

Dossier, Comparative study research about the Rural Touring Network and other European realities

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Introduction

The present „dossier” of studies and articles collects research materials to compare the rural touring network in the UK with similar phenomena in the partner countries (Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania). It is a research demonstration of the RIOTE partnership, in the frame of an Erasmus+ project, without the intention to publish an official text. Instead, this is more for an internal use among the partners and their stakeholders for further developments, and the preparation towards professional teaching materials as intellectual outputs.

Rural Touring Network in the UK

(Joe Hancock)

What is Rural Touring Network?

„The National Rural Touring Forum is a member led organisation that works strategically with partners to develop work and deliver high quality art experiences that strengthen rural and other communities.

They provide the rural touring network with training, information and networking services. Tjhe forum deliver and enable innovative work, international partnerships and commissions, and promote better understanding of the value of rural and community touring through research and advocacy.”

<http://www.ruraltouring.org/work>

How it works?

„NRTF is a membership led organisation with two types of membership: *Full Rural Touring Schemes* and *Associate Members*. Touring schemes vary enormously: The most widespread model is the independent, not for profit company, usually with charitable status. Associate Members are individuals and organisations with an interest in promoting professional arts with rural communities and include performers, companies, promoters, small venues, festivals and producers.” (See the website)

1. Touring Schemes

Touring schemes vary enormously: The most widespread model is the independent, not for profit company, usually with charitable status; some schemes form part of local authority arts provision and others are based on a contractual relationship with a service provider. In some counties rural touring is managed, on behalf of a consortia of local authorities by arts consultancy companies or by freelance administrators. (See the website)

2. Associate Members and their Benefits:

- Training, information and networking
- Advice and Resources
- Innovative work, partnerships and commissions
- Research and Advocacy

It is structured network organization on different levels: a state budget is used by the Arts Council, what commission the NRTF to realize theatrical projects in rural area. The NRTF collaborate with regional centers, like National Portfolio Organizations to find the artists and theatre companies to realize performances in rural area.

Their principle is to bring high quality performances in little isolated villages what can gently make an invitation towards the audience members. Nobody should be pushed out from his/her comfort zone but the aim is to build a lively relationship.

Those artists, who can involve audience can leave a major social impact like empowering the sense of community.

The audience is different in rural settlements and the communities don't have a theatre structure, like a building where a performance can happen. Therefore the aspect of social event has a major relevance in this projects.

The voluntary promoters from the local community have a key role in the promotion and in the realization of the theatre performances, they keep up the communication between NPO, artists and local inhabitants.

Meeting interview with Beaford Art Organization's director, Mark Wallace:

Mark's presentation about rural touring and Beaford:

Beaford is an NPO, what means that is part of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, so it is a full scheme of the national network and the most important NPO in its region, in Devon what is responsible for rural touring activity.

History:

Beaford has its 50th anniversary. It was set up by Dartington hall, which wanted to take arts to North Devon.

Situation was different 50 years ago. The villages were more isolated and the communities were self contained and spread out. Dartington hall was a centre.

North Devon didn't have a clear centre and Dartington took the role to transport arts towards the communities.

Arts Council: It was set up argued in the Second World War as an independent regional funding up until ten years ago. Culture must not be used by government to influence country. Must be an Independent body. Arts council most interested in: to reach the most audience with high quality arts.

Rural touring network was started to be built up 50 years ago. Beaford as one of the starting point was to find out who were touring and they would ask to come to North Devon for a few performances, to take tours out of concert halls.

There are different stories for different parts of country. But step by step all the rural arts organisations started to group and to create NRTF.

UK has 32 members across countries. Virtually all areas of UK are covered by a rural arts organisation. Normally they have a small staff team (4 full time employees).

The organizations work with volunteers in isolated communities. The core principle of rural touring: small core team, lots of volunteers.

When the area is bigger, than is more difficult to build audience.

For example the „Live and Local” is biggest rural organisation.

2 sources of funding for the activities of NRTF:

1. Local authority and ACE
2. NPO - national portfolio organisation - 700

An NPO in any case must support government objectives. Priorities now: developing city regions, support diversity.

Rural cultural development is not a priority at the moment, they have to deal with this.

Project based schemes: grants for the arts: they are for individual projects for one *off tour*, research and development etc. Short term projects.

Questions as to whether this is best way to run an organisation?

Are there other funding bodies for Beaford? Business sponsorship of arts?

Beaford is not a business sponsorship.

In a city it makes sense to do this, 20hrs to sell the sponsorship with 1% of profits.

In rural areas same time needed but less money available. Trusts are better for Beaford.

For example the heritage lottery fund: For Beaford photo archive, or the pharmaceuticals on the coast of North Devon.

Do beafords plan to invest in regional companies or national companies?

Core idea that audience in village halls/ schools/ communities are different to audience in art centre or theatre. These places are social places where community is used to doing social activities and having fun.

Broader audience come to these performances. What they hold in common is they all live there, audience is a community of place rather than a community of interest.

Artist can take the audience on a journey and audience give back a lot.

Purpose of work is to connect with audience.

At the community of place: the performer must not upset anybody. If you want to engage an audience you can invite or challenge and confront. Beaford likes shows that can charm, invite and then challenge audience.

Beaford choose to work with some from SW and not with others.

It offers a range of shows, what can offer a good night out. More/less challenging but Beaford guarantee a level of quality.

How do you measure the impact for arts council?

ACE has a system in place; At end of a show they can ask: what's your postcode and what's your rating;

ACE want to see what type of audience you have. Uses data base called Acorn to see what demographic of postcode is. It is a quality matrix.

In rural area is more difficult to use 'quality metrics instead'. Programmer answers questions take iPads to theatre and then asks audience same questions. We want to see if the programmer's opinion matches that of audience. Like the question of diversity or age. In our case the average above 30 years old.

What about outdoor theatre? Does that make sense in rural settlement?

Examples: The plough. Torrington. The sense of an event will bring community out.

Burn the curtain: cycling, running, Hat fair - Winchester festival. Without walls

Awards for all lottery funding - funding for villages to get people out.

Would might fund a whole show.

Investment – more in a city, where a theatre festival will make a city more attractive to new employees.

What about the collaboration between Coventry University and NRTF?

NRTF: setting up study of impact of arts on rural areas with the help of social researchers.

Looking at well-being of ageing population, what can be economical for the health system for example: keeps them from residential homes.

A new project is the dance for older community or an other Inter-generational project.

The aim of the impact: 1. quality of art; 2. ACE - 'great art for everyone' 3. a really good performance will transform; 4. we now fulfil the role of church. 5. Outreach - on children, sense of opportunity.

What about European connections with NRTF?

Some rural touring networks looking at connecting with Europe.

Comparative study research about the Rural Touring Network and similar Italian realities

(Antonietta Fusco)

“The National Rural Touring Forum represents a number of mainly rural touring schemes and rural arts development agencies, principally across England, that aim to help local people to promote high quality arts events and experiences in rural and other community venues.”

This is the definition of National Rural Touring Forum as you can find on the official website <http://www.ruraltouring.org/about>.

During the last year, that means the duration of the *"Rural Inclusive Outdoor Theatre Education" (RIOTE)* Project (September 2016-August 2017), I tried to understand and verify what are the principles on which the English model of NRTF is based and the targets whom it seeks to achieve.

With regard to this, the face-to-face meeting with Mark Wallace, the Beaford Art Organization's director, in Devon was probably the most important and clarifying appointment I had in the last months. Also the possibility of witnessing to some real NRTF events like the dance workshop organized by "Lila Dance" at Bradworthy Primary Academy School or the show "Glorilla in Shirwell" by Spitz & Co. was enlightening to really understand how the Rural touring network works in details.

From there on, the need of looking for Italian realities who could possibly be compared to the English ones, both as regard the companies or artists who make theatre in and for rural environment but mainly as regard the organizers or stakeholders which could possibly give a financial support to them.

Actually, there is nothing similar in Italy in the meaning of a forum or organization officially recognized to this intent.

My idea is that it is not a coincidence. The reasons can be attributed to the different historical, sociological and political events of the last century that, in my humble opinion, made and will make impossible the realization of a regularly funded organization like NRTF in our country.

This does not mean that in Italy this kind of activities (performances in rural environment, teaching activities with local people, interaction with children or old people not yet or not anymore confident with the use of the body in an extra-daily way etc.) is not realized or supported. On the contrary, they exist and for a very long time but not in an "official" way.

It generally happens that Municipalities, City Councils, Pro Loco (tourist organizations) and so on, ask to artists for projects specifically dedicated to local communities with the request of present performances, concerts or any sort of activities which could take care of their local history, society and cultural tradition.

On the other hand, the Italian “Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali” is continuously involved in supporting public and private Theaters, Dance Music or Art schools, teachers and artists of different disciplines with the aim of making culture everywhere conditions make it possible.

Nevertheless, all these institutions are not part of a net or of a public/institutional drawing but the success or failure of their project basically depend on the competencies and experiences of the organizations who really make culture, exactly like Theater or Dance companies, Art schools, music ensemble etc.

For this reason, I preferred to move my research towards this kind of realities (and in particular the theatrical ones) because actually they are the real characters of promoting culture or, better to say, of a possible “rural touring” in Italy.

In 70s TTB-Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo was part of that big revolution in the Italian or European theatrical research that distance itself from the traditional theatre generally performed in specific building and only for acculturated people.

Odin Theatre (<http://www.odinteatret.dk>) was the founder of this current and even though their official place was in Denmark from 1966, they decided to move for a while to the South of Italy (Salento, Carpignano) in 1974 with the intent of bringing theater where theater didn't exist at all: to come closer to people and realities absolutely not used to any kind of performing act except, in some case, for their old traditional chants and dances. So it was inaugurated what would have been the most successful and imitated way of making theater in rural communities for who belongs to the “Third Theatre”: the “barter” (according the definition of Eugenio Barba himself).

Like an exchange of objects which happens between tribes entering in contact with each other in regions not yet “westernized”, where it is exactly the barter itself to give worth to the exchanged objects, during those years it was the practice of the “barter” between actors and people of villages or small countries to make a particular sense to the work/research of the actor's body and to the process of knowledge or acculturation for local people as well.

The key word was “relation” in the meaning of osmosis, exchange, cultural enrichment for both the partners of this unusual way of sharing knowledge.

Here some links of those years and their first experiments of “barter”:

- “Dressed in white”, 1976: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rem-OOD66HI>
- “In search of Theatre”, 1974 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eswaipu5Ec4>
- “In search of Theatre, Clowns” 1974 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eyp8qpnBxHY>

On the path of its teachers, also Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo took up this challenge. A challenge characterized by the concept of the celebration/party and its anthropological aspects

like: escape from routine, upheaval/reconfirmation of social rules, regeneration of the time dimension and of the inter-subjective relationships, rediscovery of community values etc.

In particular, I would like to remember a big International cultural event: “The International Atelier on the Theatre of Group” happened in Bergamo from in 1977 under the direction of Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret and sponsored by UNESCO.

During the Atelier, theatre proved to be an answer to the socio-political situation of those years of terrorism, social conflicts and growing use of drug.

It was exactly in that occasion that TTB experimented for the first time the “barter” technique in particular in a popular district of Bergamo City, Monterosso, where local people offered food and hospitality to the actors like an exchange for their shows.

This high quality of having “friendly exchange” together made TTB possible to approach different contexts all over the world that I try to sum up here.

- Brazil, 80s. Cidade de Deus and Rocinha, the biggest favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

Famous to be place of fighting for organized gangs, TTB presented two of its shows, “Albatri” 1977 and “Si fa per ridere” 1981, in return for classes of the traditional Brazilian danze, capoeira.

- Lecco, 2004, 2005 (Italy). Staging of an outdoor show, performed along the streets of Lecco City, birthplace of the Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni, whose masterpiece novel “I Promessi Sposi” was inspiration for a big project that TTB realized together with local citizens. 300 of minor roles and actors, tailors, carpenters, workers and so on joined the realization of a big performance under the direction of TTB and their actors. A big example of collaboration with non-professionals realities but moved by a huge spirit of belonging.

- Beijing, 2006 (Republic of China). In one of the biggest Beijing Park, TTB presented a performance and some days of actor’s training in exchange for classes of circus techniques and Beijing Opera.

- Naples, 2008 (Italy). Quartiere delle Vele. Sadly famous area of Naples where Camorra lays down the rules for any action of daily life and where to present a performance was an hard but succeeded experiment to offer to local people a new way of observing their ordinary spaces.

- Bergamo, 2010 (Italy). “Libera Nos”. Project of promotion for the “book’s culture”. It took place in libraries and cultural spaces where readings, performances, concerts and folk dances were performed by both professional actors of different Bergamo’s companies and of local Bolivian community whom the project was mainly referred to.

- Holstebro and nearby villages (Denmark), 2017. In occasion of “Festuge” 2017, in collaboration with Odin Teatret and in particular with one of its actors, Kai Bredholt, TTB

was involved in the staging of “Festjyullandia”, a real encounter with the local culture of horses riders, sailors, farmers, children and old people who really took part to the performance for the majority of the scenes.

By the way, even though TTB based part of its research on this kind of projects, it is well known that its vocation is not exclusively this.

That is why I think it could be interesting now to pay attention to other Italian realities on the contrary mainly inspired by social reasons and more frequently used to interact with rural environment.

- Teatro Due Mondi di Faenza <http://www.teatroduemondi.it/in/indexin.html>

It is an independent theatre group from Faenza in Italy, subsidized by the Emilia Romagna Region. The group has been doing theatre research and theatre pedagogy for over 30 years and is composed by 11 permanent members and about 12 volunteers.

Due to a strong social motivation, the group aims to bring theatre where it is especially needed: suburbs, orphanages, socially disadvantaged areas, streets and squares.

Projects:

1. Progetto Rifugiati 2011, in collaboration with refugees hosted by CEFAL, professional training center of Lugo http://www.teatroduemondi.it/in/index_progetti_en.html
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My9SPTbzKEM&feature=youtu.be> <http://www.cefal.it>

2. Omsa Project 2010, in collaboration with ex workers of Omsa and political refugees.
(http://www.teatroduemondi.it/in/index_progetti_en.html and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BibHRBI4SsI&feature=youtu.be&list=PL428F9C1792B6BE13>)

- Teatro Nucleo <http://www.teatronucleo.org> It was founded in 1974 in Buenos Aires by Cora Herrendorf and Horacio Czertok. In 1978 it moved to Ferrara where is still keeping on its research. In particular it developed the idea of “**Teatro Comunitario**” which is a typology of social working trough the theater born in Argentina in 80s. Its main aim is to promote the integration of the Community trough artistic activities as acting, music, dance, scenography and settings. Projects:

1. Teatro carcere <http://www.teatronucleo.org/progetti/teatro-carcere/la-storia/>

2. Obsoleta <http://www.teatronucleo.org/progetti/obsoleta/>

3. Progetto Argentina <http://www.teatronucleo.org/progetti/sede-argentina/>

- Piemonte dal Vivo <http://www.piemontedalvivo.it>

Piemonte dal Vivo – Circuito Regionale Multidisciplinare is probably the most similar Italian reality to NRTEF. It works on a special region of the North Italy, to spread the culture of live

performance in all the places officially designated as well as in those absolutely unusual to performative acts for their original shape. <http://www.piemontedalvivo.it/lavanderia-a-vapore/>

- Tam Teatromusica, company who extends its range from music to performance or video installation for children as well as prisoners or people with physical or mental diseases. <http://www.tamteatromusica.it/biografia>

- I Briganti. Group of operators specialized in actions of theatre with social intent. It is a part of the community theater CUT (centro Universitario Teatrale) related to “Cattedre di Teatro Sociale e di Antropologia Teatrale” of Università Cattolica di Brescia. <http://progetti.unicatt.it/progetti-brescia-centro-universitario-teatrale-cut-il-teatro-sociale-di-comunita>

- Artisti aquilani ONLUS. A group of artists born in response to the earthquake in Aquila (central Italy) in 2009 to recreate a new possible “normal” society intimately injured in its history, culture and traditions. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahQsRe3CRCE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ew-MVtRBYVU>

Short introduction to outdoor theatre in Slovenian rural areas

(Nika Gabrovsek)

Slovenia has its own specifics; one of them is its small size, which influences theater practices. The country's population is 2 million. The capital and largest city Ljubljana has 300.000 inhabitants, the second biggest city Maribor 150.000, the third biggest city Celje 37.000 and the tenth biggest city Nova Gorica just 13.000. The total area of the country is 20.000 km².

The line between rural and urban environment is not very fixed. The rural areas are mostly in the vicinity of the towns which makes it quite easy and fast to travel, yet this doesn't exclude the fact that the rural areas should have more artistic events on higher quality level. Cultural education in these kind of environments should be adapted to their needs, and this takes time. Sadly, now, cultural happenings are mostly concentrated around local festivity with a commercial musical program.

In Slovenia, there is no organization such as the Rural Touring Network in the United Kingdom. One of the reasons for this is probably that rural and urban areas in Slovenia are quite connected.

Despite this, there are some practices that promote decentralization of outdoor theatre which is otherwise mainly the domain of the bigger cities.

Below are some examples of good practices of theater in rural areas and smaller towns:

Theatre of Ana Monro, established 1981 in Ljubljana, is one of the oldest independent theater organizations in Slovenia, and the oldest one in the field of street theatre. In 1998 they organized the 1st Street theatre festival in Ljubljana and Maribor (the two biggest cities in Slovenia) called *Ana Desetnica*. Nowadays the program of the festival takes place in 13 towns across Slovenia. With this practice they promote outdoor theater in smaller towns, which also makes it easier for local artists or producers to carry out their own theater projects in this surroundings.

Association Buffeto, the oldest professional organization in Slovenia dealing with the synthesis of circus arts, clowning and theatre annually organizes the clown theatre *Festival Klovnbuf*, which also hosts outdoor theater performances. In the past years they started to organize a part of the festival in the frame of a caravan (*Klovnbufova karavana*). After the main part of the festival in Ljubljana, some of the artists continue the caravan with their performances in smaller towns in Slovenia.

In both cases the organizers of the festival cooperate with local inhabitants and associations and/or town municipalities to find the proper place and program which would be suitable for the particular surroundings.

This kind of practice brings benefit on both sides. Festival producers can afford to host more quality performances which means more financial resources, which is realized through a touring principle. They can offer more performances to the artists, and for smaller communities it means they get a quality artistic program for local spectators. In the past years the visibility of the festivals and the number of spectators grew, which shows the need to create this kind of events.

Another interesting practice of theater within rural environments in Slovenia is the *Etno Histria* event.

Teatro Matita began this project in 2003, the event took place in rural settlements in Istria. Large numbers of artists from different countries, mostly musicians, and in a smaller part also performers, were invited to create together through socializing and informal education. The event is formatted like a workshop for amateur and professional artists who conclude their “residency” with a series of public events for the inhabitants of local communities. The event is formed as an exchange. Some local inhabitants provide accommodation facilities and teach the artists local folk songs and the artists provide a quality artistic program for them.

After 10 years the event evolved into the non-commercial and non-profit *HISTeRIA Festival* which placed a bigger emphasis on the performative and visual arts. The festival also took place in the rural environment in Istria, it created an interactive theatrical visual environment that is independent, spontaneous, and ecological in the spirit of “gesamtkunstwerk”. More than a hundred concerts, theatre performances, circus spectacles, and other events were performed at different venues that were embedded in the natural environment. Beside this they organized workshops for children and adults, seminars, an open market selling ECO

products, local food and drinks and emphasized the connection between local communities and ecological aspects.

Later on the festival moved its location to Sneznik, another rural area in the Inner Carniola region and changed its name to the *Floating castle*. The name is derived from the venue which takes place in the castle and its surroundings. In 2017 the festival hosted more than 300 artists from more than 30 countries, which included musicians, theatre and visual artists. They are continuing to emphasize sustainability and care for the environment, which is reflected through the recycling system, energy saving and no use of plastic. As they say: “The event promotes intergenerational cooperation and takes care of the future of young people and involvement of the elderly. The festival motivates local people to participate, and their engagements are a unique enrichment.”

Every larger town in the region has their own regional theater, beside this there are other practices of theater events in smaller towns with around 1000 to 4000 inhabitants which are mostly concentrated on indoor theatre performances.

Most of these middle size towns have their own cultural facility - a so called “**Cultural house**”. Most of them were established in socialist times with an idea to offer cultural content to workers and farmers. The program is mostly based on season tickets with two repertoires, one for adults, one for children. Some of the cultural houses are connected in the network **KUDUS** (association of cultural houses and institution) whose mission is mutual cooperation, exchange of good practices and protection of their interests. Because of the small size of the country the cooperation between different cultural houses, even the ones who are not included in the network, isn't very hard.

Beside the practices above there is a large number of town events and smaller sized festivals organized by local municipalities or local NGOs which take place in smaller towns or even villages. They are mostly scheduled in the summer or around holidays and school vacations (Christmas, New Year, Carnival, Easter). Usually their main focus is musical events without a very high artistic value, but slowly there is more interest in smaller, quality artistic events as well, among which there are some outdoor theatre events.

As described above, there are some good practices, but there is still a lot of room for improvement: to think about how to connect more with rural communities, which methods to use, how to finance the activities etc.

This contribution was written on the base of personal experiences of Ljud group, debates with members of Theatre of Ana Monro and Buffeto members and other performers and producers active in theatre arts through Slovenia.

Some useful links for further reading and exploring outdoor theatre happenings in Slovenia:

Festival Floating castle: <http://floatingcastle.si/>

Theatre Festival Histeria: <http://www.festivalhisteria.com/>

Theatre of Ana Monro: <http://www.anamonro.si>

Buffeto: <http://zavodbufeto.com/>

Teatro Matita: <http://www.teatromatita.com/>

KUDUS: <http://kudus.si>

A theatre community on the countryside in Hungary

(László Sipos)

Cultural Primary-care

The essence of the principle drafted by Dr. Péter Hoppál cultural secretary of state; is that people have a fundamental right to receive the opportunities of attaining quality culture. We have to get to rural and culturally neglected areas, where people can't create a richer cultural life by their own power.

Rural environment - Cultural Primary-care in the Rural Areas

We perform 130-150 times a year, about 50 times in Celldömölk the others are out of our base town.

As for the set we strive to create practical, easily transportable performances that can be performed almost everywhere.

With our outdoor and children performances the goal is to reach the biggest possible audience; while the performance should become a great event, a festivity in the life of the communities.

Organizing a performance requires a prudent job, a conscious marketing activity.

Get along the news of the performance (through brochures, posters, etc.) finding financial sources. In these matters we still have to improve.

We create three children plays every year.

Our company travels to Transylvania/Romania for a one-week-long tour twice a year, with children plays for the ethnic hungarian children who live there. They watch the plays with the biggest joy. There are poor villages where the children haven't even seen any theatre performances yet.

Some notes about the situation in Hungary

(Géza Pintér)

In Hungary there is no such system as the Rural Touring Network in the United Kingdom. During the Socialist era (before 1989), the national state theatres in the regional centres were obliged to create a certain number of performances in rural settlements within their regions. This phenomenon was called „Tájéolás.” Besides that, there was one theatre in Budapest, the Déryné Színház, which had the task to dedicate the major part of its work to touring in rural settlements throughout the year.

The situation has changed fundamentally with the fall of the old regime. Since 1990, the rural touring activity of the state theatres has been much less controlled. This is outlined in statistic researches:

<http://www.controlstudio.hu/new/riote/palyazati-dokumentumok/felmeresek-a-riote-2-projekthez/>

However, during the last 20-30 years in Hungary, there has been a growing festival culture, and some festivals, such as Művészetek Völgye or Ördögkatlan Fesztivál, are situated in small villages. The latter one takes place yearly in a geographically disadvantaged region, in the south of Baranya. These events are supporting the idea to spread the cultural goods and performative activity out of the cultural centres.

All in all, the values of community theatre (“amatőr színház,” which had become a movement in the '70's) and the expectations to offer cultural possibilities in a more democratic sense, does not seem to be supported enough in Hungary today.

Report on the situation of Rural Touring in Transilvania, Romania

(Csongor Köllő)

PREAMBLE

While I base my present report on the situation of the rural touring phenomena in Transilvania (which is one of the three main geographical, social and historical regions that roughly make up present-day Romania), due to the fact that our organization works within this region, to my knowledge the situation is the same countrywide. What is sure is that there is not one scheme or network in Romania that would have as its mission the servicing of rural area population with theatrical acts or performances.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Up until 1989 and the fall of communism, it has been traditionally the role and duty of theatres (in the towns where such institutions existed) to cover a much larger geographical

area surrounding their base by regularly touring several of their productions to villages, smaller towns, etc..

This has changed step by step during the 90's, owing to several factors, among them: the opening of the borders, wherein theatres could now make tours to surrounding countries but also to far-away lands or even continents, these requiring much more time and energy in organization; the raising and controlling, from the part of the funding body (government, local council) of the number of performances that these theatres have to hold monthly, or even the desired number of spectators that they need to lure in; and thirdly, we have to mention that in some cases it was also a case of prestige, touring the villages being considered artistically inferior and less satisfying than playing at home or in an international festival (this can be understood if we consider that for many years a number of these companies have been cut off from the international circuit).

PRESENT SITUATION

With repertoire theatres withdrawing from rural touring and independent/alternative companies not appearing (in larger numbers) at all on the theatrical scene until after 2010, there was nothing to fill in the huge and critical gap created by the tides of history. A small number of cabaret/farce type groups (with a questionable level of quality) and puppet-theatre companies roamed the land, with 5-10% of yesteryear's theatre companies doing tours in rural areas (and in most cases this is down to management's decision to uphold this practice, but what will happen when management inevitably changes?)

A part of the argument is that there is a huge cultural, social and financial discrepancy between the rural/urban areas in Romania, with the majority of art, money, social events, etc. taking place in the large towns, whereas the villages are lacking even in infrastructure, jobs and so on. However, in the long run this cannot be sustained, because a dangerous imbalance will be created that could cause a huge rift in society (as well as have economic impact on the country). A change is needed.

FUTURE PLANS

By participating in RIOTE, our organisation managed to obtain key knowledge not just of street theatre, but also about the organising of a rural touring network (having studied the successful implementation in the UK), the way it works, how it can be sustained, and so on. These two aspects complemented our own practice perfectly, having experimented already with open space theatre, but also basing some of our activities in rural areas.

At the present moment, based on the knowledge gained from RIOTE and planning to run alongside RIOTE2, we are submitting a national application into setting up what would be the first real Rural Touring Scheme in Romania, i.e. a small network of villages, local promoters and (mostly) independent companies, with the aim of then helping to set up new schemes in the future which would be held together by an umbrella organization similar to the National Rural Touring Forum in the UK.

This present application is also based on our experiences this summer, when, for the closing of RIOTE, we put together a street theatre show based on the knowledge obtained through the project, and toured it, in a sort of demo network in five villages in the Transilvanian Plains (some of these villages haven't had a theatre or anything similar visiting them in 15-20 years).

We hope that by setting up this network and hopefully making it sustainable we can contribute to mending the aforementioned discrepancies, and raising the status of the countryside mainly on the cultural level, but which in turn can have serious effects on the economic, administrative, infrastructural and other levels as well, as seen in the case of the Rural Touring Network.

Summary

It has been outlined that in the partner-countries (Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania) there is no any structure like Rural Touring Network in the UK. There are only similar, isolated examples without the concept to spread out professional theatre activity in rural settlements, (and without a democratic aspect of providing equal conditions for the whole population).

While we study the possibilities of rural touring in Italy and in Slovenia, the long-term prospective of the present project is to build a similar structure to the English example, a rural network of settlements in Hungary and in Romania. In Hungary, the idea is to connect some of the villages in the pilgrimage route of Esztergom-Máriagyűd by theatre activities. In Romania the aim is to connect villages within Transylvania by intercultural outdoor performing activities.

In any case, this is still a research to find new horizons of confrontation and new possibilities of meeting in between actors and spectators.