THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

Rural Arts Touring in Scotland: The Case of Theatre

Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion
Centre for Cultural Policy Research
University of Glasgow

COMEDIA
2004
# THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

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Where is the place that mair o’ life ye’ll learn,
Than ’hint the scenes in some auld kintra barn,
Where two-three hungry, ragged, Spouter blades,
— Wha’d better stuck through life to spools or spades,—
Driven by stern want, the fell remorseless jaud;
Mang kintra folk do ply their kittle trade?
      There ye may see a long horn shottle chiel,
On whose pale face, hunger is painted weel,
      And Dick the Third shout for ‘a horse! a horse!’
To meet young Richmond, an’ the invading force:
Or else some sniffering, snivelling, ill-clad loon,
Wha wadna hae the heart a cat to droon;
      As stern Macbeth, rampauging through his part,
An’ for his crown stab Duncan to the heart.

From the nineteenth-century poem ‘The Spouter’ by Alexander Wilson¹
In early summer 1973 a company of nine actors, musicians and stage management from the newly formed 7:84 Theatre Company (Scotland) packed themselves and a theatre set into two transit vans, left Edinburgh and began a tour that was to last for five weeks. *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, a play written by John McGrath in collaboration with the company, was performed 29 times during those summer weeks. Of those performances just seven were in established theatre venues – the Aberdeen Arts Centre, the MacRobert Centre, Stirling, the Little Theatre, Inverness, the Harbour Arts Centre, Irvine, and the Cottage Theatre, Cumbernauld. The rest of the tour consisted of one-off performances in village halls, town halls and community centres from Kinlochbervie to Dornie, Portree to Dingwall, Stromness to Oban.

This tour – just as much as the play itself – had a profound impact on the expectations of theatre makers, funders and audiences across the whole of Scotland and, in particular, in the rural areas that the tour encompassed. The approach that was established by 7:84 during that first national tour – built around one-off performances in village and community halls with the company staying in local accommodation and travelling almost daily to each new venue – is still discernible today in arts touring in all parts of rural Scotland.

This report interrogates the structures and systems of contemporary rural arts touring, focusing in particular on the experience of the theatre makers and theatre audiences. We use the reference point of *The Cheviot*… to gauge evolution and change in terms of the work of the companies, audience expectations, the nature of the venues, the funding context, and, above all, the policy framework. From this review we seek to draw conclusions and to make recommendations for policy development at government, agency and local level.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This report investigates arts touring and, more particularly, theatre touring in the rural areas of Scotland. We were concerned to examine the structures and policies that facilitate and support this work, while also reflecting on the political context and cultural relevance of the distribution and reception of theatre work in rural areas.

The Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR), in collaboration with the Crichton Tourism Research Centre (CTRC), undertook this research into the impact of rural arts touring (particularly theatre) on community development and arts practice. This was done as part of a wider study of rural touring in England and Wales. François Matarasso was commissioned by the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) to undertake research into rural arts touring and, specifically, the outcomes of its members’ work. The research was supported by the Carnegie UK Trust, the Countryside Agency, the regional offices of Arts Council England and some local authorities involved in rural touring. The CCPR was a partner in this project, contributing the literature review, the arts touring companies review, research work on the English and Welsh case studies, and the Scotland study. This report constitutes the final part of the CCPR’s contribution.

This Scottish study had two strands: a historical review of rural arts touring in Scotland, developed with particular focus on the role of theatre; and, an analysis of current practice and policy that encompassed an investigation of rural arts activity in Scotland.

The historical strand of the research project was to examine the shifts in models of touring and funding provision and infrastructure as it has evolved in Scotland from the 1970s and, particularly, from 1973 and the influential tour of 7:84 (Scotland)’s production, The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil. The contemporary strand is focused on a retelling of the touring infrastructure and an analysis of the elements that constitute rural touring theatre in Scotland. In short, our research project interrogated the structures and systems of contemporary rural touring, focusing, in particular, on the experience of promoters, theatre makers and theatre audiences.

Although touring has been an important part of Scottish theatre for centuries – and throughout the twentieth century there were important developments by the Scottish National Players, Perth Theatre, Mull Theatre and others – we have taken 1973 and The Cheviot... as a key reference point. This tour –as much as the play itself – had a profound impact on the expectations of theatre makers, funders and audiences across Scotland and, in particular, in the rural areas that the tour encompassed. A significant part of the legacy has been in the nature and meaning of rural touring and the policy assumptions and funding protocols that it influenced. The 7:84 tour – its scope and scale even more than its representations – acted as the starting point of a survey of developing policy, practice and experience of rural touring in Scotland. The approach that was used by 7:84 during that first national tour is still discernible today in arts touring in all parts of rural Scotland. We used The Cheviot... to gauge evolution and change in terms of the work of the companies,
audience expectations, the nature of the venues, the funding context, and, above all, the policy framework.

Our research adopted two approaches to the rural. One was critical and rhetorical – that is, we were aware of the contested nature of the word ‘rural’ and an awareness of this work informs this report. The second was rather more pragmatic and responded to the existing division of Scotland into local authority and economic development areas. So, our fieldwork focused on three ‘rural’ areas of Scotland: Dumfries and Galloway, the Highlands and Islands, and the North East of Scotland. We found that the cultural policies and touring infrastructure in each area were very different even when the theatre product on tour was the same or similar.

1.2 THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

I believe Scotland is a deeply centralised and inward looking country. [...] for centuries, all roads have led to Glasgow or Edinburgh, albeit for some as a brief pause on the way to London. As a nation, seen from the urban perspective, we seem unable or unwilling to acknowledge that anything of true worth can be achieved if you’re operating more than five miles from Haymarket or Byres Road. Clearly, if you live in the country, that’s either because you can’t cut it in the urban marketplace, or it’s a lifestyle choice to get out of it and bake bread.

Alasdair McCrone, ‘Urban parochialism, rural underselling: achieving parity and credibility in arts from within rural Scotland’, presentation at the CCPR Rural arts seminar, 6 March 2004

This research comes at a time of deep change in the countryside. Changes are partly the result of the economics of farming, partly due to political interventions from Brussels, London and Edinburgh, and partly to wider social change. A series of unrelated crises, from Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) to flooding, have added further burdens in many areas. Many of these issues impact on the UK as a whole. However, we see significant difference in the politics and culture of the countryside in England and Wales and in rural affairs in Scotland. The separation of this Scotland case study, and its distinct but linked research questions, reflect these differences as they have evolved against the backdrop of the nationalist movements of the 1970s, the impact of Europe-level politics, shifts in government at Westminster, and, at the turn of the millennium, the impact of devolution.

Over the past decade or so we have witnessed a growing recognition of the role of the arts and culture in social and economic development. While much attention has been given to major capital projects like Tate Modern or the regeneration of Gateshead Quays there is a deepening awareness, within government (at UK and Scottish level) and its agencies, of the benefits of arts activity. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), for example, led a cross-departmental policy review into the role of the arts and sport in addressing social exclusion.4 Non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) like the Scottish Arts Council, Arts Council England and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council are also adjusting policy and funding patterns to take account of these concerns.

However, perhaps insufficient value is placed on the distinctiveness of the role of arts in rural areas. Despite work into Fèisean nan Gàidheal – including that undertaken by Matarasso – little attention is given to rural areas and their arts interests in a debate which tends to concentrate on the more evident problems of our cities and towns, and the high-profile investments and celebrations there. Nor have those departments and
Introduction

agencies concerned with rural affairs yet shown much interest in the potential contribution of the arts to community life and its sustainability. This may be partly because of the lack of substantial research into the place of the arts in rural communities.

1.3 THEATRE TOURING IN SCOTLAND

In Scotland many aspects of rural touring are the same or similar to other types of touring (urban touring and touring beyond Scotland), but there are aspects of rural touring that are quite distinctive: it’s a story of ‘the same, but different’. Although more readily formalised in urban centres, theatre has existed in rural areas for many centuries. Indeed, historically, the type of theatrical activity that most people commonly saw was that of touring troupes and strolling players, minstrels, tumblers and actors performing on county and local market days, in village squares and other temporary sites. As most of the population lived in rural areas these strolling players would perform frequently in this environment.

In Scotland strolling players are recorded from the mid-15th century but one might see, in the tradition of the makars and the ceilidh, something of a nascent, or proto-, theatricality. By the 18th century there were established touring circuits in Scotland which evolved further through the 19th century. The leading actors of the day would tour in the summer months, and sometimes at other times in the year, playing standard repertoire pieces with the resident, or ‘stock’, companies of the provincial playhouses. As the 19th century progressed and communications improved – not least through the expansion of the rail network – it was increasingly the case that whole companies would tour out of London, bring work on provincial try-outs or extend the life of London hits with regional tours. The age of the actor-manager saw companies criss-cross the country playing for one or two weeks at each engagement. Theatre grew increasingly industrialised and regulated, and touring theatre was dominated by London companies. In Scotland, however, the geggy tradition of small touring companies performing on temporary fit-up stages survived in some rural areas until the 1920s.

Against this backdrop the repertory system emerged. In its early days, a resident company produced a regularly changing repertoire in a single theatre building. The system was predicated on cultural production and consumption within a municipality and, by extension, within an urban space. It was all about sustainability: building recognition, familiarity and trust with local audiences, and creating long-term relationships with funders. Initially at least these funders were municipalities – and the form is, in essence, civic – but this system, and its cultural and ideological values, fed easily into a national framework of subsidy. Repertory theatre was founded on an ethos of public service and a belief in the improving potential of culture. The system had built-in sustainability, not least through quickly formed and close relations with local government.

The repertory theatres (through repertoire choice, audience development and funding regimes) were a key manifestation of the cultural values of the nation. Indeed, one might argue that the public service ethos of repertory, its preferred images and representations, its paternalistic managements, and its connection with a spatially-defined local audience (an urban audience), are the very same values which contribute to the development of the influential museum and libraries sector and shape the cultural policy framework for the
UK in the mid-20th century. In short, repertory was a form and a system quickly embedded within the nascent subsidised sector.

In addition, however, and influencing cultural policy in Britain in a subtly different way, the mid-20th century saw small-scale amateur companies – some motivated by politics and ideology, some much more by what we might now term ‘community development’ and ‘cultural inclusion’ – make work relevant to a range of working class audiences in urban, industrialised and also rural areas. What is important in their work, and what did influence national policy, was its emphasis on participation and engagement across the geographic and economic diversity of the nation. As the century progressed, however, there was something of a change – with professional activity coalescing in the towns and cities and only infrequently venturing into the rural areas, where amateur activity dominated. Despite work at Perth and Mull it was increasingly the case that professional theatre became something to which one had to travel, as opposed to it coming to you. Now, however, the balance is more equal: amateur activity is nation-wide and professional touring arts are spread across the country supported by economic and cultural policy, facilitated by an infrastructure of agencies and networks, and serviced by a raft of institutions of production and distribution.

In the professionalisation of touring arts in Scotland, one can cast 1973 as a significant watershed. At this one moment theatre in Scotland was indeed being revolutionised: the Citizens’ in Glasgow and the Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh were, in their different ways, challenging an increasingly outmoded model of the ‘rep’ company, its repertoire and its cultural relevance; the Traverse in Edinburgh championed new writing and internationalism beyond London; while 7:84 simply threw away the rule book of where and how theatre could be seen in Scotland. Criss-crossing the country with new plays that responded to the immediate lived experience of their audience, 7:84 found that most elusive of things, the ‘new audience’. For 7:84 that audience was beyond the current infrastructure of Scotland’s theatre buildings; it lived and worked beyond the central belt, and the company had new stories to tell them.

Through the 1970s, the activities of 7:84, then Borderline and Wildcat, as well as the ambition of a municipally-funded company like TAG (constituted as ‘Theatre about Glasgow’) to work beyond the city limits, ensured that touring was embedded within the funding and policy paradigms of Scottish theatre. In addition the late 1970s and early 1980s saw regular Scottish tours being undertaken by English companies – perhaps most memorably for many rural residents, the Medieval Players were regular visitors to the Highlands. Indeed, some rural residents recall somewhat ruefully that there were periods when there seemed to be more English companies touring in the Highlands than Scottish ones – and, of course, doing so with Scottish Arts Council funding.

By the mid 1980s, however, it could reasonably be argued that Scottish theatre as a whole was predicated on touring. As a result Scottish arts funding at both national and local authority level has never had a specific rural policy. In Scotland, theatre funding is divided between the building-based companies (some of whom undertake tours) and the touring (non-building) companies funded for fixed periods of up to four years and/or for individual and one-off projects. As a result of this funding regime, as well as the different social and political agendas of the theatre makers, different models of touring evolved: some (pace 7:84) were predicated on touring across the geographical diversity of Scotland; some, like Clyde Unity Theatre in the 1980s, championed touring to urban areas (such as
the peripheral housing schemes) that might be seen to have been excluded from general theatre provision; some like Suspect Culture or Theatre Cryptic in the 1990s engaged in only limited touring within Scotland but were anxious to extend their touring to England, mainland Europe and beyond.

In short, then, Scottish theatre is predicated on the touring model with a raft of companies that have only transitory relationships with buildings of any kind. While the details of funding to this sector have changed, its existence has never been seriously questioned. Indeed, in the 30 years since The Cheviot… toured, the arts funding infrastructure in Scotland has developed funding schemes and packages which have embedded touring as the key delivery mechanism for theatre provision in Scotland. This model is particularly significant when looking at theatre in rural areas.

However, although there have been recent developments in small-scale work, there has never been a medium-scale touring company, with a national remit, based outwith the central belt. The closest might be the Ayr-based Borderline established in 1974 and Mull Theatre, with a building home but with a funding remit to tour in its hinterland. Arguing for professional Highlands theatre, George Gunn, the artistic director of Thurso-based Grey Coast Theatre – a small-scale theatre organisation established in 1992 – says that ‘the art form has not yet developed into theatre that is of and from the north of Scotland, as opposed to theatre that tours the north of Scotland’. By extension one might suggest that in Scotland there is only a limited amount of rural theatre compared to a healthy amount of theatre in rural areas: issues around the provenance of work being toured will be discussed later.

1.4 THE RESEARCH PROJECT

While the NRTF-commissioned research considers all art-forms, this report uses the case of theatre to focus on key policy concerns and issues. This emphasis on theatre is particularly important because of the form’s historical significance in influencing cultural policy developments in Scotland, the potency of its images and representations, and its twin manifestations as the production of a professional industry and as an amateur activity and aspect of community life. In addition, we found that – even in a mixed programme of music, dance and comedy – theatre forms the basis of programmes for most rural venues. While this study focused on professional theatre activity, we are, of course, fully conscious that it exists in close connection to amateur work, not least in terms of influencing touring patterns, schedules and audience expectations with the relationship between amateur and professional being particularly distinctive in Dumfries and Galloway.

1.4.1 Approach

For this research project we adopted an approach and methodology that was essentially qualitative, and sought to take account of the different perspectives and aspirations of those involved. This means recognising cultural issues, such as values and identity, issues of language and religion; social issues, such as education, community development and inclusion; political issues, such as the development of the NDPBs, changes in local government, the impact of Europe and devolution; and, economic issues, such as the impact on local business, transport, industrial development and even decline.
As recognised in the wider research project, there is a substantial overlap between these. For instance, the acquisition of new confidence, skills or experience, which can be seen as a social process, may lead to an economic outcome such as employment; cultural values will also have played a substantial, perhaps unrecognised, part. This interdependency is likely to be heightened in small communities where the social, cultural and economic importance of a shop, pub and village hall may be inseparable.

1.4.2 Questions and assumptions
The role of rural arts touring organisations is not a separate policy initiative but is embedded within the general Scottish arts funding system. We wanted to investigate the evolution of this connection across 30 years of arts provision and activity. We were concerned to investigate the perceived and the pragmatic (policy) links between rural touring and those bodies concerned with rural community development. At the very least there is anecdotal evidence, from individuals involved and experience in other areas of cultural development, that its impact on rural communities may be significant in relation to its scale and resources. This research sought to test this hypothesis by asking questions of historical development and about contemporary practice and policy.

Given Comedia’s work in cultural research, specifically in the area of participation in the arts, it is perhaps worth saying that the overall rural touring research approach has not assumed that the experience of a participant is more important than that of an audience member. The arts offer many different kinds of experience which must be understood, and appreciated, for what they are. This principle holds true for the Scotland case study.

1.4.3 Methods
The research used a qualitative approach based on a series of in-depth interviews with key participants in, and observers of, the field. This was supported by documentary research both in Scotland and beyond. The research methodologies included interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. The principal research method for the Scotland study was semi-structured interviews of key personnel. We undertook 58 such interviews. Those interviewed fell into four main categories: arts/policy professionals, including rural touring agency staff, local authority or other arts officers; local promoters; arts practitioners – representatives of theatre companies which tour in Scotland; and, elected or nominated representatives – local councillors, regional and/or national representatives. Each had a distinct perspective on rural touring as they have adopted different roles over the historical period that the research project reviewed. The interviews covered activity in three selected regions – Dumfries and Galloway, the Highlands and Islands, and the North East. The interviewees had a broad spread of age and gender, and their range of roles meant that we were able to gather information and opinion based on their own experiences and external observation.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, drawing on activity across Scotland, we undertook more specific work on the audience in Dumfries and Galloway. Adopting a research strategy similar to ethnography, a researcher spent a month in each of three communities in Dumfries and Galloway during the summer of 2003. By staying in the place she was able to develop a feeling for the community, get to know people through personal conversations, and participate in meetings of relevant groups. Such participant observation ensured that information gathered was seen within its social, communal and
individual contexts. The researcher attended theatre events in different communities to observe the audience, taking detailed notes with regard to age and gender, but also noting the interaction of attenders. Conversations and interviews with people at the venues were also conducted in order to understand their perception of the audience.

The researcher also led focus group discussions with members of the audience which constituted the focal point of the field research. These were semi-structured and open, with the main topics being social and cultural impact. Although guided by some general questions, the underpinning principle is that interviews remain open and answers are not pre-determined in any way as no choices are given to the interviewee. The interviewee was allowed to set his or her own agenda, according to what issues in relation to the topic he or she felt were important or worth discussing. These groups gave the research team an insight into the fabric of rural community life, shedding light on the local culture that one-to-one interviews can miss.

Observation was extended by interviews of key staff related to the theatre and arts provision in the region as well as of other stakeholders, including arts professionals and promoters; it was further supported by the reading of local sources of information and comment, including newspapers. In addition, the researcher undertook a critical review of relevant research made by local public agencies (such as the tourist board and the council) and others, including consultants. These activities sought to achieve a general sense of 'local knowledge' and opinion. The aim was to enable the research team, by drawing on official reports, to make conclusions backed by actual experience in the community.

Framing all this work, we collected and analysed data relating to funding from a range of agencies for theatre touring over 30 years. This included touring patterns over the period and venue use. Using the particular case of theatre, the study sought to establish: the infrastructure of touring in Scotland in terms of national and local funding schemes and protocols; the type and nature of the work toured – its provenance, production context and its specificity; and, how that work related to its audience.

### 1.4.4 The research team

The CCPR research team consisted of Christine Hamilton, Director of the Research Centre; Adrienne Scullion, Academic Director; and, Anselma Gallinat, Research Assistant; with additional interviews by Clara Wheelan. Our CTRC colleague was Donald MacLeod, and the director of the overall research for England and Wales was François Matarasso.

Anselma Gallinat contributed to the project, and to this report, in a particularly distinguished manner, working as Research Assistant for nine months in 2003. She prepared an extensive literature review that helped frame both this Scottish investigation and that undertaken on England and Wales, and undertook a series of interviews and some archive work to establish touring patterns in Scotland over the 30 years from *The Cheviot*… tour.

In addition she did the major fieldwork component of the research project, being resident in Dumfries and Galloway for three months in summer 2003. She also undertook an analysis of existing research on audiences in the region. The findings from Gallinat’s work are threaded through the entire report but are particularly evident in sections 4.3 and 5.5. Gallinat commenced post-doctoral work at the University of Durham in January 2004 and, although she did make invaluable comments and suggestions to it in draft stage, she was not directly involved in writing this report. Her contribution remains significant,
however, and the project and the report would have been sorely wanting without her involvement.

Finally, the team extends grateful thanks to the many audience members, promoters, practitioners, officers and others who contributed their time, experience, ideas and opinions to the research project.
2 THE RURAL QUESTION

The overall rural touring research design – and the Scotland case study within it – assumes that the cultural life of rural areas is as valid as that of towns and cities, though it is likely, for many reasons, to be different in many ways. More specifically, the rural debate in Scotland is different from that in England and in Wales because of topographic and historical factors, political differences – including models of governance – as well as ideological and cultural differences, such as the different theatre systems and levels of provision in the nations.

2.1 SCOTLAND AND THE RURAL

Heritage / A brand burned in deep / Through skin of centuries. / Scarring forever / The soul / The land / The memory / The future /


The meaning and nature of rural and rurality have been explored in academic literature, policy documents and in creative literature and expression of all kinds. In commonsense terms rural is understood as meaning the country. But even this is a difficult word: for, as Raymond Williams discusses, ‘country’ signifies both a nation – a fiendishly difficult word itself – and a topographic space, part of a ‘land; in short, the country ‘can be the whole society or its rural area’. With this elision – and with country also connoting images and ideas of the pastoral, the bucolic and the rustic, and, by extension, the natural, the untrammelled and the unspoilt – the rhetorical function of the rural has been important:

‘Country’ has come to stand for the essential values and images of place, hence the fusion of land and nation. [...] Just as the idealised England is essentially a rural idyll, a place where country and Country come together, so the ‘real’ Scotland (and Wales and Ireland) are essentially rural – ‘Welsh Wales’, the Gealtachd in both Scotland and Ireland, the heartland of the culture.

Pictorial and literary images of the rural resonate as distillations of some essential truth of a people; the rural is rehearsed in novels, drama and film as a place of authenticity, and dramatised in narratives of escape, release or transformation. Infusing Scottish culture is a tendency to see the rural experience as impacting on the imaginary and, indeed, moral well-being of the whole of Scotland: Scotland as magically transformative and psychologically healing is quintessentially described in films like *Brigadoon*, *The Maggie* (both 1954), and *Local Hero* (1983) and features in novels such as Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* (1818) and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* (1885), and plays as different as J M Barrie’s *Mary Rose* (1920) and Stephen Greenhorn’s *Passing Places* (1997). In these texts the physical experience of being in Scotland, and, generally, of being connected with a woman who functions as the personification of Scotland, has the potential to return urban man to his contented, complete and natural self.
In the late 18th century Scotland was becoming increasingly industrialised. An influential interpretation sees the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation as homogenising and argues that, during this time, the lowlands lost some sense of identity, becoming a standardised urban space rather than distinctively Scottish towns and regions. Of course, this process was not just economic but was influenced by the social and cultural policies of the Union and its bloody aftermath which oppressed some of the cultural expression of rural (in this case of Highland) Scotland.

The anthropologist Malcolm Chapman has argued that, to counter that cultural leveling, ‘the symbols, myths and tartans of the Highlands of Scotland were appropriated by lowland Scots in a bid to cling on to some distinct culture’. However, the cultural irony was that it was the iconography of the part of Scotland which had been oppressed and ‘reviled as barbarian, backward and savage’ in efforts to subdue the Jacobites and manage the new nation of the United Kingdom that ‘found itself extolled as the “real” Scotland – land of tartan, kilts and heather’. Chapman argued that, just as Scotland was losing its identity politically, culturally and economically, so it appropriated that which had flourished in the currency of the Romantic movement – the Gaelic vision. And plainly, these images have been further taken into the 20th century tourist vision of Scotland. In this, of course, Scotland is by no means unique in the modern world.

This is not the place to develop the argument of cultural appropriation but it is useful to reference this contested history in the way that Scotland is imagined and in the way that rural Scotland is valued and represented for local, national and international markets. In short, the ‘country’ of Scotland is a potent place existing in topographic reality (and as such experiencing some very practical problems to which we will return) but also ‘a landscape of the mind [and] a place of the imagination’, and it lies at the very heart of our national and cultural identities. But, of course, the danger of these identities – and these views of rural Scotland – is that they are limited and potentially patronising: why would one seek policy solutions in areas of Scotland constructed as escapist or as backward-looking or as whimsical?

Part of our aim has been to record rural solutions – or indeed local solutions – for rural problems, but we also seek to explore the issue along a different axis – that is to seek solutions which engage fully with the diversity and capacity of Scotland as a whole and which value a rural role in this as part of the whole not as an arbitrary ‘other’.

2.2 THE CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE

Town and country, not town over country.
I love my country, I fear my government.

Banner slogans, 22 September 2002

Rural is also defined or conceptualised in relation to what it is not: in simple terms the antonym of rural is urban. On 22 September 2002 up to 400,000 people converged on London to participate in a ‘March for Liberty and Livelihood’. The Countryside Alliance, which organised the protest, argued that the march was designed to highlight the needs of rural communities. Other commentators interpreted the intention as being a protest against (specific) government policies, in particular, the proposed banning of hunting with dogs.
During the (New) Labour administration, the ‘countryside debate’ has emerged as one of the most hotly contested of domestic policy areas. Key rural industries have been perceived to be in crisis. Rural services – schools, hospitals, buses and trains, post offices, banks, churches – are seen to be in decline. Issues of affordable rural housing remain unresolved. European policy – the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy – and international exchange rates are seen to work against rural needs. Flooding and outbreaks of BSE and FMD – alongside their perceived mishandling by ministers – are seen to have a disproportionate impact on rural communities.

But the country – its population and its economy – has been ‘in decline’ – or, at the very least, changing – since industrialisation. Governments have responded to these changes with policies and strategies cast along a scale ranging from protectionist via laissez-faire to wilfully destructive. Over the last two generations, however, and arguably with particular severity in the rural areas of England and Wales, the threat to the rural lifestyle has grown more acute. The intervention of government – at national and European level – has been described not in the context of a general politics of economics and ideology but as the imposition of a quintessentially urban point of view. The grassroots response to the Blair government’s rural policies has been almost wholly of this kind.


The countryside is important to all of us. Town and country are interdependent and the needs of both have to be addressed together. But there are special problems in rural areas which require a direct response […].

This negotiation of homogeneity and heterogeneity is common within modern public policy and sits comfortably with New Labour’s mythical ‘third way’. But, as the banner slogans referenced above suggest, countryside campaigners see themselves and their interests in terms of difference, not similarity. Recent academic approaches recognise diversity in the spaces, demographics and social order of the rural. The recognition that rural areas and rural populations are heterogeneous has been reflected in recent public policy – not least the rural white paper of 2000. Once the rural is understood and framed as a space of diversity, the implications for policy are clear: services – including culture and the arts – may need to be similarly diverse, responding to differences of topography and of demographics, cultural values and social need. In this report, we see the relationship between the spaces of rural and urban as a negotiated one.

As mentioned, this Scottish report is part of wider research on rural touring in England and Wales. There are political as well as cultural differences between these areas; but there also seem to be rhetorical differences. Behind the countryside protest, exemplified in the March for Liberty and Livelihood, lay the conviction that the Blair government is a creature of the cities with little ideological or electoral investment in rural areas. As a result its many policy interventions, and the political management of the rural agenda in England, have been cast as imposing urban solutions on rural problems. The countryside has become a severely contested place: it’s not just who owns it but who has the ‘right’ to legislate for (or against) it; with the underlying question being ‘whose countryside is it
anyway? This stand-off has not been reached in Scotland, where the relationship of rural and urban is much less antagonistic.

But, across the UK as a whole the countryside is changing, partly as a result of the economics of agriculture and fishing, land use and ownership, and partly because of wider social change. How have these changes been reflected in the cultural life of our rural areas? Is there any sense of a rural cultural policy? If so, how might that be different from a broader national policy?

One of the last Scottish Office rural policy statements before devolution – arguably a last hurrah of Unionist discourse, but one containing much truth – effaced the differences between rural and urban Scotland and proposed Scottish-wide solutions:

the people of Scotland are close-knit, and rural and urban communities have many links. Those living in towns have close affinities with the countryside, which often begins not far from their homes; and the rural dweller is proud of the national institutions which the cities of Scotland offer. Their common characteristics in needs for jobs and services far outweigh their differences and we pursue policies based on the same fundamental principles in all parts of Scotland.16

The first rural strategy document of the post-devolution era was Rural Scotland: A New Approach (2000), which the then First Minister, Donald Dewar, introduced with the acknowledgement

that rural Scotland is an important and integral part of Scotland, accounting for nearly 90% of our land, and 30% of our people. It makes an important contribution to Scotland’s economic prosperity, with 27% of employment being in rural areas.17

The rural, here, very much as part of the whole. These – and a re-familiarisation of the mythic functioning of the rural – are important points of reference for this study.

The rural is part of the diversity of modern Scotland but we must be aware of a broader cultural tendency to see the rural – and especially rural Scotland – as a romanticised space, a magical and uncanny space. If we continually cast the rural in this way – without countering it with a more pragmatic reading – then we also romanticise rural policies and strategic solutions that emerge from rural areas. As we suggested at the start of this section, rural debate is different in Scotland. There has been some success in framing the policy debate as seeking Scottish solutions for Scottish problems. Our research project pushes this formulation a little bit further.

Local communities across rural Scotland have developed approaches and processes which articulate (to some degree) with the strategic priorities of national and regional agencies, and which meet the needs of the grassroots community and its infrastructure. In our research we have seen what we might term as rural solutions for rural problems – or rather local solutions to the challenges of rurality: that is, systems, tactics, strategies which work in the various rural environments of Scotland.
3 THE TOURING INFRASTRUCTURE 1:
THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

The Scottish Arts Council receives its funding from the Scottish Executive and is one of the main channels for government funding for the arts in Scotland. The Scottish Arts Council also distributes National Lottery funds received via the DCMS, funding arts organisations for annual (or longer) programmes of work and making one-off grants to individual artists and organisations. In 2003/04 the Scottish Arts Council had a total budget of £60m: £38m from the Scottish Executive and £22m from the National Lottery Fund.18

3.1 POLICY

Through its various funding programmes, the Scottish Arts Council invests significantly in the supply side of the touring experience: that is, it gives direct funding to the makers (for example, the theatre companies); and, it invests in the built infrastructure (investment in theatre buildings), as well as the support networks including the crucial role of the promoter, that person on the ground who programmes, markets and facilitates the touring product. We say more about this role – and the people who fulfil it – in section 5.1.

The Scottish Arts Council has not, to this point, proposed a specific or dedicated rural policy but it does recognise specific needs in rural areas. Caroline Docherly, Head of Area Development and Planning at the Scottish Arts Council, told us, ‘in our targets, rural is one of the groups of under-represented people’. With this, and with wider government policies such as social justice and life-long learning in mind, the Scottish Arts Council does have policies and programmes that are of specific benefit to these areas.

In addition, the Scottish Arts Council has schemes in art forms with a particular focus on rural Scotland: for example, it supports festivals, including the feis in the Gaidhealtachd; crafts initiatives, particularly in Dumfries and Galloway; and, Enterprise Music Scotland, which supports music clubs throughout the country. The Scottish Arts Council funds drama touring companies and one-off theatre projects (for which there is there is no specific requirement to tour) and these may take place in rural areas. There is a general commitment to increase geographic access, and Lottery monies, dispensed through the Scottish Arts Council, have supported the redevelopment of village halls and other important rural venues.

Framing these projects are the Scottish Arts Council’s overall policies of social inclusion, audience development, and art-form development which will impact on rural areas, not least through theatre companies which operate buildings: for example, the Traverse has developed a regular Highland tour with a distinctive repertoire rooted in its role as Scotland’s new writing theatre; and, Perth and Pitlochry both serve a mainly rural area.

In addition to policies that dispense monies to producers, the Scottish Arts Council also has programmes to support the distribution network. Of particular relevance here is the funding to Highlands and Islands Arts Limited (HI~Arts), Dumfries and Galloway
Arts Association (DGAA), and North East Arts Touring (NEAT). The Scottish Arts Council also supports the Promoters’ Arts Network (PAN) in the Highlands and Islands, including funding the part-time coordinator post: in 2003/04 that support amounted to £9,000. The Scottish Arts Council also makes small awards annually of a few hundred to a few thousand pounds each to individual promoters in the Highlands and Islands. In addition, its local authority scheme, targeted on assisting councils to develop arts provision, supports work in Moray and the Borders.\(^\text{19}\)

As Docherty noted, however, the Scottish Arts Council does not have a rural policy per se but does have a policy that is connected to geography, and that is about access and audience development in rural areas. She identified, in Scottish Arts Council policies, ‘a clear focus on geographical access, recognising regional distinctiveness and building audiences throughout Scotland’. New initiatives – such as the music programme Tune-Up – are significantly focused on expanding the audience for touring music and extending the circuit beyond the traditional or familiar venues. So whilst the Scottish Arts Council has no specific rural policy nor, indeed, is there a specific theatre touring policy, it could be argued that neither is required since the issues are addressed adequately in overall policy.

### 3.2 TOURING INITIATIVE

One example of a policy that was designed to benefit touring overall, but had distinctive and special benefits for rural touring, was the Scottish Arts Council’s Touring Directory. In 2001 the Scottish Arts Council appointed a consultant, Fiona Dick, to create a resource that would enhance and develop the touring circuits in Scotland. Dick was engaged for two years to develop touring in drama and dance across Scotland – not just in rural areas. This she did by mapping the pattern of touring and encouraging closer linkages between the main players: the companies and the promoters. One key legacy of that relatively short-term post was an on-line resource – accessible through the Scottish Arts Council website – which listed all the venues in Scotland (with contact details and outline technical specifications); listed the promoters (with contact details and general interests); and, posted information about the work of the touring companies in progress and in the planning stage.\(^\text{20}\)

Dick’s coordinating and development role – as well as the on-line resource itself – was much appreciated by promoters and, in particular, the volunteer promoters in rural areas. They found that the resource broadened their knowledge of touring theatre and, as a result, widened their choice. It encouraged them to think beyond their own list of preferred or known companies, and think about programming new and unfamiliar work.

Dick’s achievements in providing information and support are lauded throughout rural Scotland, but sustaining and refreshing her resource has proved a worrying challenge for the touring sector. Duncan MacInnes, administrator of the PAN, admits that:

> for the last two years Fiona Dick has done a job in providing us with brilliant, wonderful and fantastic lists of stuff… which I used to do before but nothing as organised and comprehensive and up-to-date. And that has been the basis of what has come to the Highlands. We have no idea how that is going to be replaced. […] It is just going to be an ad hoc list or maybe downloading a whole lot of stuff off the Scottish Arts Council website – that is if companies
are putting it on. There is [now] a lack of information which means that a lot of the local promoters aren’t receiving information as regularly as they were.

In follow up interviews, it was clear that the website did not offer the PAN members the ‘one-stop shop’ they were looking for. As we will show, this network relies on being able to share quality information: the complaint was that the website was not up-to-date and there was no single process whereby an individual could receive information on everything available. However, while there were some initial gaps on the website, recent investigation shows that information about venues appears up-to-date and that companies, too, are regularly logging information about their up-coming tours and activities.

The principal danger of investing in an information resource is that it dates quickly and that it must be constantly refreshed both in how it is accessed and the information it holds. This is true of any information resource but users tend to have particularly high expectations of the currency and accuracy of a website. If, on more than one occasion, they find that information is missing or out of date they will not return to it; and, it is the Scottish Arts Council that is seen as being responsible for any lapses. At root, however, promoters lamented the loss not just of an up-to-date, useful website but of the post itself. As MacInnes told us ‘there is nothing like a real person to deal with such things’.

3.3 CURRENT ISSUES

While there are Scottish Arts Council initiatives – both cross-artform and artform specific – which impact on rural touring arts, it might be argued that the decision not to develop specific rural policies means that there is no clear leadership in this area from, or indeed for, the Scottish Arts Council. However, Scottish Arts Council’s recently refreshed organisational structure now includes a Department of Planning and Area Development. This Department – which takes a geographic overview of arts provision and is charged with maintaining close links with local authorities and other agencies – monitors local arts provision and establishes partnerships to address local priorities, particularly where provision is low.

The Scottish Arts Council is generally seen as committed to rural areas and as being responsive when it comes to support in rural areas. It has maintained a long-term relationship with Dumfries and Galloway through support for DGAA, has provided continuing support for NEAT, and, in the Highlands, works in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to support HI~Arts. Its targeted support for the activities for communities badly hit by FMD in 2000 was much appreciated by those who benefited.

One major issue now facing the Scottish Arts Council – particularly in relation to drama – is the expansion of Scotland’s national cultural institutions with the establishment of the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS). After long debate, and as the result of an astonishing degree of consensus in the sector, the NTS is intended to be a new model of theatre provision, drawing on existing theatre infrastructure both in terms of people and spaces. The NTS will, it is anticipated, commission work from existing theatres and tour work of different scale and type to existing venues.

The issue of how the NTS will serve rural areas has been much debated: many see the federated and commissioning nature of the model as having significant benefits for rural areas both as receivers and producers of theatre, but there was concern when the pro-
posal appeared to drop the idea of small-scale touring as part of the NTS model. Producers and, in particular, rural promoters are reassured that it now appears to be back on the agenda. Certainly the Scottish Arts Council’s view is that NTS productions will tour to rural areas. In general, however, the NTS proposal is predicated on theatre being made by different companies and being performed in different places. In this federal structure, the importance of touring is clear, and the challenge that rural voices be heard, tangible.
4 THE TOURING INFRASTRUCTURE 2: LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND REGIONAL POLICY

4.1 INTRODUCTION
Another aspect of the touring infrastructure where things are ‘the same, but different’ in the context of rural touring arts is seen at local authority level. In the urban areas of Scotland – particularly in the cities – the local authority is easily identified as being the body which takes the lead in developing the arts. Thus, it produces the cultural plan, develops the built infrastructure and directly supports arts activities as well as giving grants to arts organisations. While rural local authorities have the same competences, these are often devolved to local area committees. Area committees allow for the involvement of communities located far from the Council headquarters and, in the case of Highland Council, are sometimes supported in their cultural work by a local authority arts development officer. But a frequent criticism from arts organisations working in rural areas is that the amounts of money available at local area level are very small. It is also difficult to make the argument for very locally focused funds to be used to support activities which have a broader geographic reach. Lack of resources is not unique to rural areas, of course, but a small tax base and remote communities, combined with a wish to decentralise decision-making, does mean that resources are spread thinly.

The lack of local investment has an impact on the production of theatre. As we will show, a network of professional theatre companies has begun to develop in the Highlands. This is not replicated in the other areas we looked at, although locally produced work does emerge from a lively amateur theatre tradition in Dumfries and Galloway.

Local authority support for arts touring is often channelled through agencies supported by local authority grants or working in partnership with them. Although competences are the similar, there are different models in different parts of Scotland. In Dumfries and Galloway support for touring and the touring infrastructure is directed through DGAA, which also receives Scottish Arts Council funding. In the North East, the local authorities work in partnership with each other and the Scottish Arts Council to support tours to a variety of venues some of which are run by the local council. In the Highlands and Islands, where we begin, the role of HIE, and its agency HI-Arts, is central to the delivery of a great deal of arts provision – some in collaboration with the six local authorities covered by HIE.

4.2 THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS
For years the Highlands have, to most people, been shrouded in mist. Either the mist of romanticism – the land of solitary splendour, Gaelic twilight, and sturdy, independent, gently-spoken crofters. Or the mists of inevitable backwardness – a land that missed the boat, with no resources and a dwindling population, a land inhabited by lazy, shifty, dreamers who cannot be helped, in which nothing can alter.

John McGrath’s essay ‘The year of The Cheviot…’

21
The Highlands and Islands stretch for over 640 kilometres from the Shetland Isles to Campbeltown at the southern tip of Argyll. It has a land area of just over 39,050 square kilometres and a coast line over 9,000 kilometres. With a 2001 Census population of 433,745, the Highlands and Islands is one of the most sparsely populated parts of the European Union (EU): its population density of 11 persons per square kilometre compares with an EU average of 116, and a Scottish average of 65. In addition to this very low population density, 30 per cent of the population live on one of the more than 90 inhabited islands.

Inverness, with 41,000 people, is the largest settlement. Fort William, with a population of 10,000, is next. The main settlements in the inner Moray Firth area – Nairn, Inverness, Dingwall, Alness and Invergordon – are home to about 63,000 people, or nearly 15 per cent of the Highlands and Islands population. Overall, 61 per cent of Highlands and Islands residents live in rural areas or settlements of fewer than 5,000 people.22

Agriculture, forestry and fishing continue to be the region’s primary industries, with the manufacturing sector of small and medium size enterprises in areas such as medical products, and larger enterprises in more traditional sectors such as oil-related construction and whisky. However, the service sector accounts for over two-thirds of employment, primarily in tourism and public administration.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) is the economic development agency for the region, working through ten local enterprise companies. There are six local authorities (Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council, Moray Council, Orkney Islands Council, and Shetland Islands Council). The area is also served by five area tourist boards (Argyll, the Isles, Loch Lomond, Stirling and Trossachs; Highlands of Scotland; Orkney; Shetland; and, Western Isles).23

4.2.1 The built infrastructure

So – picture it if yous will – a drive in clachan on every hill-top where formerly there was heehaw but scenery.

Andy McChuckenup in John McGrath, The Cheviot…(7:84 Theatre, 1974)24

The major theatre in the Highlands and Islands is Eden Court in Inverness, currently undergoing renovation and expansion, including development of a studio theatre to operate alongside the 810 seat auditorium. Most other arts venues in the region – and all those used for theatre – are multi-purpose: examples include the Aros Centre in Portree, the Corran Halls in Oban, and the Garrison Theatre in Lerwick. In addition, there has been a recent major upgrading of the village halls. Kenny Mathieson, a journalist, argues that:

The upgrading of new or revitalised Lottery-funded village halls around the turn of the millennium has […] done much to improve the infrastructure for the arts in the Highlands, and has done so without destroying the unique ambiance of the village hall experience. These venues offer a very different experience to the urban theatre or concert hall, and a genuine focal point for local communities. 25

We will say more about these venues – the ‘different experience’ they offer and their distinctive role in their communities – later in this report.
4.2.2 Highlands and Islands Enterprise

As the rain from the hillside comes in from the sea
All the blessings of life fall in showers from me
So if you'll abandon your old misery
Then you'll open your doors to the oil industry –

Texas Jim and Whitehall (to the tune of ‘Bonnie Dundee’) in McGrath’s The Cheviot…

In the context of regional and national development agencies, HIE is distinguished by the fact that, unlike the Scottish Enterprise Network, it has both an economic and a social development role. The four divisions – Developing Skills, Growing Businesses, Making Global Connections, and Strengthening Communities – are shown graphically, in their 2001/02 annual report, as framed within a cultural context. This reflects and contributes to what one Scottish Arts Council officer called the ‘Highlands and Islands factor’.

The development agency and its local enterprise companies see no barriers to assisting the development of a local community group to build capacity to develop the arts, whether through a festival or another kind of event. They support feasibility studies for capital projects and are partners in the capital investment in arts buildings. They are involved in creative industries – for example, in crafts and music supporting the development of the work, its marketing and tourist-focused initiatives.

In the Highlands and Islands the link between social and economic development – and even a commitment to culture – has always been part of the role of the relevant development agency: HIE’s predecessor, the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) was involved in rural touring almost from the start. Chris Higgins, of the Strengthening Communities group within HIE, recalled that, in the 1980s:

the arts were happening throughout the Highlands. And we […] realised that […], as a separate strand through community development, [the arts] would pay dividends, so we […] started to think about that. […] 1973 had pointed up what effect a dynamic culture could have in a community and, around 1980, [an HIDB officer] went to Edinburgh with a few thousand in his pocket and asked theatre companies if they would do what 7:84 had done – and [he] recruited five companies for a few thousand. He actually went down to see them and knocked on doors. They, the companies, very quickly got used to it and got habituated [to working with us] and very quickly we built up a touring schedule.

Here was an development agency officer brokering partnerships between the cultural producers – and, more particularly, the touring theatre companies – and the communities, encouraging people to follow the 7:84 model of Highland touring and offering a direct investment of development agency monies in the supply side of the touring arts chain.

To begin with the funding went to companies based outside the Highlands and Islands. However, there was a significant pay off in terms of capacity building at local level that, over a longer term, contributed towards the desire for work coming from a wider range of sources – both locally produced in the region and made further afield, elsewhere in the UK and internationally.

The strategy was firstly about provision: giving villages access to a range of cultural events and building an audience for a more diverse programme, at root challenging the idea of rural Scotland being a cultural desert. Secondly, there was a social element – building capacity, developing skills in local promoters, and building confidence. Thirdly, there
Local authorities and regional policy

was an economic angle – that by giving support to touring, performing arts companies will become ever more skilled at what they do. In the long-term it was regarded as a policy that could develop indigenous work and attract the national investment to do that. It was seen as a way of offering skills development for local companies.

A key element across all three aims was that the funding intervention would be targeted to helping companies tour to the most remote communities of the north and west. The policy aimed to support these ‘fragile areas’ with company touring costs – such as accommodation and petrol – being partly met. HI~Arts officer, Maggie Dunlop, outlined to us the current parameters of this funding scheme, explaining that in order to receive up to 40 per cent of touring costs the company had to visit at least five venues in what are considered to be ‘fragile areas’ – and that includes the whole of the west coast and all of the islands, but excludes Fort William and Oban. She added that, although the funding is mainly for companies based in the Highlands and Islands, the scheme does allow for some flexibility and, occasionally, exceptions are made to allow a company from outside the area to bring a performance judged to be of a strategically important nature.

This policy has enjoyed some success. There is a well-developed network of provision in the Highlands and a very diverse programme offered in village halls throughout the year. The investment in the circuit – not least in terms of the Lottery support for refurbishment – has further enhanced this provision. The funding, which initially came directly from HIDB and then HIE, was subsequently devolved to the arts development agency HI~Arts to administer on HIE’s behalf. However, it remains the case that the communities in the most remote of these ‘fragile areas’ are amongst the less well-served in the Highlands and Islands, almost exclusively due to the distances and costs involved in reaching them.

4.2.3 Highlands and Islands Arts

Highlands and Islands Arts (HI~Arts) was founded by HIE in 1990. Its present developmental role was the result of a joint initiative by HIE and the Scottish Arts Council in 1994. HI~Arts is a limited company with charitable status, contracted by HIE to deliver, on its behalf, and with support from the Scottish Arts Council, a programme of arts development and promotion.

HI~Arts’ two main sources of income are an annual contract fee from HIE, supplemented since January 2002 by funds for its office, and revenue support as a core-funded organisation of the Scottish Arts Council. In 2003/04 the agency received £103,000 from HIE and £50,000 from the Scottish Arts Council. However, while this supports the core costs of the organisation it accounts for only a small proportion of its turnover which, in 2003/04, exceeded £1 million. The rest comes from a series of initiatives and special projects undertaken by HI~Arts, some of which are additionally funded by the Scottish Arts Council. Examples include MIDAS, a scheme for developing contemporary and traditional musicians originally launched with three year Scottish Arts Council Lottery funding, and the mobile cinema, the Screen Machine, which brings film to the Highlands and Islands and is supported by Scottish Screen as well as HIE.

HI~Arts is staffed by a director, a community projects coordinator, an art-form development coordinator, and an audience development coordinator. There is a business manager, an administrator and a secretary. In addition, there are a manager and two driver/operators for the Screen Machine, and a number of fixed-term project staff.
HI~Arts is voluntarily managed by a Board of Directors, made up of six directors augmented by invited observers from HIE, the Highland Council and the Scottish Arts Council.

Over the years HI~Arts has made a significant contribution to touring. As we have seen, it is responsible for disbursing HIE funding in the form of grants to the companies to offset touring costs. It has also assumed an enhanced role in terms of cultural strategy and planning – including festivals development, education and training – and communications, with a website and electronic journal. New initiatives of this kind include a region-wide on-line box office. An award for this project from the European Regional Development Fund was ratified in summer 2004, and the resource went ‘live’ at that time.

HI~Arts’ use of technology is a particularly valuable resource for producers, promoters and audiences in the region. Its website includes up-to-date listings and ‘what’s on’ guides which users can search in terms of date, location and art-form. There is quite detailed information on the region’s arts venues, and editorial and commentary that facilitates debate and discussion across the region and beyond. Such a resource articulates well with the other formal and informal networks of professionals and volunteers which support and facilitate cultural provision in the region, and is an appropriate and valuable response to the region’s distinctive topographies and demographics.

HI~Arts has also had a leading role in the development of Highlands theatre making. It has established a network of companies and, with funding from HIE and Scottish Arts Council, disburses grants to assist those companies with the creation and presentation of work.

4.2.4 Promoters’ Arts Network

Promoters’ Arts Network (PAN) is a very well developed network of independent, mostly volunteer, promoters. While an informal network had been in existence in the Highlands since the early 1980s, supported by the (then) Highland Regional Council, PAN was established as an independent organisation, following local government reorganisation, in 1998. PAN currently has over 80 members covering the rural parts of Scotland from Shetland to the Mull of Kintyre. It is the most developed of the networks of promoters. Although we do recognise – and later discuss – limitations in the system, we were particularly impressed by the PAN model as providing a framework appropriate to the needs of the diverse communities of the Highlands and Islands.

PAN is a network of individual promoters and promoting groups. It is not an agency, and as such it neither vets companies nor books shows. However, it does handle a little central funding for its members and gets involved in advising on the bookings of events. A key part of its remit is to share and circulate information and opinions about events amongst members. It is not an organisation with one view or policy. While PAN might express the views of local promoters, make policy decisions about how it might develop, and lobby other agencies about touring arts, it recognises the enormous variety of opinions, needs and aims amongst its members, and so encourages their individuality. For example, PAN members argue that they are all from different regions, areas, communities and villages and that each has subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, differences in their audiences and the interests of their communities. As a result their programming needs are very different. In addition, PAN members have a wide range of promoting experience: some of the network’s members are very new to promoting, while others have been in-
involved since they saw the first tour of The Cheviot...

Similarly, they vary in age, background, taste and profile. The network model reflects their independence and diversity.

PAN is run by a board of six directors with at least two observers from councils and agencies. The part-time administrator is Duncan MacInnes, who is based in south Skye. That post is supported through funding from Highland Council (£1,500) and the Scottish Arts Council, which contributed £9,000 in 2002/03. MacInnes' role is to support the network through managing membership information, disseminating information to members about potential events and to touring companies about touring in the Highlands and Islands, and organising meetings of the membership, which PAN usually holds twice a year. In addition PAN is developing a training programme that will be focused particularly in Argyll and Bute in 2004; it has also launched an Audience Development Project with £36,000 of Lottery money, administered by a project officer.

PAN meetings are a crucial part of its ethos. Promoters come together for a day-long meeting, with travel and accommodation costs (generally two overnight stays per delegate) supported from its budget. The meeting begins with a review of the past six months. Promoters share experiences and opinions of the shows and companies they have presented, and the impact of these events. Discussion is focused and feedback is sometimes generated by way of ‘awards’ – with promoters nominating ‘best company to work with’, ‘best poster’, ‘biggest disappointment’, and so on. This discussion facilitates a pooling of expertise and experience as promoters discuss how they solved particular issues or faced particular challenges during the previous half-year. The second part of the day then looks forward. The promoters discuss the shows that will be available to them to schedule in the next 6-12 months. Sometimes the experience of previous promotions will shape their discussions. Sometimes one promoter will have seen the show or previous work by a company and will make a recommendation. At the end of the discussion each promoter will present an initial list of the shows that they are interested in taking for their venue. It is then down to the company and the individual promoter – not PAN – to finalise a deal or not.

Sometimes promoters bring forward ideas gleaned from their own experience as audiences for general arts events or as the result of specific ‘go-see’ visits to festivals, such as the Fringe in Edinburgh. MacInnes described one PAN discussion, which did not result in a booking, but does illustrate how the discussion process works:

Occasionally you get offered [...] new theatre companies and no-one has seen them. I suppose a very good example [...] is an American company that went down a storm in Edinburgh called Riot Act. [...] Alistair [Mackenzie] in Poolewe saw them two years ago and said they were fantastic, and he has been trying to sell them to the Highlands [ever since], but everyone has been backing off thinking – ‘They might be too heavy’, ‘Never heard of them.’ And I noticed last week that there was a good write up on them for the Fringe and, I suspect, there is a ripple going around the Highlands saying, ‘Oh dear, isn’t that a pity we did not have the courage to follow Alistair in this kind of thing’. And, maybe, next year, if they come around, we will [...] know about them. So, yes, we will take the risk with that.

Promoters told us that PAN meetings are particularly important as they offer a valuable opportunity for feedback on the previous season and the chance to share experiences and concerns: ‘What I like about PAN is that it is honest. People go round the table and are brutal in the best possible way. So, in a way, if something is re-touring, it is ”[...]
You should go for that.” Of course, the strength of PAN is not just about these meet-
ings. Separate from these discussion days PAN promoters can and do contact each other, share information and experience.

The network model that PAN has developed suits the geography and demographics of the area it serves and the types of people who are promoters in this region. Each individual is independent, aiming to programme a regular and well-rounded schedule for their venue and community, and learning from the pooled resources of colleagues to make selections that will suit the venue and community, and will increase or advance their skills in managing events, working with companies and developing audiences. The advantage of this network structure for its members is that they are able to share information, both about what is available and about what they thought of shows they have seen, without this leading to ready-made packages of tours or a one-size-fits-all approach to tour scheduling. All of the promoters we spoke to in the Highlands and Islands talked about how important PAN is to them in this role of sharing information and experience. And it was a role equally valued by the well-established promoters and the new ones. One experienced promoter commented that, ‘We rely heavily on PAN who [sic] collates information about what is on the go’. This was echoed by another promoter, with only three year’s experience, who said ‘I don’t honestly think we knew quite where to go […] and PAN do[es] produce this quite amazing list of all the touring companies, which we found terribly useful’.

**Highland and Island funding**

This ‘empowerment’ of the local promoter was, as we have seen, one strand of the economic agency’s strategy; another was to support incoming tours, which was done through the special funding administered through HI~Arts to the companies. This funding was split between support for tours by Highland-based companies and tours undertaken by companies from further afield. However, five years ago with a reduction in budgets, this extra support was halved and the decision taken to fund only tours by indigenous Highland companies. The more established promoters were very unhappy with this decision which signalled to them that they were to restrict their choice to Highland companies. Their independence is very important to them and this decision from HIE was interpreted as directly limiting their choices. The promoters also felt that they were being asked to make a choice based on geography and not quality.

The HIE decision was consistent with its overall strategy of developing indigenously produced work by showing the potential through tours from elsewhere. In any case, HIE funding, disbursed through HI~Arts, was development money, not an ongoing funding stream. However, by the time the cut was made, companies had been supported to tour to the Highlands for nearly 20 years. The support was small – understood to be in the region of £1,500 to £4,000 – but it was a welcome help with the increased travel and accommodation costs incurred when touring in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

In the event, there is little evidence that companies stopped coming – or, if they did, they were quickly persuaded to consider the Highlands again by Fiona Dick’s development work. The more established promoters certainly felt badly about it – and they still do – but new promoters, who never knew the fund, are not aware of any problems or any undue influence on their programming choices that the policy shift has made. Perhaps the most damaging result – and the longer-term concern – is the way in which some
promoters felt that HI~Arts was no longer ‘on their side’. This has rumbled on into subsequent dealings, not least another argument about audience development.

**Audience development**

While all the promoters we talked to were keen to increase the size of their audience, they are suspicious of new initiatives that appear to be about telling them their job. Promoters feel, with some justification, that they know their community and how to attract an audience and that they do very well in attracting a high proportion of the local potential theatregoers. However, audience development is a very big and very current policy issue, and agencies such as the Scottish Arts Council want to see all the organisations it funds taking it seriously. The companies, too, are keen to attract the biggest and widest audience possible and they rely on local promoters to do this. There is some concern about the lack of marketing coordination between venues, as well as the absence of the more sophisticated marketing found in urban venues.

We will say more about the issues of audience development – and the assumptions often made about rural homogeneity – later, but rural promoters repeatedly argued that when a locally-based promoter chooses the right product, schedules it appropriately, and manages the publicity and marketing effectively, then the penetration into the local community can be very significant. Attendance at rural events is impressive. In the Highlands, while the actual numbers may not be large – between 30 and 50 a night in some small places and up to 100 in larger ones – this often represents a very high-degree of penetration into the potential audience. Rural promoters question whether urban venues could achieve such a hit rate. As one promoter told us:

> When you live in an area where you know that, for example, we have a population of about 1,000 people within 12 miles of our venue, [and] we [get a] regular audience of 100, which is 10 per cent – maybe sometimes a wee bit less. So, OK, you show me a theatre in Glasgow which gets an audience of 10 per cent [of the local population]. Please do not come and talk to us about audience development.

No-one suggested that they could not benefit from additional help or advice – or that there might be ways of tapping into other or more marginalised rural populations – but there was a sense that ‘audience development’ is, as one promoter put it, ‘a new term for an old issue’. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the current audience development project mentioned above, PAN is not closed to the issue.

**PAN as agency**

PAN is now confronting a range of important issues. For example, the task of maintaining the cohesion of the network is a challenge, particularly when there are newly refurbished halls coming on stream. In addition, the vital job of letting everyone know what is available, and encouraging companies to contact rural promoters with details of their work, relies on the Scottish Arts Council’s on-line Touring Directory being kept up to date, which, as we have seen, is not always the case.

In addition, and because of the number of promoters involved and its geographical spread, PAN also has the potential to evolve as a voice for a vast, and socially and culturally sensitive, region of Scotland. In fact the other key issue facing PAN is the pressure for it to become more of an agency. Certainly the funding bodies would like it to be more
of a representative body that can be consulted about what promoters want. It is difficult for the Scottish Arts Council, for example, to be responsive to the promoters’ needs in the Highlands if they have to contact over 80 people for a view on a particular issue. Although MacInnes is a coordinator in terms of consultation, he is very conscious that he is not a gatekeeper; nor can he speak for the whole network.

PAN has acted as an agency of sorts in applying for funding from the Scottish Arts Council to develop various initiatives, including disbursing small sums for touring, and a scheme for music development. So, on the one hand, there is a view that PAN needs to seize an opportunity and develop further – and the signals from the Scottish Arts Council are that PAN could have an important role in administering their grant-in-aid to local promoters. On the other hand, this would change hugely the nature of the organisation and put it in the position of deciding on each other's grants. The challenge that PAN may not be able to ignore is whether it can continue to be a network agency of independent-minded individuals or whether there may be advantages in assuming a more direct role comparable to that of a development agency (working at a different level from HI~Arts).

The PAN model is about empowering locally-based promoters; it is not primarily (if at all) about making life easier for companies and individual artists planning a tour. This might be an area where PAN could choose to develop a more active role. While MacInnes can make the introductions, thereafter the company booker is dealing with individual promoters and making many telephone calls, sending many email messages and faxes. In comparison, in England the rural touring schemes work to make packages of tours for companies. One performer, who tours extensively in both Scotland and England, commented that, for the touring company:

It’s actually been a far more efficient process in England because of this touring scheme that they have; the [rural touring scheme] programmer who then puts you on a menu […] and they try to get you five villages in a week or something. And once they have got that information back from the villages that is all very efficient. You get a contract. You get details about the village promoters. You get directions. You get maps. The promoters […] are told they have to provide refreshments. That does not happen in Scotland.

Whilst individual promoters in the Highlands and Islands do provide this information and level of service it is not centrally managed and so the company will broker its deal and communicate its needs many times over. At present this coordinating role is something that PAN eschews, but pressure may build for it to move in this direction.

However, the Scottish-based administrators or general managers we spoke to expressed little concern about the booking process: ‘in the Highlands we have a circuit that we tend to go back to every year’, said one administrator. We found that the touring companies also value the contact with the individual promoter on the ground and in a particular place. The inefficient nature of the process (in comparison to the English model) seemed to be outweighed by the relationships developed between company and promoter. One administrator told us that:

It all depends on individual relationships in those remote areas. In other touring areas you are much more at the mercy of local authorities, councils and venues which is not… it’s not quite so personal.

And in the Highlands there are a lot of potential venues to choose from:
As we have gone on through the years [...] we have got to know the region better ourselves. There is, in addition to choosing the actual play, [choices to be made] about where we focus the actual tour because it is a big region and we can’t do the whole thing. Each year we try to do a mixture of new venues and old venues, because we have to develop our audience in the same venues, while at the same time always beginning to explore the boundaries. But we ended up, over ten years, having gone to a wide variety of venues and we certainly cannot serve all of these venues in any one year.

This comment underlines another issue for the PAN network: access to remote venues. The sheer size of the network – and its perceived success – masks the fact that some venues have very little to choose from and, as a result, get very little product. This is particularly true for the islands, whether the Inner or Outer Hebrides, or the Northern Isles. There is no record kept which gives an overall picture of which venues promote what on an annual basis – although, admittedly, it is questionable how such monitoring might benefit the network as a whole. The part-time administration of PAN restricts what it can do in monitoring what goes where. We have not done a survey of all PAN members but, from our analysis of the companies’ touring circuits over 30 years, it appears that the areas best served are Easter Ross and then the west coast. Some of these places are remote but they are not as expensive to reach as the islands. As one promoter commented, ‘it costs more to get to Coll, Tiree and Islay than it does for the [entire] show’. A promoter on Islay confirmed that time, as well as money, is an issue:

It's essentially to do with funding and, even though the companies could come for the same fee as other places, when it comes to the crunch it’s easier not to come to somewhere like this. You are spending longer in travelling.

The downside of the PAN approach is that no strategic initiative is taken to fill gaps in provision. PAN is a network of individuals, so there is no ‘PAN position’ about the choice of work, its funding or its development. However, in developing criteria for funding one-off drama projects, the Scottish Arts Council has tried to get some idea from promoters about what they want, and there is a potential for a grouping such as PAN to influence that debate. Whether PAN can or should resist this role is an area of debate both within and without the organisation. This is a challenge for PAN – and other networks – in communicating up the funding and policy hierarchy.

4.2.5 Highland and Islands Theatre Network

Whilst the Highlands and Islands promoters have a network for their work, so too do the theatre companies of the area. There are now 21 professional theatre companies in the region, and the HI~Arts website lists 19 of them as members of the Highlands and Islands Theatre Network. They are: Adventures Unlimited, based in Fearn; Arts in Motion (including Cartoon Theatre and Clown Jewels) in Evanton; Ballet West from Taynuilt; Black Box Puppets, also from Taynuilt; Dogdaze Theatre, a theatre in education initiative based in Elgin; Dogstar Theatre from Beauly; Eden Court Theatre; Goode for a Giggle, a company that does murder mystery and cabaret-styled entertainments based in Culbokie; Thurso’s Grey Coast Theatre; Mull Theatre; Out of the Darkness Theatre in Moray which works, especially, with people with learning disabilities; Dunoon-based Perhilion Theatre; Plan B based in Invergordon; Roadrunner Theatre also in Invergordon; Skelklers based in Lerwick; Tartan Chameleon based in Nairn; Theatre Collective out of Inverness;
the newly established Theatre Hebrides from Stornoway; and, Tosg, the Gaelic-medium
theatre company, from Sleat, Skye.

The Highlands and Islands Theatre Network is a grouping of very different bedfellows. There are the buildings: Mull Theatre – a company with national ambition, making
its own work and promoting others in a small venue but funded to service a touring hinterland; and Eden Court, the region’s major receiving house in Inverness, with no remit
to make its own work but with an education and outreach programme. Then there are the
professional touring companies – Grey Coast, Dogstar, Skelklers, Theatre Collective, Tosg – looking for subsidy to develop new work, with new writers and new audiences, and
to tour in the region and beyond. There are one-man bands and small-scale theatre busi-
nesses such as Goode for a Giggle and Perhillon. These companies fulfil a different role
with its own place in the entertainment ecology, but they are unlikely to be developing the
kind of new work that will need or be eligible for public funding. Building common cause
across these companies is unlikely, but the grouping has potential to build momentum
and critical mass for small culture-based businesses in the Highlands and Islands.

4.2.6 Highlands and Islands Producers Fund

Some of the Highlands and Islands Theatre Network members – those generating new
work and engaged in art-form or sectoral development – seek funding through the High-
lands and Islands Producers Fund (HIPF). Through its general funding the Scottish Arts
Council does support companies ‘indigenous’ to rural areas – not least the Gaelic-
medium company Tosg from Skye and Mull Theatre, and, through Advancement Fund-
ing, a special part of Lottery funding, Thurso-based Grey Coast. However, in response to
the demands from rural areas and, in particular, from HI~Arts, some Scottish Arts
Council monies are dispensed through a fund – the Highlands Producers Fund – which
contributes to the development of indigenous companies in the Highlands.

The Fund generally has £80,000 per year from HIE and the Scottish Arts Council and
will make awards for new work. In 2003/04 these were: £20,069 to the Highland Festival
for the production of A Highland Wedding, £4,810 to Highland Festival for a further tour
of The Accidental Death of an Accordionist; £25,000 to Dogstar; £12,850 to Arts in Motion;
£3,200 to Arts in Motion/Clown Jewels; £10,000 to a new Stornoway company, Theatre
Hebrides; and, £3,000 to the Moray promoters Red Ferret Entertainments. The Fund is
not intended to support core work, but to bring companies to the point that they can
reasonably compete for Scottish Arts Council funding. As HI~Arts director Robert
Livingston puts it, the Fund is about ‘levelling the playing field, not tilting it towards the
Highlands’.

The argument for this funding came from HI~Arts itself, which felt that Highland
companies were unsuccessful in the Scottish Arts Council funding round for theatre mak-
ing because of lack of understanding from the drama committee about the nature and
scale of the work. Identifying funds for Highland companies alone would, it was argued,
help to develop more work locally. The number of Highland companies now stands at
21, and all have produced new work in the last two years.

Nevertheless, some of the indigenous companies – generally those close to outgrow-
ing seed-funding – still want to apply to the HIPF and complain that the small amounts
available restrict their ambition and is insufficient to underwrite a touring project. But
HI~Arts’ conception of the scheme is different, a point underlined by the fact that if a
company gets monies from the HIPF, it cannot then apply to the Scottish Arts Council for more funding to advance the project or to support a subsequent tour. The larger companies were particularly scathing about this situation. George Gunn, artistic director of Grey Coast Theatre, writes:

The Highland [and Islands] Producers Fund lets the Scottish Arts Council off the hook because it can say ‘Look, we are making special dispensation for the Highlands’ – but at £80k the divi down from that it is small beer. Highland theatre has reached a glass ceiling and unless something can get us to smash through it there will be no theatre companies native to the Highlands very soon and that would be a tragedy for the population of the north in the short term, and for the entire nation in the long term.27

Despite financial limitations, HI~Arts’ ambition to develop indigenous theatre-making has proved successful in bringing on new companies. Highland companies can and do apply directly to the Scottish Arts Council – although they face more competition. The HIPF aims to provide early investment for nascent companies, not become a ring-fenced alternative for Scottish Arts Council funding. This approach fulfils the long term policy of HIE to attract national investment to support indigenous work.

It does appear that both the Scottish Arts Council and HI~Arts have made a great deal of effort to support the development of theatre in the Highlands and Islands. However, as we said at the start of this section, there is generally little local authority support available for the development of new work or its ongoing support. This matters because the involvement of the local authorities is demonstrably so significant and so common in urban areas. The lack of local authority partnership funding, or other support in kind, can be very damaging for major projects.28

4.3 DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

Dumfries and Galloway, in the south west of Scotland, borders England and provides the shortest sea crossing from the UK to Ireland via Stranraer and Cairnryan to Belfast. The council area is the third largest geographically in Scotland and covers 3,832 square kilometres with 385 kilometres of coastline. It has a population of 148,000. The largest town in the region is Dumfries with a population of 31,000. The two other main towns are Stranraer (population 11,000) and Annan (population 8,000). All other settlements have populations of 4,500 or fewer. Population density is 39 persons per square kilometre compared with the Scottish average of 65 persons. The main industries are agriculture and forestry with a range of light industries. Tourism is also a significant sector with 0.7 million visitors a year. The local authority (Dumfries and Galloway Council), the economic development agency (Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway), the area tourist board (Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board) and the health board all have contiguous boundaries. Dumfries and Galloway, and the neighbouring Scottish Borders, were the only two areas of Scotland to be affected by FMD in 2002.

4.3.1 The built infrastructure

There are ten theatre performance spaces in Dumfries and Galloway: the space of the Birchvale Players in Dalbeattie; the Brigend Theatre in Dumfries; the Cinema in Newton Stewart; the Lockerbie Little Theatre; the Lochside Theatre, Castle Douglas; the Moffat
Youth Theatre; the Old Well Theatre, Moffat; the Ryan Centre, Stranraer; the Swallow Theatre, Whithorn; and, the Theatre Royal, Dumfries. Five out of the ten – the Lochside Theatre, the Old Well Theatre, the Ryan Centre, the Swallow Theatre, and the Theatre Royal – actively and regularly promote touring theatre; the others are only infrequently, if ever, a stopping-off point on an arts tour. However, those venues – and a good example would be Moffat Youth Theatre which is wholly focused on its own productions – which do not actively promote, do have local drama groups and tend to focus their efforts on participatory work.

The Dumfries and Galloway theatres are purpose-built but they differ in size and design. The Ryan Centre, the Theatre Royal – a much adapted historical building based in the county town – and the Lochside Theatre in Castle Douglas each seat 200 and more. The Old Well Theatre in Moffat seats 72 and the Swallow in Mosspark only 48. The towns or communities in which the theatres are situated similarly vary in size, with only the Theatre Royal being located in Dumfries. In contrast, the Swallow is situated along a single-track field road which serves only two other houses, making it the county’s most remote theatre. All other venues are located in small towns. Only one of these, the Ryan Centre, is owned and run by the local authority; all others belong to local amateur drama groups. Like the Highlands network of village halls, most of these spaces are multi-use venues, catering for amateur groups, musical societies, choirs, cinema and film clubs as well as sometimes receiving professional arts activities.

Although the five theatres identified here dominate the touring scene here, there is still some touring in smaller venues. These include the five small theatre spaces (including the Brigend Theatre and the Lockerbie Little Theatre), some hotels, churches and village halls. Touring in these places might be arranged by the Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association for one of their special projects (for example, the Seven Sense Project) or in relation to one of the two arts festivals of the region (Gaelforce and the Dumfries and Galloway Arts Festival). However, the only continuously active promoters in the region are those attached to the five main theatres, with more effort and activity being focused on amateur and other participatory work.

4.3.2 Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association

The organisation which oversees touring in Dumfries and Galloway is the Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association (DGAA). Established in 1985, DGAA is a professional arts development agency, funded by the Scottish Arts Council and by the local authority, with a service-level agreement with the core funders. Based in Dumfries, but with a regional remit, DGAA is managed by a board of directors. Officers include a director, administrator/finance officer, and business development officer, as well as various art-form officers (one for traditional music, one for contemporary music, one for literature, and two for public art). In addition there is a writer in residence, a Burns writer in residence, a website officer and a development officer for the Seven Sense Project, marking the European Year of the Disabled Person.

When first established, DGAA was engaged in promoting tours, primarily along a village hall circuit. DGAA no longer fulfils this role: it was eventually considered overly resource intensive and the Association withdrew from direct promotion leaving this work to local, generally volunteer, promoters. However, the withdrawal of DGAA as coordinator did not result in the development of independent promoters that we see in the High-
Local authorities and regional policy

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lands and Islands. Instead, the village hall circuit has all but disappeared. Reflecting on this, DGAA director, Jenny Wilson, noted the changing nature of the promoters in the area:

all the old co-promoters in villages are now all quite senior people, and we have not found that they are replaced by younger people. And that is just the way life is lived. Which is not to say that younger people are not involved in voluntary activities – I think they are, but it is a different kind of activity. And perhaps does not put entertainment by visiting companies at the top of the list. They are quite musically orientated […] most of the halls have dances and ceilidhs, local endeavours, bringing professional or semi-professional bands, but not necessarily bringing a professional theatre show for kids or adults.

In passing, we heard that hall committees are increasingly involving older people. One of our interviewees, based in the North East, felt that the involvement of young people in voluntary activity was generally on the decline. Though there is an ageing population whose expertise should not be squandered, wider representation on such committees is a mark of local democracy and inclusion. We noted that this trend was not altogether true in the Highlands where we encountered wider community engagement and a raft of new – although not always young – promoters.

Even recognising the significance of local amateur activity in the region, DGAA still provides funding to facilitate professional performing arts. The funding offered by the Association to the local promoters is a guarantee against loss. In 2002/03 this was only available against a list of productions ‘approved’ by DGAA. Promoters were free to book productions that do not attract ‘guarantee support’ but, if they did so, they took financial responsibility. DGAA is acting as a development agency in that it applies criteria to whether a company or production meet its objectives and, thereby, attract support. This policy sees the existing market as limiting choice and uses public subsidy to promote work that fits, in some degree, the access, participation and art-form development agenda of DGAA. The implication of this policy is that, without this kind of support, promoters would be more reluctant to take risks and the theatres would, according to Wilson, ‘have regular programmes of fairly safe productions because they are all voluntary, or most of them are, and they all need to make the box office, to keep the roof on and pay the heating bills and all that stuff’. Wilson argued that:

We also wanted the local theatres to make their own choices. We had made the choices up till then and we wanted them to make the choices to fit into the programme, within the parameters that we had set, which is something different, something additional, perhaps something you would not otherwise book.

DGAA introduced this policy with the aim of developing a new audience. It was particularly keen to develop work for children, to support dance, and to extend the run of productions related to the school syllabus. It argues that this policy has led to longer tours and additional productions. The challenge is that the choice of shows covered by the funding is not always considered suitable by local audiences. In 2003, however, this scheme was amended to allow greater flexibility for promoters who are now free to book any shows they wish within agreed guidelines.

Cultural programming is much more centralised in Dumfries and Galloway than in the Highlands and Islands area and, as a result, grassroots volunteers are less empowered.
the Highlands and Islands volunteer promoters are able to be as creative and challenging in their programming choices as their budgets and their audiences will bear. In Dumfries and Galloway a more centralised and, arguably, more strategic arts development model is adopted. In assuming the role of development agency, as opposed to that of funding council or network, DGAA inevitably manages, to a degree, local promoters’ choices.

The DGAA policy has resulted in a mixed programme of guaranteed and independently-booked shows in theatres in the region. The bigger theatre in Stranraer does not use the guarantee, preferring to book the productions it wants. However, this venue receives a grant from the Council and may be in less need of the DGAA support. The theatre in Castle Douglas books productions from the guaranteed list, but does so only rarely.

However, whilst there are some fundamental questions about arts subsidy here, we are aware that the sums involved are very small. Grants available to promoters taking shows with ‘guarantee support’ are around £200 – this sum very typical of the amounts of subsidy available for shows across a range of rural schemes and activities. Whilst aiming to prefer a particular type of work, in reality the DGAA scheme is unlikely to have any significant impact on the ability or wish of (at least experienced) promoters programming what they think will work for their communities.

From our interviews with the promoters in Dumfries and Galloway, it appears that they have been reasonably successful in attracting an audience, sustaining a regular operation and balancing a programme of visiting work alongside the amateur work of the local companies. In Moffat’s Old Well Theatre, for example, the theatre’s autumn season averages 70 per cent capacity – and, although within that their own amateur shows can sell out, this is still a very good return.

The major concern, however, is money. There is no evidence that Dumfries and Galloway’s theatres make regular losses, but there is a constant concern around their finances. This may be due to the fact that the guarantee scheme does not offer them very much of a safety net and, if they promote themselves, they are taking a higher risk – even when they are not paying a fee to the company but working on a split of the box office. The economies of scale mean that a theatre with 200 seats does offer an opportunity to take a reasonable sum at the box office. In contrast the smaller theatres struggle, particularly where there is resistance to climbing ticket prices. As the promoter of one small theatre in Dumfries and Galloway told us:

The main problem is always financial. Some of these shows will make a loss. You have seen the theatre, it only seats 48. If you charge £7 a seat or even £8 a seat and the show costs £500, obviously you are going to lose money. Now the Arts Association do[es] give some guarantees. This is one thing we can do. Another thing we can do is if we tie in the event with a festival, like the Book Town Festival or a regional festival, then we can get a little bit of assistance there. To some extent the companies we have are constrained by what we can afford and whether the events can be tied in with other sources of funding.

Given its rather centralising policy and the virtual collapse of a regular circuit of village halls, the potential for DGAA to be a network hub is limited. However, like PAN, DGAA arranges half yearly meetings of all promoters. Most promoters attend at least one per annum. The meetings are informal and serve to exchange and to debate issues of shared concern such as the question of ticket prices, timing of shows and so on. Again like PAN, other than the productions that attract guarantee support, there is no central
direction from DGAA and no attempt is made at the meetings to coordinate tours across the region, unless promoters do so of their own accord. Whilst some aspects of the DGAA system are the same as in the PAN model, there is at least one very significant difference. The Highlands and Islands have achieved a critical mass in the numbers of promoters and the scale of their activities. In contrast in the south west there are a few local promoters programming a small amount of work. The network potential is, therefore, limited. The stories of critical fireworks and passionate debate that we heard of at PAN meetings did not seem to be repeated in the meetings organised by DGAA with its smaller group of less active promoters.

One issue which faced Dumfries and Galloway during the last few years was the outbreak of FMD. As a response to that crisis the Scottish Arts Council gave some additional support to the affected areas. What is interesting is that, while the impact at the time was cataclysmic, out of it came an opportunity to reflect and re-group. Wilson, the DGAA director described to us what happened:

Nobody was going anywhere. The theatres were not sure what they should do and whether they should go on putting their shows on or not. We did a survey – a very brief one – of what happened with the theatres and the majority of them lost between maybe £1,500 [and] £3,000 through lost shows, lost audiences, money which they had spent on advertising, various kinds of expenditures. And that was the evidence we used to go to the [Scottish] Arts Council and say – ‘Look, this is real and really difficult for people.’ And we did a project together with the Borders and that helped to rebuild programmes and audiences. […] we worked with the Borders Council and the Council in Dumfries to offer a number of things. Programming was one of them, workshops and opportunities for people to participate and that kind of thing. […] from the organisational point of view, I think the theatres took a chance to think about how they might reach their audiences. Certainly some of the Borders theatres did. They kind of rejigged some of their programming and the ways they reached people and opened up subscription selling and that kind of thing. So there were some benefits from it, yes. There was not a huge amount of money – I think it was all of £30,000 which, stretched between Stranraer and Eyemouth, is not vast – but it made a bit of a difference.

Although no-one would wish such a disaster on any area, the experience illustrates that an opportunity to sit back and look at policy and programmes can help develop new ideas. However, it is also notable that FMD was only raised by the DGAA director – no-one else in that region or beyond mentioned its impact on cultural provision or even on public policy. This might be seen to underline the strategic and leadership role of DGAA in the arts in the area, and affirm its identity as development agency.

4.4 NORTH EAST AND ABERDEENSHIRE

The North East of Scotland comprises the mainly rural area of Aberdeenshire and the city of Aberdeen. Taken together, the city and the rural region have a combined population of 439,000 people, representing 8.7 per cent of the population of Scotland. Population density in the Aberdeen City area is 1,142 persons per square kilometre, compared with 36 persons per square kilometre in rural Aberdeenshire. The area is strongly associated with the oil industry, with more than 400 internationally owned companies operating in the city of Aberdeen, and over 800 technology-based companies throughout the re-
gion. However, agriculture remains a key industry: the area produces a third of Scotland’s agricultural output. Other traditional industries include whisky and fishing; tourism is also important, employing more than 18,000 people.

The local authorities which represent the North East are Aberdeenshire Council and the City of Aberdeen Council. The enterprise company is Scottish Enterprise Grampian and the tourist board is Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands. The latter includes Moray, Scotland’s smallest council, which is part of the enterprise network in the Highlands and Islands and, thus, crosses between the two areas. In this report, material on Moray is identified as such and referenced in both this section and the section on the Highlands and Islands.

4.4.1 The built infrastructure
The venues of the North East – beyond Aberdeen – are a mixture of village or town halls and some unique venues. For example, in Moray the regularly-used venues are town halls, schools or community schools in Elgin, Forres and Keith, while the Buckie Drifter, the fisheries museum, has also been pressed into service. In Aberdeenshire, the main centres are either in the rural heartland – for example, in Banchory, Ballater, Aboyne and Fettercairn – or the coast – for example, in Peterhead and Fraserburgh. There are two theatres in the area which are part of the community schools at Aboyne and Peterhead.

The area also has two independent venues that do a limited amount of arts promotion. The Volunteer Hall in Findhorn is a relatively new venue that has entered the circuit, thanks to some support from the local council, for individual events. The Woodend Barn at Banchory is a local individual effort which has developed a venue from a converted barn and now offers a range of activity throughout the year. However, there is, across the area as a whole, less touring activity than in the Highlands. While Highland promoters average one event a month, the centrally promoted events of North East Arts Touring add up to four or five tours of three or four nights each year.

4.4.2 North East Arts Touring
From its inception in 1984, North East Arts Touring (NEAT) has been a partnership of local authorities in the North East: currently the city of Aberdeen and the mainly rural councils of Aberdeenshire and Moray. In addition, support has come from the Scottish Arts Council. The NEAT approach has been to act as an agency for producing companies, putting together the north-east leg of a longer tour. The NEAT committee, consisting mainly of local authority representatives, discusses what is available, affordable and of potential interest, and then books centrally. While this makes touring easier for the companies, it could be seen to work against the independent promoter and the development of grassroots skills. One of the features of the Highlands and Islands promoters is their individuality and local knowledge, with a nuanced understanding of the local audience and a confident and creative approach to programming for them.

Throughout NEAT’s life the role of Aberdeen City Council has been crucial in sustaining the potential network, particularly in the provision of staffing for managing the touring circuit. However, with recent changes in the city council, and encouraged by the Scottish Arts Council, NEAT has undergone a review. The result of this has been the appointment of a development officer with support from the local councils, the Scottish Arts Council and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The new policy being developed by
NEAT will see the development of a network of local promoters – that is, NEAT will set the parameters for a network of people similar to, but different from, the PAN model.

NEAT plans to encourage local promoters, and to stimulate more touring, by investing in a guarantee scheme that will provide a financial cushion against losing money on a promotion. The initial approach is for the development officer to undertake the promotion of larger (and more expensive) region-wide tours of theatre or dance, working alongside local promoters. Examples in spring 2004 included Romeo and Juliet by Prime Productions, and shows from Essential Scottish Opera and Scottish Dance Theatre. In addition, however, the plan is to encourage local promoters to take on smaller-scale work themselves, focusing, in the first instance, on one-person shows or children’s work. A financial guarantee in the region of £200 will be offered, with Scottish Arts Council and local authority support. It is still too early to tell how successful this initiative will be. However, we believe that there is a particular need to encourage promoters in this area, and the work of the development officer and the financial commitment is focusing on just that.

The NEAT initiative is not primarily about doing more work, although that might happen, nor is it necessarily a response to declining audiences. The motivation is to increase and broaden (to develop) that audience, and to do that by creating stronger local links. In that respect PAN’s experience and example is important. But if the PAN example teaches us anything, it is that local solutions are best, and NEAT must find its own way.

The view is widely held that ‘things are different’ between the Highlands and the North East. Moray Council is a member of both PAN and NEAT and is in a unique position to comment on the two contexts and schemes. Nick Fearne, Arts Officer with Moray Council, describes what he sees as a cultural difference:

I do not think NEAT could ever work in the Highlands or PAN work over here because, I think, culturally and geographically they are completely different. There is slightly more [of] a kind of get up [and go in the Highlands]. I think there is more a feeling in the Highlands that, if you live in Skerray and you want anything, you need to get on and organise it yourself. Whereas here [in Moray] there is more an attitude [of] ‘the council should do it’. I think that is a historical thing.

Another NEAT member supported this view saying: ‘I think we are trying to capture that thing which is in the Highlands where people do everything’. However, for us, the lesson is that each area and region needs to develop the policy and the implementation mechanism that works best for it – and it is clear that NEAT is currently moving in a direction that is appropriate for that area.

4.5 REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Reflecting the topographic, cultural and economic diversity of rural Scotland, the structures that support touring in these three rural areas of Scotland are quite different. While DGAA has taken a hands-on development agency role, HI~Arts has focused its interventions at a strategic level – working with and in the enterprise network to develop the infrastructure, for example – and facilitating the development of a sophisticated regional network of grassroots, volunteer promoters. In the North East new developments have
to find their way through systems and attitudes predicated on local authority interventions but aiming to achieve something of the critical mass of activity that PAN members have been able to realise. In each area the significance of a range of high-quality venues is recognised with Lottery support being a particularly important factor in developing the small theatres of Dumfries and Galloway and the village hall network of the Highlands and Islands. Though Eden Court is being redeveloped, there remain major gaps (and opportunities) in the infrastructure not least in Dumfries and on Mull. Even within the busy arts environment of the Highlands and Islands some areas are better served than others.

Differences also exist in terms of the impact touring has had on indigenous makers: in the Highlands and Islands new professional companies have emerged and they are ambitious to present work alongside that of the companies touring from elsewhere in Scotland and beyond. In Dumfries and Galloway indigenous activity is strong in terms of the visual arts and literature, but local theatre making is largely the preserve of a well-developed group of amateur companies.

Given this diversity – and the local solutions being developed in the rural areas of Scotland – one can easily see the challenge facing the national agencies to work with this raft of professional and volunteer practitioners, makers and promoters, the well-served and those still missing out.
5 THE TOURING INFRASTRUCTURE 3: ON THE GROUND

5.1 PROMOTERS

It will already be clear that the crucial factor in supporting touring in rural Scotland is the promoter, the person on the ground who makes it happen. A key role in organising any tour – be it theatre, music, comedy or dance – is that of the promoter. But, we discovered, the promoter’s role seemed much more visible in certain areas of Scottish touring than in others. The difference was connected to location and whether the promotion was undertaken by a professional – a local authority arts officer, cultural coordinator or the general manager of a theatre – or a volunteer working for their local venue. The latter group dominates the rural touring scene – being particularly significant in the Highlands and Islands – and is the focus of this section. One arts consultant, resident in a rural area, summarised the importance of rural promoters: they are, he asserted, an ‘astonishing breed of folk and the reason the touring exists is because of these local promoters and if you did not have these people it just would not be here’.

The role of the local promoter is distinctive but not exceptional. The same voluntary contribution exists in both rural and urban contexts in England and Wales – but, in Scotland, it is unique to rural areas. In urban Scotland the cultural sector is almost entirely supported by professional activity – by arts officers, venue managers, art-form organisations. In contrast, in rural areas the networks and support infrastructures are very different. There are promoters working across rural Scotland who are ‘professional’ – in the sense that they get paid to promote work, either as part of their role as a local authority arts officer or as a venue manager. However, we saw that rural touring in Scotland is supported primarily by a network of those who volunteer to do it – and we now examine what is a very remarkable contribution to cultural provision in rural Scotland. We begin with a basic question: what it is that local promoters actually do?

The promoter – perhaps supported by a committee, perhaps acting on his own – fulfils a wide variety of roles to put on an arts performance in a village hall or other venue. Promoters decide what will be programmed into their venue and when it will be scheduled. They reserve the venue and make the booking with the company (or its agent). They raise the fee to pay the company. They deal with publicity – print distribution, press releases for the local media – and manage the whole event. This can mean a very hands-on role in terms of sticking up posters, selling tickets at an impromptu box office, setting up chairs on the night, and even smoothing ruffled feathers when things do not quite go to plan. These volunteers might apply for grants from a variety of sources, not least their local authorities and the Scottish Arts Council, and will certainly have to report to the funding organisations on how they have spent the money. They will prepare annual reports and accounts. In short, the promoters act as something like a small-scale arts development officers in their own community.

The promoter might enjoy some plaudits if all goes well, but equally he is open to criticism if a performance is not up to scratch or the overall programme falters or is not
successful. Like any promoter, rural volunteers do not want to deal with a bad night. As one told us: ‘Basically, if people go away happy then that’s wonderful. If it’s rotten I’ll go away and hide ’cos I get it in the neck’. As rural promoters generally live in the community for which they promote, this degree of scrutiny can be particularly significant. Indeed, one key difference between urban and village situations is that the rural promoters live in a very public way with the consequences of what they promote. One promoter summarised his work and role by saying that:

It’s a huge amount of responsibility. It’s everything: apply for grants; do the books; try and make sure you haven’t miscalculated, trying to work ahead and think how much is that going to cost – B&Bs, hall hire and stuff. It is… it does… it worries… worries you from one end of the year to the other.

The promoter draws on his or her reputation to attract a company and an audience but that same reputation is at stake if either party has a disappointing experience.

Local rural promoters might work as individuals, be part of a committee and/or report to a voluntary committee or board, thereby sharing this responsibility. In the theatres of Dumfries and Galloway, the incoming tours are scheduled to fit with the amateur season and the promoter is a member of the theatre committee. On the other hand, in the Highlands and Islands, most village halls are multi-use and there the promoter tends to be part of a hall committee or events sub-committee, with others offering advice and support. In some cases promoters have a distinct connection with or role in the community, as one Highland promoter told us: ‘I’m an incomer, twenty years here, married to a local girl. But most of the local hall committee are people who have been here twenty years or more, or born and brought up here’.

We found that amongst the myths of touring theatre in Scotland were entrenched views of just who these volunteer promoters were: can one characterise promoters as a group of well meaning incomers who are imposing their cultural tastes on the local populations and getting public money to support some kind of expensive hobby? We will come back to this word ‘incomer’ and the motivations of the volunteer promoter.

Although the committee is important to some – providing support, sharing responsibility and ensuring ownership by the local community – others sometimes find it difficult to work in that way:

There used to be a committee but it was very cumbersome because you have to move quite fast because tours get booked up very quickly. […] that particular committee sort of disintegrated and then it became just myself. And I was given a remit to choose a variety of productions and the more I did it the more experience they felt I might have in knowing what was the right thing. And I just discussed it with the treasurer on a financial framework and, if she was happy, we then went ahead and booked.

And again:

We try and do it on a committee level but it is difficult. Until four or five years ago it tended to be me as secretary, every time we have a meeting, every month I would say ‘I have booked this that and the other.’ […] About three or four years ago there was a sort of slight revolt and folk said, ‘Hang on! We want to be part of this’, and so, in the process of getting more democratic, it gets less effective. […] On the other hand, it means everybody has a say and other people
have their input. So it is a good sort of example that democracy is a good thing, but sometimes to make things happen it is sometimes good to have one person who takes the risk.

The promoters in rural areas share many of the same issues as urban-based promoters. They want to have as many people at their shows as possible, from as wide a group as possible. Financially they want to break even on their season. The promoters we spoke to shared many concerns about both size and range of their audiences, as well as how their audiences made decisions about what they wanted to see and when. For example, it is unusual for audiences to book in advance, so many promoters spoke of waiting in the hall within half an hour of the show starting, wondering if anyone was going to turn up. When this happened promoters generally expressed their concern, not just for the box office takings, but for the experience for the company and the impact that low attendance might have on future visits.

Rural promoters – so clearly part of their local communities and with a hands-on role in managing an event – are ultimately no surer of what works for an audience than any other promoter. Most offer an eclectic mix of events with the expectation that at some point something will appeal to everyone, but there is often a strong sense of programming to their own instincts – even preference. As one told us ‘We’re not frightened of giving our audience hard things; we’re just frightened of giving them things that aren’t good’.

In the 30 years since The Cheviot… toured the role of the promoter has become more ‘professionalised’. That is not to say that it is filled by a paid employee but that the tasks are more clearly articulated and the vision more about developing a programme than a one-off performance. In 1973 the tasks now assigned to a network of locally-based promoters were the responsibility of informal networks of friends and acquaintances. Writing of the first tour of The Cheviot… John McGrath recognised that:

> Between us [the members of the company] we had friends or contacts in almost every corner of the North, and they soon made many more friends in the others. The response to [the proposed tour] was one first of amazement, then of enthusiasm, and then of overwhelming practical kindness. People willingly took on the jobs of sticking up posters, selling tickets, spreading the word, finding accommodation, sometimes even providing it. [The company’s representatives] book[ed] halls on the spot, in as sensible an order as they could, balancing free dates, mileage, rival attractions and estimated exhaustion […].³¹

Now the tasks are the same but their organisation is supported by the promoters.

In Dumfries and Galloway there is a good mix in the make up of the promoters, with three of the five active local promoters born and bred in the area and the others, along with DGAA director Wilson, being more recent residents. All the promoters we spoke to in the Highlands and Islands are either ‘incomers’ (although maybe of many years standing) or returners: that is, they are people who have chosen to settle in the Highlands having been born and/or educated there and/or had early careers outside the Highlands. Although some did fit into the category of people who had retired and moved from the south – either elsewhere in Scotland or England – the majority who had settled in the Highlands were still of working age. For some it was a return to family roots. For others it was and is a better place to bring up children and achieve a fuller and better quality of life. Many of the ‘incomer’ promoters we talked to had, however, lived in the Highlands
for more than 20 years. Children may have been one motivation for their move, but was that post-68 lifestyle another factor?

As well as their choice of rural residence other things united these people. Particularly in the Highlands and Islands, and to some extent in the small independent theatres in Dumfries and Galloway, the role of promoter is not just demanding but also very creative. We found that this was part of the appeal of the role. In addition, it became clear that promoters often had, in earlier phases of their careers, a professional interest or role in the arts and/or cultural industries. The majority of the Highland and Islands volunteer promoters we spoke to had a previous connection to the arts in addition to their current arts promotion work. In some cases they had been active in arts management in urban centres but others had been involved in television or in teaching drama or art. Others are still practising artists or writers, working for the love of it or to earn money. They tend, as a result, to see themselves as knowledgeable about the arts, are well networked, and they certainly aspire to keep up to date with what is happening. We saw that volunteer promoters are aware of and passionate about the arts in Scotland and beyond. This enthusiasm and commitment is something they want to share. Some relevant comments include:

When we’re on the mainland, we’re visiting theatres and concert halls and music clubs and stuff. So we have a little bit of an ear to the ground for what we like.

I’m probably in the privileged position that I see more theatre than anyone else up here. […] I’m not just talking about theatre but opera, chamber orchestra – we do these things as well. I’m in a privileged position.

You do it because it’s something you’re interested in and you want to do it. It really comes down to that anyhow. It’s interesting enough to make you want to do the effort really. I feel really, really lucky because most of the time I know what is going on in the central belt. I realise I am in a privileged position. I can take time and go down to the Traverse. I know the lie of the land. I have been in most theatres in Scotland and if I want see something then I will move heaven and earth to see it.

As suggested above, we found that promoting work was seen as a way of keeping in touch with a former life or career. For example one promoter, who had a background in television, argued that being a promoter was

a way of keeping contact with that world if you are living up here. […] It’s the exchange, the exchange of people coming in, companies coming in, working with companies. Companies, not just Scottish touring companies, but companies from abroad sometimes, music, all sorts.

So, the motivation has something to do with allowing the promoters themselves access to interesting work. They want it for themselves; but, crucially, they also want it for their community and are prepared to make it happen. Indeed, we found that, again and again, promoters came back to the theme of ‘building the community’. Sometimes this was seen as being about addressing specific groups. One island-based promoter told us:

The likes of coming to [the] Traverse [production] tonight. For a bunch of teenagers who are in [tonight], drama is an eye-opener for them, because they can see how the set, not necessarily as performers but stage managers, lighting, they can see how it’s all done in a small theatre.

And they can do the same thing. So it’s really important to encourage it through education.

But often they see their role as making a contribution to community life in general:
People are hugely community orientated so we acknowledge that what we do with high-quality professional arts does have a community benefit and, debatably, an economic benefit [...].

Given the opportunity it is also about promoting local work. One promoter told us:

One group we had here last week [...] were seven 20-year olds straight out of college and they were fantastic musicians. And we had busted a gut last week to get them a PA and all this sort of thing. And I was complaining about the day spent sorting out all the equipment. And then, the hour and a half they gave us, that was really good and worth it, and it was great to feel part of it.

This sense of belonging and ‘feeling part of it’ is a recurring theme. There is no doubt that promoters feel they work hard to fulfil their myriad roles and that they take risks, but we found that this was balanced by something very important in terms of their own personal satisfaction: they are aware of the responsibilities but also of the rewards. One Highland promoter reflected:

If you do it voluntarily it always costs you. Well, it costs you in time which, fortunately enough, the [Scottish] Arts Council accepted. We’ve been hammering away at that for years: if you calculate the time given the voluntary sector then it’s a huge amount of budget; it’s part of the arts funding. If the arts sector gives £100,000, you can be guaranteed the voluntary sector gives £300,000. That’s the way it works but they’ve accepted that. So when anyone asks for the contribution, I say it’s ten grand from the voluntary sector.

We found that any stress relating to dealing with finances or an audience who does not like the show, is balanced by a greater and more profound personal effect. When asked why they did it, the reaction suggested that this role is fundamental to who they are in the local community, it defines them and it gives them a huge amount of personal pleasure:

I get a great buzz out of it.

It’s an ego… no, it’s not an ego trip. I will really enjoy the buzz when the whole thing gets going and when I sit down to enjoy some theatre. I suppose it is a curious thing about seeing other people enjoying themselves. Seeing it all come together and saying [...] it is happening and it is happening because of us.

One promoter described very precisely how it felt to pull off a big success:

The orchestra jammed in one corner, we had 120 people jammed in there. And all this effort. And it was just jam packed; I did not even have a seat – I had to sit on the floor – up against one side up, just behind the violin. And then the moment it happened. You sort of relaxed. It still brings tears into my eyes. It was a wonderful moment. It is brilliant when that happens and, in a way, we should nurture that more and more but it is no different to how the performer feels when the play is successful or an artist gets an exhibition up on the wall. And, I think, some of it is ‘Gosh! Isn’t it great we can get these folk up here… and they want to keep coming’?

Even a cursory glance at the programme for any of the Highland villages we visited will illustrate the amount of effort the local promoters put in and the rich menu of culture that they promote for their audiences. For example, the programme for Lochinver village hall, between April and June 2003, included the following events:
• Duncan Chisholm and Ivan Drever, founder members of Wolfstone, performing traditional music;
• Dogstar’s *The Strathspey King* – a new drama of the life of fiddler James Scott-Skinner by the Beauly-based company;
• *Eugene Onegin* performed by Scottish Opera Go Round;
• Liz Lochhead’s *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* revived by Prime Productions;
• *The Other Side*, a multimedia production from Evanton-based Cartoon Theatre aimed at children and families;
• Bayou Seco, the world music duo performing music from southern states of the USA;
• the Scottish Chamber Orchestra string section with a classical music concert;
• Clair, a Highland-based traditional music band; and,
• *For the Islands I Sing*, a drama based on the work of writer George McKay Brown performed by Splinter Productions.

In the space of three months, in this local hall, a volunteer promoter put together this diverse programme for his audience. There are three plays and one performance piece for children: all four are presented by Scottish companies, including three presenting work thematically about Scotland. There are two visits by national companies: one opera by the small-scale touring arm of Scottish Opera; and, one chamber concert by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. There are three other music events – two presenting Scottish musicians and one world music. It’s quite a range of work and gives the audience a varied choice, whilst also encouraging them to try new things alongside some more familiar fare. In this snapshot the programme offers a balance of music and drama. A longer view reveals a similar mixed programme but with, perhaps, a greater emphasis on theatre events – including work for children and family audiences – and an ambition to represent a diverse range of cultures including international work alongside work that engages very immediately with Scottish traditions.

One island-based promoter explained his planning processes:

We do, at the beginning of the year, say ‘OK, let’s try to get five theatre, five traditional music, couple of world music, couple of chamber, and couple of children’s theatre.’ We have a kind of policy but, like all the best policies, it is just there as a guide. So that, if somebody feels that we have too much heavy theatre, they can say ‘Hang on, we are only supposed to have five.’ And the trouble is that, if you stick to it too rigidly, you can miss out on opportunities and the other thing that can happen. Last September we suddenly realised we had a theatre season – we had six theatre things in a row and every ten days or so we had the Traverse, Benchtours, The Arches, those sort of folk, and we actually built up quite an audience until the last one when everyone went ‘Oh no! We’ve had enough theatre!’ and did not come to the last one, which was a shame because it was one of the better ones.

In general, there are between 10 and 15 events a year in most of the villages we investigated in the Highlands and Islands area. There may be little happening over the winter – and July and August tend to be given over to other kinds of activity – but that is certainly an average of more than one event a month. It is perhaps instructive to note that the Highlands and Islands volunteer promoters achieve a higher average of actual performances than local authority arts officers who have, of course, a broader range of responsi-
bilities. As might be deduced, then, the role of the promoter is multifaceted and often unique to – and certainly shaped by – a particular place, venue or community.

There is also an ‘internal’ challenge for networks organisations: whilst the reality is never so clear cut, the danger is that one man’s network is another man’s clique. In looking at the role rural touring has had and continues to have in developing networks and links, we did identify the danger of networks being exclusive as well as inclusive, but this is a familiar dilemma for public bodies and for community democracy and it would be wrong to see it as just a concern for the cultural sector.

The organisational structure of any committee or board to which they report will impact on the role and the autonomy of the individual promoter, but so too will the level and type of support and/or policy arrangements in each region and area. The very different ways that PAN, NEAT and DGAA work means that promoters in each of these areas work in different ways too. From our interviews with new PAN members it is clear that PAN does not function as an exclusive or closed club. In developing its type of network, NEAT must work to ensure that its policies do not limit membership and close down the voices that network organisations are designed to promote.

5.2 REGIONAL VARIATIONS

The role of the promoter is necessarily different in the various rural regions of Scotland. As indicated, in Dumfries and Galloway touring theatre is concentrated around five theatres across the region. These theatres present touring work alongside a lively programme of locally produced amateur theatre. The voluntary promoter is usually a member of the theatre committee. Here the promoter is likely to have been involved for many years – and built up a goodly amount of experience – and so, sometimes, they are trusted to get on with the business of organising the programme with limited reference to others. As before, the contribution is both cultural and social. For example, there are plans in Dumfries to develop and refurbish the Theatre Royal and increase the amount of theatre available in the area. Despite this development, touring theatre is regarded by one of the promoters as being important now and in the future for the cultural development of the town:

Touring theatre in Scotland is extremely lively and healthy at the moment. There is lots of really good stuff coming. So that is very exciting and I would like to see more of it […] It is a huge gap in the cultural infrastructure here. Thank goodness there is touring theatre! And I can’t wait for the day where we can attract lots and lots more of it. And I think at the same time stimulate some of our home grown theatre companies as well.

In Moffat, too, incoming tours complement the existing provision:

because there is a lot going on apart from the amateur dramatic society. There is the incoming theatre we are bringing in, the music society has [its] home there, the choir has their home there, the film club has their home there. It has added another dimension to the town.

Again this activity is seen to contribute to community spirit and well being:

It’s good for your health and your well being to go and sit and have a good laugh or even a good cry if you like the sad things. I think it’s good [to] share [the experience] and [to] talk to people at the interval and afterwards about it.
And, as with the Highland promoters, the output is impressive and promoters here also build up knowledge of companies based on previous experiences.

It is clear that the kind of voluntary effort in both Dumfries and Galloway and the Highlands and Islands is able to promote a wide variety and large number of events in rural and remote communities. In the NEAT area, efforts are being made to empower a new network of local promoters to take on the role filled by local authority officers who feel they do not have the direct relationship with the community of the local networks.

If there are challenges to making decisions by committee, some promoters would envy the level of autonomy implied in some of the quotations above. Depending on local conditions and policy, promoters are empowered along a sliding scale of independence. And it is the case that people can be empowered by positive committee support; and a go-ahead individual can activate a committee to contribute in new ways to their community.

In the Highlands and Islands, including Argyll and Bute, local volunteer promoters are often responsible for producing a complete, balanced, year-long programme in village halls. They receive support directly from the Scottish Arts Council for their programming and they are supported in their activities by the membership network of PAN. As we have noted, PAN is the most developed of the networks of promoters. Its members argue that the network model suits the diversity of the geographical area they represent.

Reflecting the variety of communities in the Highlands and Islands, PAN promoters vary in age and background, taste and profile. Some of the network’s members are new to promoting, while some were part of the informal network of friends that supported the first tour of *The Cheviot*.... This degree of autonomy and independence, as well as the variety of place, and spaces that the PAN members represent, makes it hard to draw general conclusions about promoters. However, they are united by a high level of activity: most are promoting an event – a music event, theatre event or dance event – around once a month. This high level of activity has major benefits for audience development – the level of audience penetration that these events can reach is very high indeed – and places arts activity at the heart of the community. In the Highlands and Islands we saw a robust and vibrant group of volunteers and a degree of activity and choice in accessible – affordable, well-publicised, welcoming and inclusive – arts provision that many would envy.

There is one important point to reflect on here, and that is the idea of professional. Whilst all volunteer promoters wanted to fulfil their role to the best of their ability and to work in a proficient manner, none wanted to do the job full time. They value their role and identity as volunteers and did not want to lose that distinctiveness. However, they are embedded within the overall system of rural arts touring, and a professional industry and cultural provision does depend on them. As such the system might be forgiven for treating them as ‘professional’. That is not just in terms of on the ground activity but in responding to policy debate, commenting on infrastructural and funding change, and representing their community, organisation or interests in meetings of all kinds.

In contrast, in the North East local authority arts officers undertake most promoting activities. Other than at the Woodend Barn at Banchory and the Volunteer Hall in Findhorn there is no grass roots level of promotion happening in the region. However, the NEAT initiative – and in particular the appointment of a development officer – is intended to stimulate, develop and support just such activity and resources.

In Dumfries and Galloway the level of activity by promoters varies across the region. In some venues the level of activity is high: for example, in the spring and summer period
of 2003 the Theatre Royal Dumfries promoted seven events, over and above its core amateur productions. The region is also home to one of Scotland’s newer venues, the Swallow Theatre. The theatre is small its level of activity is still significant. For example, in 2003, it had six visiting events – theatre and music – as well as a programme of locally produced amateur drama, musicals and pantomime. On average, and including the amateur programme, there are 15 to 20 events a year. We found that, because of the focus on locally produced activity, and fewer incoming events than you might find in the Highlands, the network of promoters is not as strong as PAN. Nevertheless, promoters in Dumfries and Galloway do rely on feedback from others in the area. However, the network is further limited because promotion is itself limited to the activities of the theatre venues, the network or village hall activity having withered, and with that the local level of promotion.

5.3 VENUES

Most of the activity we saw – and still the dominant image of rural arts touring – is the troupe of players drawing up outside a village hall, unloading a set, performing in the hall, staying overnight, and then moving on to the next village hall the next night. No report on rural touring in Scotland can ignore or underestimate the significance of this type of production context. One rural-based consultant argued that:

Still the most effective form of touring is stuff in village halls. [...] In a rural situation you have to go out and find your audience and the best way is to play in venues where people are most comfortable.

In the three regions we investigated, rural touring theatre happens in venues of a wide variety of size, location and facility, but most venues are multi-use. From our interviews with promoters, our audience focus groups and from other observations, we found that, while this encourages a high degree of recognition and familiarity for audiences, it also means challenges for touring companies and promoters.

In the Highlands and Islands and in the North East venues are predominantly adapted village halls, many of which benefited from Millennium Lottery funding and have been renovated very recently: we say more about the benefits and drawbacks of this below. In Dumfries and Galloway, however, the venues are theatres, which vary in scope and size from the Dumfries Theatre Royal to the Swallow in Whithorn.

The multi-use village hall venue places the most distinctive challenges on all the touring theatre agents. Irrespective of their place in a policy or funding infrastructure, local promoters – individuals and their committees – have to fit in with other community activity. Most rural halls have many roles and purposes and uses, from yoga to play groups: touring theatre has to fit in around and as part of these ongoing events. And it is not just events in the hall that can influence the pattern of rural touring. One new promoter told us that there were already 80 separate organisations operating in her glen covering everything from sea angling to woodland renewal. In rural areas, even as in urban and suburban ones, theatre – and other touring arts – has to compete with a range of other cultural, social and political activities. Promoters across the country also alerted us to the disproportionate impact other kinds of community events can have on the success or failure of their presentations. A death in the village can mean the cancellation of the show out of
respect. If the promoter is not aware of something like a local wedding, then a clash with an incoming show can mean no audience.

As intimated, the Lottery has had a major impact on venues across Scotland with much funding being used to renovate and build village halls. Lottery capital investment has created new venues, such as that at Glenmoriston, while existing halls, which had already been used for arts touring, have been refurbished and offer a much better experience for companies and audiences. The sense of ownership and pride in the renewed building goes beyond comfort, however. One promoter told us that there is a degree of pride that our wee hall can have Scottish Opera or a company from America or wherever else. By the same token, it is great that folk come from all over the Moray Firth area to see the hall and what goes on in it. It is providing people with a wide variety of things to do.

For the promoter who does focus on the tourist as well as the resident (and not all do), the village hall event is seen as a way of bringing the visitor in to have a good time in the expectation they will come back. This is particularly marked with visitors who self-cater and who are sometimes encouraged to book their holiday to coincide with an event on the programme. As one Highland promoter told us ‘for a couple who are up here for a week walking or fishing, to go out on a Wednesday night to see [a performance of a play such as] Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off can add that extra something’.

On a practical level, however, things are not always so positive. There is the perennial issue of managing a multi-use space, particularly if a company is there for more than a day, rehearsing or doing workshops, as occasionally happens. The problems are practical and about the expectations of both parties:

With the best will in the world the companies do not clear away completely – they think we will just pop that in the corner. What they do not know is that the youth club is coming to play football and the fact that there is something in the corner is a real problem. Or they put stuff against the wall because they think that the yoga woman needs floor space when, in fact, she needs wall space because they all press themselves up against the wall. It becomes a petty ownership thing – ‘Every time you go to the fridge it’s full of those actors’ food.’ It is just about the fact that [the] village hall – although there is a huge sense of sense of ownership pride and recognition from the people who live there – they are also very transient places and you have to kind of ship out and leave a blank canvass.

Another promoter reflected on similar practical problems when she recollected that:

You can have one sort of company which is fabulous and brilliant. The audiences love [it]. But [the company members] are really, really painful, and you can’t wait till they leave, because they have asked for so many impossible things. But when you get three or four of those in a year… you just get really, really…! Most of them [the companies and their members] tend to know that we [the promoters] are doing it voluntarily, and that means [that] you are squeezing it in between working, children, eating, one group getting out the hall, and another group coming in. And you are thinking ‘If they leave all their stuff there, they are going to piss people off!’ So there are masses of things going on. And what you don’t need is the company saying ‘Oh! I thought you were providing food – and I’m vegan – and she is vegetarian – and I only eat on Tuesday.’ And you say ‘Don’t do this to me!’

But there is a more serious, infrastructural issue with investing in multi-use halls, to do with sightlines and sets. Where there is a stage, it is often the case that the company do
not want to use it because it is too small, so they play ‘on the floor’, which results in poor sight-lines. The suggestion from grass roots activists is that because Lottery money was for the development of a community space, considerations other than the arts took precedence. One Argyll promoter said:

You have to remember that a lot of these community venues – maybe more so because it took them longer to work with Lottery money – they are very wide usage. You have your playgroup in the morning, your art groups, your sewing groups, your flower groups. The arts were never taken as a main consideration.

Of course, some developments have led to new purpose-built venues, such as the community school in Ullapool and the Gaelic college at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and some halls have tiered seating available or have found other solutions to sightlines. But again and again we heard companies come in for criticism from promoters for not taking account of the restrictions in touring rural venues, restrictions that include difficult get-ins (for example, up a flight of stairs) or small spaces. Whilst we might expect theatre companies to plan ahead for these aspects of touring, we should not underestimate the difficulties of creating a show for touring. As one theatre director discussed with us, it is all about compromise and, if – as might very reasonably be expected in a Scottish mid-scale tour – you are touring everywhere from the Citizens’ main stage to the tiny theatre in Moffat and then a village hall in the west Highlands, there will have to be flexibility and compromise. But we found that rural promoters frequently complained about companies not planning sufficiently for these shifts in scale. In particular promoters talked about sets being too big.

There is, in general, a great deal of frustration that companies just do not pay attention to the problems of touring – still less rural touring. From the number of times this issue was mentioned and described to us by promoters, we can only conclude that many companies are not alert to the scenographic and other practical challenges of life on the road: this represents a serious lack of thinking in the case of some of the touring companies. Two promoters from different parts of the country commented:

A lot of them do not understand what it is to tour in a rural area. They come with sets that cannot adapt and this terrible thing about not being able to see after the second row.

They call themselves touring theatre companies but they build a set for the Lyceum!

However, we also found that some companies approach touring activity with a high degree of flexibility and detailed planning that included clear briefs for designers. Indeed, some of those we spoke to – including TAG and the Traverse – built more than one version of their set to accommodate the different demands of rural touring and the fact that they were also performing in larger theatre spaces with more technical resources to hand. This is an expensive option but it does mean that the show can look good and work well in all venues from the larger theatres in the cities through to the small halls of rural Scotland.

With its focus on attitudes, the survey work undertaken for the English and Welsh research in this project has some different insights into issues of quality and the distinctive experience of being in a rural venue. It found that audiences were tolerant of the limitations of the rural touring experience – or rather that they were tolerant of the limitations of the hall’s facilities and the impact that might have on the live experience. They know
the chairs will not be very comfortable, that it may be too cold or too hot, and they tend to see such discomfort as inevitable. Since people do have realistic, not to say low, expectations of the venue, they can be very pleased by how good things turn out to be. However, we found that such understanding in the face of the physical limitations of the venue was not extended to the event on stage.

There are many aspects of touring theatre that require flexibility and creativity from all the players: in this, the diversity of the venues (their promoters and their audiences) that companies will encounter should not be underestimated.

5.4 PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

The significance of a show’s poster was a rather unexpected feature of comments from promoters and others in rural areas. In rural areas it is the poster that sells the show – one promoter told us that at the ‘end of the day 90 per cent of whether it works or not is the poster’. The lesson is that posters that work for city venues are not necessarily appropriate for a rural area. The repeated frustration is that the poster is usually not clear enough – to the extent that it does not even communicate if it is a play, let alone if it is worth coming to see. The same point was made by promoters and arts officers across the country and might be summarised by the following from a Highland promoter:

Posters are vital. [...] if it is a well-known play or company it does not matter quite so much but something like tonight's thing [...] it is vital. [...] I have only the good ones up. I should have a rogues gallery. Two I remember would have worked well in Glasgow and Edinburgh – one was Benchtours' *Don Quixote* and all it had was Benchtours wonderful image of horses feet and a black background and I think it had *Don Quixote* on it. It did not say 'theatre' anywhere. I remember brilliant show but not good take up because people did not know. Another company from Glasgow did a show called *Circus* a few years ago and the poster said the name of the company and ‘Circus’ and, of course, everyone was thinking ‘Oh, the circus is coming to town’, literally. We had to stick over it ‘This is theatre.’

Similarly, promoters and local authority arts officers alike underlined the importance of appropriate copy from companies. One local authority officer declared that sometimes

[the producing companies] are not really thinking about [us]. It is different about getting into *The List* or *The Herald* or *Scotland on Sunday* or any major UK newspaper. You want something which tells you ‘You are going to enjoy it.’

Whilst a promoter in Dumfries and Galloway said:

Because I used to earn my living as a press officer I've got my way of doing press releases. I quite often re-write them – just to localise them. It depends on their press office; some of them are very good quality; some of them, I think – press offices – don't know how to write good English.

A recent piece of research in Dumfries and Galloway shows, in a quantified manner, the significance of a raft of publicity options: it found that the local paper was the strongest source of publicity with 82 per cent of usage; word of mouth follows with only 21 per cent; and posters, brochures, television, radio, etc, feature at lower levels of significance.32 Our groups in Dumfries and Galloway also discussed publicity, and emotions sometimes
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ran high when weighing the use of newspapers against posters, and considering whether enough promotion is done. In the semi-structured, open interviews, posters and leaflets were always discussed more frequently and in stronger terms than newspaper coverage.

On the other hand, one example indicated that newspaper advertisements increased the attendance of visitors from another town. The people we consulted considered that the advertisements spread the information more widely than the locally distributed posters and fliers. Other comments underlined the importance of word of mouth. For example, with regard to a week-long run of a play by the amateur drama group, attendance at the beginning of the week was often seen to be low, while at the end of the week shows sell out. This phenomenon – familiar in other theatre contexts – is due to the dynamics of word of mouth, with people waiting until someone can tell them what the show is about and whether it is worthwhile seeing. The strongest factor in swaying an individual’s decision about attending or not is word of mouth: what is being said about a play or an exhibition will impact on what decisions they make as to attendance.33

In comparison to both brief newspaper adverts and word of mouth, posters and fliers inhabit a somewhat ambiguous position, halfway between informing and influencing; for example, as suggested above, promoters frequently told us about ‘bad posters’ having a negative influence on attendance. Although it is difficult to say what characteristics of posters caused particular responses, it seems that those with the following qualities lack some appeal: dark colours, black and white print, scary, ‘offensive’ or abstract images. One example that caused particular controversy was the poster for a new play called *Hard Pressed*, which featured two Edam-style cheeses in a lacy bra. This production was discussed by many different interviewees and the poster was always mentioned disparagingly. One local authority arts officer recollected that this poster led to the cancellation of a booking:

> There have been times when the posters have been no good at all. There have been disasters. There was one that was done of a play which came out of Highland Festival several years ago: *Hard Pressed*. The poster was this red frilly bra filled with two edam cheeses – very voluptuous – you had to look closely to see it had anything to do with cheese. It might have said ‘Islay Cheese Story’ on the poster, but I don’t know. We had this booked to go into Portsoy church hall, and the committee saw the poster and said ‘No!’ In the end there was nothing racy about the show at all – I think there was one joke about the ‘cheeses of Nazareth’ and that was the most blasphemous statement in the whole show! But that is the way it goes.

We heard a less extreme reaction when another local authority arts officer exclaimed: ‘Did you see the poster? I did not know whether to take our logo off it, I was so upset. But [she added] it would not have bothered me if the show was good’.

5.5 AUDIENCES

We were concerned to find out more about the audiences for rural touring arts audiences. We wanted to find out: who goes to arts events?; why do these people go to such events?; and, in what social and economic contexts does art in the region take place? To achieve this, during 2003 we undertook a three-month field research project into the impact of touring theatre on communities in Dumfries and Galloway.
The Dumfries and Galloway field research was undertaken to explore audiences’ experiences of rural touring and audiences’ attitudes towards it. It was coincidental that our research took place shortly after the consultants Morris Hargreaves McIntyre had completed a commission by Dumfries and Galloway Council and DGAA to undertake a household survey across the region to provide a profile of actual and potential audiences for the arts in different forms. The resulting report, *The Audience Atlas* was published in 2003. Both our project and *The Audience Atlas* research addressed very similar questions, but the different research approaches – qualitative in our case and quantitative for the consultants – led to some distinct findings, which, if examined together, provide interesting insight into audiences.

*The Audience Atlas* shows that some art forms are better attended than others: for example, plays and pantomime/variety show (22% both) are slightly better attended than musicals (19%). In terms of preference, however, musicals have the highest number of potential attenders (35%), closely followed by plays (32%) and then pantomime/variety (26%). This divergence between the actual and potential attendance at musicals and plays may indicate a lack of provision of those art forms and an unmet local demand.

Our field research also found that musicals were a popular art form at each of the three villages we worked in. Not only was there a demand for musicals but this was met to an extent by the provision of shows by local amateur groups. We also found that people enjoy travelling to big musicals in central-belt venues. What they also told us was that this was regarded as a special (and usually expensive) night out which combined theatre-going with a meal – a quite different experience in their minds from local events.

However, we found that while locally staged musicals usually sold out, the theatres often found it difficult to attract audiences for plays, particularly plays by visiting companies. On the one hand this is explained by the fact that the musicals are produced by the local drama group who bring their own clientele to the shows whilst the touring companies cannot mobilise such local networks. But it does not explain why plays presented by the amateur drama group are not always as successful as the musical by the same groups.

The findings in *The Audience Atlas* go some way to providing a profile of the potential audience but, in assessing how audiences make choices, it might be necessary to distinguish not only between art forms but also between amateur and professional work.

In our discussions with audience members it was clear that pantomimes are considered to be family events. The primarily female attenders of the focus groups explained that their husbands would not usually attend a play at the local theatre whereas the Christmas pantomime was an event attended by the whole family. In contrast, *The Audience Atlas* shows that 64% of the pantomime audience is female and 36% is male, while only 57% of the audience at plays is female and 43% male. According to Morris *et al*, the proportion of females is even greater at pantomimes than at drama: this is not what was implied in our group discussions.

We also found different results in terms of the age profile of audiences. Information gathered during the field research indicates a strong tendency towards older age groups (45+) for theatre. This was verified during observations of events, in communication with promoters, other theatre staff and members of the audience. It is also mirrored in a survey currently in progress at the Old Well Theatre in Moffat. *The Audience Atlas* presents the attendance of different age groups as follows: age 35-44, 16%; age 45-54, 20%; age 55-64 17%. These seem to be much more balanced proportions with a stronger represen-
tation of the middle aged and a smaller number of senior citizens in comparison with both fieldwork observations and the survey at Moffat.

Arts events take place within a social and economic network. The position of any individual in the community will, therefore, have an impact on their attitude towards attending events. The life-story of this person, whether he or she usually attends theatre or music events, plays a clear role. Beyond this, many more considerations, like the social group the individual is part of, whether the theatre organisers are part of his or her network, the accessibility and attractiveness of the venue, the scheduling of the event, the social situation of the individual, the openness or otherwise of the venue and its audience, play a part. Some of these often unconscious considerations include: the perception of those who run the event; the perception of those who might attend – do I fit in?… do I want to mingle with these people?… can I feel relaxed there?; the perception of the place – is it comfortable?… will I be able to see/hear?… how far is it and what are the roads like?; the timing of the event on any one day or week; and the appeal of the event itself. All of these, and other factors too, combine when someone decides whether to attend an event, and the decision making process will differ in every situation. We need, therefore, to ask why people do, and why people do not, attend such events.

The Audience Atlas considered motivations for attending. In their telephone interviews, entertainment (34%) and the social night out (32%) were mentioned as primary motivations for attending arts events. Factors like interest and stimulation (12%) and to broaden knowledge (7%) featured much less prominently. Does this mean that people in the region only want to have fun but not be educated? And does having fun mean enjoying light entertainment? As The Audience Atlas does not delve any deeper into these questions it might very well lead to such conclusions.

However, the matter of what motivates people is much more complex. In exploring issues of what audiences enjoy, discussions in the focus groups featured reflections on entertainment, of ‘leaning back and letting yourself be entertained’, as a highly important factor for a theatre night out. In the continuing discussion it emerged, however, that entertainment does not necessarily mean comedy or even light entertainment. Participants explained that all kinds of things ‘entertain us in different ways’: drama, thriller, mystery, comedy, etc, all offered engagement and enjoyment in one way or another. The question of culture and education was also discussed. These factors do not appear as motivations for attending for all of the discussants, but they were, nevertheless, perceived by all as being part of the package. In addition, the theatre in the small town was regarded by the group as contributing to their quality of life. This, however, does not mean that quality of life features as a motivating force for attendance.

As we have already noted, promoters claim some success with attracting (in terms of proportion of population) large audiences. Promoters also admit to being motivated by the opportunity to contribute to community life and to engage in the arts. The audience members we interviewed in focus groups – and those profiled in The Audience Atlas – do regard the provision of theatre locally as something which adds to their opportunities to engage in social events. They also respond to work which is captivating and, in their words, ‘moves slickly’, recognising that the theatre has a role to play in contributing to the quality of village life.
As previously discussed, the Scottish Arts Council does not have specific rural policies, nor is there a specific rural touring circuit. As a consequence most theatre tours in Scotland visit both rural and urban venues. From our analysis of touring schedules we see that companies generally mix several weeks of rural touring – predominantly one-off performances in a long line of venues – with weeks of visiting urban areas, where there is a greater likelihood of longer engagements – several days or even a whole week in one venue. The Scottish Arts Council argues that there is a commonality of scale in small- to mid-scale work produced and seen in rural and urban areas. David Taylor, Head of Drama at the Scottish Arts Council, summarised: ‘A rural tour will bleed into an urban [and] peripheral area. What they have in common is scale – scale of venue – small- to mid-scale’. Again we see that this is the case: in the same tour one production might play the Tron Theatre in Glasgow, Paisley Arts Centre, Dundee Rep and a range of village halls and other community venues.

Whilst, in essence, we would agree with the Scottish Arts Council that there is a lot in common between rural and urban areas when it comes to touring, there is at least one important discontinuity: it remains the case that most of the touring theatre made in Scotland comes from the central belt and companies based there.

Among the many myths, half-truths and misconceptions we encountered during this study, one of the most mythologised aspects was about motivation: on the one hand, questioning the motivations of the promoters – self-aggrandisement, publicly-subsidised hobby, cultural commitment and/or public service and social responsibility?; on the other, questioning why theatre companies tour. Theatre companies – and their reasons for touring – are the next element of the rural touring infrastructure.

6.1 THE COMPANIES

In contemporary theatre the ‘usual suspects’ of Scottish rural touring include 7:84, TAG, and the Traverse from Scotland, and Third Party from England. Each of these companies has a role in the diversity of theatre in Scotland: the Traverse is committed to new writing; TAG makes work for children and young people; Third Party performs mainly
Shakespeare. A relative newcomer is Scottish company Prime Productions with a repertoire of classic work, some with a Scottish connection, not least Mary Queen of Scots Got her Head Chopped Off and Sunset Song. Another recent addition is Stellar Quines which focuses on women playwrights. In addition, companies like Grid Iron, which works outside conventional theatres, are also popular with some who want to extend their audience particularly into the difficult to reach young adult market.

Alongside these companies – with, or quickly establishing, strong reputations – there is a locally produced ingredient, performing mainly new Scottish work. These companies include: Grey Coast, performing mainly new plays about Caithness and rural Scotland; Theatre Collective, formed out of the Highland Festival; Tosg, a Gaelic-medium company; and, Dogstar, which recently toured a show about the fiddler James Scott-Skinner. Mull Theatre has a mixed repertoire of modern classics such as Michael Frayn’s Copenhagen and Wallace Shawn’s The Designated Mourner, alongside Scottish texts such as Para Handy’s Tales and a very successful touring version of Kidnapped.

The promoters gave us many reasons which, they felt, moved theatre companies to tour, but they boiled down to the pragmatic and the romantic. Promoters variously argued that theatre companies tour to follow funding; for the quality of theatrical experience in terms of the intimacy of the space and warmth of the audience; and, for the physical and, indeed, psychological experience of being in a rural area.

There is a perception, from some promoters and from other stakeholders, too, that companies – particularly small new and young companies – have to tour to be awarded funding. In parallel, there is criticism that the Scottish Arts Council does not do enough to encourage the more established companies to get out and tour. In consequence people feel that this sometimes leads to ‘unsuitable’ work going on tour. One promoter focused on the public monies from which touring companies would benefit: ‘There’s still the pressure from the Scottish Arts Council that they have to do it and the money’s not in the Scottish Arts Council to subsidise them to do it properly or us properly’. Promoters from different parts of the country also talked about the distinctive nature of performing in a small rural venue:

the great thing about rural touring is that you’re right up close to the audience and in the performers, they can find… sort of rediscover… something they’d almost forgotten about if they’d been working in big theatres.

It can be a cohesive audience, and they can be very attentive and very effusive at the end. Sometimes we have had groups who sort of said in the interval ‘Ooh, bit of a cold audience’, and I say, ‘No, they are not. They are listening very attentively’ – and at the end they give them a standing ovation.

One policy maker talked about the impalpable aspects of touring in Scotland, conjuring a rather romanticised view that might not sit too easily in the cut and thrust of the wider public policy debate:

whether artists or members of the audience, coming out of Poolewe hall and seeing that [view up Loch Ewe] and I defy anyone not to feel that – or in any place in Skye and, with the best will in the world, you do not get it in the Gorbals. It is an indefinable thing.

With these justifications in mind, we wanted to know if that was also how the companies see it. We interviewed current and past members of 7:84, Borderline, TAG and the Trav-
verse – all core-funded central-belt companies who have toured extensively throughout Scotland. In addition, in the Highlands we talked to Grey Coast, Mull Theatre, and Theatre Collective/Highland Festival. We also interviewed Third Party, a company based in Hastings in England who regularly tour in Scotland, particularly to the Highlands.

None of our interviewees spoke of pressure – untoward or benign – from core funders in general or from the Scottish Arts Council in particular: indeed as there are no special funds at the Scottish Arts Council to support rural touring the myth that companies tour rural Scotland for the money was quickly dispensed with. Touring companies tour for the simple reason that it is their role and purpose: if you have no theatre space to call ‘home’, then you have to get out and about. If you want your tour to be of a good length then, just as inevitably, you do have to play some rural venues. For a company like Hastings-based Third Party Productions, which does nothing but tour – in England and on the continent as well as in Scotland – Scottish Arts Council support is vital to cover the additional costs of being on the road. But that is just economics; it is clear that, for the touring companies, the motivation to tour in rural areas does not just come from the potential for funding. It is difficult to conclude from any of our interviews that the companies are in this for the money.

However, one important policy reason why companies based in the central belt tour to rural areas is an aspiration to be ‘national’. For example, in the case of TAG, it was an aspiration to be seen to be Scotland’s foremost company for children and young people, and for company members this meant reaching a geographically diverse audience. According to James Brining, the company’s former artistic director:

What we were saying was that we have to make sure that there is a good geographical spread across Scotland and start to establish relationships with promoters, with venues, with schools, with young people, throughout the country.

The Traverse Theatre, identified and funded to be Scotland’s new writing theatre, decided that, in order to fulfil its national aspiration, the company needed to work in a more focused and sustained way outside Edinburgh. So the Traverse established a development project for new writing in the Highlands and, since 1993, has undertaken an annual tour of Highland venues; we say more on this initiative below.

The policy encouragement for companies to undertake rural touring is multi-faceted. The Scottish Arts Council’s policy on access, its encouragement of initiatives from companies to tour rural areas and its support for the promoter; the work of DGAA and NEAT in supporting incoming tours with national and local funds; the strategy of HIDB/HIE and then HI~Arts in developing an infrastructure for support for the companies and the venues; all of these have had an impact on the decision of companies to either tour in rural areas or to establish themselves as companies in rural areas.

We asked theatre companies about the experience of touring in rural areas – was it different? Were the spaces they played during a rural tour more intimate? On this the theatre practitioners tend to agree with the promoters; it is a different experience and the nature of the venues played was a major factor in this difference. One theatre director told us that: ‘You feel more connected to the audience, partly because the architecture of the theatre is more immediate. […] In a Highland village hall you always know what an audience is thinking or feeling’. While one young actor we talked to during a tour assured us that:
It’s nice to bring a piece of theatre to a community that wouldn’t normally see it. They don’t have all the pretensions. They don’t bring a theatre etiquette. I don’t object to that, but it’s a very honest relationship you have with them and, if it reaches them and means something to them, then it reminds you that that’s what it’s all about.

So there is, overall, a strong indication from those who tour that there is a particular and, indeed, a special relationship to be forged with the audience. Some suggested it was because the audience knew each other that they had a sense of being involved in a shared community experience. Philip Howard, the artistic director of the Traverse, rejected the idea that audiences in the Highlands were somehow less sophisticated, but he did see differences between the rural and the urban audience. He identified what he called a mythology about Highland audiences being remote from the urban centres and, therefore, perhaps even not in tune with current theatrical developments. I think that is absolutely not the case. I think that Highland audiences, over the last fifteen years – partly thanks to the Traverse but, I have to admit, not entirely due to us – the Highlands audience has become one of the most sophisticated theatre audiences in Scotland, because they actually get a lot of work. And it is not true or as simple as to say that, because you live in a remote community in the Highlands, you don’t have as much access to the theatre as people in the city. Because that ignores the element of choice. People in the city may find that practically it may be very easy to come to the theatre but it is not a choice they would make, whereas in the Highlands, because a theatre company is visiting their community, the act of going to the theatre is part of your social behaviour. [...] The smaller the community you visit, the more intense the idea of going to the theatre as duty becomes.

Importantly, theatre companies did face some challenges when it came to casting for a rural tour. One director (of a long-established touring company with a clear national remit) told us that older actors, in particular, are less keen to be away from family or simply to undergo the rigours of touring: ‘Much harder work than getting to your dressing room, getting your key and having a drink at the bar afterwards’. On the other hand, some actors we interviewed during this project admitted that, although, they were not originally contracted for a tour, once they heard they were going to the Highlands, it was something they welcomed, particularly for that distinctive relationship with the audience.

As the research project evolved we became increasingly alert to a concern with issues of representation. Our starting point had been the 7:84 tour of The Cheviot…, a production explicitly about life in the Highlands. One of the factors that made that production so successful was that it told that particular story about a particular place to a particular audience at a particular time. We were concerned to consider what kinds of work – what kinds of representations – companies wanted to take to rural areas today: was it similarly engaged with life in the Highlands?; did they reflect the huge changes and differences in Highland lifestyles?; did they reflect the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of life in contemporary Scotland?; were they, in short, as diverse and as unpredictable as Scottish and British theatre in general?

We encountered a variety of views. Howard argued that Highland audiences should get access to all aspects of the Traverse’s repertoire from Highland- or from Edinburgh-based writers through to international work. However, he reiterated a point about his company’s national remit and noted that:
because we are a national resource we will always be looking at Highland writers and we will probably find that, if we produce a Highland play, that will probably also be one that we would take on tour.

Introducing the published version of the 2002 new play and tour, Iain F MacLeod's *Homers*, Howard writes:

The Traverse's work in the Highlands & Islands [sic] [since 1993] has been a unique combination of touring productions [...] and accompanying playwriting workshops. The aim has always been to provide Highland audiences with a rich mix of new drama while also developing the work of Highland playwrights – and of course ultimately to combine the two, as in the case of *Homers*.

Howard goes on to emphasise the importance of the touring element of the project and the demands of the audience: ‘One of the benefits of this system is to ensure that writing development does not exist in a cocoon, away from the reality of production and the demands of audiences.’

Nevertheless, we might suggest that the texts selected for the Traverse’s Highland tours, and perhaps even more clearly the linked writers’ project, have been distinguished by an interest in rural life and voices. The Traverse’s Highland tour and writers’ project has produced a selection of plays that differ hugely in their response to the challenge of a Highland tour. Plays produced under the scheme are: Stuart Hepburn’s *Loose Ends* (1993), Antoine O’Flaharta’s *Grace in America* (1994), David Harrower’s *Knives in Hens* (1995), Brian Friel’s *Faith Healer* (1996), Iain Crichton Smith’s *Lazybed* (1997), Nicola McCartney’s *Heritage* (1998), the 1999 short-play selection *Highland Shorts*, Henry Adam’s *Among Unbroken Hearts* (2000), Stephen Greenhorn’s version of Arne Sierens’s *The Ballad of Crazy Paola*, Iain F McLeod’s *Homers* (2002), David Greig’s *Outlying Islands* (2003), and, Alan Wilkins *The Nest* (2004). The images of life presented in even these 11 productions are historically, geographically, socially and culturally diverse – even if a core theme is place and isolated or marginalised spaces.

For companies like TAG, taking projects like ‘Making the Nation’ – with participatory projects like ‘Sense of Community’ and performances of plays such as *Julius Caesar* – to all parts of Scotland, urban and rural, was important, as the project explored issues of political engagement in post-devolution Scotland. TAG personnel noted that reactions to the project that were different in the varied communities of Scotland.

Rural-based Grey Coast, which does focus on new writing specifically for the Highlands, pointed out that, of course, not all Highland audiences are the same. Here is a description of the reaction to *Farmlands*, a play about women on farms in Easter Ross:

Some of the responses we got there were incredible. No-one had ever put their lives on stage before, but not only did we get people who don’t go to the theatre, we got people who have been to theatre before but never seen their lives up there. Tears in their eyes. You take that to Lochaber, and it just does not work the same.

This is exactly the same issue which 7:84 faced in 1980 with John McGrath’s *Blood Red Roses*. This was a play about militancy in the trades unions in Thatcher’s Britain. It was 7:84’s fifth Highland tour and the company had, by that stage, built a considerable reputation and following. Taking such a subject to the Highlands could have been seen as a risk – what relevance was it to them? However, as Elizabeth McLennan, one of the perform-
ers in that production, explained there was a range of ways in which it hooked into even the very rural audience of Sutherland:

There was a very strong tradition in the Highlands that every village had its amateur dramatics. They were producing plays with characters you are supposed to like and characters you are supposed not to like – goodies and baddies – and then there is the slimy character that screws everything up, and so on. Similarly within Blood Red Roses there were characters they could identify with on that gut level of goodies and baddies; characters about whom they said ‘We want her to win’ or ‘We want that bastard to be sorted out’ and so on. But on the level of the industrial dispute, for example, they did not care. That’s what went on in the cities. It was, however, different in Stornoway, and that was partly because they had had a big battle there over the Sunday and the ferry and, subsequently, over the military bases and the extension of Stornoway airport – issues which we dealt with in a later play called The Catch in 1982. The response to that play was wildly enthusiastic about militancy.

So does the touring theatre company come for the scenery? There is no evidence from those we talked to that touring was any kind of holiday, particularly for the stage management crew. One-night stands in different venues which involve a get-in and get-out at least five days a week, and a lot of driving in between, is very hard work. It is, in the view of many of the directors, we spoke to, ‘young persons’ work’ and, as mentioned, it is not always easy to persuade older and more established actors to accept a contract to go out on the road. For some actors and other theatre personnel we spoke to, their Highland tour was a first visit to the rural parts of Scotland, and for those who come from rural areas and now, because of work, live in the city, there was a sense that they knew how important it was to bring theatre to areas which did not have nightly access to it. One young actor summed up the rough and the smooth of rural touring:

It’s hard. No, it’s not hard, that’s rubbish. Two hours work a night, and you’re staying in beautiful places, being driven around and it’s all paid for – it’s the easiest job in the world. But it’s hard living out of a bag, and the travelling makes me tired.

At the end of the day, we found that the companies who tour place a significant value and a particular emphasis on the relationship with the audience and the experience that brings. Overall, we found that companies, be they rural- or urban-based, have a very positive view of touring to rural areas of Scotland. Again and again we heard that this is something they want to do because it fulfils a commitment to creating access to theatre and because, for many individuals, it is a different kind of experience from performing in urban areas. However, sometimes insufficient attention is paid to the practical challenges of rural touring and this can lead to frustrations at all parts of the touring infrastructure but perhaps most acutely with the locally-based promoter.

6.2 THE PRODUCTIONS

The content of The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil was focused on the Highland experience. It was about the historical and contemporary exploitation of the Highlands by forces of capital. In addition, it was dramaturgically framed for the community. McGrath described the form of the drama as that of the ‘ceilidh play’. Elizabeth McLennan, a founder member of that company, told us that
the idea was to use the form of a ceilidh to sing songs, tells jokes and stories, and facts and his-
tory in a way which was recognisable and felt familiar and made it, well, as exciting historically
as obviously it was and made people feel very secure with challenging ideas.

The formal reference to the ceilidh rooted that production in the culture of the Highlands
and connoted a sense of community and shared experiences and values that was under-
scored in the political content of the work. We asked our interviewees if they were con-
cerned to programme work that was similarly connected – in form and/or content – to
the lived experiences of their audiences.

We found that the issue of what kind of theatre appeals to rural audiences stirs up a
strong debate amongst promoters and policy makers. Crudely, it centres around two op-
posing positions. On the one hand, there is the view that rural audiences want theatre
that reflects their circumstances and their lives. By extension, it is often argued that com-
panies who are from a rural background are best placed to deliver this. On the other
hand, it is argued that audiences in rural parts of Scotland want access to the same range
of cultural experiences available to urban dwellers irrespective of the provenance of the
company, the nature of the work, the type of product. Hidden in this potential stand-off
are issues closely connected to cultural policy and funding decisions, which are concerned
with the nature and role of subsidy and whether it should provide – in old-fashioned
terms – ‘the best for the most’ parachuted in to a performance space, or invest in devel-
oping a society’s or a community’s own cultural expression and industry.

In Dumfries and Galloway one promoter expressed concern as to whether or not
audiences today could under-
stand what was characte-
rised as an ‘old-fashioned Scottish
play’. Another pointed out that his own amateur company had produced Tony Roper’s
The Steamie a few years before and its popularity as a familiar Scottish comedy, and the
‘recognition factor’, helped the play to sell out well before it opened. In 2002 the Byre
Theatre Company’s tour of Rona Munro’s Bondagers, a play set in the 19th century Bor-
ders, had also proved very popular in the area. One promoter concluded that she did not
necessarily give pri-
ority to Scottish plays but, nevertheless, she liked to book Scottish
companies. This might just imply that Scottish companies are more popular with the
audiences – perhaps because audiences are familiar with their name, or that they are
aware of their other work from national press coverage in The Herald and The Scotsman, or
that the companies make regular appearances in the locality.

Very clearly, promoters in the Highlands want to offer audiences a range of different
experiences. For example, new initiatives from the Scottish Arts Council in promoting
different kinds of music – particularly non-western music – have provoked some interest
from Highland promoters. Recently, international work that has proved particularly suc-
cessful in rural areas has included a Russian chamber orchestra in Glenmoriston, Tibetan
monks in Arddoss, an American guitar player in Drumadrochit, and Eric Bogle in Lo-
chinver. This richness in music available across the Highlands is augmented by the regular
appearance of traditional Scottish musicians of all sorts, and visits from Essential Scottish
Opera and Scottish Opera Go Round. At the very least this suggests that in music there is
a lot of choice for promoters and that they apply a variety of criteria when selecting what
they think might be right for their audiences. There is a challenge for theatre makers to
meet this level of diversity in their work.

However, companies who try to second guess the tastes and interests of rural audi-
ences are easily dismissed. As one commentator put it, ‘Just putting in the Gaelic song
and story of the herring industry is quickly sussed’. Or, as another Highland promoter said, ‘the biggest turn off is someone coming up and saying “We are going to bring culture to the Highlands!” and “Let’s do a play about the Clearances.” Been there and done that.’

Even for visitors the work does not have to be Scottish, it just has to be on and it has to be of interest:

I know perfectly well from past experience that for visitors to come and see Theo Travis, who has come from London, one of the top jazz bands in the country and see them in Lochinver village hall is as much an experience for them as to see Duncan Chisholm and Ivan Drever [traditional musicians from Lewis] who are very Highland so… I’m not… we’re not saying that the programme should be overtly Scottish or Highland, I don’t think that’s necessary.

Similarly shows that err towards gritty realistic urban dramas, stereotypically about drug-taking in peripheral housing schemes, tend not to be too popular either. But still, promoters across the country are keen to embrace theatre that is thought-provoking.

It was interesting to hear views of the same production from promoters, audiences and policy makers across the country. A good example was Stellar Quines’ production of US writer Margaret Edson’s *Wit* which toured Scotland in 2002 – playing both urban venues such as the Tron in Glasgow and the Traverse in Edinburgh and rural ones from the Macphail Centre in Ullapool to the Lochside Theatre in Castle Douglas. *Wit* is a play about a woman – an English literature professor – dying of cancer. In general the promoters we spoke to found that the play was moving and well performed but recognised that it was poorly attended. The problem was thought to lie partly with the subject and substantially with the poster. According to both a Highland promoter and one in the Dumfries and Galloway region, the topic caused resistance from audiences who saw it as just too depressing. The former also argued that it excluded ‘nearly everyone with a relative who has had cancer or died from cancer’, while the latter commented that ‘It’s a very brave person who goes in to see something like that’. An audience member in Dumfries and Galloway argued that it was primarily the poster that put people off: another agreed that a ‘less scary’ poster would have meant more business. Those who had seen the play argued strongly that it had been a ‘great’ piece of theatre that had something to say to people whose lives had been touched by cancer and those who had not.

But are these experiences of audience resistance different from the urban situation? Is it not that sometimes we want to be entertained and sometimes we want to be challenged and that a play about a woman dying from cancer or other ‘demanding’ topics, no matter how funny and how resonant and how well-written, produced and performed, are not always one’s first choice on a cold winter night? Audiences have to make the same choice about whether they want to see these productions irrespective of whether they live in rural or urban areas.
In May 2003 a company of four actors and a stage management team of three from the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, packed themselves and a theatre set into vans, left the capital and began an eight-week tour. Outlying Islands, a play by David Greig, was performed 25 times during those summer weeks. Of those performances 12 were in theatres, including the Citizens’ Theatre, Glasgow, the Adam Smith Theatre, Kirkcaldy, the Salisbury Playhouse, and the Eden Court Theatre, Inverness. The rest were one-off performances in village halls, including ones on the islands of Mull, Islay and Easdale.

So far, so familiar.

Thirty years on from the first tour of John McGrath’s The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil, it appears that remarkably little has changed in the character, extent and pattern of rural touring in Scotland. The approach that was established by 7:84 Theatre Company (Scotland) during its first two tours in 1973 is still discernible today in arts touring in all parts of rural Scotland: a company arrives in a van, puts up the set in a village hall or community theatre, performs the show, takes down the set, perhaps joins the audience in the pub, stays in a local bed and breakfast, and then gets up the next day to do the same thing in another village.

For the last 30 years, in the spring and autumn (the peak time for touring) companies have set off from the central belt of Scotland to perform theatre in rural areas. And yet, in the time between these two shows – both, in their different ways, about life in rural communities – a great deal has changed in Scotland as a whole and in rural areas in particular. Road links have improved and ferries are faster. Traditional industries have declined, even if new variations on old themes have evolved, such as the salmon farms of the west. Tourism has grown significantly; oil has steadied, and even declined, as an economic driver. And even if Objective 1 status is now a thing of the past, European funding has resulted in investment in the transport infrastructure and business development. Local government reorganisation in the mid 1990s hit rural Scotland unequally, with Argyll and Bute, in particular, losing out in relation to certain service provisions, including cultural services, as the result of the abolition of Strathclyde Regional Council. More recently the establishment of the Scottish Parliament has shifted the model of governance and systems of government in Scotland in unprecedented ways: how this will finally impact on the infrastructure of civic Scotland remains uncertain. Whilst Holyrood has not been concerned to debate the philosophical nature of rural policy – in the manner of Westminster and Whitehall – the devolved parliament has engaged with rural life in important ways, not least in relation to land reform and ownership, the fisheries debate, and FMD.

At a regional level – and most particularly in the north – the development agencies HIDB and subsequently HIE, and their network of area agencies, have been a focus of investment and strategic partnerships. At a different, more local level, village halls have been refurbished and other local amenities, like theatres in small towns, have been reno-
vated – much of this investment thanks to Lottery money. Overall the infrastructure is more robust and better serviced.

This has contributed to a change in attitudes. Across the UK as a whole, but with discernible success in Scotland because of the early achievement of Glasgow as European City of Culture, there is a recognition that investment in culture can produce a range of benefits, of which confidence and an uplift in national and international profiles are not the least. In many rural areas, and in particular in the Highlands and Islands, there is talk of ‘cultural confidence’, a confidence reflected in the international profile of the St Magnus Festival in Orkney, in the bid by Inverness for the title of Capital of Culture in 2008, and in the ambition of many volunteer promoters to schedule ten and more events in their village halls each year. There is, in short, a culture of culture – a willingness to invest in cultural activities, to deliver across a range of social and economic issues – and there are infrastructural and policy developments, as well as formal and informal networks, in place throughout the nation.

There is also growing evidence, again particularly in the Highlands and Islands, that cultural provision is no longer wholly reliant on imports from the central belt but can be and is being created locally, just as it can be and is being imported from international providers. Whilst some art-forms have achieved more in this area than others, there is a general expectation that artists, of whatever genre and outlook, will find a platform close to their local base. From that base they may look beyond Scotland but they will also expect to perform and hang their work close to home, communicating with their more immediate peers.

Within this context of change – and drawing on the frameworks of public policy, and cultural production and provision raised by this study – we have identified two key areas of potential significance in policy development. They concern social and economic development and the role of volunteers, and cultural relevance and audience development. In this section we gloss these issues in relation to our research, demonstrate how they were expressed and explored by the people consulted, and suggest some more aspects of rural touring theatre that are ‘the same, but different’.

7.1 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS

1973 pointed up what effect a dynamic culture could have in a community.

Chris Higgins, HIE

Reflecting on our interviews, observations and reading, what can we conclude about the place of arts touring in Scottish rural life today? And, more specifically, what impact does arts touring have on the development of rural communities? Does it go beyond the immediate, direct enjoyment of a good night out – itself, of course, a much-valued experience? What evidence is there that communities have benefited in a noticeable manner from national and local policies and actions that support rural arts touring?

In the Highlands and Islands, over the last 20 years, the social and economic development agency, now HIE, has pursued an explicit policy of supporting rural touring. This has taken the form of funding companies to tour, creating a demand from audiences for a diverse range of work, and developing the local capacity for promoting touring. This
three-pronged approach was seen as a means of engendering confidence in Highlands and Islands communities. Crucially, this was regarded as a strategic requirement for economic growth. As we have shown, this approach has been followed through. There is now a great diversity of work touring rural areas in the Highlands and Islands and, indeed, beyond. There is a clear demand in rural communities for a range of work and there is the local capacity to facilitate and support its delivery, not least through an improved infrastructure. But what about the strategy overall? Has the expansion of rural arts touring brought wider social benefits? In this section we consider this issue in relation to four aspects of rural life:

- social change – the wider social networks which emerge as a result of this regular arts promotion;
- community development – the extent to which rural touring is embedded in community life;
- personal development – the contact, commitment and the networks which develop as a result of an individual’s involvement in promoting work; and, closely linked,
- issues around volunteers.

7.1.1 Social change

The ceilidh was mad. Really weird. The place was full of folk from the village. And fishermen and crofters and some tourists… and us.

Alex in Greenhorn’s Passing Places

The first of these aspects of development relates to the members of the audience who may use the theatre as social venue or the event as a special occasion. In Dumfries and Galloway, interviewees point to the social networks that are created and reinforced when going to the theatre. Sometimes several generations go together, or a number of friends of the same age. Women, in particular, commented on how the theatre was an appealing environment which they liked to use for meeting with friends. The y told us that they could enjoy the show and meet others in the interval in a safe and friendly social setting. Such an outing formed an experience which would feed future discussions between them. As DGAA director Jenny Wilson confirmed:

They [the members of the audience] have shared an experience which they talk about and which they use as a yardstick: ‘Do you remember when?’ [...] It becomes part of the sort of mortar that helps to hold the bricks together.

In one of our audience focus groups a participant said that she found the theatre very helpful when she first moved into the town: she was able to make new social connections both as an audience member of incoming shows and as a participant in the amateur activities. She was able to do things with other people and have fun with other people in a shared community environment. The activities that took place in the theatre helped create the social environment in which she could settle. Another focus group participant explained that it was very often those who move into the area who sat on organising committees. This was not seen to be negative by community members: it was understood that once people have moved to an area they want to make this a nice place to be, they want to make a contribution, and so they get involved. It was clear these activities provide points of contact with others and help in processes of settling. Whilst new residents form
an important constituency in theatre activities, it should be stressed that the theatre committees we encountered consisted of new and longer-standing residents.

The experience of the newcomer becoming involved in supporting rural arts touring is borne out by further examples from the Highlands where many of the promoters also got involved after moving into the area. We did not undertake any work with audiences in the Highlands, but the promoters’ view is that the arrival of the touring event is important in village life and is a chance for people to meet and socialise. The development of venues is regarded as important in offering a more sociable environment with improved circulation and meeting space. As HI-Arts Director Robert Livingston noted:

One of the mistakes people make is assuming that the audiences out there are desperate. Most communities have incredibly active lives and so the challenge for the promoter and the company is to make a mark against all the other things that are happening out there. It is not a cultural desert.

One promoter described the busy use of the village hall – and demonstrates the crowded market place in which rural touring theatre exists:

Every morning it is playgroup and nursery; Tuesday afternoon, the school uses it for gym; on Wednesdays it is lunch club; Thursday night youth club; Wednesday night yoga; Tuesday night it is whist or ceilidh; Monday nights it is community council or village hall meeting; and, then, Friday and Saturday plays, dances, ceilidhs, fashion shows.

Presenting performing arts in this busy community space, as opposed to a purpose-built theatre, has an implication beyond the practical. This is a shared space which ‘belongs’ to the community and is used by them in a range of ways, sometimes as an extension of home and/or church and/or school life: as one performer put it, the village hall venue is ‘not a neutral space like a theatre’. This is a space where, as one actor put it, the artists are the guests of the audience, the reverse of the situation in a theatre or arts centre. As a result, in the words of a scheme manager, ‘whatever you do in that space, you do to the power of ten’. One musician, interviewed as part of the English and Welsh part of the study, expanded upon this important point when he recognised that:

People have come out to be entertained in their space. This is the point. They use this space all the time in a rural community. We [the touring companies] don’t. So we are very much coming into their space, quite a different feel. It is almost like walking into somebody’s front room. Say you are mum in the village; you have probably been to the village hall that morning to pick up your son from the playgroup; the week before you might have been in the jumble sale and the next you might be performing on the stage as part of the amateur dramatic group. And we are slotted in between all these community events. Very much one feels like a guest in somebody else’s home, which is very nice. It is a different feel to a theatre where almost anyone can come in.

The experience of seeing a diverse range of cultural activity in this shared, familiar, multi-use space is, arguably, the distinctive aspect of the rural touring experience and, as such, it resonates across the expression of social, cultural and personal values.

There is also some indication from our work with audiences in Dumfries and Galway that a regular programme of drama has a positive effect on the decision of people to relocate from cities. One audience member told us that the existence of a local drama group, and professional incoming shows, were points to consider when deciding whether
to move from Glasgow to Moffat. Chris Higgins of HIE also argues that support for cultural provision helps to attract much needed people to settle in the Highlands, particularly those who left to pursue higher education or other career prospects and are now returning to bring up their families.

But, there is another aspect to close social ties: what can be seen from the inside as an inclusive arrangement can appear exclusive from the outside. The struggle to engage with the widest possible audience is not unique to rural areas, and there is some evidence to suggest that the rural promoter is more successful than his/her urban counterpart in attracting people from all parts of the community. But it remains the case that strong networks can work in both inclusive and exclusive ways. The theatre may appear to be inhabited by like-minded people, but it can also appear off-putting to those who feel that they may not ‘fit in’, particularly if the regular attenders are also good friends. In our discussions with audiences this worked both ways. People were introduced to the theatre because of the encouragement of friends who were already involved. But, on the other hand, the atmosphere to some appeared ‘clubby’; and that has both positive and negative connotations.

For village halls, the arrival of a theatre company is not the only activity which goes on: such a visit, no matter how welcome, has to fit into a busy calendar of events. In this context it is incumbent upon the touring company to make their product attractive and/or distinctive. This is true as much for indigenous companies as others. For example, in last year’s production of Seven Hunters, a play about the Flannan Islands Lighthouse, the Theatre Collective team aspired to create a complete package of activities and experiences around the performance. A company member told us that he thought it was good […] not to do one night stands but to go to a community for at least two days and do workshops – and do [the] two shows we are doing, Usquebaugh: The Story of Whisky and Seven Hunters, and [also] tour an art exhibition, tour a heritage installation and do storytelling workshops and do art workshops in schools and do talks to heritage groups. You know, do the whole bit.

On a very different scale, this desired level of impact is certainly what some believed the RSC achieved in Forres with their production of The Merchant of Venice in 2002. Nick Fearne, the arts officer in Moray, described the scale of the operation: ‘There was the whole thing of five articulated trucks and building the auditorium and turning [it] into the space’. But, he went on to argue, ‘the principles were the same. It was still bringing touring theatre into an underserved area. It just happened to be one of the best companies in the world. It was the same principles and the RSC treated it as the same’. However, the impact on the community of this event went beyond the performances and the education programme and the treatment the company received was perhaps also a little different:

When you think about it, 33 people staying a week in local accommodation […] They are […] eating, drinking, hiring cars. Some of them stayed in the pub in Forres [and it] became, like, the ‘RSC club’. After the first night, on the Tuesday – usually two men and a dog in there on a Tuesday – it was packed. […] In Forres they felt part of the community. When [they were] getting their messages [shopping], check-out ladies are asking ‘How are you getting on?’ There was a karaoke night with them. It was just great.
Not every visit is like the RSC coming to town, of course, but this sense of community engagement and pride is widely reflected. As a promoter in Dumfries and Galloway observed, with no little pride in her voice: ‘[the] Scottish Opera programme and the poster last time actually had us on the design’. In terms of community development, then, a vibrant touring arts programme can, quite simply, put your community on the map.

7.1.2 Community development

I enjoy seeing the shows and I love seeing people going in and getting captivated by it. I love seeing companies going into the hall and saying ‘Wow, this is a fabulous place!’ and being amazed by [our village] and the people who live here.

Highland promoter

Community development is a range of practices dedicated to increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life, improving local conditions, especially for people in disadvantaged situations, and enabling people to participate in public decision-making and to achieve greater long-term control over their circumstances. Community life means activities undertaken voluntarily by people pursuing common interests, improving shared conditions or representing joint concerns.

Community Development Foundation

At a local level the promoter is generally part of the local hall committee and supported through another network which is concerned with other community activities which take place in the hall. We mapped this, in particular, in Dumfries and Galloway where our research involved a detailed observation of the wider role of theatre in communities. In Moffat, for example, we can clearly trace those links and networks across the town where the two theatre buildings are the Old Mill Theatre and the Youth Theatre. The bookshop and the music shop sell tickets for the theatre. Posters can be found at the butcher’s and in front of the bookshop, as well as in the windows of several other shops. The owner of the music shop created a summer show and is also in charge of the local choir. The members of the theatre committee, similarly, have roles that connect them to their social environment beyond the theatre activity: one has been on the community council; a couple are on the gala committee; others are members of the Mountain Rescue or the town’s Twinning Committee. There are examples of members of the theatre using their professional skills and contacts – secretarial and building skills, for example – to the benefit of theatre making. With their other roles – voluntary, professional or both – the committee members are engaged in a number of different networks that work across the community. They are able to mobilise these resources for the theatre, or to activate their resources at the theatre for their other tasks, thereby fusing the social capital that is linked to these different networks. By doing so the relationships between community members are reinforced and new ones are established.

Connected to this is the relation of the institution of theatre and its embedding within the community. In Castle Douglas the theatre committee hires out costumes. This service is popular and well used. Local clubs and organisations at times borrow the theatre’s crockery and glassware for their own functions. Once a year the theatre hires all of its technical equipment to the local school and its members are asked to offer face-painting at local festivals. In return the theatre receives significant sponsorship or help in kind from individuals and businesses in the area. The theatre is, thereby, embedded in the
town and wider area through general reciprocity and a relationship of exchange and distribution. We mapped a similar situation in Dumfries where the Theatre Royal also receives significant help in kind and hires out costumes. In Castle Douglas, for example, the theatre has now become a landmark of the town; local people bring their visiting relatives or friends to show them ‘our theatre’. We found that this takes place even if they, the locals, do not actually attend events there. In these cases and others we saw theatres that are linked with the community in ways which go well beyond providing entertainment.

Pride in the venue takes particular forms when that venue is the village hall. Here we heard how there was a great deal of pleasure that ‘our own wee hall’ could attract the big names such as Scottish Opera or a group from the USA or Tibet or Burkina Faso. In terms of embedding the work into the community, while the multi-use hall presents its problems not least in timetabling, it also places arts activity at the very centre of the community’s public life.

7.1.3 Personal development


_The Young Woman in David Harrower’s Knives in Hens (Traverse Theatre, 1995)_

There is evidence, drawn from our interviews, that attest to promotional activity being important in terms of an individual’s self-actualisation and the development of personal skills and competencies. However, in this section, we are concerned to understand the role of the locally-based promoters and their relation to one another and to other members of the community or place, and to understand the networks which underpin the promoting of rural touring.

The promoter’s confidence in his or her own ability to programme was more strongly evident in PAN members than in other areas. Some ascribed this to the ‘Highland character’ or the result of rural isolation – an expression of the need to get on and do it oneself – but the learning inherent in the PAN processes, with meetings based on sharing and debate, is a contributory factor. This was contrasted with the task of recruiting promoters in the NEAT area where there was a sense that communities have got into the habit of waiting for the local authority to act. However, it also suggests that the network itself engenders a sense of confidence. PAN members are also quite notable for their links with the wider arts world, and they valued keeping in contact and being aware of what is happening in Glasgow or Edinburgh and beyond.

There is a further challenge at the grassroots level of local activity. When a promoter – as an individual or as part of a small team – makes choices about programming or spending there is question mark about whose interests they are serving. Put bluntly, are promoters programming work that reflects their cultural and social interests or work that serves their community in all its diversity of age, class, opinion and taste? At a local level, are promoters themselves cultural gatekeepers?

7.1.4 Volunteers

If you look at the active promoters, you will see that all or most are freelance, they have their own business or are retired. In other words they have a lifestyle which can support meeting the company in the middle of the afternoon at the hall, ‘phoning the [Scottish] Arts Council at 11am, putting an application form in, meeting people like you. If you have a 9 to 5 job you
cannot do this. [...] what promoters do in their own life has a huge [...] if all the volunteers
got jobs then it will grind to a halt.

Highland promoter

Touring in Scotland’s rural areas depends upon volunteers: without them there would be
no rural touring – at least not as far as we would recognise it today. The volunteer aspect
of this activity is particularly interesting, not least because the delivery system around it is
highly professionalised and subsidised. The distinctive nature of the volunteer in the touring
infrastructure is universally acknowledged. Although one promoter said that, ‘Yes, it
would be lovely if I was getting a pay cheque to go with it’, in general we found that payment
was not a particular desire for the local promoters: they place significant value on
their role and identity as volunteers.

However, there is some unease about the relationship between the volunteer and the
paid promoter and/or paid arts officer. Local volunteer promoters are never happy when
a paid official tells them how to do their job. This seems to be felt most keenly by those
who have been doing this work for some time and, occasionally, have a sense that they
are being taken for granted, or that they are being unduly criticised for their efforts. These
feelings and experiences have arisen recently when questions were raised about the approach the promoters take to their audience.

We did encounter negative views of the volunteer promoter as self-indulgent incomer,
subsidising their own cultural interests with public monies, but only at some distance
from the grassroots activity itself – in Edinburgh and, sometimes, even in Inverness. Yes,
volunteer promoters are more likely to be incomers than not – but they are incomers who
have settled and re-populated an area of declining population; sometimes they are ‘re-
turners’; and none fits the prejudiced and offensive stereotype of the ‘white-settler’. Yes,
these volunteers have brought to bear their own tastes and experiences on programming,
but the question is has this been done with disregard to the local and wider social and
cultural context? We found not, and that promoters made choices that were both subtle
and nuanced in their response to personal, community and art-form development.

A further question arises: has the activity of this energetic group of volunteers con-
tributed to the revival of a sense of cultural confidence in the Highlands or is it holding
back development?; is such activity about community development or does it represent a
form of cultural exclusion?

As we have shown, the incomer has an important role to play in rural areas, particu-
larly in the Highlands; it is not, however, exemplified by people retiring and selling up in
the English Home Counties, settling in the Highlands, and taking over a village activity.
Many of those who have migrated to the Highlands and are involved in promoting did so
20 or more years ago and many of the newer arrivals are not retired. Moreover, attracting
returners or incomers is a specific policy of HIE, and rural touring has been regarded as a
key tactic in addressing that strategy. However, we found that in some national agencies –
for example, in some parts of the Scottish Arts Council – there is an enduring mythology
that voluntary promoters are incomers who want to impose on the local community what
they previously enjoyed in other, urban environments. This attitude – often expressed as
a wariness of the cultural and social choices being made at grassroots level – suggests that
there is some disjointedness between the national overview as seen from the Scottish Arts
Council and the regional policy of HIE which actively promotes migration.
Nevertheless, there is, within the Scottish Arts Council, a recognition of the importance of the volunteer in supporting not only touring but also the network of festivals which happen in the summer throughout Scotland. The Scottish Arts Council has, for example, funded the (re-)development of the NEAT circuit to encourage voluntary support. However, it must also decide whether to give more responsibility to existing voluntary networks. On the one hand, there is a concern to avoid ‘volunteer fatigue’ and not overburden people who freely give their time. On the other hand, the Scottish Arts Council does not want to be administering very small grants (£1,000 to £2,000) to local promoters in rural areas. PAN knows, for example, that it would not take a great deal of pushing on its part to be given more responsibility for disbursing the funds, but the membership is, understandably, reluctant to take on the potentially divisive role of deciding on each others’ funds. Neither is PAN currently interested in taking on any commissioning role, unlike professional promoters in urban areas. (The Scottish Arts Council has a relatively new fund for theatres in towns in the central belt to let them commission work: this is something which PAN certainly rejects as its role.)

There are downsides to the major part of touring theatre in Scotland being predicated on a network of part-time volunteers. There is the danger of exclusivity – in terms of processes and programming with promoters selecting what they want to see with little regard to the views of other members of their community or to art form or community development. This could lead to strategy being squeezed out as individual volunteers – more or less accountable to their audiences and not to local authority or agency offices – plough their own furrow irrespective of wider policy initiatives. There is also the danger of burn out; and the need for capacity-building to encourage new ideas or, indeed, new promoters. But, in varying degrees, these are challenges that face paid arts workers as much as unpaid and we found that, for the most part, volunteer promoters are creative, committed and concerned individuals, motivated to make a contribution to their community, and excited by culture in general and theatre in particular. They are self-critical and aware of the challenges implicit in their role but they are willing to step forward and do something. Difficult though it may be for agencies and authorities to deal with this unpredictable and independent group of individuals, without them the cultural and social infrastructure of the rural areas of Scotland would be much diminished, if not wholly absent.

7.2 CULTURAL RELEVANCE AND AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

All the shows that we took to the Highlands had, without exception, strong Highland connections, so the prime motivation was to take back, to reflect back to people their history, their current situation, their forms of entertainment. They enjoyed stuff about their own lives.

Elizabeth McLennan

Promoters across Scotland – in rural as much as in urban areas – want to present a varied programme of work for their audiences. However, for many promoters – for many producers – there is an additional demand that work should resonate in some way with the lives of their audience. How this cultural relevance is marked/achieved is an area where individual choice and cultural policy meet – not always smoothly.
In summer 2003 Outlying Islands was the latest production to form the Traverse’s Highland tour. As mentioned, previous Traverse Highland tours have included Crichton Smith’s Lazy Bed (1997), McCartney’s Heritage (1998) and Adam’s Among Unbroken Hearts (2000). It is a project with a strong reputation in the Highlands, not least because it is seen to reflect the diversity of Highland culture. The tour sends out work that has been staged at the Traverse itself, and so might be seen to be part of the organisation’s general commitment to new writing – a point reinforced by the new writing project that runs parallel to the tour. There is a clear tendency to present work that has some connection with rural life and/or is by rural writers. Yet the plays taken on tour vary widely in style, tone and subject matter, from McCartney’s play about Ulster-Scots emigrants in Saskatchewan in the 1910s to Adam’s play of modern youth- and drug-culture in Caithness and Iain F MacLeod’s anarchic Homers (2002) set in Glasgow and the Islands in the 1960s. One Argyllshire promoter spoke positively about this mature engagement with Highland life:

We had [the Traverse production of] Highland Shorts here. I liked that kind of idea because it was quite specific to the Highlands... the type of writing... the issues, current issues, not like bloody ‘45 or something. We’re past history of the Highlands, we’re trying to move forward.

David Greig’s play is the most recent of this series. It had premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2002 and been well-received critically and popularly. It is set on a small uninhabited island. The world is on the brink of a terrible war. Two young men are ferried to the island by an old man and his young niece. Tensions rise and the play spirals toward sex, murder and suicide.

When the Traverse contacted promoters regarding the tour of this show they were keen to communicate several messages: that this was another in the Traverse’s series of Highland tours; that the product was, therefore, of high quality; and, that there was a nude scene. To underline these messages the company provided promoters with a video recording of the production. Given that the play is set on a remote island – easily read as a remote Hebridean island – the Traverse’s original plan was to include as many island venues as possible in the tour. However, one regular island venue on the Traverse Highland tour did not take the show because of the nudity and the expected backlash from more conservative elements within the community. What had been an unremarkable scene in Edinburgh was a matter for much discussion in the Highlands. For some it was not a big issue, but they were pleased the Traverse had let them know. Others took time and effort to inform their audience. Still others decided not to book the production based on the information they received and their knowledge of their community. It remains the case today that there are some communities for whom theatre is, if not outright condemned then at least disapproved of on religious grounds. In addition, as mentioned previously, there is a very real difference in the experience of seeing the show in a hall in a small village and in the relative anonymity of the Traverse’s main auditorium. However, promoters were keen to explain to us that it was not that their audiences were any more or less liable to be shocked than the Edinburgh audience, but that they needed to have the product clearly explained to them. As one Highland promoter told us: ‘I wanted people to be very sure about what they were coming to. I didn’t want them to bring their eight year old because the baby sitter had let them down’.

Culturally, rather than socially and ethically, there are other problems associated with performing explicit and even challenging productions in village halls, connected to the
mixed use of these venues and their multi-faceted role within the community. As one promoter memorably put it:

The hall is used for other things and it is all very well having nudity, it is quite another having two people having pretty accurate simulated sex on stage [during a performance of Outlying Islands] where tomorrow afternoon pensioners will be eating curly sandwiches.

More than one promoter spoke about the impact of the arrival of a company in the village, also commenting on how different that is from a city experience:

There are people that go to the theatre in the cities because it is the done thing to do rather than because they are desperate to go to the theatre, whereas here people are going more because: (a) they are supporting their local theatre and the group that run it; and, (b) because it is an opportunity to see theatre without travelling fifty miles.

And one commented on a different atmosphere: ‘I think it must be partly because the audience know each other. It tends to be a nicer atmosphere’.

But what attracts an audience? It is unlikely to be just the warm and familiar atmosphere. One Highland promoter tried to characterise his audience:

I am sure the audiences up here go to a wider spread of things. Yes, you get people who go to jazz or to theatre alone, but there is a lot more overlap, I suspect. I can only go on a gut reaction on that. I suppose, possibly, you get a greater variety of younger and older in an audience. I may be wrong. I suspect you get more family groups here. Of necessity, people bring along younger children.

As we have already noted, promoters in the Highlands are keen to support a wide range of work. This is perhaps less true in other rural areas. In NEAT, for example, the local authority is keen to book theatre with a high-recognition factor, understood to mean Shakespeare or something with a north-east theme. We were told:

The first thing we look at is product which is suitable for audiences who are not necessarily theatre goers so Shakespeare or a known play or something which has a recognisable factor in it – Jessie Kesson, Yellow on the Broom, or Sunset Song, which was a wow of a success, of course, up here.

Issues like those raised by Outlying Islands are managed by local promoters who can – if given sufficient information by companies – make informed choices about what will and will not work within their venue. However, there is an added complication when the issue of cultural relevance – and indigenous ambition – rubs up against that of quality. We encountered this issue in different ways and circumstances, generally in the Highlands where there are a number of locally-based companies keen to launch new work. One story that we heard repeatedly was about Theatre Collective’s production of Hard Pressed.

The story seems to go that, after meeting in Inverness in 2000, the entire Drama committee of the Scottish Arts Council went to Tain to see Hard Pressed, a new production by the Inverness-based company. The production was in receipt of significant public funding, so the committee had a strong vested interest: the Scottish Arts Council’s Scotland Onstage fund had awarded Highland Festival £5,000 in 1999 to commission the play; there was a further £57,566 the following year to support the production and tour, over and above other Highland Festival funding.
Having ventured to the exposed wilds of Tain, however, these urban sophisticates/patronising southerners/people without a sense of humour (delete as appropriate) did not have a good night out. They hated every moment of the show, judging the production of cripplingly poor quality, the narrative inexcusably couthy, and its representations mired in stereotype. In contrast – as the story goes – the local, Highland audience was delighted with it, recognised the play’s ironical take on rural stereotypes, enjoyed it all tremendously, and all but came to blows in securing tickets for subsequent performances.

The moral of the story is not really to do with who was right and who was wrong, but whose notion of quality is to be believed and, more importantly, acted upon. It illustrates how the quality of work by indigenous, rural-based companies is perceived. There is a view that, because locally produced work is often less well funded, and the members of the company are, in some cases, less experienced, it is not always of the highest quality. The issue was summarised by one Highland promoter who, when asked if he would promote locally produced work, was clear that ‘of course we will book them, but we are not going to lower the standards by taking second-rate subsidised companies in the Highlands because they just happen to be based in the Highlands’.

On the other hand, Mull Theatre was mentioned again and again as a producer of consistently high quality work liked by local audiences, whilst Theatre Collective has made popular and successful shows, generally based on local experiences, since *Hard Pressed*. Both *Accidental Death of an Accordionist* and *The Wedding* won what can only be described as a cult following when they were produced across the Highlands in 2001 and 2002 respectively.

Whatever *Hard Pressed* was, it was a learning experience for all concerned, not least the company: whilst one local authority arts officer declared ‘That [*Hard Pressed*] was shocking […]. My jaw dropped at that’, she did try to book both subsequent shows by the company. And even the Scottish Arts Council came round, awarding the company project funding in 2003 for a different type of piece about the Flannan Isles lighthouse keepers.

As we have mentioned, budget changes five years ago restricted the touring funds administered by HI~Arts to Highland companies only. Whilst this was consistent with the HIE policy for its cultural programme, it did provoke a backlash from promoters, particularly established ones. We have found it difficult to detect any change to touring patterns since, but clearly the decision has had an effect on the attitude of some of the promoters and, in a sector where much work is voluntary, something that seemed to undervalue or disregard them was damaging.

Promoters want to exercise choice, but is work produced in rural areas a realistic option? Is there, for example, support for the creation of the work itself? The question of what is on offer to promoters is, of course, also influenced by wider public policy, in this case by the funding policy of the Scottish Arts Council – as well as by decisions made by local authorities and other agencies such as HI~Arts and DGAA.

In terms of national cultural policy, the division of opinion over the work of Theatre Collective was seen in the Highlands as being a challenge to Scottish Arts Council policy. One key player argued that the Scottish Arts Council tended to support companies like urban-based Benchtours and Grid Iron which did limited business in the rural marketplace. In contrast, the work of Theatre Collective, which was not favoured by the Scottish Arts Council, was much preferred by local audiences. He also argued that, despite Scot-
British Arts Council negativity, such ‘overtly popular work’ had an important role in building an audience.

Alongside the question about whether or not there is sufficient support to develop locally produced work, lies the wider one of what support the Scottish Arts Council gives to touring theatre in general. Does it meet the demands of rural promoters? As we have seen the promoters themselves do not take a common view on this. Some claim there is a huge choice – almost overwhelming – while others suggest that once you have sifted through what is really available and affordable and what fits the hall and the available booking dates – the choice is not as rich as you might first think. Again it is clear that promoters want to exercise creativity in their programming, they want to choose, to judge for themselves what would work, they want to be able to invite a range of companies to visit their area, and feel equally free to pass over others.

Against the interest in local work locally produced must be set the demands of audiences and promoters to experience a range of different types of culture – not least of different traditions and countries. We saw that promoters were motivated to serve their diverse audience through a programme which mixed different art-forms, different genres, and different cultures. One promoter told us of the excitement generated in her community by a decision to programme music by Tibetan monks:

We try also to get things which are unusual and no-one has tried before, s next year, we have the Tibetan monks. Everyone is into the Tibetan monks. If someone else asks me in the village when are the Tibetan monks coming I think I will go mad. They are doing workshops and performances and all sleeping in the hall apparently.

Others talked of high numbers attending a performance by a group of drummers from Burkina Faso with ‘People still asking if they’re going to come back’. One of the reasons that these international events appeal is that they are seen to be attractive for a family audience – that is an audience of adults and children. One promoter summed up the appeal by saying that ‘locals will come to things like that, it’s a whole family sort of thing, they like that, people do like that, they want the rest of the world to come here, to see a bit of it’. In short, promoters are keen to widen the cultural experiences of audiences. Duncan MacInnes told us that, in an effort to expand the types of music available, PAN had made two applications to Tune Up, a new Scottish Arts Council touring music fund:

one [application was] to bring Asian music up here, but without naming an Asian band, although we said we had already made contacts. And the other was for two or three good quality jazz groups which the promoters up here wanted to have. So we put in our application. In the first round all the money went to individual bands or agencies, so in a way somebody somewhere is saying: ‘Give the money to the band and let them organise the tour’. Rather than ‘Give the money to the local promoter and let them book it’. I think it was partly because we were a bit vague about who was coming, because that was unimportant [to us]. What we wanted was the ability to bring good quality Asian music up here, rather than acting as the agent for such-and-such a band and wanting to push them. I felt a bit disappointed by what came out of that.

To judge by the bands that did tour as a result of Tune Up funding, MacInnes and his PAN promoters benefited from some innovative, international jazz musicians – including the Paolo Fresu Sextet that played the Aros Centre in Portree and the Wynd Theatre in
Melrose (in addition to venues in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling), and Erik Truffaz who played Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Glenurquhart Public Hall, Drumnadrochit and Eastgate Arts Centre in Peebles (as well as Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling). However, there were no Asian bands promoted as a result of the first tranche of Tune Up funding, despite interest from the promoters in expanding the musical experiences of their audiences. Interestingly, most of the bands whose touring was supported by Tune Up were Scottish – not least among them Capercaillie, the Paragon Ensemble and Salsa Celtica as well as younger talents such as Malinky and Daimh. It was suggested that the preponderance of Scottish and Irish musical traditions, however contemporary, represented in Tune Up reflected a central belt view of what rural communities want. Whilst these Celtic traditions were very popular, enjoying extended tours and good houses, the promoters and officers in rural areas were keen to add a further dimension to their programming and the music they wanted their audiences to experience was Asian.

In seeking to expand the range of work being presented, promoters do want to capture something of ‘the circus coming to town’ as a means of expanding the appeal of their programmes to as wide an audience as possible. But they also build their audience through the regularity of their presentations and through programming work that speaks directly to their communities.

Uniquely to the Highlands, through the development of skills of local indigenous companies, HIE policies can claim some success in growing cultural enterprises. In economic parlance, the plan was to turn the Highlands from an importer of work into an exporter. Although there is still more work coming in than going out, it is, nevertheless, the case that there is now more in the way of indigenously produced work being made than there was in the past.

There is evidence that this approach to developing the arts has a positive effect on rural communities, building confidence and strengthening networks and ties. It does lead to self-fulfilment as well as community cohesion and relies on subtle and not so subtle networks and is all about connecting. It is a flexible, locally-based approach to cultural planning which takes account of differences in communities and neighbourhoods.

Are audiences more mixed in rural areas? As far as age is concerned simple practical issues like babysitting, or the lack of it, can lead to a situation where the audience is inappropriately mixed, which brings its own problems – and the experiences around nudity in the Traverse Theatre’s production of Outlying Islands offer a useful case study here, but other venues and other productions face similar concerns about bad language.

The incomer vs. indigenous debate, which we touched on in relation to the promoter, also arises in relation to the audience. Is it the case that, in the Highlands, the audience is made up of incomers? Certainly the view of the promoters is that they do not always hit the widest possible audience: according to one ‘It depends – they will turn out for traditional music things but not so much maybe for drama’. Another said:

You’ll get a particular type of audience, what they refer to as ‘incomers’ – me being one of them, from Glasgow a long time ago – and they’re more interested in coming to theatre than, say, the Highland audience because of the type of nature of the people… and they’re quite shy.

There is a sense of regret for these implied divisions: ‘I think we haven’t broken into that at all, we haven’t got there. The people who go to things tend to be people who have
come to live here’. But as one west Highland promoter commented, with reference to Free Church attitudes to theatre:

I am not saying it is an excuse but you have to accept that there are three or four hundred people [in this village] who will never go to the theatre. They will not come to anything, not music or anything.

The other gap – acknowledged as a particular challenge throughout our Scottish and English and Welsh field work – is the teenage/young adult market: ‘We haven’t got young people either, or they’re doing other things but not coming out to the theatre. No, they’re not. I’d love to say it’s different’. The commonly held view is that the barrier to attracting that audience is programming. They do go to the cinema – not least to the highly popular Screen Machine – but they are not attracted to much else, except, perhaps, comedy. But despite the potential of comedy to attract a younger audience, we found that promoters were sometimes reluctant to promote stand-up, as the result of some bad experiences. One promoter told of a comedienne who started fighting with a member of the audience until she (the promoter) went in and broke up the fight. Another told of a comedy group which had been a failure due to the content of the act: ‘They started by offending older people in the front row by spitting beer at them. Everyone was very polite but it had not worked’. And, of course, the network nature of PAN means that horror stories as well as plaudits and good practice circulate very readily.

Parallel research into rural touring in England and Wales tried to focus on the attitudes of rural communities and argued that, amongst young people, there was a perception that the village hall or equivalent venues were ‘uncool’, that there was a fear that they would be patronised or told how to behave in the village hall and that, finally, they preferred to seek their entertainment and social life away from the supervision of parents and neighbours. One English scheme manager said: ‘Young people are young people: they want to go to the pub and leave home,’ while a Scottish colleague argued that ‘Teenagers want to do and participate, not just sit and be talked to’. And this is, indeed, one of the ways in which rural theatres engage with this ‘difficult’ market: by way of the many youth theatres that are spread across Scotland. While this participatory work was not the focus of this research project, one example that we explored in some detail was the Moffat Youth Theatre which has had particular success with a summer-school scheme which brought professional performers into the community to work with the group’s young members.

Research in England and Wales revealed some interesting work in developing young promoters. Several rural touring schemes, including those in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Midlands, have undertaken initiatives to involve young people as promoters. By working with established groups – youth clubs, schools, young people’s theatre groups – it has been possible to support teenagers in selecting, marketing and running shows of their own. However, researchers judged that such initiatives are costly in terms of staff time for training and mentoring, and have depended on additional resources such as the Arts Council England New Audiences Fund. Fatally, they have also been difficult to sustain because those involved tend to move on to college, work or simply to cities. In reality, the ideal of experienced promoters passing on skills and experience to the next cohort has rarely proved possible because young people’s lives change fast.
In Dumfries and Galloway, according to the promoters, comedy attracts young people, but older age groups enjoy musicals, as well as drama which may challenge but is also entertaining. One promoter went as far as to describe their audience’s taste as ‘conservative’, in the sense of middle of the road, old-fashioned and unadventurous. However, this term was used by very few of the promoters we talked to and often only as a first reaction to questions about the tastes of their audiences; those who had reflected more fully on the issue were more moderate in response and language.

As previously mentioned, when we spoke to the audience themselves in Dumfries and Galloway, they did indicate how much they valued the theatre as a social space, enjoying the ‘atmosphere’. It was particularly valued by women, who saw it as a safe place for a night out with other female friends. Women in general had a distinctive sense of the value of the theatre that they saw. The experience of going to Glasgow or Edinburgh for a big show was clearly different. Our audience research in Dumfries and Galloway revealed that that group attributed less value to a show in, say, Moffat, than to shows in cities. However, promoters in the Highlands and Islands argued that shows in city venues, though different, were not necessarily better or worse. Interestingly, however, even if the Dumfries and Galloway audience enjoyed a production in their local theatre, they ascribed less ‘cultural value’ to the event if it was a one-person show than to a production with a larger company. Audience members understood that these one-person shows were promoted because they were not as expensive as those on a larger scale.

However, there is, perhaps a warning for rural promoters here: cultural investment in the local theatre will diminish if the products seen are too frequently this type of one-person show which are accorded low cultural value – and generally labelled ‘boring’ – by their audiences. It is not that local promoters are competing with the special experience of travelling to the capital for a large-scale musical or pantomime, but with expectations (tempered by realism) that the local venue can and should provide a good range of work.

Nevertheless, theatre, in the view of some, is about Shakespeare or the works of playwrights taught in school. These audiences challenged the view that they were conservative agreeing that as long as it was ‘captivating’ and ‘moved slickly’ they were, in fact, interested in new plays. However, others were less keen on the challenge of new work or even of classics like Shakespeare. Local themes, contemporary or historical, they felt, worked best. Interestingly, this group had a lower proportion of incomers than the other.

A further aspect of audience development is the potential of the tourist market. We encountered a split on this issue. Some promoters feel that ‘everyone is too busy’ in the summer catering for the tourists in other ways to promote work for them, while tourists go on holiday to ‘walk, fish or do outdoor things’. In any case festivals tend to happen at this time. (In passing, the festival in Sleat, south Skye, is the same organisation which promotes regular events all year round, and turns itself into a festival organisation for two weeks of intensive activity in July.)

Some promoters felt very strongly, however, that it was foolish to ignore a tourist market in the summer or at any other time of year. One Highland promoter – who also runs a small culture-related business – reflected on this issue:

Now, I know perfectly well that an awful lot of the [local promoters] just don’t go for that tourism market. They just don’t. They either are not aware of it or can’t be bothered with it. I don’t know what it is. It’s maybe because I am in a tourism-orientated business first of all. It should maybe be done more with Hi~Arts, with meetings with HoST [Highlands of Scotland
Tourism and all the rest of it to try and get people in tourist information centres and tourism officers just more aware of what is going on in the Highlands touring-wise […]

In addition we found that the Old Well Theatre in Moffat produces a local, amateur show especially for tourists.

For others, the local audience comes first, and the idea of promoting work for just a tourist audience has overtones of, as one put it, ‘the show of the North’. The key, according to one Highland promoter, is to encourage the holidaymaker to experience something they had not done at home:

So the visitor thing is important and what you’re also doing is… because often your visitors are quite local, people from Orkney and Shetland and things like that, so we’re not talking about necessarily Italian or Swiss or French, though they’re here too, but often it was particularly when [the] Glasgow Fair was [the] Glasgow Fair and things like that there was loads of Scottish people, so you were introducing them to something that had probably happened in the Tron [Theatre in Glasgow] the week before they left but they never got to that.47

We see some potential to expand the audience into other areas by programming work for a teenage market, tapping into the tourist market, and even enticing a larger indigenous audience. Having said that, attendance at rural events is impressive.

It may be fragile, but the development of locally produced work alongside growth in other art forms – particularly traditional music – and supported by the touring circuit, and larger venues like Eden Court, indicates that progress has been made over the last 20 years. This is typically described across the Highlands as cultural confidence and it underpinned the unsuccessful bid for 2008 Capital of Culture and has led to the 2007 Year of Highland Culture. The latter is an Executive-backed initiative to promote Highland culture throughout Scotland. Plans are at an early stage of development. However, the view of theatre practitioners and those in policy positions is that a lot of additional investment and support will have to be given to indigenous companies if they are going to be in a position to fully embrace the opportunities afforded by this event.

There is some scepticism, too, in Dumfries and Galloway about the ‘new’ ideas coming from Edinburgh on audience development. DGAA argue that their own research showed that promoters in the area are already successful in attracting audiences and there is a lot of local support, even from non theatregoers. For example, one officer reflected that:

The audience development survey [The Audience Atlas] has shown that there is a high enthusiasm for going to things. The findings tell us that something like 80 per cent of the people who live here claim that they have been to an arts event in the last year. Now that is 80 per cent of 147,000 people, that is actually quite a large number of people. Ninety five per cent of them said, whether they have been or not, that they would like to go to something.
We have called this report ‘The same, but different’, and the epigram holds true in many ways. For example, there is much in the experience of rural touring today that is the same as it was 30 years ago. The experience of presenting and seeing _The Cheviot… and Outlying Islands_ is, in some degree, little different. But we cannot ignore the differences, not least in the cultural confidence we found in rural areas, perhaps most especially in the Highlands.

Our research set out to examine arts touring in the rural areas of Scotland, with specific emphasis on the theatre. To achieve this we reviewed the policy framework, undertook an extensive series of interviews and a period of fieldwork. Throughout we have been concerned to see how rural arts touring is supported by policies of all kinds, and how rural touring is delivered on the ground. We have also been concerned to establish how the presentation of arts in the rural regions of Scotland relates to life in these areas. While we focused on the example of theatre, much of what we observed also applies to arts touring generally.

At the start of this report we commented on rural and cultural policy – suggesting that the one substantially ignored the other. Contemporary public policy sees the rural as different from the urban. It also acknowledges that there is difference within the rural itself—that the rural consists of a wide variety of topography, economy and community. We argued that what happens in rural areas reflects this view of differences and heterogeneity. However, we also suggested that there was not a lot of culture in rural policy; and, similarly little rural policy in Scottish cultural policy. Now that we have undertaken this research – and drawing on the evidence and ideas presented here – can connections be made? Can rural policy contribute to cultural development? Can cultural policy contribute to rural life?

### 8.1 RURAL POLICY

Rural policy is increasingly sensitive to local issues: things work differently in rural areas and contemporary rural policy aspires to a flexibility that encompasses this. As a result it is increasingly valued for its connectedness to local concerns. Although cultural policy is often absent from rural policy debate and discourse, the Highlands and Islands, where we saw commitment to the idea that cultural investment contributes to a wider economic goal of strengthening communities, are an exception. The articulation of a cultural agenda in HIE’s rural policies has led to successes. There is a sense of cultural confidence in the Highlands and (some) islands, expressed in the facts that there are professional theatre companies at work in this region; there is a network of locally-based volunteers delivering a high-quality service; there are audiences for their services and work; and, there are growing festivals.

Rural policy _per se_ falls outside our area of expertise but, from our experience of the Highlands and Islands, it is clear that in this area culture has a role to play in develop-
ment. In ignoring the potential of culture – to build confidence, increase profile, support activity and engagement – rural policy makers are missing an opportunity.

8.2 CULTURAL POLICY

Should cultural agencies have a specific rural strategy? The Scottish Arts Council recognises that the rural matters and so, maybe, another document is not needed.

The Highlands and Islands Producers Fund, partly supported by Scottish Arts Council, has created one funding stream dedicated to companies indigenous to the Highlands and Islands. This came about as a result of a lobby which argued that Highland theatre companies were failing to receive support for their work because of perceived ‘central-belt bias’ in decision making. The tension between theatre created in rural areas and theatre that tours to rural areas remains a challenge of principle and practice for public subsidy and theatre makers.

We would suggest that when the Scottish Arts Council is deciding issues as broad-ranging as capital investment in new resources or policies for, say children’s theatre, the rural should be emphasised more clearly. However, in the context of the Scottish Executive’s review of culture, and the First Minister’s earlier declaration on the significance of culture for our nation, an examination of the place of arts in rural areas is timely. We therefore have some specific points to make regarding cultural policy and the rural.

8.2.1 Some pressing issues

The infrastructure for touring theatre across Scotland has developed over the years, sometimes, as in the case of the Highlands, through a focused, strategy-driven approach. Investment from the Lottery has made a huge difference to the state and provision of village halls in the Highlands and Islands – enabling some to be refurbished and new ones built – and to the theatres in Dumfries and Galloway. The recent support for the development of Eden Court Theatre will give Inverness, and the wider region, a further boost.

However, despite such investment, there are gaps in the rural infrastructure – for example, in Dumfries, where the local community is working on proposals to modernise the historic Theatre Royal, and in Mull. Here, alongside developments in theatre making and touring, there is a real opportunity to create a new venue which would give Mull Theatre a much deserved new home and provide an amenity on the island for locals, and also for the increasing number of Balamory-seeking tourists. The rejection by the Scottish Arts Council Lottery Committee of Mull Theatre’s application for support for a new theatre – a long-standing ambition – was interpreted as a lack of understanding of rural realities, not least the stringencies faced by Argyll and Bute Council.

Another pressing issue in the area of theatre promotion is the unknown potential of the new National Theatre for Scotland. How will it affect the work already experienced in rural areas? Promoters are interested in promoting new work and new companies – and they always want a high-quality product – but will the NTS fit, literally and metaphorically, the small theatre and village hall circuit which serves rural communities in Scotland? And will it present the types and range of work local promoters want for their audiences?

Whilst things can and do go wrong, the companies who currently tour rural Scotland generally enjoy a good relationship with promoters and with the funding agencies. Lessons were there to be learned for all parties – not least on the part of the professionals.
who sometimes fail to take account of the size of venues or the specific marketing needs of their volunteer promoters. The companies generally value the close relationship with these grassroots promoters and with the audience developed in small communities. We found that they did recognise that, while this might differ from the urban audience, it was still an audience that would demand a range of work, and would recognise good work and poor work when it saw it.

Companies and promoters share a common purpose: to deliver good experiences to a rural audience. Companies are not motivated by money to tour, but there is a view that rural touring is a way of being defined as a company with a national remit. In the symbolic conflation of ‘rural’ with ‘country’ and even ‘nation’ this might be seen as a particularly influential market for some companies and individuals.

The promotion of theatre in local communities is part of other activities which take place. It is recognised as valuable to rural life in social and economic terms as well as cultural ones. However, the motivation of the individual promoter may be more personal: often they want to be part of an artistic event and share with others the enthusiasm they have for the arts.

8.2.2 Volunteers

The role of the volunteer is insufficiently recognised. This is not about valuing particular individuals – important though that is – but understanding that the delivery of professional theatre in Scotland is dependent on amateurs who give their time, energy and reputation to promote work for their communities.

The structure of rural touring is predicated on the volunteer and this differs sharply from touring in urban areas, where the venues are run by professionals. In rural arts touring, the situation in Scotland is similar to, yet different from that in England, where the networks of volunteers which exist at grassroots level are supported through a professional framework of rural touring schemes. The rural promoter in Scotland, like his or her urban counterpart, wants what is best for the audience. The volunteer promoter is no less engaged in the issue of quality and cultural relevance than the urban professional. In fact in some areas – not least that covered by PAN – there are some very open debates about quality encompassing issues around the work itself and the behaviour and attitudes of the visiting company. We found huge differences in systems and provision across the rural areas of Scotland – but everywhere the role of the amateur was significant.

The most developed network supporting rural arts touring is in the Highlands and Islands. This is built on the fact that rural touring has been part of rural development policy from HIE/HIDB for 30 years. In this area a network of locally-based volunteer promoters organises a range of different events in local village halls with direct support from the Scottish Arts Council and sometimes the local council too. Policies from HIE and grassroots audience development have also contributed to the growth – albeit fragile – of locally produced work in theatre.

In Dumfries and Galloway there are fewer volunteer promoters, but professional theatre is still closely connected to amateur activity. Amateur theatre is important to the cultural life of the region and several amateur companies own and operate their own venues – venues to which professional companies tour. It is amateurs, therefore, who sustain and maintain both venues and audiences throughout the year, with the professionals dovetailing relatively smoothly into this locally relevant theatre system. In the North East
a local authority-run circuit which has operated for over 20 years is just now giving way to a promoter-led approach with a professional arts officer taking a more developmental role.

In short, across Scotland we have seen a grassroots commitment to the arts themselves, as well as a recognition of and respect for their wider social impact. We have seen the place that rural touring – and in particular theatre touring in rural areas – has on the cultural life of the community. We have explored its contribution to building a sense of community, developing skills, strengthening networks and, in some areas, providing a starting point for locally created work. Life in rural Scotland is much enhanced by those experiences.

What is different – and what remains a challenge to the funding structures – is how the volunteer views his or her relationship with the funding structures. Sensitive to being ‘told what to do’ – with regard to the companies they book or the audiences they should attract – promoters are happy to share views with each other about the range and quality of work. Despite being a crucial element in the arts delivery mechanism and interacting with professional makers and agencies, they remain uncomfortable about being viewed as another professional wing of the cultural sector. Agencies such as the Scottish Arts Council need to interact with various constituencies, but as a network for an independent minded group of volunteers PAN does not currently act in such a manner.

There are other pressures on volunteers, including a common concern about money and making the books balance. The promoters we met were very capable and financially canny, but one of their major worries was the responsible use of public money. Nevertheless, we saw that the touring infrastructure which works with these volunteers ensured a remarkably efficient and subtly nuanced distribution system for the performing arts in Scotland. It is one that rarely, if ever, gets into financial difficulty.

The Scottish Arts Council wants to empower promoters – to seek their views and involve them in discussions on what to fund. It is also keen to devolve funding to their networks and to encourage them to think about issues such as audience development. For the reasons suggested, promoters are reluctant to surrender their independence and flexibility. On the whole, they are also suspicious of too many initiatives being imposed on them: in this they are like professional promoters, but they can be particularly vulnerable, as their effort is focused on programming their venues, not responding to strategies and projects that seem important in Edinburgh. Overall, what is clear is that volunteer promoters want to be taken seriously and they want to be valued for the work they do. They wish to remain volunteers and are genuinely doing it for the love of it. This independence of spirit inevitably results in difficulties for public agencies used to dealing with professional groups, particularly when they want to introduce new initiatives. Again and again we heard that the best support the Scottish Arts Council and other agencies can offer the volunteer promoters is not strategic objectives or cultural plans or even a flurry of new schemes, but good, clear and up-to-date information about companies and their current programmes.

What implication does all of that have for local cultural planning? Why is it that in rural areas members of the community can be supported to make their own choices about what happens in their village, while those in urban Scotland are not similarly empowered? From our research, the volunteer effort which makes this possible does not happen in a vacuum nor does it replace the support, financial and otherwise, which local councils or
national agencies offer. But in rural Scotland delivery on the ground is left to those closest to the community.

This does not happen within any nationally developed policy framework - either a rural or cultural policy framework - but it does address some key issues of rural and cultural development in areas such as the role of women and the openness of communities to a diverse and vibrant range of work. In telling this story of the vitality and the diversity of rural touring in Scotland, can we see rural solutions to some of Scotland’s problems. We would argue that the answer is yes. As is clear from this report, there is something in the rural experience which offers ideas and solutions to the development and distribution of the arts for the rest of the country. The rural model offers a powerful solution to the challenges of community and art-form development, and to issues of entitlement and access which certainly has an application for the current Scottish Executive debate on cultural rights.

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APPENDICES

A1 ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT

BSE Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy ('Mad cow’ disease)
CCPR Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow
CTRC Crichton Tourism Research Centre, Crichton Campus of the University of Glasgow
Defra Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DCMS Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DGAA Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association
EU European Union
FMD Foot and Mouth Disease
FST Federation of Scottish Theatre
HI~Arts Highlands and Islands Arts Limited
HIDB Highlands and Islands Development Board
HIE Highlands and Islands Enterprise
HIPF Highlands and Islands Producers Fund
NDPB Non-departmental public body
NEAT North East Arts Touring
NRTF National Rural Touring Forum
NTS National Theatre of Scotland
PAN Promoters’ Arts Network
SEALL Sleat Entertainments for All
UADS Upper Annandale Dramatic Society

A2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team extends grateful thanks to the many audience members, promoters, practitioners, officers and others who contributed their time, experience, ideas and opinions to the research project. The team is happy to express its gratitude to the following individuals –

Liz Anderson, Guild of Players, Dumfries  Eddie Jackson, Borderline Theatre
Bryan Beattie, consultant  Linda Jolly, Carbridge
Helen Black, TAG Theatre  Robert Livingston, HI~Arts
James Brining, Dundee Rep Theatre  Alistair McCrone, Mull Theatre
Chris Brotherston, Macpail Centre, Ullapool  Alastair Mac Donald, Highland Festival
John Cairns, formerly Grey Coast Theatre  Jenny MacFie, Glenurquhart
Isabelle Campbell, Highland Council  Duncan MacInnes, PAN, SEALL Skye
Lorne Campbell, Traverse Theatre  Alastair Mackenzie, West Coast Arts, Aultbea
Rebecca Coggins, Dumfries and Galloway Council  Elizabeth McLennan, actor
Lucy Conway, Ardross  Ruari McNeil, Gaelforce
Garry Coutts, Highland Council  Colin Marr, Eden Court
Fiona Dick, consultant  Sandy Maxwell, NEAT
The team is happy to express its gratitude to the following organisations and their members, officers and staff –

- 7:84 Theatre Company
- Borderline Theatre Company
- Guild of Players, Dumfries
- HI~Arts
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Lochside Theatre, Castle Douglas
- Old Well Theatre, Moffat
- Moffat Youth Theatre
- Morris Hargreaves McEwry

Many thanks, too, to the following for their contributions in discussions and personal conversations: Paul, Dan, and Emily; Liz and Louie; Vicki, Renate, Janet, Vicki, Mary, Jean, Jane, Tom, and Caryl; and the many others who were part of our discussion groups and/or who expressed a wish to remain anonymous. We would also like to thank Jane and Garry, Heather and Jon, and Margaret and Jim for their hospitality.

The authors also acknowledge the invaluable role of the rest of the CCPR team in contributing to the completion of the research project and report. The CCPR team consists of the authors and: Susan Galloway, Research Fellow; Beatriz Garcia, Research Fellow; and, Nicola Sneddon, Information and Resources Administrator.
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This is a select bibliography of material referenced during our research: a fuller literature review – including commentary – is available through the Resources section of the CCPR website <www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk>. All web links checked 21 June 2004.

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Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association http://www.dgaa.net/
Eden Court Theatre http://www.eden-court.co.uk/
European Union http://europa.eu.int/index_en.htm
### A4 CONTACTS

This report was written by Christine Hamilton, Director, and Adrienne Scullion, Academic Director, of the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow.

| Address | Centre for Cultural Policy Research  
|         | University of Glasgow  
|         | Glasgow  
|         | G12 8QQ  
|         | Scotland, UK  
| Telephone | 0141 330 3806  
| Fax | 0141 330 4142  
| Email | culturalpolicy@arts.gla.ac.uk  
| Website | http://www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk/  

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- Scottish Arts Council [http://www.scottisharts.org.uk](http://www.scottisharts.org.uk)
- TAG Theatre [http://www.tag-theatre.co.uk/](http://www.tag-theatre.co.uk/)
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2. François Matarasso, Only Connect: Arts Touring and Rural Communities (Stroud: Comedia, 2004).


8. Mull Theatre, founded in 1966, is based in a converted coach house in the grounds of a Free Church manse in Dervaig, some 35 kilometres from the island’s main ferry terminal at Tobermory. The company is led by full-time artistic director, Alasdair McCrone. Its work encompasses repertory, touring, children’s theatre, new writing and commissions. Mull Theatre first received a Scottish Arts Council touring grant in 1997 and is now in receipt of Scottish Arts Council core funding as a touring company. Although it operates out of a building, and produces and programmes that venue, it is funded only as a touring company: See <http://www.mulltheatre.com/> [accessed 21 June 2004].


The highly structured interviews conducted by The Audience Atlas consultants enabled them to cover a large number of participants. In contrast, our ethnographic field research focused more strongly on understanding the complexities and depths of the subject matter, consequently limiting itself in amount of interviewees and geographical coverage. Social science researchers Norma K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln summarise this point very clearly: 'The choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context.' See Norma K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* (London: Sage Publications: London, 1994, p. 2). In pass-
ing, we noted at the start of this report that public policy discourse now recognises that rural areas are places of diversity and heterogeneity. It was clear that the promoters we spoke to want to involve the widest range of residents in their programme. In parallel with the findings in England and Wales, this was not for ideological reasons but because of their own ideas of serving a community and a good turn out was a motivation (reward, in fact) for their time and effort.


39 Objective One is one of the European Union’s key regional development funds. Regions designated as being of Objective One status are places within the European Union where per capita GDP is less than 75 per cent of that of the wider community, as well as certain thinly populated or outlying areas. The recognition of Objective One status is usually accompanied by grants in aid from the EU.


43 Elizabeth McLennan, a member of the original 7:84 (Scotland) company, told us of a parallel case: that during the much mythologised Highland tour of *The Cheviot…* only two people turned up for performance in Ness who claimed that, because the Free Church preached against theatre going, there would be no local audience. However, she also recalled that there was a full house in Stornoway the next night!


45 Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p. 63.

46 For more on this participatory-type of work we again recommend Giesekam, *Luvvies and Rude Mechanics?*

47 The traditional two weeks trades holiday for Glasgow in July.


49 *Balamory* is a highly successful BBC television programme for pre-school children filmed on location in Tobermory. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/balamory/index.shtml>, [accessed 21 June 2004].

50 For example, as a network of volunteers PAN is resistant about becoming the ‘voice’ of its diverse membership. In contrast the Federation of Scottish Theatre (FST) is constituted as a membership organisation for professional theatre in Scotland, offering advice and services to members but also being a powerful and effective lobbying voice for Scottish theatre.