Fostering work-relationship with local and minority self-governments of the listed villages: Szakácsi, Abaújszolnok, Léh, Rásonysápberencs, Hegymeg, Tomor, Kázmárk, Felsővadász. "
Balázs Simon, UtcaSZAK

Control Studio Association continued

A future rural touring network in Hungary is a great possibility to give space also to independent theatre companies. The National Cultural Found in Hungary (NKA) supports also outdoor theatre festivals in rural environment. Street theatre as a form of art has a great potential to develop new audiences in socially marginalized areas. This point of view is well explained by Horacio Czeretok, in his book, the Theatre of exile, Routledge, New York, 2016:

"People in the street take no interest whatsoever in theatre and are convinced that

GETTING STARTED

it's nothing to do with them. In our cities and towns, what we know as theatre is reserved for a steadfast minority, most of whom, besides, see it as something cultural rather than artistic, as a social event rather than a personal need.

When we ask the same people the same question after the performance, the answers are marked by a substantial and surprising change of attitude. [...] This immediate and enthusiastic response by a non-audience-made-into-audience to the call of theatre in open spaces, in any city street, should be enough. [...] Our cities and towns need theatre in their streets, as a barrier against the tide of barbarism. But the people who have taken possession of it hoard it jealously, keeping it hostage within the walls of acting museums."

One other already existing rural theatre network in Hungary is the Barn-Theatre Programme (Pajtaszínház Programme).

This programme is a good model, financed by the National Public Art Institution (MNI) and partly managed by the National Theatre of Budapest. It involves 81 villages, 40% have under 1,000 inhabitants but all of them have no more than 4,000 people.

The idea of the programme is to create regional networks which are connected on national level. Every region/province choose 1-2 villages to work with a professional mentor from September to January, who they will meet with a dozen times.

The villages are changed every year, and any village/community can apply with a minimum of ten signed participants. The local community than will receive a theatre mentor/director to create a performance, based on a previously written script or one they write themselves.

In January these villages come together in the National Theatre of Budapest for a meeting, to present what they have created.

A relevant site: <https://nemzetiszinhas.hu/hirek/2018/10/folytatodik-a-pajtaszinhazi-szemle>

The aim is to build theatre making communities that continue to make work after their mentorship and direct involvement in the project is over. So far Barn-Theatre has been successful with 90% of the involved communities still existing.

Information provided by Géza Pinter

ROMANIA

From Shoshin Theatre

In Romania, the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN) or the Department for Interethnic Relations (DRI) can be an outlet for funding, as well as local or county councils. In a second circle, such activities could be supported by administrations such as the National Program for Rural Development (PNDR).

Some big companies have foundations attached to them, who sometimes give money for culture. But this kind of cultural entrepreneurship should and cannot depend solely on application-based funds, and the laborious process of linking five-six sources together.

It also cannot depend on ticket sales, as it is clear that the income generated will never reach the level of expenses. Therefore, in order to foster a dependable medium in which this branch can grow, attract companies as well as villages and therefore create a thriving rural art scene.

In the long run Romania needs a structure similar to the NRTF in the UK. This structure would need to be recreated and funding allocated at government level, which could potentially be supplemented by application-based funding or local funding.

Information provided by Csongor Köllő

GETTING STARTED



SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY



A View from the Edge by 'Owdyado Theatre Company

CHAPTER FOUR: SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY

TAKE ART EXPLAINED

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

- STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
- AIMS & OBJECTIVES
- KEY TARGETS
- FUNDING
- ARTISTIC POLICY
- RECRUITING LOCAL PROMOTERS/VOLUNTEERS
- OTHER POLICIES

This next two chapters will use Take Art's methodology to give a step-by-step guide in setting up a rural touring agency and then 'making it happen'. But first some background to Take Art.

TAKE ART EXPLAINED

Set up as a rural touring agency in 1987, Take Art is a pioneering arts organisation based in the county of Somerset in SW England. We are a registered charity (not for profit) and a limited company.

Take Art doesn't live in a theatre, a dance studio or an arts centre but in the villages, towns and rural communities of Somerset. We are part of ACE's national portfolio of organisations, with a remit to deliver a wide range of arts opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to experience, participate and work in the arts.

Our theatre, dance, music and early years activity as well as our rural touring programme is often targeted at the most disadvantaged in society, including people living in rural areas and those who don't access the arts for economic, social or psychological reasons.

SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY

"Above all else Take Art answers the one question central to the philosophy of life in rural Somerset, namely 'What do you do when you can't stand watching TV any more?'

The answer is easy. You pick up the phone and contact Take Art.

The telephone will be answered by someone who is about to help you fulfil all your dreams. Then you set off on an adventure of arts promotion which you never thought was even possible. Eventually you are having such a good time in your village hall that even your children will stop watching the TV!

Long may it continue. I have a feeling we cannot manage without Take Art"

Mike Hoskin, an original village hall promoter, writing in 1987

Since 1987, we have coordinated tours by over 750 companies and brought high quality performances to well over 150,000 people and have the reputation of being one of the most celebrated UK rural touring agencies. Promoting work across all art forms, our programme reaches a wide network of village halls, schools, churches and community spaces. We develop new audiences in new spaces and ensure our programme is accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. We play a valuable part in supporting the presentation of a high quality performing arts programme that is geographically accessible to all Somerset residents.

We carefully research, and bring, great local, regional, national and international touring work into the county. We connect audiences and artists closer together by developing projects where companies rehearse and share work-in-progress; we arrange overnight hospitality to companies with volunteer hosts, run workshops in schools and offer post show discussions.

"I feel that our whole community has been fortunate throughout the past years to have this chance to experience the arts with such diversity. I wonder now what we did before Take Art."

Adult Education Community Tutor,
Avishayes School

Take Art currently works in partnership with over 30 volunteer promoting groups, supporting the presentation of 60 exciting, diverse and ambitious theatre, dance, music and puppetry performances, reaching an audience of over 5,000 each year.

"The standard of artistry has been consistently high, and the support with publicity and liaison second to none. Take Art is one of the most exciting developments in Somerset and our arts programme has been enhanced as a result of this initiative."

Avril Silk, Community Arts Organiser,
Ashbrittle Arts

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

A short paragraph on why you would like to start a rural touring agency in your area. For example, Take Art's statement of purpose is:

To raise the awareness, profile and understanding of the arts in Somerset and to increase access to the arts across the county, particularly for those disadvantaged geographically, culturally, economically, socially and physically. Through our rural touring programme, we will work in partnership with local volunteers to bring professional live arts events into rural communities of Somerset, providing quality arts provision to those places where there is little accessibility to these kind of events.

SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Set some simple, clear aims 'what you want to do' and your objectives 'how are you going to do this'.

Take Art's aims and objectives are:

Aims

- To bring memorable high quality professional performances, across all art forms, to rural communities in Somerset;
- To create a local network of volunteer promoters and venues.

Objectives

- We will offer a diverse range of touring dance, theatre and music companies to volunteer promoting groups across Somerset;
- We will promote work that appeals to a wide range and mix of audiences;
- We will support a programme of cultural diversity in its widest sense;
- We will offer a balanced programme of local, national and international work;
- We will ensure there is a good balance of female to male artists offered;
- We will develop the confidence of volunteers to become local arts promoters.

KEY TARGETS

What do you want to do and what difference do you want to make. For example each year, Take Art:

- Will offer tours from up to 20 diverse touring companies;
- Will work with at least 30 different volunteer promoting groups;
- Over 45 shows will be promoted annually;
- Will aim for an average 65 audience members per show;
- Companies and artists will have the opportunity to tour into Somerset;
- Audiences will experience live performances in rural Somerset;
- Volunteers' capacity building will improve.

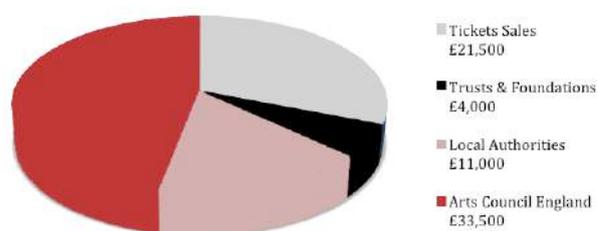
FUNDING

There are a number of possible funding streams in UK. Take Art receives funding from a number of sources, for example:

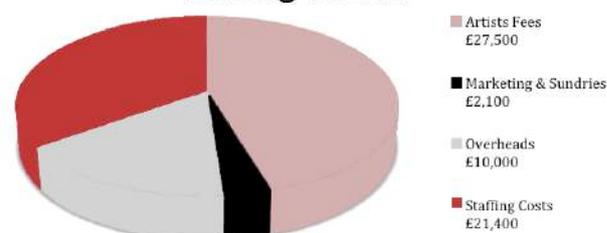
- Arts Council England
- Local Authorities in Somerset
- Earned income from ticket sales
- Trusts & Foundations

Broadly speaking, Take Art allocates a proportion of the annual grant from ACE and local authorities to support its staffing and overhead costs as well as a small amount to support the artistic programme. Any money raised from Trusts and Foundations is specifically for additional rural touring projects. The chart below shows the average annual income and expenditure. It is also interesting to note that ticket sales almost equate to the costs of the artist fees.

Income Take Art Rural Touring in 2018



Expenditure Take Art Rural Touring in 2018



Income

Arts Council England

Take Art is part of ACE's national portfolio of arts organisations and as such has a partnership agreement to deliver an agreed programme of work for each four-year period.

SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY

Take Art offices, Somerset, UK



Local Authorities

Since 2011, the prevailing economic uncertainty and 'austerity' in UK has badly affected local authority funding for the arts. In Somerset, we no longer have service level agreements and only one out of six authorities continues to fund us on an ongoing basis. There are small arts development streams that we can apply to annually but this does not allow for a stable base for our work in rural areas.

Ticket Sales

Since the demise of local authority funding, earned income (ticket sales) has become an extremely important element for the survival of a rural touring programme in Somerset. We work with each volunteer promoting group to find the right level of ticket prices and to maximise the return of funds to Take Art. Without this the programme would simply not be possible.

Tickets for each performance are sold to audience members by the local promoter who in turn sends the rural touring agency a percentage of their box office receipts. In Somerset we request a return of 80% of all tickets sold.

Trusts & Foundations

Take Art is part of a regional SW England group of rural touring organisations who collaborate on specific rural touring projects which bring in an element of project income.

Expenditure

Typical areas of expenditure to run a rural touring programme include:

- Artistic Fees: the money to pay the performers;
- Marketing Costs: for publicising both the rural touring organisation and each performance;
- Running Costs: postage, telephone, stationery, general office overheads;
- Staffing: the coordinator's fee: with bigger agencies this may be a full time salary plus an administrator and marketing member of staff;
- Training: capacity building programmes for promoters;
- Some agencies would also invest in purchase of equipment such as sound and lighting.

SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY

The Head Wrap Diaries by Uchemma Dance. Photo credit fotoimichristofloppoulou



ARTISTIC POLICY

Your artistic policy will be an extension of your aims and objectives. It should be central to your organisation. The quality of the touring work offered is one of the most important elements of running a programme. Your artistic policy should be a 'live' document, not one that sits on a shelf in the office. It should guide, shape and develop your programme.

Take Art's artistic policy is:

Take Art is committed to offering rural promoters the highest quality of performances available for touring into Somerset. The work will cover a wide range of art forms including theatre, dance, film, music, puppetry and combined arts. It will be selected and offered to promoters on the basis of quality, appropriateness, availability and price. Together the balance of companies on the programme should offer a variety of work that is enjoyable, memorable, involving, ambitious, well-performed, affordable and entertaining. The work will aim to have general appeal to a wide range and mix of audiences, many will be

family-friendly shows, will reflect the needs, wishes and tastes of local people and be drawn from a pool of international, national, regional and local performance companies.

Throughout the year artists and companies are encouraged to submit information on the productions that they have available for forthcoming touring in order to be considered for inclusion on the Take Art rural touring programme. In February/March a short list of productions, available for promoting between the following September to June, is drawn up from the information submitted, using the criteria described above.

Every submission is given equal consideration. Artists and companies are contacted to establish availability, technical requirements, target audiences, to negotiate a block of dates and agree fees. A brochure containing a list of 20-40 different productions is produced and mailed to all village promoters who have registered their interest. The promoters then make their

SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY

choices and submit a booking request form. Take Art juggles the dates and organises tours which are generally confirmed during June and July when each presenting company is sent a formal contract.

Take Art aims to support cultural diversity in its broadest form: to offer performances that reflect the different cultures of communities throughout the country, as well as outside the UK and to offer experiences for people from diverse backgrounds and with different cultural values to come together.

Take Art also aims to assist performers, companies and promoters to bring an element of new and challenging work, through contemporary writing and/or presentation styles as well as new commissions, to rural venues. The network of rural promoters will be offered advice and support in order to develop confidence in the promotion of the arts in their venues and to create new audiences for arts activities. Promoters will be encouraged to share the workload between a team of local volunteers. Take Art will ensure that good equal opportunities practice is part of programming, performing, marketing and management.

RECRUITING LOCAL PROMOTERS

The local volunteer promoter is absolutely essential to making rural touring a success. Good recruitment is key. The best promoters are those who are well linked in to their own local networks, who know many people in their village and who are good at 'spreading the word'. They also need to be people who are well liked and respected in their community.

Promoters may just be one person taking on all the work themselves or they could be a small group of people sharing the roles between them.

They could be committee members of their village hall (or community venue) or they could be people connected with community groups such as the local priest or schoolteacher. Or they could simply be individuals with a personal

interest in bringing live performance to their own local communities.

Recruitment of promoters may have started to take place during your audit and local consultation process, when you may have been able to establish a short list of motivated local individuals. If not, the best way to recruit is either by holding a meeting in each community to gather interest or to put up posters advertising recruitment. Most villages in UK have parish or church newsletters or noticeboards where this sort of advertising can take place. Local parish councils or community groups can also help direct you to the people in their village most likely to be interested in becoming a volunteer promoter.

OTHER POLICIES

Take Art has a number of other policies that can be made available on request;

- Child Protection & Safeguarding (including vulnerable adults)
- Customer Service
- Equality
- Environmental Sustainability
- Health & Safety
- Public Liability

"Recruitment of these enthusiastic individuals will be the key to successfully setting up a rural touring model in Hungary and Romania. Uniting people around a desire to keep their villages 'vibrant, alive and kicking' through building their volunteering capacity and developing skills in arts promotion will make all the difference. Without these key and committed people rural touring simply would not happen."

Sarah Peterkin, Take Art

MAKING IT HAPPEN

May Contain Food by Protein. Photo credit: Richard Tomlinson



CHAPTER FIVE: MAKING IT HAPPEN

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

- ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
- CHOOSING COMPANIES
- TIMELINE
- MENU LAUNCH
- AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT
- PROMOTER TRAINING
- MONITORING AND EVALUATION
- WHAT NEXT?

So what's next? Let's assume you have completed your research into developing and setting up a rural touring agency in your own country.

You have set out your statement of purpose, your aims and objectives, got the partners together, generated interest, recruited local volunteer promoters and found the funding. Now what do you do before your first tours can take place?

This section looks at the practical stages that Take Art goes through to 'make it all happen'. Firstly, we will outline the key responsibilities on both the part of the coordinator and the local promoting group and the companies involved. They are not definitive but provide a good overview.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rural touring relies on a partnership between the agency organisation, promoter and artists with each side taking responsibility as follows:

The Coordinator:

provides a menu of performances that are memorable, enjoyable, diverse and affordable; offers financial support; provides advice and support; contracts, pays and liaises with the performance companies.

MAKING IT HAPPEN



Volunteer Promoter/Group:

choose the events they would like to promote; book the venue and ensures appropriate licences are in place; publicises and sells tickets, ensures the venue is safe, accessible and welcoming to the audience; manages the event on the day; pays Take Art the agreed fee.

The Artist/Company:

provides the rural touring coordinator with show information and publicity materials; provides all technical and performance requirements; performs the show as contracted and invoices the agency after the event.

CHOOSING COMPANIES

Next, how does Take Art select the companies and performers who will be offered for Somerset rural touring?

Our artistic policy outlines our wish to tour work from different art forms (theatre, music, dance, poetry etc.), from local performers, regional, national and international companies.

We also wish to reflect diversity in its broadest sense e.g. reflecting different cultures, gender balance as well as performance that reflects disability.

With the above in mind, Take Art encourages artists and companies to submit details of their performances throughout the year. This is collected in one place for when programming takes place during Feb & March of each year. A long list is drawn up of work that fits our artistic policy and over a few weeks this is distilled down to a short list of 20-24 touring shows. Appropriateness of the work, availability and affordability are also a key element of this part of the process.

The programming balance is key to everything. It is critical to find work that is varied in price; work with a set, a cast, stage lighting etc. that will transform a village hall into a completely different place for the one performance night as well as the one-person shows that could be performed in a much smaller hall with very little in the way of props or technology.

MAKING IT HAPPEN



Ultimately we are seeking work that will have general appeal to a wide variety of people, that has all or some of the following traits: enjoyable, engaging, memorable, involving, ambitious, well-performed, affordable, new, challenging and entertaining.

Take Art meets at least once a year with our regional SW rural touring agency coordinators to discuss programming and to compare our highlights, and lowlights, of the previous season. We share ideas and news of upcoming shows and invariably plan some projects where we can work together to offer companies a run of 10-15 dates across the SW regional network of seven rural touring agencies. This especially applies to national and international touring where it becomes vital to offer companies more than one-off dates, in order for the tour to be cost effective for both company and agency.

The success of rural touring over the last 30

years has brought the sector into the mainstream consciousness of touring companies. These days it is unusual to speak to a company who has not heard of rural touring. It might not be the ideal circuit for some companies but they will have heard of its existence and respect its uniqueness.

Festivals and showcases are great occasions to meet new artists and companies. Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland and Contact East in Canada, as well as the NRTF's own biennial showcase *New Directions*, are Take Art's main sources of new touring performances.

It would be highly unusual for Take Art to book a show by a company that they have never seen or that had not been recommended by a peer working in the industry. Personal recommendations from people you trust are incredibly important and vital to the success of the rural touring programme.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

TIMELINE

Once Take Art has chosen their short list of companies, a process is followed to take this all the way through to successful promotion of the event.

- **Feb-March:** Short list companies/artists;
- **Feb-March:** Talk the performance over with the company: content, technical requirements, running time, target audience, publicity material, accommodation requirements and agree a fee (all-inclusive of any additional costs e.g. travel, VAT etc.);
- **Feb-March:** Send a Company Information Form;
- **Feb-March:** Update database of Volunteer Promoters;
- **April:** Compile a 'menu' of the shows;
- **April:** Design a Booking Request Form;
- **April:** Plan a Promoters' Meeting and send invitations to Volunteer Promoters;
- **April-May:** Hold Promoters' Meeting to launch the Menu;
- **June:** Receive Booking Requests from Volunteer Promoters;
- **June-July:** Fix tour dates for Sept-June touring period;
- **July:** Send out Promoter Agreement Forms;
- **Aug:** Send out Company Contracts;
- **Aug-March:** Send out promotional material: posters, fliers, tickets to Volunteer Promoters;
- **Sept-June:** Support Volunteer Promoters with advice throughout the touring period; attend shows, pay companies, send Box Office Returns & Feedback Forms.

MENU LAUNCH

A very important and key element of the annual process is to hold an event, a Promoters' Meeting, to launch the new menu brochure. For Take Art the menu is generally ready to be launched at the end April or early May.

We have run our menu launch in a number of different ways. Over a whole day to include training sessions on 'how to market your event' or as a showcase with some companies performing extracts of their work. Or more simply, an informal meeting one afternoon to go through the menu and talk about each show. It really depends on how many Volunteer Promoters you have and what you are hoping to achieve.

Volunteer Promoters find it invaluable to hear directly from the coordinator a little bit about each show, how and why it could be promoted in their own village halls. They like to hear the background of the artists and companies being offered and they want to know what each production will be about.

Volunteer Promoters also enjoy meeting each other and swapping tips and good ideas for gathering audiences and promoting arts events. And above all else they love to visit other people's halls to have a look around and to see how they run them differently.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Rural touring is a fantastic opportunity for companies to develop their audience. It is not unusual for members of the audience to buy a ticket simply in order to support the local promoter and to support the fact that something is happening in their locality. They may not ever of heard of the company, the piece of work or even know what it is that they have come along to see.

Village audiences can be from a very wide demographic. A huge range of ages, backgrounds and types of people live in UK rural communities. You can not assume they are new to the arts. There is a very special and unique element to rural touring. Performers are welcomed into the community's own space so this allows for a genuine conversation after the show. Audiences will often sign up to a company's mailing list and go on to be a keen follower of their work.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

PROMOTER TRAINING

Rural touring turns local people into arts promoters. Volunteers build capacity and knowledge by going through the process of choosing a show, booking the venue, publicising and marketing the event, selling tickets, hosting the artists and looking after the audience on the night.

The coordinator offers advice and help throughout the process and acts as the liaison between the company and the promoter, sorting out any issues and helping to problem solve.

Occasionally a coordinator will run specific training sessions for the promoters. Perhaps around changes in law, e.g. data protection, or digital marketing or social media or building a Facebook group for the village. We have also run sessions on how to make the venue safe and welcoming; on disability discrimination and on audience development.

These sessions can help build volunteers' confidence as well as provide useful tips and hints for promoter improvement.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Take Art asks every Volunteer Promoter to complete a box office and feedback form after each show. As well as giving quantitative data about audience numbers and ticket sales this also gives us a good indication on what both the promoter and their audience felt about the show and about the whole event.

We also carry out audience surveys, requesting data from those attending on how they heard about the show, how far they travelled, their motivation for attending as well as how well they rated the quality of the show and any comments on the production. We also collect some personal data about gender, age, disability, ethnicity and their postcodes so that we can build up a picture and analyse our audience profile. This is important in enabling us to improve our service in the future.

Take Art tries to attend at least one show by every company on tour and every new promoting group each year. It is crucial for the coordinator to witness the event in action and to get a sense of both the audience and the company and how the work is received. It helps to build the knowledge and experience of what works well and what could be offered in the future to develop the programme to its full potential.

WHAT NEXT?

If this handbook has inspired you to think about starting rural touring in your particular area then please contact:

In Romania:

Shoshin Theatre Association, Csongor Köllő and Kincső Veres at shoshin.mail@gmail.com, or 0720068419.

In Hungary:

Control Studio Association, Géza Pinter at RIOTE2project@gmail.com or 06706585211.

HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT



CHAPTER SIX: HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

HISTORY OF RURAL TOURING

NATIONAL RURAL TOURING FORUM

REGIONAL NETWORKS

ARTS FUNDING IN ENGLAND

NATIONAL POLICY

OUTSIDE ENGLAND

HISTORY OF RURAL TOURING

The first rural touring agencies started in the 1980s in Hampshire, Lincolnshire and South East Wales. In Somerset, an inspired individual with a passion for taking the arts into rural areas carried out a feasibility study to establish a rural touring programme and used the Hampshire model as the starting point.

With start up funding from Arts Council England (ACE) and the local area government offices, Take Art was formed in Somerset, SW England in 1987. Good ideas have a habit of growing and during the 1990s Zeitgeist many more similar organisations were developed across England. Currently, in 2018, that number totals 25.

In 1993, a group of seven or eight rural touring organisations from central and SW England came together for a joint meeting. They discovered that they shared many common interests.

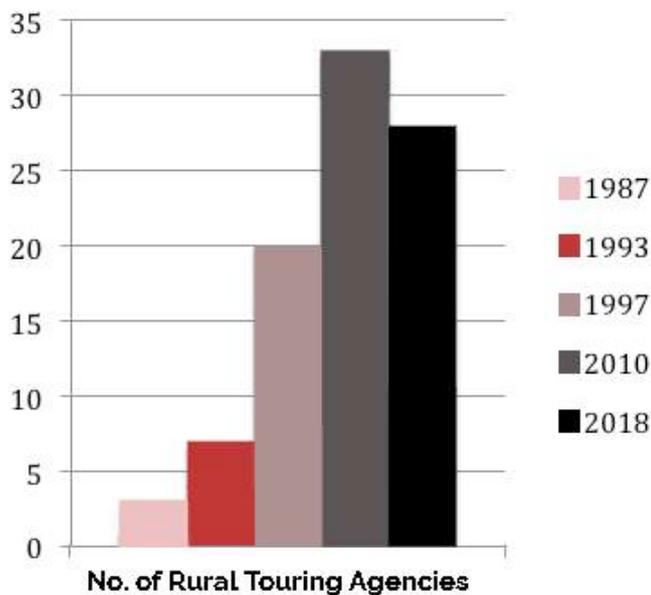
They discussed the value of creating a national

HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

'advocacy' organisation and so the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) was established in 1997.

"1997 was a defining moment for rural touring as a new sector."

National Rural Touring Forum



NATIONAL RURAL TOURING FORUM

The NRTF is the umbrella body representing rural and community touring agencies in England and Wales. It is a member led organisation and a registered charity (not for profit) as well as a company limited by guarantee.

The NRTF ambitions are: to be the leading advocate for the UK rural touring sector and; for rural communities to become cultural centres. Their aims are: to further strengthen a thriving sector; to support the growth and development of rural touring agencies and; to support more artists, promoters and venues across the UK.

The NRTF Articles of Association state that only rural touring agencies are able to vote at meetings. This means that the NRTF operates under the direction of its 'full' members. Artists and companies are also encouraged to join the NRTF but as 'associate' rather than 'full' members. They cannot vote on key decisions.

In the beginning the turnover of the NRTF was approximately £6,000 per year. This was enough to contract a freelance person for a few days a year to support an annual conference and to produce some advocacy material.

The NRTF immediately attracted 20 rural touring agencies to join as members at this early stage so it is evident that the local rural touring infrastructure in England, Wales and Scotland pre-dated the existence of the NRTF as a body.

Of those 20 original NRTF rural touring agencies:

- Over 50% were organised through the arts department of the local government department;
- 35% were independent charities (or not for profit organisations);
- The remaining 15% were part of a larger arts organisation with significant other responsibilities outside of rural touring.

Almost immediately after formation, the NRTF was very successful in fundraising. When ACE created a new funding programme, the NRTF applied for and received almost £500,000 for a 3-year period from 1997-2000 to expand and develop projects associated with rural touring. It is interesting that not all the 20 touring agencies wanted to commit to working together and this project involved only 13 of the members. This very significant project was successfully delivered and ever since the NRTF has been a regularly funded ACE organisation.

"I believe the NRTF was successful in its project application in 1997 partly as a result of the late 90s national politics focus on 'arts and rural areas'. ACE saw the NRTF as a way to reach many rural areas of England and thereby create a 'good news' story."

Ralph Lister, Take Art & NRTF Development Director 1997-2018

HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT



Isla by D'Click. Photo Credit: fotografia de Pilo Gallizo

The NRTF operates in a number of ways:

- It provides the rural touring network with training, information and networking services;
- It delivers and enables innovative work, international partnerships and commissions;
- It promotes better understanding of the value of rural and community touring through research and advocacy.

There are 25 members (2018 statistic) and members are listed on the NRTF website www.ruraltouring.org. This provides a good starting point for potential new agencies in avoiding duplication of existing organisations. One of the strengths of the network has been the willingness to help each other and to discuss plans with new parties.

It organises and co-ordinates activities on behalf of its members including:

- An Annual Conference: usually a residential

2-3 day meeting that incorporates showcase performances by artists and companies, discussion and debate around current issues and presentations by funders and policymakers.

- Development of Strategic Projects: such as the Rural Touring Dance Initiative (RTDI) over a 6 year period 2015-2021 to encourage the performance of more contemporary dance in rural areas.
- Presence at key events: such as the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, one of the largest festivals of its kind in the world.
- Professional Development Opportunities: offering its members grants and bursaries to visit festivals and to be mentored by other professional arts colleagues.
- Research Projects: currently the NRTF is working with Coventry University to research the social impact of rural touring with a major research grant from the Arts Council England.

For more information on the above please visit www.ruraltouring.org

HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT



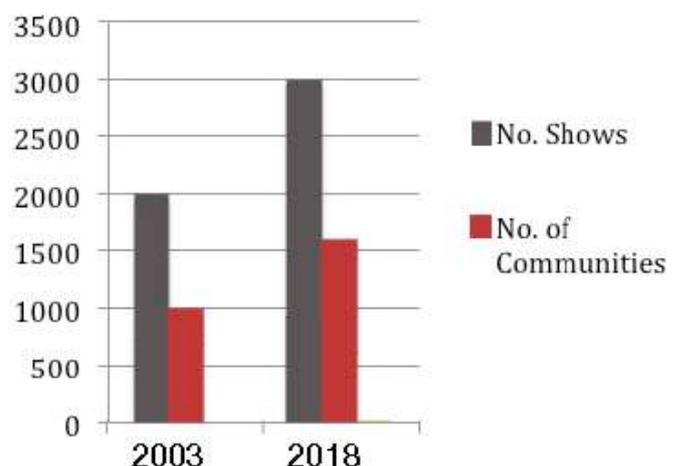
The NRTF has a few members in Scotland and Wales as well as England. These members feel it is better to be part of a larger UK wide organisation than to be alone within their own countries, even though they have a separate funding system. In England, there are several geographic regions but there is currently no interest in developing formal regional bodies. Everyone wishes to be part of a national organisation, which has a critical mass acknowledged by the ACE.

The period from 2000 to 2010 was an excellent decade for rural touring. The British economy was growing and national arts funding, through both local government and ACE, was in a good position. To get a sense of the rural touring story it is important to read *Only Connect*, a report on rural touring, commissioned by the National Rural Touring Forum 2003. Available from www.ruraltouring.org

The NRTF audit of 2003 shows there were 35 English agencies, and one Welsh and two Scottish members, with a network over 1,000 promoting groups, 2,000 performances with over 150,000 audience members and an annual turnover of £1.5 million.

Local authority funding cuts and austerity measures since 2011 has had a negative impact on rural touring. Some organisations have merged with neighbouring networks some have reduced in size and a few have sadly disappeared, see table on previous page.

In the most recent audit carried out by the NRTF in 2018 there were 25 English, 1 Welsh and 2 Scottish rural touring organisations working with a network of 1,600 rural communities, 2,800 performances and reaching an audience of 330,000. The turnover of the sector now amounted to £4 million. So although there were fewer organisations, their turnover and depth of work had increased.



HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Nearly 18% of population in England live in rural areas. However 97% of ACE core spending goes to arts organisations based in urban areas. Rural touring goes a small way to help redress the balance by providing access to high quality arts experiences in the heart of communities where people live and congregate.

Rural communities are difficult to categorise. Some are ex-industrial whilst others still heavily depend on agriculture. Many are retirement settlements, others have high numbers of families on low incomes. Most villages have a local hall with a committee of people planning activities for their community. Many villages have a handful of enthusiastic volunteers, or a passionate individual, who wish to see high quality arts events taking place in their village. These are the local voluntary promoters who are at the very heart of rural touring.

NRTF AGENCIES IN THE UK IN 2019



REGIONAL NETWORKS

Many of the NRTF rural touring agencies have grouped together regionally and found a strength in combining their resources to successfully work on joint projects.

For example in SW England, there are seven rural touring organisations which between them cover the whole of that region, these are:

- Carn2Cove in Cornwall (also running a temporary programme in Mid & South Devon for 2018/20)
- Beaford Arts in North Devon
- Take Art in Somerset
- Artsreach in Dorset
- AirinG in Gloucestershire
- Rural Arts in Wiltshire
- Orchard Theatre, North Somerset

These are all well-established, successful organisations funded as National Portfolio Organisations (NPO) by ACE. Since the 1990s they have worked together on joint programming and marketing as well as specific national and international touring projects.

Each year they hold a regional network meeting to share programming knowledge and to pitch ideas for joint projects. LocoMotor is a current project funded by ACE strategic funds to bring international work to rural communities across the SW.

Other regions may not have full coverage of rural touring agencies in every county but they will have at least one or two per region.

ARTS FUNDING IN ENGLAND

The national Government has a number of departments and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has responsibility for the arts. There is an 'at arms length' principle in England which means the DCMS gives funding for the arts to an independent body, ACE to distribute.

HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

ACE supports a portfolio of over 600 arts organisations for a whole variety of purposes and these include national flagship organisations like the Royal Shakespeare Company (£60 million per year) and smaller grass roots organisations like Take Art (£160,000 annually).

There is a system of over 300 local authorities (local government) in England and they receive their funding through a combination of grants from the national government and money raised through local taxes. They have a number of responsibilities which are either mandatory under law such as providing care for the elderly or they are discretionary (they can choose if and by how much they wish to be involved in carrying out these responsibilities). Funding for the arts falls into the discretionary area of local government responsibility.

NATIONAL POLICY

In England the principal funder of the arts is ACE, an independent organisation based in London with offices in North, Central, South East and South West England. It receives funding from Government through DCMS and also distributes money funnelled to the arts through a National Lottery scheme.

ACE have produced a number of publications and reports relevant to rural touring and these include:

- Arts Council England and communities living in rural England – a position statement 2014;
- Rural Evidence & Data Review 2015;
- Rural Narrative 2018–2022.

All documents available at www.artscouncil.org.uk

ACE is undergoing a refresh of the Rural Evidence & Data Review in 2018 as part of a process that will inform their next 10 year strategy, 2020–2030. It has created a consultative Rural Stakeholder Group that meets twice a year to discuss arts and rural areas (within a wider culture and rural context).

Whilst it is no longer available to download, ACE commissioned a national report into arts and rural areas in 2005 by social and arts researcher, François Matarasso. This demonstrates that the subject of ‘arts in rural areas’ has been on the policy making agenda for well over a decade.

It is probably not surprising that countries such as Sweden and Norway, with strong social democratic principles, are investing heavily in enabling rural communities to access culture. In England, which has entered a post-industrialised phase, it has taken a long time to bring the need for rural communities to have good access to culture to the attention of policymakers. Advocacy by pressure groups, such as NRTF, has been instrumental in achieving this.

OUTSIDE ENGLAND

SCOTLAND

There are several rural touring organisations in Scotland and while several operate in a similar way to the rural touring agencies in England, the Touring Network is different www.thetouringnetwork.com It is an organisation that works with a number of small, rural arts venues as well as the typical volunteer local promoter and they also have developed a website that aims to connect promoters and artists and companies.

WALES

In Wales, rural touring is structured differently and is actually directly managed by Arts Council Wales (ACW), the Welsh equivalent of ACE. It operates a large programme and relies quite heavily on their website to broker promoters and companies www.nightout.org.uk

SWEDEN

In Sweden, Riksteatern has a huge rural touring network with 60,000 volunteers promoting events in rural areas www.riksteatern.se It is heavily funded by the Swedish government and makes a number of productions annually in a

HISTORY & SECTOR DEVELOPMENT



Hatch Beauchamp Village Hall

theatre making factory in Stockholm which then tour at a number of different scales. It is also linked with a number of regional Riksteatern agencies such as Riksteatern Värmland which are similar to some of the English rural touring agencies www.varmland.riksteatern.se

NORWAY

In Norway, there is a national 'Culture Rucksack' that takes performances into school settings across the country and which attracts substantial government funding www.creativitycultureeducation.org. Much of Norway can be defined as rural and this programme also works with regional agencies such as Sogn og Fjordane www.skulesekken.no

ESTONIA, ITALY, LITHUANIA AND ROMANIA

In July 2018, a consortium of European partners in England, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, and more recently Romania, were successful in a Creative Europe Co-operation Project application for SPARSE. The full project title is *Supporting & Promoting Arts in Rural Settlements of Europe*.

The project will foster rural touring in the partner countries i.e. taking performances by professional performing arts companies and artists into rural areas to audiences in local community venues. This will help to address the

issue that many rural communities do not enjoy the same opportunities to enjoy high quality arts as their urban counterparts. Kick-started by a capacity building programme, SPARSE will create a network within each partner country that puts audience development and access to the arts by rural communities at its heart.

Over four years, fledgling rural touring networks will be created and tested in Estonia, Italy, Lithuania and Romania. The English model is not seen as the 'expert model' which must be followed. It provides one example of how rural touring can work and it is anticipated that each partner will customise the model to suit their own individual circumstances.

During the project a new organisation, The European Rural Touring Network, will be introduced to provide advocacy and profile raising opportunities for this needed but under-represented field of activity.

SPARSE is in its early days with a website set to be launched in March 2019. There is, however, a Facebook page at www.facebook.com/SPARSEU

"A rural touring agency is like an arts centre with hundreds of volunteers, operating in multiple spaces, serving multiple communities."

Rural Touring Organisation, UK

