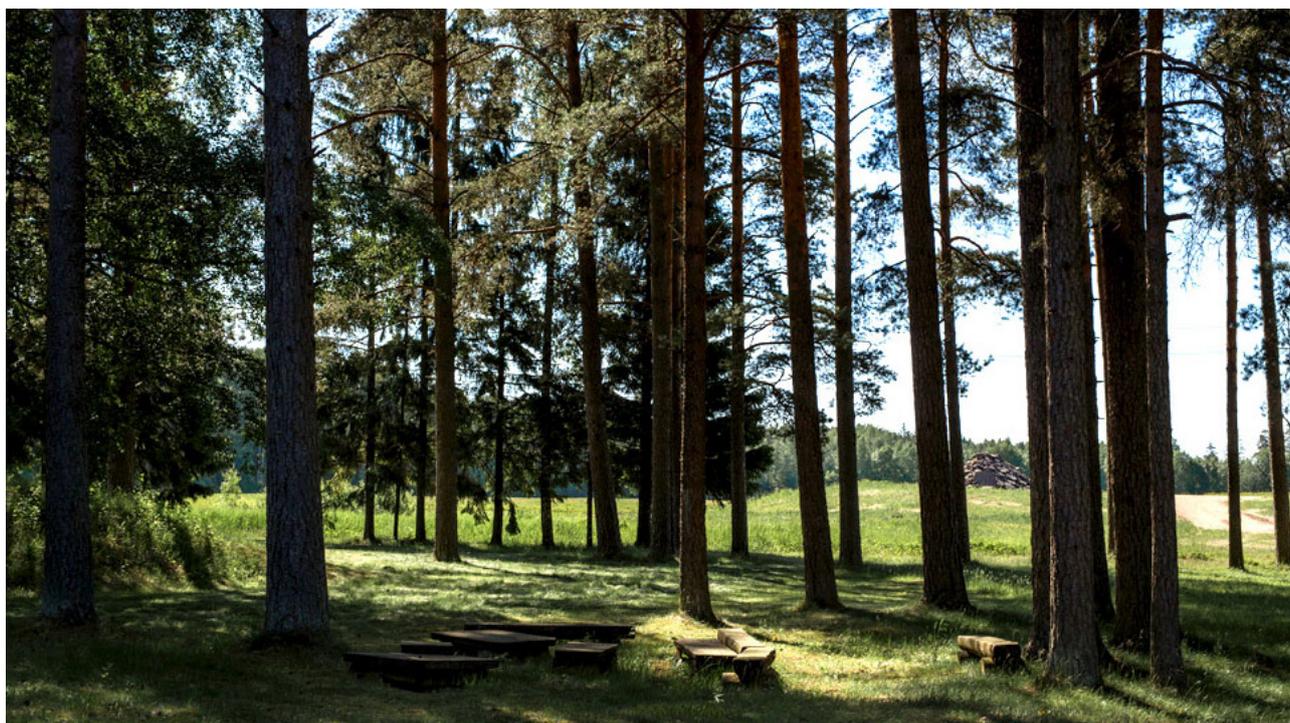


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ARTS

In Rural Areas



Garden, Massia Esti, Photo: Anna Siggelkow



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Arts in Rural Areas

IETM Publication

by Fernando García-Dory, Piotr Michałowski, Laura H Drane

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Since 2002, her practice has brought her to both cities and small settlements across the UK, keeping her deeply concerned about genuine public engagement – people being put at risk of change by an encounter based on a two-way exchange.

Laura H Drane is a company producer for award-winning artist collective Light, Ladd & Emberton, and currently part-time interim Senior Producer for Cirque Bijou with responsibility for the UK's professional circus company of disabled and non-disabled people, Extraordinary Bodies. She is also an Arts Associate (external adviser) to the Arts Council of Wales.

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Foreword

In times of the obsession with profit and growth, natural and social resources are exploited in all corners of the world. Yet, the urge to radically rethink the system sneaked into various levels. Many creative and forward-looking professionals are actively searching for new spaces of opportunity, to shape and test new modes of economic production and responsible social fabric. Rural areas have become relevant places for experimentation - smaller in size, providing more time and space, with less hierarchical governance structures.

Contemporary performing arts in a rural context are an integral part of that exercise of imagining a different future. Moreover, contemporary art in rural areas have been nurturing and shaping local narratives for ages. However, contemporary artistic practices have gone almost unnoticed in many funding schemes - both cultural programmes and rural development funds, which tend to focus on economic assets of only a few sectors.

In the past few years, IETM has organised a sequence of sessions and one entire meeting on the subject of art in rural areas. Some of the brightest art professionals engaging with rurality have created an AREA (art in rural areas) focus group within our network and continued their exchange during IETM events and beyond. Through the dialogue within that group and with other members experienced and interested in the topic, we have discovered a fascinating, vibrant and powerful world of contemporary arts in rural areas.

Today, more than ever, we want to turn the global attention to that hugely important world.

When creating this publication, we realised it is urgent to find unconventional approaches to the arts in rural areas. We need to identify innovative solutions to support the rural arts in their endeavour of working transversally with other sectors. We have to seize the momentum and potential of rural arts to help reinvent the system. Today, when our planet needs it the most.

We hope the present publication sets a strong and fertile ground for reflecting on those ambitions. Please get in touch with us (ietm@ietm.org) or write us on our forum (www.ietm.org/forums) if you wish to further the debate.

We are very grateful to the three authors for their insightful and sincere contributions. We also heartily thank our members and other art professionals who shared their practices, stories, views and experiences with us - through the ongoing exchange during IETM meetings and via the open call we announced in July - August 2019. Some of the cases collected through the call are presented in the annexes.

The publication "Arts in Rural Areas" is part of a collaborative trajectory, which embraces three other European cultural networks - CultureAction Europe, European Network of Cultural Centres, and Trans Europe Halles. The policy paper "Beyond the urban", which you can read below, is the product of our joint work. **It is still in progress and subject to comments and suggestions for improvement.** We will present it at the event, taking place in Brussels on March 16th 2020, where artists, cultural professionals and policy-makers will give us their view. You will find the final version of "Beyond the urban" in the next edition of the current publication.

So, stay tuned: www.ietm.org

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BEYOND THE URBAN

*Contemporary arts and culture
in non-urban areas as keys
to a sustainable and cohesive Europe*

Brussels, March 2020

Authored by



Policy Paper

This policy paper is written by Culture Action Europe, European Network of Cultural Centres, IETM (International network for contemporary performing arts) and Trans Europe Halles, representing together more than 5,000 organisations and individual professionals.

Culture Action Europe (CAE) is the major European network of cultural networks, organisations, artists, activists, academics and policymakers. CAE is the first port of call for informed opinion and debate about arts and cultural policy in the EU. As the only intersectoral network, it brings together all practices in culture, from the performing arts to literature, the visual arts, design and cross-arts initiatives, to community centres and activist groups. CAE believes in the value and values of culture and its contribution to the development of sustainable and inclusive societies. www.cultureactioneurope.org

The European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC) was founded in 1994 to promote dialogue and cooperation between social-oriented cultural centres in Europe. In the 2000s it became a “network of networks”, before gradually opening membership to individual cultural centres in direct interaction with communities and citizens. It also includes other cultural organisations and professionals as associate members. Today, the ENCC reaches about 5000 cultural organisations in over 20 countries, with quite diverse structures, practices and audiences, who align on values of cultural equality, intercultural diversity and sustainability. www.encc.eu

IETM, International network for contemporary performing arts, is one of the oldest and largest cultural networks, which represents the voice of over 500 performing arts organisations and institutions, including theatres and arts centres, festivals, performing companies, curators and programmers, producers, art councils and associations from about 50 countries. IETM advocates for the value of the arts and culture in a changing world and empowers performing arts professionals through access to international connections, knowledge and a dynamic forum for exchange. www.ietm.org

Trans Europe Halles (TEH) is one of the oldest and most dynamic cultural networks in Europe. Based in Sweden, it has been at the forefront of repurposing abandoned buildings for arts, culture and activism since 1983 and currently counts 129 members in 37 different countries across Europe. www.teh.net

RATIONALE

When it comes to culture in non-urban and peripheral areas in policy discourse, the focus is often given to only a few cultural sectors while being limited mostly to their economic impacts and the preservation value of tangible heritage, landscapes and monuments. Such an approach risks overlooking a vast, vibrant and complex world of non-urban contemporary art and socio-cultural practices.

At this point, when populist and anti-European sentiments are rising across the EU (including non-urban areas), **it is a high time to support the sectors which inspire innovative and sustainable ways of organising communities and practicing democracy.** Moreover, given the degrading condition of natural resources and ecosystems, **we feel the urgency to acknowledge at all policy levels that we are operating in the new reality of Climate Emergency that is demanding change across all sectors.** Contemporary arts and culture have a unique potential to trigger a creative process of rethinking economic paradigms and testing new models, reconnect people to nature and foster new imagination for the system's change.

Therefore, this policy paper aims to put forward a comprehensive approach to:²

1. integrating culture in all policies dealing with non-urban and peripheral areas, including the EU regional and cohesion policies;
2. making the EU cultural action more suited for non-urban challenges and aspirations.

The objectives are to:

1. **ensure the recognition** at various policy levels (global, EU, national, regional, local) of the importance of culture and the arts in non-urban and peripheral areas;
2. shape the direction of action through **identifying the most timely issues** which need to be addressed and researched;
3. **put forward key solutions** on how to support culture and the arts in non-urban and peripheral areas, at different policy levels.

ARGUMENTS FOR RECOGNITION

We believe that **non-urban areas should be in focus today, more than ever**, because:

- a. The unity of the EU is unprecedentedly hindered by a wave of populism and euroscepticism. Those attitudes are prospering in various parts of Europe, but their scale and strength in non-urban contexts are not sufficiently acknowledged and addressed.
- b. At the same time, many innovative solidarity mechanisms are already taking place in rural areas, along with innovative social practices to increase civic engagement.
- c. Non-urban areas are at the frontline of a rapid transformation: climate effects of the current intensive production modes, migration, demographic changes, political turbulences, and more.
- d. The EU's overall focus on building a sustainable future³ can only be realised through a radical rethinking of the current models of economic production and prevailing ways of organising social life. Non-urban areas host a large number of sustainable practices of responsible use of natural and cultural resources, plus the rural might become a laboratory for experimentation, due to smaller scales, more time and space, and less hierarchical governance structures.

We are convinced that **contemporary culture and art in non-urban environments must be appreciated and supported**, because:

- e. Culture and the arts foster social cohesion and inclusion as well as active citizen participation, and this is particularly relevant in socially and politically isolated areas.
- f. Access to culture and the arts is an essential element of well-being, health, empowerment, happiness, self-identification and ultimately of reinvigorating or conceiving new narratives for individuals and societies. Those are vitally needed in peripheral environments, struggling with feelings of isolation, neglectedness and exclusion.

¹ Non-urban areas are understood in this paper as rural, remote and mountainous areas (these constitute 80% of the EU territory, and are home to 57% of its population), including islands; small towns and villages; "invisible cities" of less than 50 000 inhabitants (that no one hears about if they do not live in them, even though 20 to 40% (depending on the country) of the EU population live in them.); peripheral and suburban areas that lack infrastructure and access to culture and other necessities.

² in its inclusive definition which embraces intangible heritage and contemporary art

³ of which the European Green Deal is the most ambitious and comprehensive example

⁴ IETM publication on Art in Rural Areas

- g. Culture and the arts function in a transversal and equal way, and thus have the potential to catalyse collaboration and networking, and create links among various organisations and consolidation of scattered communities. This is vital for building and maintaining connections in remote and depopulating areas with scarce physical infrastructure, such as schools, transport, medical and social services, which are getting increasingly digitised or centralised, which causes a lack of informal live contacts between people.
- h. Contemporary artists and cultural professionals, in collaboration with multidisciplinary teams, can help realising the potential of rurality to be a laboratory for conceiving an innovative vision on how global societies, whether urban or rural, central or peripheral, can reinvent current modes of economic, social and political functioning and ensure a sustainable future for our planet.
- e. **Insufficient mobility opportunities:** EU and most of the national mobility funding schemes are not adjusted to the needs and challenges of rural and peripheral contexts;
- f. **Scattered networks and weak connectedness:** lack of hard and soft infrastructure: transport, digital services, possibilities for live networking and face-to-face meetings among peers living in different towns / villages;
- g. **Scarcity of access to quality arts and cultural education,** which results in limited or no exercise of cultural rights and access to high-level cultural professions by non-urban and peripheral population, especially its least advantaged parts;
- h. **Poor territorial and landscape planning:** lack of strategic vision, insufficient tools for local diagnosis and evaluation; use of non-urban areas for the purposes unwanted by cities (such as waste storages, prisons, energy production, among others), as well as creating mono-spaces (spaces devoted only to one type of production, solely commercial or residential zones, etc.)

ISSUES AT STAKE

We call on the EU institutions, member states and regional and local authorities to address **the following challenges** which prevent culture and the arts in non-urban areas from fully realising their potential:

- a. **Gaps in perception:** a narrow definition of “culture” (material heritage and tourism) prevailing in current policy discourses, which neglects contemporary arts, social innovation and “living” cultural practices; a distorted image of rurality and peripheries, either romanticised or associated with decline;
- b. **Over-instrumentalization of art and culture in non-urban contexts:** perceiving it solely as a potential solution to local challenges (thus expecting funded projects to be related to farming, tackle isolation, etc.). This vision is partial and detrimental as it disregards the real power of the arts and inevitably discourages both artists and audiences in the long run ;
- c. **Shortage of financial support and investment** within and towards non-urban areas and an overall lack of local resources (for example, low incomes preventing from accessing cultural services and a lack of infrastructure for rehearsals, and presenting art and culture);
- d. **Lack of acknowledgement** by funders, policy-makers and evaluators of the specifics of producing culture and art in non-urban areas: need of longer time for research, more efforts and dedication, in order to realise sustainable practices, build strong connections with audiences and achieve positive outcomes and impacts (which rarely mean high numbers of tickets sold);

- i. **Effects of global non-sustainable economic paradigms:** environmental and social impacts of tourism, intensive agriculture, massive and low-cost production, and other side-effects of favouring growth and profits over sustainability.

SOLUTIONS

We call on the EU, national, regional and local policy-makers to create and augment investment in culture and the arts in non-urban environments. This should be done through including culture and the arts in all funding instruments tackling non-urban and peripheral areas, as well as through integrating rurality and non-urban contexts in all cultural programmes and funds.

Those investments should be guided by the following principles:

- a. Expand focus from built heritage to intangible heritage and living, forward-thinking contemporary art and cultural practices;
- b. Respect the autonomy of local communities, foster motivation and self-empowerment through building awareness of existing values and active involvement of local communities in all stages; Stimulate participation, inclusion and equality as guiding values of cultural and artistic work.

⁵ | IETM Publication on Art in Rural Areas Publication date March 16th 2020

- c. Respect the autonomy of local communities, foster motivation and self-empowerment through building awareness of existing values and active involvement of local communities in all stages;
- d. Stimulate participation, inclusion and equality as guiding values of cultural and artistic work.

Moreover, particular attention should be paid to:

1. Mobility:

- a. Integrate non-urban needs and challenges in cultural mobility funding schemes (for example, more explicit support for slow travel, reimbursement of traveling time as working hours); implement effective ways of disseminating mobility funding calls among potential applicants beyond cities;
- b. Invest in low-carbon transport solutions and digitisation of non-urban and peripheral areas, taking into consideration the needs of cultural and artistic production.

2. Networks

- a. Encourage long-term connections, collaboration and networking among cultural operators in non-urban contexts, by organising exchanges and peer-to-peer learning and investing in permanent networks;
- b. Design networks of local policy-makers to exchange best practices of culture-led local development;

3. Capacity-building:

- a. Provide direct, small-scale and easily manageable grants for individual artists, collectives and companies;
- b. Expand and improve training for artists and cultural producers who want to engage with rural contexts to do so with an informed position, using methodologies and analytic tools from other disciplines ;
- c. Provide knowledge to policy-makers and rural development agencies on how culture can be integrated in local policies;
- d. Improve access to quality arts and culture education on school and university levels and in lifelong learning schemes.

4. Transversal work

- a. Support cross-sectoral alliances (arts, science, social sectors) that address transversal issues and challenges (agriculture, natural resources, relationship to the landscape, etc) and serve as “change laboratories”; give visibility to such multidisciplinary projects to inspire other sectors;
- b. Encourage dialogue among various policy fields to reflect on, complement and support the transversal work happening on the ground.

5. Framing further discourse and debate

- a. Frame new questions about culture, arts and cultural heritage in non-urban areas as a practice and to seek answers grounded in qualitative evidence rather than in reigning orthodoxies;
- b. Work with local actors and stakeholders to identify particular spaces and practices that are ripe and ready for reinterpretation; and
- c. Radically re-frame heritage in terms of people's actual practices and re-imagine it through the lens of contemporary arts and living culture.

We invite policy-makers, artists, cultural operators, and representatives of other sectors engaging with culture and the arts to collectively reflect on how those solutions can be translated into concrete measures and what should be the next steps. **In this framework, we call on the European Parliament to conduct a study on the situation and value of the contemporary arts and culture in non-urban areas.**

1

THE RURAL AS A SPACE FOR CO-CREATION AND RECONNECTION WITH THE LAND

by Fernando García Dory

It is a cold clear morning in the [Cabrach](#), one of the most remote places in rural Scotland. 30 artists from all around Europe walk through the fields and fences of a vast private state which the landowner plans to turn into a massive windmill park. Guided by a local resident, they are headed for a landscape drawing workshop which forms part of a collective exercise, a critical tool, for land acknowledgement, uncovering embodied relations with the territory, and claiming access to common resources in a context of privatisation. The whole workshop becomes a performance and speculation about what kinds of development locals would like to see in the area, taking into account the recently passed [Land Reform Act](#).

This happening was part of the European cultural cooperation project [Frontiers in Retreat](#) - just one of numerous art projects across the continent that aim to rethink rural sites.

DEFINING THE RURAL TODAY

Rurality is a multidimensional concept, yet this chapter will try to focus on its 'spatial' and 'material' aspects, namely: land and landscape, nature, biodiversity, agriculture, farming.

The countryside of Europe is a universe of different realities

A forested area in northern Finland, the vineyards of Irpinia in the hinterland of Naples, apple fields and trekking paths in former sheep tracks in Bolzano, the Dutch dairy farms and competitive horticulture, the high moorlands of the Cabrach in Scotland, and the last cheesemakers and shepherds of the Spanish mountain range. What do all these places have in common?

In recent decades, rural areas have been undergoing huge transformations all around the world, but in the European region one can clearly see how industrial farming, and our modern way of life in general, have influenced and completely remodelled every kind of rural area.

The European countryside is composed of a constellation of topographies and types of climate, and over the millennia specific cultures have evolved to fit them. The French term *terroir* is used to characterise the specific collection of environmental factors that affect a certain agricultural crop, such as the context of its unique environment, the soil composition, the farming practices, and so on. The concept of *terroir* is similar to a traditional farmer's understanding of the rural environment. Yet nowadays, in Europe and other so-called 'advanced economies', much more important than the local specificities of the environment, and more influential upon concrete agricultural practices than the *terroir*, are the economic and political conditions that govern the countryside.

Economic and political factors affecting the rural

Sociologists, economists and anthropologists have different views on how to define criteria for 'the rural', but they agree on the growing difficulty of establishing a subject for their studies that is separate from 'the urban'. Ways of living and supply, consumption patterns, and so on are homogeneously represented within a rural-urban – 'rurban' – landscape that features increasing suburbanisation.

Rurality is an aggregate of assemblages of markets, policies and global systems. These factors define which areas will be competitive, and, in many cases, which will be built-up and industrialised.

Looking at their models of production, we can clearly distinguish two extremes within the countryside paradigm.

On the one hand, we have the areas and farms that are oriented towards well organised market structures – agri-business clusters that make a certain product highly competitive within big, often international markets. These forms of industrial farming – the 'factory farms' – are becoming mechanised and robotised to such an extent that they barely need manpower to be operated¹. On the other hand, there are areas which, due to their geographical conditions or history, are more oriented towards diversification and traditional forms of what is called High Nature Value (HNV) farming. These smaller farms can hardly compete with the results from intensive agriculture, therefore they often seek survival by developing other economic activities, such as agritourism, or by joining networks and projects to foster their sustainability.

But keeping Europe's agriculture healthy and sustainable is still a challenge. A total of 40% of Europe's land is cultivated by around 3.5% of the population². Still, predominantly rural regions represent 80% or more of the territory in Ireland, Finland, Estonia, Portugal and Austria³. According to the organisation European Coordination Via Campesina, a farm closes down every 25 minutes in Europe.

Some time ago, the Common Agricultural Policy realised that it had to take action to avoid this catastrophic effect, which had been brought about in part by its own commitments to promoting low cost food production and industrialising the farming sector. In the 1990s, the LEADER initiative and Pillars II and III appeared, and new strategies were put in place to offer possible forms of sustainable rural development to 'unfavourable' or non-competitive areas.

1 | See *Meanwhile in the Countryside* (IETM, 2017).

2 | See *Landscapes in transition. An account of 25 years of land cover change in Europe* (EEA, 2017).

3 | See *Rural areas and the primary sector in the EU* (European Union, 2018).

Some major challenges affecting rural areas today

Almost 30 years after these corrective measures were established, we can roughly divide the main challenges for today's rural regions into several categories.

Areas that are highly competitive can become agro-industrial conglomerates, offering few or precarious jobs, causing environmental problems (concentrations of animal waste or plastic, high carbon footprint due to the intercontinental transport of raw and processed products, chemicals, etc.), exacerbating issues with food safety and animal welfare – and, as a result of all this, causing rural cultural identity to vanish. This type of farming requires significant investment and capital expenditure, thus putting a lot of stress on farmers. As a result, it becomes easier for such operations to be handled by companies and land-based divisions of large actors in the food chain, as in the [example](#) of Cargill in the UK, for instance.

While the above described areas of intensive farming have poor biodiversity, the areas associated with traditional or HNV forms of farming often face difficulties posed by unfavourable policies and progressive depopulation. There are no effective incentives in place to maintain certain agroecological practices that are commercially uncompetitive; as such, we risk losing them. Landscapes formed over centuries and cultural heritage sites are at risk – as is our [food sovereignty](#). Wild nature is endangered. Unfarmed or 'wild' areas are scarce in Europe because of the long history of peasant cultures using the land. Natural reserves were created when the most sustainable forms of farming were practised, and nowadays they sometimes feel apart from or even contradict with the local population's needs, thus creating a tension between preserving nature and keeping nearby rural settlements economically viable. New forms of understanding and co-custodianship have to be defined.

In general, when sustainability is at stake, a greater emphasis should be placed on innovation in sustainable forms of farming, as well as on the liveability of rural environments to encourage primary sector activities. How to deal with the lack of services, participation and governance, fulfilment and cultural creativity? How to make agroecological products economically feasible? It should be taken into account that cities and peri-urban areas are no longer the opposite of rural. Therefore experiments with forms of rural production should be undertaken. The inertia of the 'urban' approach to rural areas, which homogenises and subordinates them to leisure needs, has to be overcome. Cities need to be informed of and sensitive to all the biodiverse cultural landscapes of the rural.

Rural populations (now elderly and discounted) have evolved within those ecosystems under a condition of mutual influence. Richard Norgaard has [used](#) the concept of 'co-evolution' to emphasise how human activities modify an ecosystem and how the responses of the ecosystem provide reasons for the next individual action or social organisation. Over time, co-evolution between nature and society has led to increased complexity in socio-environmental relations, sophisticated social organisations, and cultural forms that range from an agreement to manage some commons to culinary traditions to material heritage.

Possibilities for positive change

Usually, small-scale farming exists in remote rural areas that are balanced on a thin line. On the one side is abandonment, and the decay of a former social, economic and agro-environmental richness. On the other, the promise of revival by building upon existing resources with innovative methods.

Somehow, the rural becomes a 'space of possibility', a place where many different interests could eventually collide, or be in synergy. For example, young people who don't find satisfying opportunities in cities might look to the rural as a space of experimentation. There have been enough anecdotal examples to call it a trend in the [US](#) or [Japan](#), for instance.

Rurality might trigger changes towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and behaviour: slow living, reconnecting with nature, responsible consumption and production, close connections and spontaneous communication, a revival of craftsmanship as opposed to unified mass production, and so on. Yet for all these needed changes to occur rurality has to be appreciated, rediscovered, looked at with a fresh eye...

ART IN RURAL AREAS TODAY

Can art provide a valid, as well as critical, contribution to rural life?

Art offers a unique set of tools to analyse current perceptions and representations of rural life, and to think about how these influence the construction of identity.

Art can provide a perspective on rural life that highlights the threats and opportunities that exist in the European countryside, and that stem from our contemporary culture. Rural life seems to be seen as that last, silenced but persistent ‘otherness’, regarded sometimes with apprehension and detachment, sometimes with bucolic idealism.

In any case, in these uncertain times of radical transformation this collection of knowledge, memories and relationships must be studied with the due care and attention it deserves. As one of the most prominent figures of contemporary thinking and artistic production, [John Berger](#), pointed out in his trilogy about the dispossession and dislocation of peasant communities during the Industrial Revolution in 19th century Europe:

“And yet to dismiss the peasant experience as belonging to the past and irrelevant to modern life; to imagine that the thousands of years of peasant culture leave no inheritance for the future, simply because it has almost never taken the form of enduring objects; to continue to maintain, as it has been for centuries, that it is something marginal to civilization; all this is to deny the value of too much history and too many lives. You can’t cross out a part of history like the one that draws a line on a settled account.”⁴

In these uncertain times, a reunion between the city and the countryside may be the key to society’s transition towards a more sustainable future.

But art does not simply open a space for re-cognising and re-thinking how rural communities perceive themselves, their contexts and histories so that they can create a vision for the future. It can also trigger a process of creative questioning and an exploration of potential, based on both inherited and new inputs – and it can communicate what those processes of innovation might give form to.

Artists can join multidisciplinary teams for rural development, or bring their own multidisciplinary sets of tools. In doing so, they can catalyse active local participation, contribute to rethinking the rural paradigm, and influence the development and implementation of

integrated rural policies like the Endogenous Rural Development processes ([ERD](#)).

There is yet another reason for artists to be interested in rurality. The rural area is increasingly becoming a contested zone where the most pressing issues of our time are playing out: environmental sustainability, global economics versus local economies, issues of food production and genetic modification, and cultural commodification. In the process of adaptation to a shifting global order, vast transformations are taking place in the biophysical, social and cultural realms – a situation which offers a lot of possibilities for artistic exploration and critical rethinking.

What kind of art are we talking about when we talk about contemporary art in rural areas?

Ultimately, this transition is not only affecting the way the rural is perceived, but also how art is produced – where and by whom – and how it is distributed and disseminated.

There is a growing crisis of meaning in the art world – a fact that younger generations of cultural producers, who exist in increasingly precarious conditions and have unclear futures, are very well aware of. Pascal Gielen, Belgian sociologist of the culture of [post-Fordism times](#), has called them the “murmuring multitude”. What they’ve recognised is that art, in its current form, is both an agent and a subject of globalisation.

The proliferation of biennales, art fairs, symposiums and events capitalises on the way arts signify ‘high’ culture, making art itself almost a status symbol.

As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello explained so well in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, there was once, mainly in the 1960s, a legitimate demand from the ‘creative class’ for higher freedom and flexibility, and this led to a culture of fierce competition, continuous availability, and self-exploitation. Now, new technologies of communication demand the promotion of the self at every opportunity. The pathology of ‘communicative capitalism’, as defined by various thinkers such as Bifo, Lazzarato and others, is just an expression of the disconnection between every person and their environment, and from one another.

The hegemonic discourse of ‘progress’ associated with metropolitan growth is fuelled by and fuels an art system that looks predominantly towards the city as its main source of inspiration, intervention and circulation. This is based on an ignorance of, or

⁴ | [John Berger, *Into Their Labours*, trilogy.](#)

even disdain for, other types of surroundings, including the rural. But the rural is actually a low-density urban realm in which nature breathes a bit more through the interstices. Leaning towards these interstices gives us the possibility to experience another way of living, a way that has been embodied by indigenous and peasant cultures, and that has become almost extinct in the course of the rapid industrialisation of post-war Europe. It is a culture that has to be reconsidered or reinvented, now more than ever.

What feels needed is a new narrative, a cosmology, on how we can define development and well-being, dissociating it from the drive for increased productivity or the sole pursuit of economic growth, and perhaps connecting it instead with the indigenous notion of 'the good life'.

This form of harmony is proposed by the arts in different forms and languages. Working beyond traditional media, it takes inspiration from what the avant-gardes of the 20th century made possible, and resonates with changes at the level of governance, economic organisation, education, and local politics.

The rural can also be a key reservoir of knowledge and practices for the cultural impulse as our societies transition to sustainability, and as we recover territorial balance and local economies.

It is important to start by setting criteria, and by making an inventory of the different initiatives that, in this current context of economic and environmental crisis, are rethinking urbanism, landscapes, land use, and territorial planning. To be more precise, it is also necessary to place at the centre of the research the notion of marginal space – the 'Third Landscape' of French horticulturalist Gilles Clément – and an expanded notion of public arts in the rural.

While some art projects in Europe's rural areas act mostly as amenities and opportunities for local populations to access urban culture, others are taking the rural as content, not just as staging ground. There is a great need for such projects of exchange, examination and reflection – projects that draw lines of connection between current critical discourses, that move between theory and practice, and that root themselves in different rural realities. It would be beyond the scope of this text to make a detailed list of such works, but here are just two worth mentioning: [Grizedale Arts](#), in Cumbria, northern England, and [Casa delle Agricolture](#), in Castiglione, southern Italy.

So, if we have in mind 'rural art' that has the ability to make an impact, trigger change, move and excite audiences, we will be talking about art that goes beyond most of the prevailing notions of how art is done in the countryside. The role of creativity and arts, as well as the artist's role, have to be examined and reconsidered. We simply cannot think anymore of art in rural areas as a lovely postcard, a pastoral landscape of an inert scenery, or a nostalgic

homage to heritage. Rurality offers a lively space of exchange and creativity that is an equal match to urban cities, and this fact should be reflected in the way art is being done in rural areas today.

If we focus on art that has impacts on rural sustainability or endorses a reconnection with nature, this task goes beyond the notion of 'offering' urban art to the rural by programming music or cinema festivals, or by touring traditional exhibitions to rural settlements or placing them 'in the wild'. It also goes beyond the oft-repeated model of 'Art and Nature' sculpture parks and the obsolete remnants of Land Art and Earthworks, genres that flourished from the 1970s through to the 1990s. What seems pertinent in the current context is offering an account of meaningful experiences, rather than a list of heritage sites and cultural and environmental amenities suitable for ecotourism.

The perfect Garden of Eden, fenced

In this moment of uncertain continuity for those rural cultures that have guaranteed viable agroecosystems in Europe since the Neolithic period, we face the rise of another possibility for land use, the so-called [rewilding](#).

A substantial number of civil society organisations and individuals consider that since the countryside is being progressively depopulated it offers a chance to recreate a sort of primeval condition. They imagine wild herbivores and reintroduced predators roaming the land, thus creating a sort of landscaped natural reserve for the amusement of urban populations. The risk of this view lies in the negation of the identity of our landscapes, a man-made substrate of cultural and social forms that dates far back in time.

Rewilding depends on the simulation – the spectacle – of an 'undisturbed nature'. It relies on a dialectic between two landscapes: the landscape of production (cultivation farms and agroecosystems) and the landscape of consumption (public entertainment and natural parks for recreation). But when we accept that framing, we compromise the possibility of reconnecting young people with, for instance, the land as a means of living. This, in turn, restricts the possibility of giving rise to sustainable farming, or of achieving '[food autonomy](#)', a crucial concept of the worldwide movement [La Via Campesina](#). This social movement of small farmers and indigenous peoples' organisations calls for change in the current agricultural and food system, and in recent years its interventions have been gaining traction within international policies. As a grassroots movement, La Via Campesina relies on self-organisation, critical rethinking, and the search for sustainable solutions in farming – and this often goes hand in hand with art and creativity as powerful triggers of change and empowerment for local communities.

Reconnecting people with land

It is an urgent necessity to rethink our current model of development so that we can encourage higher numbers of people to tend agroecosystems that produce goods, in a sustainable and decentralised way, at the same time as they restore soil fertility, biodiversity and numerous other aspects of a healthy rural ecosystem. In many cases, an effective approach has been to encourage cultural interventions in rural areas, looking at questions of farming and building local economies while working on participation and community empowerment.

An example in this line is the **Village Halls** project in Llansteffan, Wales, which brought three local graduate artists together for a series of development days in the village, allowing participants to consider the environment, history and community of the area while developing work that explored various aspects of Llansteffan. The project reached out to the Llansteffan History Society and members of the local community organised village tours, meetings and activities for the participants. The project culminated in an exhibition in the village hall, which included performances, video, live writing, animation, sound and photography, as well as a sketch walk.

This approach of creating work that has relevance to the community is a subversion of the typical kind of touring exhibition that transports art from an urban context to a rural one. Here are some other examples of how making art with the local community brings in new audiences and raises relevant topics.



Photo: Casa delle Agricolture

Project:

Notte Verde

Organisation:

Casa delle Agricolture

Location:

Castiglione, Italy

In Castiglione, Italy, the Casa delle Agricolture project connected the local community with a visiting artist. Together they developed a number of different actions, from establishing a plant nursery, to cultivating various ancient varieties of wheat. Notte Verde, one of their ongoing initiatives, is a festival started to promote sustainable farming in response to the dangerous decay of soils after many years of using chemical pesticides. The latest edition gathered more than 20 000 people, who enjoyed local products or attended experts' presentations. Now the project is rebuilding a community mill for the village, thus securing jobs for young people to stay. Through their association, Casa delle Agricolture, the project team also work with North African migrants and involve them in developing new economic activities that can potentially lead to a sustainable common future.

Project:

INLAND

Organisation:

INLAND, an arts collective, dedicated to agricultural, social and cultural production, and a collaborative agency

Location:

Rural areas of Europe

INLAND is a 'glocal' (global-local) project that examines the role of territories, geopolitics, culture and identity in the contemporary relationship between city and countryside. Its aim is to encourage contemporary art practice that operates in relation to the rural, and to explore how that approach might modify the way art happens and circulates.

The project focuses on the economics of art and land, on the idea of 'organised utopia', and on the ways we interact with the biosphere. INLAND is envisioned as a para-institution of "polyvalent specialist mobile units working in emergency contexts" that always operates "in relation to an 'official' institution, that is, a state, a company, or an art institution". This provides an entry point to think about the "growth of social formations, from a social movement to a state to a multinational chain".

When it launched, the project kicked off a three-year programme (2010-2013), aiming to support rural life, which consisted of an international conference, an artistic strand that saw 22 artists in residence in the same number of villages across Spain, and a programme of exhibitions and presentations. This was followed by a period of reflection and evaluation (2013-2015), pursued by study groups in the Netherlands and Spain, and a series of publications. The methodology of the project was extended to different countries, aiming to question harmful EU policies regarding culture and the rural.

Currently, INLAND functions as a group of open spaces for land-based collaborations, economies, and communities of practice, as well as a substrate for post-contemporary forms of art and culture. Appearing in different forms in different countries, whilst dispersing individual agency within the collective, INLAND Europa publishes books, produces shows, and makes cheese. It also advises the European Union Commission as a consultant on the use of art for rural development policies, facilitates the movements of shepherds, and is promoting access to land in different locations for collective artistic and agricultural production. Alongside all this, it develops different training projects, such as an annual Shepherds School through which applicants can learn the theory and practice of this form of life, working together with veteran shepherds.

SOME LIMITATIONS

In order not to take art as a panacea in rural development, we have to examine its limitations as well as its possibilities in community contexts.

The main limitations are perhaps related with the specialised language and the very particular evolution of contemporary art. Given that art has, for most of the last century, usually developed its value within the art domain itself, it can sometimes have difficulty connecting to, and having currency within, everyday concerns.

So this apparent dichotomy demands very talented artists that can both navigate the local rural context and find their way in the world of global contemporary art, in order to have an impact on both.

On the other hand, local authorities and rural development agencies – even if they might have an intuition for the need to support cultural projects in rural areas – don't have a well-informed understanding of how art and culture could operate. As a result, they can end up funding or supporting certain more traditional forms, or even end up with rather kitschy manifestations of art. They also tend to put significant pressure on the output of cultural projects, limiting research and avoiding open questions in order to prioritise results.

There are other difficulties, such as the need for clearer support to cultural projects in terms of funding opportunities and visibility. In comparison with the vibrant life of the city, rural cultural processes are quieter and grow little by little, by dint of attention and dedication. Unfortunately, the prevailing cultural system is often more interested in the opposite approach.

We also need to expand and improve training for artists and cultural producers so that they can engage with rural contexts from an informed position, using methodologies and analytic tools from other disciplines, such as sociology, Participatory Action Research, community development, and even ecological economics.



Photo: INLAND Project

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

When approaching a rural context in Europe, we will mostly find challenges related to a dismantled sociocultural tissue, a lack of self-esteem and identity, and an atomisation of social life. Fewer, older people, often commuting; or youth that have to travel every day to bigger towns. The feeling of being peripheral, a lack of spaces for communality or collective creative expression. And maybe even economic deprivation or the lack of essential services... it's as if a whole economic sector, in this case farming, were being restructured but with no clear substitute – just as we saw with coal mining and other traditional industries. Industrialisation of agricultural and food systems will involve less and less agency for farmers, growing automation, and dependency on markets and other actors in the food chain.

There is also the challenge of rising conservative views, containing a rejection of all that liberal globalisation has brought to rural areas in place of its promised wealth. Migrant communities risk being treated with aversion, and fractures in the social tissue might make the work of artists with progressive views more and more difficult. In the end, artists are always at risk of being the outsider, not considered part of the community but as just another 'enlightened expert' come to tell the locals what to do...

In order to work with these challenges we need to start by looking at the frame in which our intervention will operate. And that involves rethinking the questions.

For example, if we were approaching a rural site that evidently had a problem with a lack of services, would we boost the supply of services through contractors, to bridge the gap between rural and city residents, or would we look at ways to generate an empowered and resilient community to co-produce their own services?

And if all these specialised cultural producers are given the opportunity to influence the development of rural areas, what space is left for those who still live on and even from the land to have their say? In what way can we include participatory and inclusive methodologies that challenge the inherited, top-down approach of the technocracies and expert bodies?

Artworks and art projects have to be useful and meaningful in the local context, but they must also contain a quality and relevance – a currency – in contemporary art discourses. They must remain capable of coping with the established, and increasingly meaningless, art institutions and channels – and be ready to replace them.

It is not only the rural voice that has to be at the centre of this approach but the farming sector in particular – and not as object or

theme but as subject and co-author. It is in the direct management of natural resources, agro-biodiversity, and rural landscapes that the whole narrative of another Europe of regions and countryside has to be built.

It is also where an important reservoir of knowledge, symbolisms and transcendent body and inter-species operations can inspire an art that would bind us back to ourselves and the environment. A viewpoint that encompasses the perspective of an Agroecological Agrarian Reform in Europe should guide the assessment of existing potentials, and allow for a form of rural development in which cultural and agricultural policies go hand in hand with a careful attention to participation.

This would form part of an important and necessary change to the values in our societies as they transition to sustainability – a point that has already been stressed by the European Sustainable Development Strategy of 2007, and by the targets of Europe 2020.



2

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF ARTS IN RURAL AREAS

Piotr Michałowski

The roots of the word 'culture' lie in Cicero's *colere*, the Latin for 'to tend or to cultivate'. This framing of culture connects us to an archetypal image of man's special relationship with the land, and probably it was observation of agricultural work, with its disciplined care and inspiring laws of nature, that led Cicero to make his comparison and to coin the phrase *cultura animi*, meaning 'cultivation of the soul'⁵. Indeed, cultivation requires some experience, some awareness, but also cooperation. Just as bread sometimes does not rise, one can have all the right ingredients and yet, in some circumstances, fall short of the desired outcome.

In this respect, rural areas have an amazing way of encouraging experimentation, whether agricultural or artistic. Similar to the 'trial' field, where one can try to establish various, sometimes foreign plant species, in the social sphere inspiration can come from many different places. Of course, it is seldom easy: though it may be

invisible on the surface, the ground keeps a memory of its decades of cultivation with certain plants, and may simply not accept new seedlings. This can happen in the sphere of social experiments as well, when we do not pay attention to the heritage of a place, its invisible divisions and traditions. With any social or artistic intervention in a local community (or a local 'ecosystem', a local culture), it is an important and difficult task to propose solutions for social self-organisation that will positively affect the development of social capital, strengthen interpersonal ties, and stimulate new forms of self-realisation. A careful and effective artist will, therefore, get to know the local context. Any new solution should be in symbiosis with it, bringing positive change and building upon existing structures, rather than acting as a cultural revolution or sudden break from tradition. So, any artistic intervention in a place should both build community awareness and grow the sensitivity of the artist for the local culture and context.

5 | "So all cultivated minds do not bear fruit. To continue the figure: as a field, though fertile, cannot yield a harvest without cultivation, no more can the mind without learning; thus each is feeble without the other. But philosophy is the culture of the soul. It draws out vices by the root, prepares the mind to receive seed, and commits to it, and, so to speak, sows in it what, when grown, may bear the most abundant fruit." Quote from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, translated by Andrew P. Peabody (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1886), p. 96. Available [here](#).

THE RURAL SITUATION NOW: MIGRATION, DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

“Seasonal workers from Eastern Europe work in the fields of Western Europe, Indian farmers go to Italy to work in the dairies. That is how new people get in the countryside and these people are usually very welcome because they are the workforce of modern agriculture. These people also bring their own cultures to the countryside.”⁶— Henk Keiser

Today, we seem to have made a significant departure from the kinds of ‘cultivation’ that Cicero experienced in his time, and rural areas have begun to lose their agricultural identity. These drastic changes started at the beginning of the 20th century, intensified significantly in the years after World War II, and escalated even further after the 2008 financial crisis and the huge migration waves in the 2010s. They brought numerous challenges to rural areas and to the way we think of the ‘rural’, and yet they also opened new possibilities for a better future.

Migration trends – whether driven by economic, social or political forces – constitute the largest strain posed on rural areas. On the one hand, technological progress facilitates cultivation and reduces the number of people required to handle agricultural processes – which means fewer and fewer working age people in rural areas. When a workforce is needed, more often than not it is sourced from outside, whether with seasonal workers or long-term moving migrants (as demonstrated in [a recent EU survey](#)). On the other hand, across Europe there is a symmetrical trend towards migration: younger generations going from rural areas towards cities; then in the other direction, adult urban residents in their sixties and beyond moving towards rural areas. The general motivations are completely different, yet quite predictable: cities give obvious opportunities for work and development, while the countryside grants peace from the urban bustle. While we have been long accustomed to the phenomenon of ‘global cities’, the recent 21st century trend of people moving towards rural areas is giving rise to a kind of ‘globalisation’ of the villages, as people from different regions, as well as people of different nationalities, move to a certain rural area they have never been connected to before – and bring their own cultures with them.

Despite the ‘repopulation’ experienced in recent years, the ‘drain’ of young people away from rural areas will have irreversible and unpredictable effects: continuity is broken when a generation of potential promoters for local development disappear.

The abandonment of our connection with the land disturbs an established paradigm for understanding rural areas. For this reason, a frequent mistake of a specific ‘city-centrism’ is to try to implement urban culture in rural areas – when of course culture is absolutely already present in rural areas, and there’s no particular need to import the urban kind.

All the above-mentioned processes are exacerbated by ageing populations, experiences of marginalisation, a sense of detachment / not belonging, the feeling of not being heard, the rise of populism and right wing propaganda, and so on. There are no easy answers to these challenges.

And yet there are many advantages to rural living, starting with the opportunity to (re)connect with nature and access open space – benefits difficult to find in crowded cities that struggle against serious air pollution. Social life in small settlements, with its spontaneous and close connections with friends, neighbours and fellow villagers, is also often perceived as higher quality than big city social life with all its opportunities for culture and entertainment. In addition, the prospects for local self-organisation around common values, communal projects, initiatives, and so on are sometimes better in small communities than in urban settlements where any citizen initiatives have to be formalised and regulated in order to comply with the complicated organisation of urban communal living.

The described trends are so common throughout Europe that we should look for instruments and solutions that will not only provide ad hoc support for a given locality but address challenges on the wider European level. A possible solution is to strengthen cooperation and exchange for effective actions between rural areas, engaging residents in creating ‘symbiotic’ initiatives that strive for social development, self-organisation and local entrepreneurship. Hence, we should look for answers within the existing EU support networks and tools in order to find improvements in the areas of culture and heritage, the social and creative economy, rural and business sector cooperation, and so on.

⁶ | Henk Keiser, Director of Rural Forum Denmark, speech at IETM Plenary meeting in Brussels, 2017.

POLICY MEASURES TARGETING THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES OF RURAL AREAS

Through insightful conversations with various stakeholders from non-urban areas – held at participatory working meetings on the topics of art, culture and cultural participation in rural areas – European networks like ENCC, IETM and CAE have identified several issues that call for action. Further on in this chapter there is detailed information on those reports, with recommendations. For now, some of the proposals include: a wider promotion, in terms of geographical distribution, of participatory processes through culture in Europe; promotion of more inclusive approaches among citizens and professionals of different sectors; and developing systemic programmes, solutions and tools to empower regional leaders and improve the competences of local policymakers.

There are several schemes and cooperation/support programmes currently active, and it's worth mentioning here their scope of work and priorities.

LEADER is an EU mechanism that provides effective professional support for rural communities. It aims to keep citizens in their place of residence, or at least to reduce overall migration. As a local development method, it has been used for 20 years to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, in decision-making, and in resource allocation for the development of their rural areas. It is implemented by around 2600 Local Action Groups (LAGs), covering over 54% of the rural population in the EU, and bringing together public, private and civil society stakeholders in a particular area.

The necessity of providing inspiration for creativity and entrepreneurship is often completely neglected by formal education. Actions to develop support programmes and EU committees, like the European Economic and Social Committee, try to fill this gap. Still, there is significant room for improvement in this area, especially with respect to Committee visibility in the EU Member States. The aim is to build consensus between these groups so that EESC opinions truly reflect the economic and social interests of EU citizens.

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), another potential actor in the field, was established in 2008 by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI). The ENRD is governed by the formal structures of its Assembly and Steering Group, which bring together a range of rural development stakeholder groups to provide strategic direction, guidance and coordination.

Additionally, **National Rural Networks (NRNs)** operate in each

EU Member State to support and enhance rural development objectives as defined in the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). NRNs enable and facilitate exchange and learning between all the partners involved in Rural Development policy implementation: public authorities, economic and social partners, and the relevant bodies representing civil society.

With the above mechanisms working on international and national levels, grassroots cooperation networks can be created, with a variety of stakeholders, to focus on the accumulation of knowledge, as well as on fostering competences and supporting participatory processes in order to create local development strategies.

One of the fundamental advantages of networking is that it counteracts isolation. The opportunity to join with other communities to face situations and share known solutions, or to co-create spaces of inspiration and synergy, is an indisputable benefit. However, the number of rural communities carrying out major networking activities or applying for funding for partnership development and local capacity building remains rather small. Among many possible barriers, we can point to a lack of faith in Cicero's *colere*: a disbelief that such 'cultivation' can be a success, and an unwillingness to invest the time and resources in preparing the ground for the potential growth of local and international cooperation. In addition, networking requires long-term investment and engagement, while many communities might be focused on achieving short-term benefits and solutions. But there are many more opportunities on the EU level for getting inspiration and encouragement, or for exchanging ideas.

One example is the European Week of Regions and Cities, an annual four-day event, created in 2003 by the European Committee of the Regions, during which cities and regions showcase their capacity to create growth and jobs, to implement European Union cohesion policies, and to prove the importance of the local and regional levels in good European governance. The event has become a European networking platform for experts in regional and local development, enabling the exchange of good practices in economic development and social inclusion, cross-border cooperation, public-private partnerships, regional innovation, and community-led local development.

INPUT FROM INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE NETWORKS

In recent years there has been increasing discussion within European arts and culture networks on the resilience, participation and empowerment of rural areas in the context of the arts. Several parallel processes of consultation and stakeholder interaction have been initiated. The [IETM network](#) began a series of working sessions at plenary and satellite meetings (such as [IETM Brussels 2017](#), [IETM Porto 2018](#), [Satellite Wales 2018](#), [IETM Munich 2018](#), and [IETM Hull 2019](#)), and produced several pivotal reports⁷ that have reflected upon some important aspects of the conversation. Among other things, they have worked to define the rural, to map performing arts in rural areas, and to share inspiring outcomes of performing arts projects and practices sited in rural areas.

This very publication is yet another IETM endeavour to promote performing arts in rural areas. Accompanied by a collection of examples and practices from all over the globe, it aims to outline the major challenges and solutions that will need to be considered on the way to renewing policy and fostering the production of a more impactful art in rural areas.

In 2019, the network [Culture Action Europe \(CAE\)](#) launched an advocacy campaign focused on arts and culture in rural and peripheral areas. Its main focal points are social cohesion, living culture, and sustainability. The advocacy itself aims to achieve recognition at the EU policy level for arts in rural areas, and to establish transversal solutions, across various policy fields, to support culture and the arts in rural and peripheral areas. The annual [Beyond the Obvious \(BtO\)](#) conference meetings are part of the development process for such policy change endeavours. In 2019, the [Culture Crops BtO](#) meeting was dedicated particularly to shaping policy recommendations for non-urban territories.

Meanwhile, the European Network of Cultural Centres ([ENCC](#)) has kept its focus on accessibility, innovation, inclusion, cooperation and education. For this purpose, the ENCC network devised a crowdsourced manifesto, [Culture for Shared, Smart, Innovative Territories](#). The preparation of the manifesto was initiated during [ECoC Wrocław 2016](#) in the region of Lower Silesia, Poland. By the end of 2019, around 200 stakeholders from 22 European countries had taken part in the process. ENCC also launched a [Working Group on Territorial Development](#), which operates as a working lab for professional stakeholders, actively supporting policy initiatives, sharing expertise and insights, and providing content to international conferences on non-urban territories.

IETM, CAE and ENCC have decided to collect all the knowledge and recommendations gathered by these various initiatives into a single manifesto for arts and territorial development. The launch of the common document has been scheduled for March 2020, with a working meeting with MEPs planned in the run-up to publication. In 2020, [Voices of Culture](#) are also initiating a [broad dialogue](#) on the role of culture in non-urban areas of the European Union, and on what the EU can do to promote culture in peri-urban spaces, the suburbs and the periphery.

All these activities are of great importance not only for the arts and culture sector. Giving local leaders the opportunity to share their experience and recommendations, which will be included in policy proposals at the EU and Member States level, is an example of good governance. It fosters active participation in bottom-up decision-making and counteracts the usual isolation that the periphery experiences from the process of policymaking. The kinds of inclusive and participatory models for shaping policy initiated by the above-mentioned networks should be supported as a priority.

⁷ | [List of IETM publications and reports here.](#)

ART IN RURAL AREAS - AN (UN)EXPECTED AGENT OF CHANGE

But how do the arts make a difference where it matters for local communities in rural areas anyway? Is art not about aesthetic pursuits, celebrating cultural heritage, providing entertainment and pleasurable leisure time, rather than empowering local communities and tackling issues like migration, depopulation or an ageing demographic?

“Imagination can be a very dangerous weapon.” I still recall these words of the artist and researcher Igor Stokfiszewski, spoken at a panel session on political systems and culture at the [Forum for the Future of Culture](#) meeting in Warsaw in 2017. He was referring to the practice of populist and far right governments [suppressing artists](#) for fear of their ability to influence communities and inspire them to action.

Art possesses a strong political power. Art can make a difference. And at times art becomes an act of bravery. It triggers genuine creativity, innovation, and sustainable development. And these are crucial qualities when trying to describe a ‘strategically well-governed’ local community. An absence of those qualities is among the causes of numerous damaging social trends and patterns, such as depopulation, disintegration, passiveness, frustration, or extremist political choices.

Contemporary artistic creation, and especially participatory art projects, can prove useful in one very practical respect. Despite some obvious similarities, each local community lives in a specific sociocultural, economic and ecological context. Therefore any issues within a community call for tailor-made solutions. Inclusive participatory art projects can bring up uncomfortable questions, but they can also gather a community in a safe space for experimentation, triggering creativity and dialogue. They can give people a voice, and thus empower them to find and uphold the solutions that best fit their local context.

Art and social empowerment in rural areas

Within Europe there are many insightful examples of local communities being positively affected by artistic projects. Yet to demonstrate the impact art has on social empowerment, we can take a step beyond the continent, and be inspired by projects implemented in regions with far harsher conditions for civil rights, or far greater levels of democratic infringement than we bear in Europe. There are numerous interesting examples in IETM’s collection of case studies, which looks at how art projects have a positive effect on communities. Taking a brief tour through these now, we will be traveling through continents – starting with Asia, and continuing through South America before arriving back on European ground.

The first example takes us to Nepal, and to an altitude of more than 4000 metres above sea level, to shed light on an artistic endeavour undertaken within these challenging physical conditions. It is a project that demonstrates how, thanks to modern technology, arts in isolated areas can make local voices heard worldwide.

Project: Sometimes Asmita Shrish , freelance artist and filmmaker, and the team behind the ‘[Film-making Workshops for Indigenous Film-makers in Nepal, 2019](#)’

Organisation: [Asmita Shrish, Freelance Artist/Film-maker](#)

Location: Nepal

had to trek for four days in order to reach their next destination, climbing from 6am to 5pm in quite harsh conditions and at altitudes of up to 4500 metres. Being an indigenous film-maker herself, Asmita’s main mission was to use audio/visual storytelling to encourage communication and self-expression, increasing awareness of local voices from Nepal’s remote rural areas. “When storytelling gets connected with indigenous cultural practices, it becomes personalised and meaningful. Community members feel validated and hence, more engaged to link with their own selves,” says Asmita. Traditions do not exist on their own: they have to be communicated, contested, challenged, processed, constructed and (re)invented. All the project’s storytelling workshops aimed at creating an inclusive environment for participants by encouraging them to discuss favourite films, important local stories, folk tales, and contemporary stories revolving around indigenous communities. Sharing their stories with each other gave the participants the opportunity to explore elements of their own identities. Asmita’s own film of the project is in post-production and will explore issues around gender minorities, endangered cultural heritage, the position and struggles of women in a patriarchal world, war, and sexual violence. **More details on the project: Annex A. IETM Art in rural areas case study database, ID 133.**

The next example, from Colombia, demonstrates that art in peripheral territories can be an act of bravery, challenging structures of power which for centuries have held a dominant position.

Project:

[Art of empowerment](#), part of the Bëngbe Benacheng research

Organisation:

[Jully Acuña Suárez & Marcelo Marques Miranda](#)

(Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University);

Location:

Sibundoy, Colombia

Marcelo Miranda and Jully Acuña Suárez, leaders of the Art of empowerment project in Sibundoy, a municipality in the Putumayo district of the Republic of Colombia, describe the region as neglected by the central government, strongly influenced by the Church, and suffering from censorship and brutal acts

of police violence towards the indigenous inhabitants. In the context of this precarious situation, Miranda and Suárez began an artistic project based on research into the cultural heritage of the indigenous Sibundoy Camëntsá people. The project, [the Art of empowerment](#), aimed to “represent the community in its contemporary context, challenge colonial precepts in art and mainstream archaeological and museum practices, and spark a missing and much needed intercultural dialogue”. In practice, the project’s artistic and research team collaborates with the local community to critically address cultural policy, the local government-managed museum, and this museum’s practice of displaying human remains. It co-curates new exhibitions based on the Camëntsá people’s own interpretation of history, material culture, archaeological and sacred sites, territory, and development. The project has been developed in collaboration with local NGOs and indigenous leaders. The overall research project on cultural heritage is funded by the British Museum and the Gerda Henkel Foundation. It is supported by the British Museum’s Santo Domingo Centre of Excellence for Latin American Research, where the results will be exhibited. Despite this broad institutional support, the project would never have succeeded without local collaboration and engagement. What drives it is the willingness of local people to participate in artistic activities, and to help raise awareness among governments about the issues tackled in the project. With their support, it can gradually raise awareness of the ways arts and culture can provide both a platform to speak and a foundation to search for better opportunities in life. **More details about the project: Annex A. Case study IDD 64**

Another inspiring example, this time a European one, on how contemporary art can empower, and give a voice to, socially and territorially peripheral communities.

Project:

[Who Killed Szomna Grancsa? theatre performance](#)

Organisation:

[Giuvlipen, Roma theatre](#)

Location:

Romania

Who Killed Szomna Grancsa? (2017-2019) is a theatre performance that tells the story of a young Roma girl from a remote village who believes in the importance of education and does everything she can to keep going to school.

Living in a patriarchal Roma community which denies girls the right to education, or even to choose for themselves, she encounters a lot of difficulties. The play was based on a true story from contemporary Romania, from a distant village where Roma and Hungarian people, both outsiders in Romanian society, share quite harsh living conditions.

So, what is so particular in this case? First of all, Giuvlipen, the group behind the project, is the first independent Roma feminist theatre company in Romania – a country that has one of the largest Romani communities in Europe. Furthermore, this community is notorious for depriving women and girls of their basic human rights. Putting on stage the issues of school drop-out, depression, suicide, rural poverty and isolation faced by Roma teenagers from the countryside, and then performing the piece for Roma audiences, has taken a big step towards giving Roma girls and women a voice in their everyday lives. Having a professional collaborative project with both Roma and non-Roma artists (actors, director, stage designer, musicians) and showing it on city stages and at theatre festivals is still an innovative practice in Romania. It sends a clear message that contemporary Roma arts are by no means inferior to the majority culture, and that Roma people should be acknowledged as an equal and integral part of society. **More on this project, with photos and links to videos – Annex A. Case Study IDD 141**

Art and bridging the generation gap in rural areas

As we have already touched on, the ageing of rural populations and the migration of the young to cities has placed a huge strain on policies or initiatives hoping to revive rural areas. The gap between the younger and older generations is even wider now, at a time of rapidly changing technology. Young and old simply speak in different languages. How can this be overcome? Should we teach older people the language of the young? Perhaps train younger people in the codes of previous generations? Or should we try to make a new common language, with common codes and shared memories? Not surprisingly, in considering these questions contemporary art projects have proved successful in opening up space for intergenerational meetings and shared experiences.

Project:

Moments, part of [Bridging Generations project](#): colourful bus stops

Organisation:

The community of Oleśnica

Location:

Poland

Here's an example from the remote rural areas of the community of Oleśnica (12 000 inhabitants) in the south-western part of Poland. In 2013, the small village of Boguszyce turned its assembly hall into a local storytelling museum, with collections of items and cooking recipes. To gather the stories that lay hidden in rural work tools, old radios and sewing machines, the community recorded autobiographical video portraits, involving young people as makers and producers.

With an understanding of the positive role of art in social inclusion, and responding to the needs of the community, the venue became a hub for diverse artistic projects, with local people becoming the creators of local and international initiatives. In 2016, the intergenerational theatrical group Moments was created under the international project [Bridging Generations](#) (funded by the EU programme Europe for Citizens). Non-professional actors from the ages of 7 to 77 were led by a professional director and choreographer in a mime performance, also called Moments, related to the painful history of WWII, and using several precious symbolic mementos gathered in the local museum's Chamber of Memories. This performing arts project was based on three aims: initiation of a collaborative project between professional artists and the local community; attribution of '[symbolic capital](#)' to the community's treasured tokens

of remembrance within the Chamber of Memories; and fostering capacity and social energy to give local people a voice and tell their story to the world.

Having a taste for making art together as a way of bringing life to their village, in 2013 the community of Oleśnica joined the Swiss Contribution grant programme – a scheme that allowed them to foster local grassroots projects in the visual arts. [One such project](#), created by artists and local leaders, involved local inhabitants in the artistic regeneration of a village's bus stop. Following a technical refurbishment, the local community came together to participate in designing a mural that featured motifs inspired by local culture and heritage. Then, with the support of a professional artist (also living in the village), locals of all ages were involved in the painting. The intergenerational aspect was very important for the success and recognition of the process, also instilling among participants a sense of taking responsibility for the public space and its aesthetics. The community succeeded in creating a snowball effect, and as of 2019 their initiative has inspired another 18 villages to create their own unique and colourful bus stops.

Jan Żarecki, mayor of the village of Ostrowina (in Oleśnica County) gave an interview on Polish TV in 2015: "Three generations helped us. We only gave a short notice and people came to support this project. It is much cleaner, much nicer now... People slowly start to behave differently, I mean better. Also this project gave us a good promotion – for our village lost somewhere in the woods." Today, the Colourful Bus Stops project has contributed to a sense of belonging and territorial integration across the area of Oleśnica.⁸

⁸ | *Colourful Bus Stops and the theatrical group Moments, as art projects forming part of the Bridging Generations initiative, were named as one of 12 best practices in 'Innovative Audience Development' in the report of Economia Creativa, published in March 2018, and recognised by the OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Development.*

Folklore, tourism and heritage – a needed shift

Contemporary art projects in rural areas should go beyond obvious forms – such as simple presentations of folklore or handcrafts – and align themselves to trajectories of creativity and transformation. Such an approach allows traditions to stay ‘alive’ in the sense of being embedded in an ongoing, everyday ‘performance’ or practice. Hopefully, it can also help counteract the all too easy slide into the kinds of decorative entertainment typified by historical re-enactments, historic/folklore amusement parks, traditional craft festivals, and the like, because preserving a tradition doesn’t mean freezing it in time. Rather, it’s about a continuous process of redefinition, questioning and rephrasing. As Asmita Shrish, one of the respondents to IETM’s survey on arts in rural areas remarked: “...traditions do not exist by themselves, they have to be communicated, contested, challenged, processed, constructed, and (re)invented for our purpose(s)”.

We can also reference the cultural studies theory of Prof. Stanisław Pietraszko, who founded the cultural studies programme at the University of Wrocław, Poland in 1972. His theory derives from the Neo-Kantianism of the Baden School and places values at the centre of its definition of culture, stating that “culture is a way of life by values”⁹. This inclusive theory opens the door to a broader understanding of the processes at work in any community, and also guards against the simplistic justification that ‘culture’ equals ‘art’, which in the case of rural communities quite often leads to a reduction of ‘culture’ to ‘folkloric art’.

Let’s have a look at an example of ‘folklore’ meeting ‘contemporary art’ – and in a project that rethinks both, rather than just decoratively attaching a lovely patch of the past to the realities of the present day.

Project:

The Journey, a dance-music project connecting traditional and contemporary dance (2011-2020 and beyond)

Organisation:

Materias Diversos from Lisbon, Portugal

Location:

Portugal, and internationally

Initiated in 2011, The Journey is an ongoing dance-music project that connects local, traditional dance with contemporary dance practices. Bringing together amateur dancers from rural communities and professional contemporary dance practitioners, it involves a period of creative residency and culminates

in a public performance. Participants learn from one another as they draw connections between contemporary and traditional dance and music.

50 people, aged 4 to 80, embarked on this journey only having prior experience of traditional dance. Not one person among them had ever seen a contemporary dance performance. But once they overcame their fear of experimenting, and once they felt that their ‘culture’ was respected within the process, they plunged into the project with obvious pleasure. A participant in the project told Filipa Francisco, its lead choreographer: “... we are learning your steps and you are learning ours. But yours are connected to our imagination”. For her part, Filipa frames the major outcomes of the project in terms of empowerment: “Working with these groups is also giving voice and visibility to them, to the margins. To put these groups in nice theatres, on a professional stage, with microphones is a way of saying: yes you do, you deserve it! Creating together is a way of saying your voice is important. Opening a space for improvisation is a way of saying your imagination is important. Working with contemporary dance is a way of saying tradition can live in the present.” More about this project in Annex A. Case study IDD 85.

Folklore and tradition are the parts of culture typically used to attract tourism. The audiences are out there, ready to target, and so a whole industry and economy has developed around them. Unfortunately, quite often these forms have been simplified to fit a stylised and standardised image of ‘tradition’, one that can be conveniently marketed to mildly interested tourists who are ready to spend an hour or so ‘getting to know the local culture’.

⁹ | Reference from Stanisław Pietraszko, *Studia o kulturze* (Wrocław: 1992).

In terms of 'experiencing the local culture', the tourist industry regards the tourists or visitors as 'the customers' and the locals merely as a 'resource' to make the customers happy. This widespread and simplistic approach has already caused a series of problems for areas with very high levels of tourism. It poses even greater threats to the balance of rural communities, where the positive outcomes of tourism (most of them economic) must be an added value to an integrated, well organised community. Yet local authorities usually find it rather difficult to prioritise community and social development over tourism. Where tourism has a very visible impact through its economic contribution, investing in social development is a long-term process that can often exceed the political mandates of governing bodies.

Quite often this lack of a long-term vision, or this absence of boldness and creativity when it comes to developing the touristic offer of rural areas, leads to a uniform convergence on simple festivals and celebrations when there are multitudes of heritage sites, natural phenomena, local legends and stories that are worth sharing with visitors. Artists have proven themselves resourceful explorers of all these unique peculiarities of place.

For instance, Association Zona, an arts company from Croatia, organises aMORE – festival moru ('aMORE – festival for the Sea'), an interdisciplinary festival that mixes arts, culture, science and ecology in order to raise awareness of the threat to maritime ecosystems. The festival is oriented towards the need for promoting natural preservation in the region of the Istrian peninsula, which suffers from over-tourism. Although not aimed at 'visitors', it attracts a lot of interest from tourists, as well as the local citizens who care for the maritime life in their region. **More about this project in Annex A. Case study IDD 146.**

Between the Seas, a Mediterranean residency and festival in Monemvasia (Southern Greece), is another example from the region that prioritises locals over tourists – and thereby wins both. (See Appendix A. Case Study IDD 10 for further details.)

Art in rural areas as an ongoing resource for positive social change

Visiting artists can bring a fresh, outsider's eye to local communities in rural areas, and yet the strongest impacts come from artists who actually stay in a community. Building trust, instigating positive change, empowering communities, and achieving project sustainability all require that artists maintain their intervention for a longer period of time than the typical residency programme. Therefore rural residency schemes usually offer opportunities for extended stays so that the artists can get to know the life of the local community and establish connections there. Making numerous visits to a community over a longer period of time is another approach that many artists adopt, especially if transport links allow it. Still, it feels that some of the most convincing stories and most inspiring examples of positive change can be found in projects where artists actually live in a community...

Project:

Travelling Fairy Tales

Organisation:

Academy of Imagination Association

Location:

Poland

In 2006, a group of young artists from Wrocław, Poland began spending their summer months running a travelling puppet theatre (initially across the region of Lower Silesia, later all around the country), inviting local

inhabitants of all ages to join workshops and to perform in an evening show given in the central square of each village. The group was called Academy of Imagination, and the project – Travelling Fairy Tales. Each day, the theatre would travel to another village, recalling the ancient tradition of the Commedia dell'arte. The artists (city-based) were impressed by the lack of 'snobbism' among their rural audiences – by their openness and curiosity. At the same time, the project left them feeling a lack of continuity: just after initiating the artistic and creative process, and just as a conversation was starting, everything was interrupted to move on to the next site. And that's why some of the artists from the group decided to establish themselves more permanently by moving into the rural communities they'd visited. Their idea was to provide sustainable solutions and art workshops on a daily basis, in cooperation with local culture centres or supported by project-based funding.

That is a serious commitment to make, with many positive effects both for the artists and the communities they live in. Such longitudinal projects provide sufficient space for experiments with various artistic approaches, as well as genuine community involvement and participation. Art projects of this kind can introduce non-urban citizens to new or previously unknown ways of bringing their communities together, which usually inspires them to continue organising gatherings or to plan new artistic activities. Art opens the door to emotional and aesthetic experiences that can awaken the social potential of local communities.

Here's another longitudinal project aimed at (re)building the sense of communality in rural areas.

Project:

[A Vila do Mañá \('The Town of Tomorrow'\), the region of Galicia, Spain](#)

Organisation:

PØSTarquitectos and Sandra González Álvarez

Location:

Spain

Initiated in 2016, the project A Vila do Mañá has evolved to act as an educational and outreach project. Using art and play as tools, its goal is to make children aware of all the ways that the commons manifests in public life – from tangible and intangible heritage, to architecture, urbanism and landscapes. The objective, as Sandra González Álvarez explains, is to awaken a new, urban perspective on space. The children who participate discover and nurture a new way of looking at things – one that they can carry forward and that will eventually influence them as the citizens of tomorrow.

The project implements a series of workshops, held in, and financially supported by, the town halls of various settlements in the region of Galicia. Each workshop is different because the organisers believe that each place has its own identity. "The impact of the A Vila do Mañá project has gone beyond the young participants, inspiring all citizens. The realisation of interventions in different public places involves the whole society, provoking an intergenerational dialogue that enriches the experience," says Sandra González Álvarez. [Annex B. IDD 81]

ART IN RURAL AREAS NEEDS OUR SUPPORT

Creative organisations situated in remote, sparsely populated areas are often isolated and economically fragile, yet it is well recorded that they can boost local economies, improve quality of life, and encourage more active civil communities through their cultural provision and through realising the potential of locally based cultural and artistic projects.

Supporting the arts and including them in the strategies, developmental policies, and everyday proceedings of local authorities is a necessity, and is strongly recommended for achieving the goals of coherent territorial development. As a board member of ENCC network and a cultural practitioner of the public, private and NGO sector with 20 years of experience, I truly support bottom-up solutions. The extensive database of projects collected by IETM, which feeds this publication with its numerous examples and case studies, offers plenty of best practices to follow, challenges to tackle, and inspiring solutions to implement. See Appendix A and Appendix B for case studies and list of collected projects.

Emerging from this body of experiences, some commonly repeated points and recommendations include the importance of continuing art education, the transformative effects of empowerment programmes, the need to foster skills for self-organisation, and the central place of creative thinking, innovation, accessibility, inclusion and social cohesion.

The need for advocacy and recognition for art in rural areas

Efficient strategies for the endorsement, advocacy and recognition of arts and culture in rural areas have to be implemented on local, regional and international levels – possibly by emphasising their transversality, impact and importance on the European scale.

The personal need for culture and the arts is one that has to be instilled, regardless of whether we're speaking about the urban or the rural. In the non-urban areas there are fewer opportunities and the focus on them should therefore be stronger. Artistic interventions in rural areas can act as a trigger for change and personal development, with the arts providing a path to discover previously unknown values and aesthetics. Without systemic cultural education we will find ourselves lacking structural growth in participation, understanding, and dedication to culture and the arts in rural areas. There is a definite need for an art education beyond formal processes. Village halls or centres for culture are the perfect fit for this purpose, being intergenerational hubs – what Ray Oldenburg calls 'third places'.

National authorities and the general population have to become aware of the barriers that underrepresented (remote and rural/peri-urban) populations experience: depopulation and ageing, a lack of appropriate infrastructure for social development and economic growth, and a similar lack of transport infrastructure, civil services, and so on. Art and culture can be seen as another way of creating awareness of this inequality, and perhaps even of triggering measures to alleviate it.

The need for local community empowerment programmes

Turning rural inhabitants back into active citizens and building empowered communities is crucial to successfully and sustainably resolving local challenges and the problems of life in rural areas. This process can be initiated, if not by the community itself, then through the involvement of external 'facilitators' and the implementation of community development programmes, with all the risks that brings of having outsiders parachuted into the local community. Delicate as this relationship may be, artists have already proven themselves ingenious mediators and facilitators of positive change.

Starting this process is crucial. Once underway, local communities can enter into dialogue with local authorities and influence the political agenda in ways that are desired by and important for the whole community. Being united gives communities the (social) power to set the right priorities.

The need for developing new skills

A strong recommendation is to invest in the acquisition of new competences that will foster creative work and the involvement of rural communities. Artists, cultural workers, local government bodies, community leaders, social workers, ordinary citizens – everyone can benefit from developing such skills. This can be achieved through engaging in capacity building projects and initiatives, through projects that provide hands-on learning, and through meetings, the sharing of best practices, and networking.

Networking as the most versatile tool

Networking offers a multitude of opportunities to learn first-hand about diverse solutions and possible drawbacks. It offers opportunities to cooperate and collaborate. In the case of developing rural areas, bringing together stakeholders and experts from diverse fields such as the arts, sustainable agriculture, the academic sector, social welfare, local development, cultural heritage, ecology, and so on has fuelled numerous exciting collaborations that can be discovered in the IETM case study database. Joining forces and engaging in self-organisation proved to be the ultimate solution to most challenges that art projects in rural areas have to overcome. And what better way to find partners than through communication and networking!

Another pressing need is to empower local and international networks of stakeholders, from diverse fields, to organise in situ research projects that can supply quantitative and qualitative data. This in turn can grant better leverage when approaching public bodies or policymakers.

All these recommendations are shared by the Working Group on Territorial Development, coordinated since 2016 by the European Network of Cultural Centres – ENCC. Similar recommendations were formed by the IETM working group on rural development, the Rural Forum Denmark, and the CAE advocacy group, all of whom are experienced in fostering arts in rural areas.

Finally, one last example of how art brings positive change to rural life. This one comes from rural Central and West Jutland, Lemvig Municipality, Denmark.

Project:

MEETINGS

Organisation:

[ET4U \(a non-profit artist-run association\)](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)

Location:

Denmark, Lemvig Municipality

MEETINGS is a four-year video and performance project, with two festivals to showcase the artworks created within the project.

From 2016-19, ET4U, the non-profit artist-run association behind the project, invited international artists for

residences in Central and West Jutland, Denmark. They created new video and performance works dealing with, taking place in, and produced through meetings with the local community. In this way, the works provide new artistic reflections on the area as seen from the outside. The project reached new audiences in rural areas of Jutland, mostly due to the close connection between the makers and their audiences. Taking into account their 20 years of experience making and presenting art in rural areas, ET4U knew that organising meetings, and opening up a 'safe ground' for debate and conversation within the community's own everyday, public spaces, was the key to encouraging participation on the way to interest and engagement. The hope was that this would lead to new creative ideas for a better life in the rural area. With this in mind, it was reassuring to hear the words of a local farmer: "I was brought up to think that art is something that hangs on the wall. But art is different, and when you see something like this it gets you thinking in different ways – and I think that's fantastic!" **[More about this project in: Appendix A, Case study IDD 61]**

3

LIVING CULTURES

Laura H Drane

Some personal notes: I am Laura H Drane, a Wales-based creative producer and a passionate advocate for creating arts in public spaces, especially in rural areas.

Though I have spent many years in cities – Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester – my own life has strong elements of rurality. I used to live ‘on the tops’ in West Yorkshire, and spent a large part of my teens in Somerset on the fringes of a large village of about 4000 inhabitants. In terms of the arc of my career, I started out in 1999 when I began working as an outdoor touring producer (mainly Shakespeare to country houses and stately homes) before freelancing as a creative producer, consultant and facilitator. All of that has entailed everything from producing a science festival across a large, mainly rural county in northern England, to facilitating network meetings and away days for rurally based clients as varied as music education providers and professional dance companies. Looking back, I can see that much of my work has been built around what I call genuine public engagement, which means starting with mutuality, putting work where people already are, and being open to the potential risk of change for all involved, principles I think stand me in good stead to write about such topics now.

During 2017 and 2018, I spent more time thinking about and experiencing the realities of living cultures – in terms of the arts and rural contexts – than at almost any other point in my career to date as a creative producer. This was as a result of the performance work we were making in our collective *Light, Ladd & Emberton*, and as a result of facilitating the IETM Satellite in north Wales, on the theme of arts and rurality, curated by Karine Decorne of Migrations. The Satellite was both a joy and a challenge – to prepare for, to remain attentive to, and to consolidate in many sessions over several days, in the name of exploring further, digging deeply and reflecting back.

Meeting over 50 participants from around the world, with so many inspiring projects to share, has further embedded for me the realisation that creating contemporary arts in rural areas is a genuine global trend.

LIVING CULTURES IN RURAL AREAS

It is high time to relinquish the simplistic idea that 'rural culture' is about folklore, traditions, pastoral landscapes, and cultural heritage sites, all of which can be conveniently packaged into tourist products and offered to mildly interested visitors along with the local cheese. People who live in rural areas do not stroll around in folklore costumes, and in the evenings they don't gather around the fireplace to sing folk songs or tell ancient fairy tales. Instead, they share their own living and breathing contemporary culture, which is undoubtedly partially global, but to the greatest extent influenced by their current locality: their current socio-economic and demographic dynamics, their most pressing topics, their relations to urban areas, central government and other rural settlements, their memories of the past and thoughts for the future.

This, of course, is quite an ambitious scope to grasp in this publication. So instead, what would we mean when we talk of living cultures, of the arts and its relationship to rurality? Here follow a few key frames for this:

- **Living cultures in terms of valuing contemporary art creation in rural communities** – especially contributing to a critical understanding of contemporary challenges and policy. By this I mean art that is in and of a place that informs and is informed by it.
- **Living cultures and their relationship to touring, when bringing professional guest artists to rural communities.** This can be about both connection and reach. It is especially challenging to and for those touring in rural areas (where often there is an increased level of intimacy with an audience, who are sometimes more open or more demanding, whilst doing repeated shows and longer residencies or runs, all of which drives a certain self-sufficiency for the touring artist or company).
- **Living cultures related to audience development** – be that the increase in audiences in numerical terms over time, or the development of the audience members themselves, this reach and connection is essential if we are serious about arts for all everywhere. It's about fully recognising that rural areas are at least as varied as urban ones (wealthy and in need, underemployed and busy, lacking resources and fantastically wealthy, remote and well connected – it's not all farming, folklore and festivities).



Tweet by @EmmieKell:

"Some things you might experience if you work in a rural area:

**people who do your job in a city are better*

**the 'centre' is where innovation lies*

**it's your responsibility to get to the centre to engage with their practice (reverse does not apply)"*

I'd like to offer a few relevant, and hopefully illuminating, examples from my own practice.

Since our collaboration on the IETM Satellite on rural arts, Karine Decorne and I have also worked with [Natural Resources Wales](#), the national body which looks after much of the natural infrastructure of Wales, be that flood defences, coastline or Sites of Special Scientific Interest, around their potential to fully embrace the arts. This will involve ongoing organisational and sectoral development if we are all to collaborate and truly make the most of the opportunity. In performance terms, Light, Ladd & Emberton's first physical work – [Caitlin](#), about the poet Dylan Thomas' wife – has toured many rural (and urban) settings since 2014, including village halls and community spaces across the country. It is a show framed by the device of audiences coming to hear a testimony at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, sitting with the performers in a circle of chairs. The best spaces for the work are those that feel as if they could indeed host an AA meeting, and often we find that the show's presentation in smaller, more intimate settings, like country schools and church halls, generates even more of an emotional response from the audiences. But the challenges – appropriate spaces to present, our travel times from place to place (remote is where you are not), the price of show tickets, the lack of public transport links, and more – are real, and all of them have implications for bringing that work into more rural settings, despite the rewards.

We have also researched and then presented a [major new piece in development](#) in the small town of Harlech, Gwynedd, North Wales. Harlech is a small town that has an autumn/winter/spring population of 1447 people, which quadruples over the six-week high-summer season as tourists arrive for holidays and day trips. In this work, we undertook deep research into local people, current and long gone, plus the narratives, myths, geological facts and more of the area. We presented all of these collided and woven together, primarily back to those who have inspired and informed them – the locals – to offer a new narrative of that place. Most town residents were curious as to our process of weaving all these differing elements for presentation, some were beneficiaries of our local spending (as holiday home owners, or shop owners/workers, be that cafe, post office, pub or fish 'n' chip shop), and

everyone we met was encouraging when they knew we were asking for their stories and input. Undoubtedly it helped that a few of us are Welsh speakers and learners in what is one of the strongest parts of Wales for the indigenous language.

Lastly, it was whilst we were resident and researching that piece that we began our next commission – [a show about the last Welsh prince of Wales](#), the rebel leader Owain Glyndŵr. With funds from the tourism authority, Visit Wales, we were engaged to make a show that boosted the night-time economy of four towns in North Wales, all of which had castles and which together formed a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In this work, we reinterpreted and reanimated spaces that some locals saw as only for paying tourists, and not as spaces for them (especially as they are associated with imperial/colonial pasts). We also stayed locally to make the work, spending into the local economy and making connections as we did so, and employed local performing artists within the cast to support their practice and contribute to sustainable careers. Disgo Distaw Owain Glyndŵr Silent Disco went on to be nominated for a national Tourism Business Innovation Award. It has since revisited the area, and is due to go there again in the future. The positive impacts for the communities combine things like recognition for their heritage settings and contemporary lives – and bringing those stories to a much wider audience – with other tourism innovations in experiences, marketing and infrastructure (such as accommodation and attractions).

In conclusion, my own practice has convinced me there are multiple benefits to be gained from having a living culture in rural areas. The economic returns of local spending, attracting tourism, and reflecting and transmitting living languages are perhaps the easiest to grasp. Yet there is much more.

We as artist-creatives gain more diverse audiences and wider reach for our works, and of course we gather stories, imagery, deep connections, resonances (to place, myth, heritage) when making and presenting. As Susanne Danig from BIRCA art residency puts it: “It is not about communities learning from artists, it is about us learning from them!”

Project:

[Bækkelund International Residency Center for Artists – BIRCA](#)

Organisation:

[Danig Performing Arts Service](#)

Location:

Klemensker, Bornholm, Denmark

Bækkelund International Residency Centre for Artists – BIRCA is located in rural countryside on the remote Danish island of Bornholm. The centre has two big spaces and living areas to accommodate research processes for resident performing artists. International

collaborations, contemporary dance, new circus, all kinds of experimental work – that’s the artistic scope of BIRCA. As Susanne Danig, the founder of the residency programme explains, the site was established in 2017 with the idea to “give artists the chance to lean into the quietness and serenity of this place to connect more strongly with their own creativity”. Initially, the focus was on bringing professional artists, both Danish and international, to the residency. In the last two years, however, BIRCA started seeking collaborations with local artists and art organisations on the island. BIRCA also invited local cultural workers and artists, along with experts from the Danish and Nordic performing arts scene, into its advisory board. Resident artists at BIRCA hold open-door events, attend rehearsals, and give workshops. Susanne makes sure that local art professionals and ‘ordinary’ people are invited and feel welcome at the centre. Apart from its artistic programme for the local community, BIRCA hosts workshops on artistic entrepreneurship, gives performing arts workshops, engages with the local circus company and other artistic makers, hosts [a festival](#), and collaborates with the local Bornholms Teater.

When it comes to engaging local communities with BIRCA’s activities, Susanne underlines that it should by no means be a forced exchange: “Now, in the third year of our residency programme, we can start opening up towards the local communities. It takes time, it takes building relationships so that we are not regarded as ‘some strange artists doing stuff in that farm by the forest’ ... And what we want to do in BIRCA is not about opening new working positions but about opening new perspectives of thinking: both for the local community and the artists. We are not here to ‘teach the local community something new’, we are here to learn from them and exchange ideas.”

More about BIRCA and the ways it builds local partnerships – Annex A, IDD 140

My experience shows that working in rural areas gradually influences your artistic practice and thematic scope. We are proudly from Wales, and it is a largely rural country. As a collective of performance makers from and of and in this place, we seek to embody untold and under-told stories which are personal and universal (and which, if delivered verbally, are always bilingual in Welsh/English). Performing for and with publics, we inhabit spaces like castles, village halls, theatres and beaches. The local communities for their part benefit from the range of work presented, the spaces temporarily transformed, the local economy enhanced, but more so, from having their stories and culture mirrored back to themselves.

Fellow art professionals at IETM sessions on arts in rural areas have shared similar observations from their experience of making art outside big cities. Often, people from rural communities feel unrepresented in the themes and the aesthetics of what has been celebrated as 'high', global, critically acclaimed art. Therefore, they have been genuinely excited to see their life and their stories set on stage, a fact that Henk Keizer, at the IETM session '[Artistic creation outside the urban areas](#)', brought memorably to life when speaking about the company New Heroes' performance [We, Pig Country](#), which toured rural Belgium and the Netherlands with huge success: "People were literary crying. People who have always thought that theatre is not for them now have attended a show celebrating them, their life, and their problems. They said: finally, somebody hears us and tells our story! And they were exhilarated!"

More than 15 years ago, François Matarasso, a rural arts practitioner, researcher, and propagator of cultural democracy and participatory art practices, noted in his [report](#) for the National Rural Touring Forum 2004 that rural touring in particular is a powerful agent for the revival of rural areas. Matarasso distinguishes several artistic and community development impacts art touring has on rural areas.

The access to high quality professional productions should be seen as a part of mainstream arts provision, giving to rural audiences diversity of choice: "Part of the artistic value of rural touring is in extending the range of work available to people living in rural areas, and especially in adding to the amateur and commercial work which is most common." He also refers to performances at rural facilities as a "unique experience" due to the intimacy of the space, the opportunity for audiences and performers to meet each other informally, and the simple fact that the members of the audience know each other well – which is rarely the case in cities.

The research in 2004 found evidence of the positive impacts of art touring on community cohesion and development, [summarised](#) by Matarasso as bringing people together, further developing the sense of community, encouraging community initiatives, and, as

a result, making rural settlements livelier and more viable: "The importance of rural touring in community development is that, rather than simply giving people access to a service, it involves them directly in all aspects of its delivery, where they live... Rural touring has often been the first step in local arts and community development initiatives, valuable because it is accessible, yet demanding."

Recent commentary, like Art Council England's '[Taking arts and culture to the heart of rural communities: AIR in G](#)' or PEW's '[Can the Arts Help Save Rural America?](#)' also demonstrates that rural touring enriches the cultural offer in rural communities by providing contemporary professional artistic productions, thus opening new perspectives for artistic experiences for local audiences, bringing new audiences, and boosting the chances of people choosing to come and live in these places.

We have to keep in mind that touring is just one of the many ways living culture is created in rural areas!

In an attempt to grasp the broad picture of arts in rural areas, in July and August 2019, IETM issued an open call to collect examples from around the world. More than 140 cases from Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and North and South America were collected. They demonstrated both the large variety of types of rurality around the world and the multitude of artistic projects that are currently developed in rural areas.

Setting artistic residencies in rural areas seems to be a trend, if we look at the case studies collection. Some of them, like BIRCA residency from Denmark, are featured here. What are the main reasons for opening an artistic residency outside multicultural urban hubs? First of all, acquiring land and buildings is considerably cheaper in increasingly depopulated rural areas. So, having comfortable living quarters for the resident artists as well as spacious production venues, along with venues to present the artistic production, is actually a more achievable task in rural rather than urban settlements. This gives artists the opportunity to meet with audiences, spend quality time together, work on large-scale projects, and engage in collaborative and participatory art pieces. Judging from the artists' statements, no less important for them is to go to rural areas with the opportunity to shift the focus of their artistic practices, to slow down, to reconnect with nature and other ways of life like farming – a trend which is demonstrated in this publication in 'Chapter A: Sustainability'.

Touring art projects, with the perceivable impacts on art and on rural communities which have been outlined above, constitute more than one third of the case study collection, featuring artistic tours from Belgium, UK, Norway, Ireland, Greece, Iceland, Denmark, the Netherlands, United States, Germany, France, India, Czech republic, Serbia, Latvia, Finland, Sweden, Russia,

Montenegro, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Iran, Italy, Luxembourg, Australia, Armenia...

Evidently, the most challenging but also the most rewarding way of getting to know the local community is to create art together with them. These projects are developed by artists who permanently live in rural settlements and who are an integrated part of the local community.

Project:

The Freezer Centre,
[Rif, Snæfellsbær, Iceland](#)

Organisation:

The Freezer

Location:

Iceland

The case study of The Freezer (a hostel, theatre and culture centre) follows the story of Kári Viðarsson, a professional actor and dramaturg who works and lives in the fishing village of Rif, a small settlement of 130

inhabitants located two hours away from Reykjavik, in the municipality of Snæfellsbær, Iceland. Since 2010, the centre has evolved as a multifunctional company, combining professional theatre, outreach programmes in the local community, artist residencies, regular live music, and a few festivals with a hostel. How does Kári manage to keep the interest of locals? "In a small community, when people don't like the show, it just won't have a life. You have to work hard and present art of a high standard," Kári explains. An example of an artistically inspiring work that became loved by the local community, as well as art critics in the city, is [Hero](#), Kári's first performance at The Freezer and one that is still on stage.

The Freezer collaborates with artists based in Iceland and from all over the world. Musicians often contact Kári with a request to hold a concert at The Freezer, especially now that it's technically fully equipped. Sometimes the locals ask for a certain band to appear as well.

As for the artistic residency, Kári aims to keep it as free-flowing as possible. Typically, artists stay for a month, although there have been residences of a week at one extreme and four months at the other. Without making it a requirement, Kári tends to select artistic projects that deal with the local surroundings or that interact with the local community and research their stories.

Besides being ambitious in his artistic pursuits, Kári has another advantage on his side: he is deeply rooted in the local community and maintains an ongoing informal conversation with the locals on matters concerning the centre. In fact, the centre stemmed from his desire to keep the community together and make it livelier. The relationship between them is reciprocal. "The local inhabitants attend our events in great numbers as this community understands that, without them, The Freezer would not exist... This gives locals a big sense of ownership over the work we do and this pride translates into us usually getting a lot of people from all over to see our work and our runs being longer than most of the other independent theatre in Iceland," says Kári.

More about The Freezer and its exciting activities, as well as its successful collaborations with local organisations and the municipality – in Annex A, case study IDD 145.

Despite the variety of approaches to making living arts in rural areas, certain patterns can be drawn to help identify common challenges, solutions and methods that should inform any policy changes aimed at facilitating the creation of contemporary arts in rural areas.



Photo: Freezer Center

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR LIVING ARTS IN RURAL AREAS

The above-mentioned IETM Arts in rural areas survey, collecting over 140 cases of arts in rurality, asked contributors to share their perceptions of the particular challenges and impediments they meet when working in rural areas.

Scarce funding is only one of the challenges cited by art practitioners but the most commonly cited nonetheless. We would note both the diminishing of arts funding overall, as well as the disparity of funding levels with urban areas. There can also be a scarcity of other viable sources from which to fundraise (e.g. businesses, wealthier patrons). To give broader context to this, and focusing on the UK momentarily, there has been an acknowledgement of this fact by Arts Council England. They have undertaken a [rural evidence and data review](#) finding that “less than 3% (£40.1m) of Arts Council England’s total funding for revenue funded organisations (NPOs in receipt of £1.6bn) goes to rural areas ... despite 18% of the English population living in these parts of the country. But levels of rural arts participation and attendance were found to be higher than in urban areas.”¹⁰

But why would artists touring or creating art in rural areas need more funds if they (kind of) tend to make more ‘intimate’, small-scale works for fewer audiences? The answers are in the specifics of rurality itself and they lead into the broader issues that artists and art organisations meet when creating, touring, and developing audiences in rural areas. One major challenge can be that rural areas have relatively **low levels of cultural participation, low levels of cultural infrastructure**, or both, which further exacerbates other challenges. Many art practitioners regularly cite the relative lack of infrastructure, be that civic or arts-related (e.g. the cost and infrequency of public transport, or lack of dedicated rehearsal or creation spaces). Within that frame, some also question whether it is harder to attract and retain talent, or indeed whether there are times it is appealing as a form of retreat for those not from those places. Influential urban theorist Richard Florida of CityLab states: “Ultimately, Wojan and company’s analysis finds a strong statistical association between the arts, innovation, and economic dynamism in rural areas [of the USA]. And this leads them to conclude that the arts are a direct force in rural innovation, not just an indirect factor that helps to attract and retain talent.”

There can be **tensions with regard to ‘incomers’** – whether arriving as an invited guest of the community or a trusted partner, or whether ‘bringing culture to the masses’ more in the vein of a crusader or invader. The latter is of course especially troubling as every place has cultures already, and a strong mentality of ‘they need what we have’ may well be toxic to true relationship building. As with many arts practices, we must also be mindful of the **risks of colonisation or appropriation**, especially in relation to othering, minority language(s) and cultures which are not our own.

Rural or even small city living can offer the opportunity to create culture rather than consume it.

Karen Rosenkranz

Too often, we also hear those involved in arts and rurality – whether publics, artists or stakeholders – warn of the **over-instrumentalisation of art in these contexts**, where it is seen as a potential solution to perceived problems or becomes overly issues-based (e.g. making pieces only in relation to farming, relative isolation, etc.). Art might give grounds for critical and aesthetic reflection, for innovation, yet downgrading it to a mere instrument for solving social tension or attracting outside funds (through festivals, for example) means diminishing its power; and that will inevitably be a drawback for both artists and audiences in the long run.

Local, resident audiences have their own pressing routines of daily life, which are characteristic of rural settings: the seasonal demands of farming, or of having to travel longer distances to get to work. Artists have to abide by these specifics of rural life. Depending on the demographics, many of the rural communities might be perceived as **‘hard to reach audiences’** that are stuck in their place, whether older and having been there most or all of their lives, or younger and having been born there without an obvious route to leave. Of course we add into this mix that some rural areas are overly attractive to tourist audiences – be they day visitors or those on longer trips (in-country or from abroad) – and the balancing of all these different types of peoples within a community can be a strain. In short, there is a need to manage expectations on both sides – both for the artist / arts organisation and the publics / host communities.

¹⁰ | Jonathan Knott, ‘Five Years Left For Rural Arts?’, *ArtsProfessional*, 5 September 2019.

SOLUTIONS AND POLICY CHANGES THAT WORK

Acknowledging these challenges, we are most interested in the solutions artists and organisations have found in their practices to overcome these and other problems in order to build vibrant and meaningful relationships around their artworks.

The most obvious of these issues should not be overlooked or understated: **there is a huge difference for those who live and work as artists in their local rural community**; in other words, where they make their practice as resident of, not in residence with, a community. As is clearly seen from the case study of Kári and The Freezer in Iceland, local people need some time to get accustomed to artists in their community, but once they do, and if the artistic work is relevant and meaningful for them, they will come to see events regularly and take part in any artistic endeavours eagerly. Furthermore, the local government body will recognise the significance of such a fruitful art practice and will be open to collaborations.

There is a key importance too in bringing local and regional perspectives and voices to national and international stages and narratives, **ensuring voices are heard from regions across the country and beyond, internationally**. The already mentioned performance *We, Pig Country*, developed for the province of West Flanders, has been shown on major stages in Amsterdam, Brussels and other cities.

One active solution is also about starting with **people** wherever they are, **as leaders, participants and co-creators**. The UK-based and globally active *Fun Palaces*, or a scheme like *Creative Civic Change* where local people are active agents of change, as providers of solutions, and as active co-creators, are convincing examples of the positive outcomes of giving local people agency over artistic and production processes.

Two further solutions we are exploring here in Wales are the potential impact of located producers, i.e. producers being based locally/regionally, and producers at the junction of venues, artists/organisations and publics. Similarly, the long-established rural touring network *Night Out / Noson Allan* addresses economies of scale, arts access in rural areas, and more. In all of these examples, we see that collaboration with the local community on the project is about them having real agency, not about us bringing know-how from outside.

"It is extremely important for us to work together with locals and not to take something away from them that is selfishly transformed by the artists."

[Pro Progressione Hungary, Budapest IDD 102]

There may also be wins if there are **longer leads for planning and research, and if there is time to live in and get to know the local community**, build conversations and trust, access alternative **networks**, and move towards more sustainable practices, outcomes and impacts. One thing we found especially effective in this area was to ask questions and listen more than we talked, and to find other things to do together that supported our integration, like going to the darts competition in the caravan park, attending a history society talk, meeting the head teacher at an open day – living the local life.

On many occasions, solutions for hard to overcome challenges, like the lack of rehearsal or performing venues, insufficient funding, or logistical difficulties are found through partnerships with key **local stakeholders, ambassadors or volunteers**.

As the respondent to the IETM survey from Hungary-based company Pro Progressione explained, finding a local contact person to take care of the logistics proved to be a fair solution: "Our local contacts helped us in finding participants, accommodation, etc. and to make all the necessary steps before the tour has started. They will also be present in the location during our stay in order to help us – which is building their capacities as well, hopefully having the effect of them taking the initiative to set up their own projects in the future." (See Annex A, Case Study ID 102)

This leads us to wonder about what policy changes might be beneficial for art in rural areas.

No doubt, there has to be better funding, not just to have parity with that of urban areas (relative to population density) but so that there might be further additional resources for rural areas based on the many challenges and potential solutions outlined above. At both funding and policy levels it is urgent and important that there are acknowledgements for the specifics of making art in rural areas: it takes time, effort and dedication; and long-term sustainability is needed for positive outcomes to flourish.

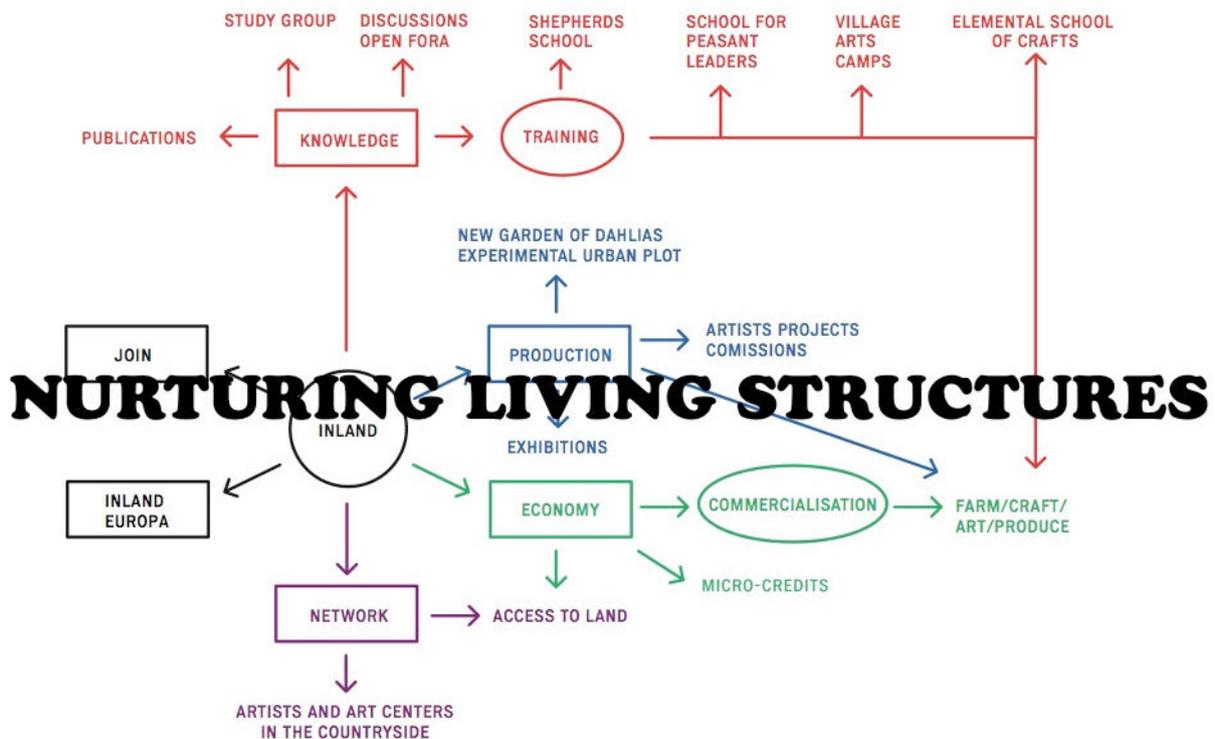
There are of course other areas of consideration too. One might be an improved understanding of the needs and conditions for arts in rural areas, gained through an open dialogue with practitioners. There must also be practical policies for younger people, especially concerning education, skills and employment, their access needs, and more.

Also there are key policy considerations in each of these specific areas where arts and rural issues may intersect with other policies and local or national governmental departments, including and not limited to:

- Arts and health, including cross-sectoral initiatives like dance sessions for older people to help with physical stability, increase physical independence, and reduce likelihood of falls.
- Local and circular economies, keeping investment largely in the places where it is made.
- Transport, including the potential of a performance ticket that covers the cost of public transport to attend, and timetables (arrival and departure times) lining up well with the timing of the event.
- Tourism, including how to sustainably attract people to a locality that may have limited local infrastructure (like roads, hotels, etc.) without damaging the local population or environment.

Many of these issues can be addressed through open dialogue with practitioners and though the usual methods of effecting policy change: peer-reviewed academic research and impact studies, documentation and archives, specialist networks ranging from the local to the international, conferences and sharings, digital access and distribution, advocacy and campaigning, etc.

For anyone wanting to dig more deeply, the magazine ArtsProfessional did a whole issue (311) on art in rural areas, examining the realities, the pros and cons, and more, through articles on rural funding, audience research, cultural diversity, creation, production and touring, with pieces by the National Rural Touring Forum, Clod Ensemble, The Audience Agency, and University of Lincoln, among others.





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4

APPENDIX A

Case Studies

Even A Week-long Residency Can Make 4A Difference At A Small Town

IDD 10



BETWEEN THE SEAS: MEDITERRANEAN RESIDENCY IN MONEMVASIA (GREECE)

Between The Seas,

Monemvasia, Greece

Since 2017, Between the Seas artistic residency takes place every September in the heritage castle town of Monemvasia, in Southern Greece. It is a small town in the Southern tip of the Peloponnese with no more than 100 inhabitants in the winter. This number rises in the summer months thanks to tourism, albeit Monemvasia is not a widely known touristic site but a tiny town secluded in a very rural, agricultural region. This specific location and landscape of the castletown were among the reasons to choose the place for a residency that nurtures contemporary artistic creation.

Every year approximately 3 artists or groups in the field of performing arts (dance, theatre, music) are selected from across the Mediterranean region to develop a new project or deepen their work on an existing project. Each artist is offered accommodation and studio space for one week. At the end of the residency artists share their work with the local community in one of the open air spaces inside the castle. In the course of the residency some artists are invited to offer workshops for the local community. This is the first and only international, cross-cultural event happening in the region and it has so far been received enthusiastically by the local community.

Why? How can a short one-week residency get the attention and the involvement of the local people?

First of all, it is the specifics of the place: the town is so small that locals and artists get to know each other within a couple of days. Then, the team of Between the Seas (BTS) start the information campaign about the coming residency, performance, workshops and public performances/discussions several weeks ahead, through flyers, social media, press and word of mouth. Local businesses, interested residents, the partnership with Kimothoi, the local educational community-based centre help in disseminating the information and building up interest.

A crucial part of the targeted approach of BTS to engage the local people have been the workshops in modern dance and in circus and juggling with local participants between the ages of 12-30. Both of them were met with enthusiasm and the participants expressed desire for more such opportunities. And here's what the BTS team testifies:

“What we observed was that the workshops nurtured a closer relationship between participants and artists and a greater understanding on the part of the participants for the work of the artists and for art forms that they might not be familiar with. Similarly the artists’ feedback was that they found their time with the students very meaningful and rewarding.”

Why do the citizens of Monemvasia gradually develop an interest in modern dance or any contemporary performing arts practices?

The typical artistic offer in the region is amateur theater, local artists, folkloric spectacles, large scale concerts with “brand names” from Athens. In recent years, though, young, independent artists in the performing and visual arts visiting or living in Monemvasia are making systematic efforts to present contemporary work on the amateur or the professional level and offer professional level educational programs in dance and theatre for young people and adults. The residency breaks new grounds because it brings and presents emerging and mid-career international artists recognised in their own countries and internationally, who offer world-class performances, techniques and teaching methods - for instance choreographers Rachel Erdos, Ravid Abarbanel, Paula Quintana or musician composer Andreas Arnold.

So, many of the local audience members share that they had never seen anything similar before and yet that they loved the experience. The BTS team has observed that as they get exposed to more performances, audiences get more emboldened to ask questions and engage in discussion with the artists. Many of the spectators return from week to week and from year to year, stating that they have been looking for the events to happen again next year. Why do they like it? Perhaps, it is a combination of the novelty of the offer, the aspiring artistic quality of the productions, the satisfaction of knowing that international artists come to your small town, the opportunity to meet the resident artists informally, to get to know them better... may be all this builds for the growing taste in such kind of art.

Yet, developing an understanding and fondness into any artform needs time and deliberate efforts. The BTS team share they would gladly make the residencies longer, but for now, they cannot afford that financially. The residency takes place only in September and for the rest of the year, the Kimothoi centre offers educational programs for children, youth and adults and stages performances with students. And there are the local artists who continue to develop their contemporary performing art pieces for the local audiences.

Why ‘participation’ is not a panacea?

‘Participation’ and ‘co-creation’ have become buzz-words in audience development in the recent years and funders kind of expect that from any art project that would be undertaken in ‘hard to reach’ groups, as rural communities are often defined. At the same time, many artists sincerely embrace these practices as an open and democratic way to make art nowadays. But are they applicable in any context? Rather not, argues Aktina Stathaki from the BTS team: “My observation has been that while local people are very eager to participate as audiences, it is harder to engage them as participants or co-creators. The reasons may be practical (ie time of the year, language barriers) but also cultural - for the local community sharing personal material is not something they are used to or, presumably, interested in.”

Therefore, visiting artists should not assume that the local people would openly and easily provide personal material for artistic creation or become co-creators as that might go against their daily ethos and culture. “It seems to me that local communities feel they gain so much by meeting cultures, languages, artists and art forms they have not encountered before.”, Aktina shares.



Photo: *Between The Seas*

Artistic residency at Massia reimagines the future of urban and rural living

IDD 27



PUNCTUM'S PUBLIC COOLING HOUSE

Punctum

Victoria, Australia

Other Project Links

- [Video](#)
- [Booklet](#)

Started in 2018, The Public Cooling House is an ongoing project of the Australian live arts company Punctum. It has been developed in partnership with the Regional Centre of Culture - Victoria, Creative Victoria, Regional Arts Victoria, Mount Alexander Shire Council.

The project combines devising a simple structure without any use of nails, designed in Australian and Arab ancient evaporative cooling techniques. The cooling house is placed in public space, accompanied by a program of live performances and talks from a broad cross section of professionals including farmers, medical practitioners, research horticulturists, and architects. It opens perspectives to the region's water future in a context of climate change.

As Jude Anderson, the artistic director of Punctum, who presented the project for the IETM Art in rural areas survey explained, wherever the public cooling house has been set up, it drew audiences and participants of all ages and all walks of life, farmers, climate scientists, designers, performers, engineers, musicians, school groups, architects. It appeared that the design and performance practice of the project resonated deeply with people from a wide spread of cultural backgrounds. As such it has been programmed in a variety of contexts - from singular events in rural areas to international festivals. It also opens the way for conversations from design and bio-mimicry to future climate scenarios, while the contemporary performance programme communicates on an emotional and aesthetic level with the audiences and the participants.

The project has received professional acclaim, being featured in the 2019 Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design among others, and has secured local and state government grants, as well as philanthropic donations, but what Punctum cherish the most is the warm response from the numerous visitors and participants; and the hope of a risen awareness for the most cherished resource on our planet: our water.

A seasoned independent performing arts creator herself, with working experience across four continents: Australia, Europe, North and South America, Jude briefly summarised the most pending challenges for performing arts in non-urban Australia.

- In Australia in particular, the distance between towns and cities makes touring very expensive and entailing complex logistics - which means creating more work in situ.

- A still current colonialist model of programming and touring is orientated to support cultural institutions in rural and regional areas with the presentation of works devised by metropolitan companies - rather than supporting them in creation of their own works.

- Audiences and participants from rural areas seem less confident in their articulation of cultural experiences. They also tend to be more 'time poor' than is generally assumed.
- The rise of Airbnb might lower costs for touring in big cities but in rural towns it means accommodation for artists and production teams is increasingly expensive.

Each of these challenges calls for creative solutions and artists working in rural / remote Australia have established what works best for them. Paying extra attention and taking extra effort in project design and project management is a must if one has to cater for increased costs, transport and supplier logistics in these regions. In order to secure at least the chance of attendance, artists have to take into account local seasonal occupations and calendar of events when they prepare their programmes and events. In terms of local audiences, the provision of post event refreshments and a space for discussions/ conversations and debates helps a lot for building trust and a sense of ownership of the event. Engaging locally based 'arts ambassadors', supplying them with material that enables them to have conversations with others long before the event takes place raises the chances for local community involvement and building a genuine interest in the work. Certain clever moves can be handy when tackling logistic issues, for instance, find local accommodation champions and provide them with free entry to the events along with paying for accommodating the artists.

If artists want to achieve better conditions for working in rural and remote areas, they have to be active on a policy level as well, Jude believes. "Attend as many policy forums on touring to advocate for a touring model that takes into account the benefits that arise from supporting a more complex, regionally based contemporary arts ecology," she says.

Jude was kind to share her vision how policy makers can better support art in rural areas, in four points:

1. Support a complex view of creating, producing and touring in regional, rural and remote settings locally, nationally and internationally.
2. Give support for an enriched cultural ecology that enables supply and demand streams to be developed across regions nationally and internationally.
3. Support artists practicing in regional, rural and remote settings to ensure their work is created within a level playing field.
4. Support presenters, programmers and commissioners who seek to meet with and experience the work of artists practicing regionally."

Nailed it.



Photo: Punctum



Photo: Punctum

“There are no nails” – a cooling house as a common space to contemplate our future

IDD 22



THE COUNTRYSIDE OF THE FUTURE - MASSIA (EST)

Massia/ Sébastien Hendrickx

Pärnu County, Estonia

Other Project Links

- [Video](#)
- [Instagram](#)

MASSIA residency is located in an old school in Massiaru, a village in Häädemeste Parish, Pärnu County in southwestern Estonia. The location is about 180 km from Tallinn, and about 140 km from Riga (Latvia). It takes full advantage of the place and its surroundings. Trips to the nearby coastline and the natural reserve are part of the programme for resident artists, along with the medicinal herb garden and the spacious building, once the village school, now offering commodities to up to 30 resident artists at a time. It is open for individuals or groups from any field – artists, activists, researchers, practitioners, scientists etc. – who research and determine their own modes of work and knowledge production.

MASSIA is a self-governed autonomous space for artistic experiment and risk. “MASSIA tries to stress the notions of self-organisation and autonomy in an hospitable and easily accessible building in order to survive prosperously in the absence of

authority and surveillance.”, states the explanation at the residency website. The building has almost no staff, there is no application procedure, everyone is welcome to stay and work at the residency under the condition they will keep and leave the premises the way they have found them: “give the building, this instrument back to itself that it can be used by others and stay in this mode of constant becoming”.

One of the projects at this autonomous residency is dedicated to rethinking the countryside of the future. In the autumn of 2019 an eight days working programme kickstarted a research into and imagining a possible future countryside, an exploration of aesthetics on the borders between nature, culture and the wild, innovations and eroding traditions.

The Countryside of the Future was a collaboration between MASSIA and Extinction Rebellion Belgium and involved experts from XR Eesti (EST), Tartu University (EST) and FoAM Brussels (BE). Interested thinkers, artists, activists, writers from Estonia and abroad were invited to join (train travels being encouraged instead of flying by plane).

Here are the starting points and the topics of the research and experiment programme, introduced by Sébastien Hendrickx, one of its curators:

“Futurity is a category under pressure, especially in times of climate change. Only seldom has it been brought in relation to the countryside. The modern locus of the future was the city, which further stimulated a political divide between urban and rural citizens still persistent today - also in Estonia, if we look at the recent elections. Worldwide urbanisation generated depopulated areas: how to re-think them? A specific ideology of progress has led to an erosion of traditional practices and knowledge - cultures we could be in need of again quite soon in the new climate regime. On an EU level, agriculture’s interests are often pitted against the environment’s.

How to think of them together, on the crossroads of nature, culture and wilderness? And what could art have to do with all of this?

Could we imagine a terrestrial aesthetics, not enclosed within the local, nor uncritically immersed in the global? Earthly, experimental, queer, open, hospitable, risky, messy, strange?”

Art opens debate and conversation for a better living

IDD 61



MEETINGS is a four-year video and performance project taking place in rural Central and West Jutland, Denmark, 2016-19. It provides the framework for entirely new networks and meetings. It encourages encounters between international contemporary artists and the localities of Central and Western Jutland and the people living there, through the creation of a number of new video and performance works that take the everyday lives of local people as their starting points.

Within the project activities, ET4U invited international artists for residences who created new video and performance works dealing with, taking place in, and produced in the meeting with the local area. The works are new artistic reflections on the area seen from the outside. MEETINGS creates art related to where we live, and the works are shown in untraditional places and locations in Central and West Jutland such as barns, stables, abandoned houses etc.

MEETINGS

ET4U (a non-profit artist-run association)

Denmark, Lemvig Municipality

Other project Links

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Catalogue of MEETINGS 2017](#)

The aims of ET4U are to show high quality international contemporary visual arts in West Jutland, to be a forum for debate and to create networks among artists. So, the primary audience for MEETINGS are the citizens living in Central and West Jutland, along with Danish and international artists, and any visitors of the region as well.

MEETINGS featured two festivals, in September 2017, and in September, 2019, which presented the new video and performance works produced for the project. Both were well visited, also because the resident artists grew close relations with the local community. The 2017 festival edition received a prize for artistic quality by the Danish Arts Foundation.

The project would not be possible without the broad support it received. MEETINGS was funded by the Cultural Agreement for Central and Western Jutland 2015-19 (Ministry of Culture Denmark), Lemvig Municipality, Central Denmark Region, European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017, The Obel Family Foundation, The Danish Arts Foundation, 3F's Media and Culture Fund, and private sponsors. Yet the greatest contribution for the project's success should be credited to the keen response from all the local partners, communities, organisations, institutions, local businesses, and individuals involved on all levels of the MEETINGS project.

Resident artists arrived for a week of initial visits – to get introduced to the area, the people and the local topics. A public meeting was organised at which the artists have presented themselves and their practice and where people from the local community have presented themselves and introduced to different aspects of the local area. Often ideas for the artists' projects have started developing already out of these meetings, and the artists as well as people from the area have started looking forward to the residencies. During the residencies the artists were accepted as the 'new neighbours' in the local community and could further the processes that started at the initial meeting. The artists were 'the experts' when it comes to the art work, and the people in the local community were 'the experts' when it comes to the area, and both parts were necessary for creating the new art works. Later on, at the MEETINGS festival editions, the local people opened up their communal and private properties to host the video presentations and the performance works.

ET4U are positive about the obvious impacts of these encounters: "Personal meetings and collaborations between the artists and the local communities created a better understanding and patience with the other part, and it's a unique access to the art works for new audiences who are not familiar with contemporary arts." And when speaking of contemporary art in rural areas, ET4U, with their 20 years of experience, are someone whose expertise is worth taking into account. Their work in rural areas where access to contemporary art is usually scarce, has proved that artists have to change their practice of art presentation from exhibitions in a gallery spaces to initiating participatory art projects in the public space, in collaboration with the local communities. "We want to share with our neighbours the experience of contemporary arts and go behind the prejudices of it. And we want to share with our artist colleagues the experience of life in a rural area and also go behind the prejudices of that. The actual personal meeting between real people and the collaborations between urban based artists and rural based communities are the essential points as we see it."

Art that opens debate and conversation definitely has a place in the rurality as it stimulates new creative ideas for a better life.

And here is what a local farmer round table evaluation: "I was brought up to think that art is something that hangs on the wall. But art is different, and when you see something like this it gets you thinking in different ways – and I think that's fantastic!"



Photo: Meetings

Art as a platform to raise your voice

IDD 64



ART OF EMPOWERMENT, PART OF THE BËNGBE BENACHENG RESEARCH PROJECT

Jully Acuña Suárez & Marcelo Marques Miranda

(Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University)

Sibundoy, Colombia

Marcelo Miranda and Jully Acuña Suárez, leaders of the Art of empowerment project at Sibundoy, a municipality in the Putumayo district of the Republic of Colombia, described the region as being neglected by the central government, strongly influenced by the Church, suffering from censorship and brutal acts of police violence towards the indigenous inhabitants. In such a precarious situation, in 2017, the Art of empowerment project based on research of the cultural heritage of the indigenous Sibundoy Camëntsá people, started its development. As its initiators, researchers Jully Acuña Suárez and Marcelo Marques Miranda, have stated, the project intends to “represent the community in its contemporary context and challenge colonial precepts in art and mainstream archaeological and museum practices and sparkle a missing and much needed intercultural dialogue”.

By using participatory art practices, the project aims at challenging those colonial perceptions of indigenous art as primitive and exotic craftsmanship which is exhibited in museums as trophies, decontextualized and desacralised. More specifically, the artistic and research team of the project collaborates with the local community to critically address cultural policy, the local government-managed museum, the way it displays human remains, and to co-curate new exhibitions based on the Camëntsá's people own interpretation of history, material culture, archaeological and sacred sites, territory, development. They also intend to challenge local concepts of art and tradition and sparkle a debate on colonisation and indigenous identity as many do not accept contemporary art as “indigenous art” because it escapes the art canons imposed by the Catholic church during colonisation. Thus, art is confused with “tradition” and lays the foundation for the Camëntsá people to self-identify with an exotic, primitive and allochronic existence fashioned by the West.

The main artistic goal of the project is to create a huge participatory artwork that will cover the main square of Sibundoy, a sacred place for the Camëntsá people. “The artwork will be made out of textiles by several indigenous artists and will represent the ancestral knowledge of the Camëntsá people. Hopefully, this will raise awareness on the historic and contemporary issues the Camëntsás have been facing and lay the foundations for a debate on (neo)colonialism, (neo)extractivism, and human and collective rights.”, IETM survey respondent explained.

The target audiences of the project are local indigenous people and settlers, but also on a broader national and international level, academics, artists and the general public.

The project is developed in collaboration with local NGO's and indigenous leaders. The overall research project on cultural heritage is funded by the British Museum and the Gerda Henkel Foundation. It is supported by the British Museum's Santo Domingo Centre of Excellence for Latin American Research, where the results will be exhibited. Despite the broad institutional support the project will never succeed without local collaboration and support. The willingness of the local people to participate in the artistic activities and raise awareness among governments about the issues tackled in the project will gradually power their understanding that arts and culture can provide a platform to speak and to search for better life opportunities.

Photo - *The copyright belongs to Jully, me and Colectivo Ayentš, a collective of 12 Camëntsá researchers and artists.*

You have to make ambitious art if you work in such a small community!

IDD 78



LATITUDE 50, CENTRE FOR STREET ARTS AND CIRCUS

Latitude 50

Marchin, Belgium

Other project Links

- [Facebook](#)
- [Flickr](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Youtube](#)

Installed in a rural area and enriched by its numerous partnerships, for the past 15 years of its existence, Latitude 50 represents a space of permanent creativity, imagination and exchange. A village, a town square, artist digs, a stage decor workshop, rehearsal halls, a restaurant, and the serenity of the rural life... this is the landscape of Latitude 50.

As a centre of circus and street arts, each year Latitude 50 hosts a dozen of performances, co-organises the free street art festival, Les Unes Fois d'un Soir in Huy, and provides residency space to art companies developing their new creation. Every season about

150 artists arrive at the centre to work on their own shows. In partnership with SACD, SSA, La Chaufferie- Acte1, it offers the "Ecriture en Campagne" grant to support artists in their artistic creation. This allows each season three to five companies to develop their performances at the residency. Latitude 50 assists them in every aspect of creation: rehearsal venues and accommodation for the artists, company management, production management, communication, audience development and so on.

Latitude 50 also gives the opportunity for meetings and exchange between the companies and the local people through work in progress presentations. There is a dedicated team member who takes care to maintain communication with the local community. Whenever possible, the companies at the residency present their work in progress and hold workshops. Some of the venues at the Latitude 50 premises are available for rent to the citizens of Marchin. Since 2018, the premises of Latitude 50 are open at lunchtime five days a week.

Latitude 50 is in contact with the local schools and in result, many children learn circus techniques as a hobby.

Since 2018, Latitude 50 has been recognised as the scenic centre of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, which gives recognition to both its activities for the public and those serving professionals of the circus and street art sector.

Latitude 50 attracts various kinds of audiences: local people with cultural sensibility, connoisseurs from all over Belgium and art professionals. Over the years, Latitude 50 has gained bigger and bigger audiences, around 35000 each year. The audience of the festival Les Unes Fois d'Un Soir is, by the nature of the event, much more diverse: people who are not especially fond of art but visit the festival because they perceive it as a nice family activity, and, of course also the audiences of Latitude 50, connoisseurs and professionals.

In a near future, Latitude 50 plans a new solid building especially designed to host circus creation and events.

A dance connected with the imagination

IDD 85



THE JOURNEY, A DANCE-MUSIC PROJECT CONNECTING TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE (2011-2020 AND BEYOND)

Materias Diversos

Portugal, and internationally

Other project Links

- [Video](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Pictures](#)

Initiated in 2011, The Journey is an ongoing dance-music project that connects local traditional dance with contemporary dance practices. Bringing together amateur dancers from rural communities and professional contemporary dance practitioners. It involves a period of creative residency and culminates in a public performance. Participants learn from one another as they draw connections between contemporary and traditional dance and music.

50 people, aged 4 to 80, embarked on this journey only having prior experience in traditional dance. Not one person among them had ever seen a contemporary dance performance.

“It was very difficult with the first group”, Filipa Francisco, the lead choreographer in the project and respondent to the IETM Art in rural areas survey, recalled. People were anxious that the artists could be disrespectful to their dances, wanting to change them. They had difficulties with the floor work, with certain dance choreographies (in fandango for instance it is not usual to have two women dancing together). In touching and looking in the eyes, in relaxing. “We had difficulties in communicating. But by constantly speaking and listening, we established an atmosphere of mutual respect.” Filipa recollected.

Seven years of experience have taught both artists and participants to communicate, but the idea of improvising, creating together, not knowing what is the final result is still a frightening place for the groups when they enter this project. Once participants overcame their fear of experimenting and as they felt their ‘culture’ was respected, they plunged into the project with obvious pleasure. A participant told Filipa that “...we are learning your steps and you are learning ours. But yours are connected to our imagination”.

For her part, Filipa frames the major outcomes of the project in terms of empowerment: “Working with these groups is also giving voice and visibility to them, to the margins. To put these groups in nice theatres, on a professional stage, with microphones is a way of saying: yes you do, you deserve it! Creating together is a way of saying your voice is important. Opening a space for improvisation is a way of saying your imagination is important. Working with contemporary dance is a way of saying tradition can live in the present”.

Some surprising and important outcomes of the project are that:

- Having in mind the precarious working conditions for arts in rural areas, the project is still running;
- The groups who took part in the project, invited the artists in return twice to their own Traditional Dance Festival;
- Some participants still do the warm up they have learnt from the classes in the project;
- Some learned about how to look each other while dancing and use that;
- They speak about the project with the artists and to each other;
- They go to see each other performances;
- The idea of making a documentary film has been circulation for some time;
- The participants learned new ways how to work with young people;
- Some have discovered a new talent (an 80 years old participant, improvising for the first time, happy to realise that is never late to learn and try new things);
- Some participants started dancing more, even in their homes or doing their farming chores;
- Both artists and participants realised that dance is about hard work, respect and affection – and become a new affectionate caring community.

Work together with the locals, do not take their story away from them

IDD 102



PLAY! MOBILE

Collaboration led by Pro Progressione and partners MAGMA (RO), Kulturanova (RS), di mini teatro (FR), Meet Lab (HU)

Serbia, Romania, France and Hungary

Other project Links

– [Video](#)

“Play! MOBILE (2018-2019) is an international Creative Europe collaboration project between organisations from Serbia, Romania, France and Hungary led by Pro Progressione (HU). The four partners were driven by the common belief that community art practice, the creation of modifiable site-specific installations and the development of a participatory game as a platform for interaction between artist-artefact and the public offers a nuanced and inclusive way for capacity building and development of new audiences.

The project encouraged cultural participation by touring the micro regions of Europe. The project’s international team of multidisciplinary artists visited 12 settlements in the four partner countries where devised, together with local communities, stories and narratives that were meaningful and important in the life of the locals. This added an important layer to the creative structure offered by the artists and turned the installations and the theatre adventure game into a unique and site-specific participation-based art piece on each site.

By turning public spaces of the visited settlements into playgrounds for contemporary art, the project team aimed to create an alternative way of cultural consumption, a methodology to present contemporary artworks without the necessity of having all the satisfactory infrastructure. Furthermore, the project proved that the usage of public spaces both as space of rehearsal, promotion, creation and performance space contributes to the transparency of the process for the audience and helps building trust; for a trusted relationship is the foundation for involvement of local participants in the artistic creation that demolishes the visible and invisible walls between art and viewer, artist and audience.

Wherever the artistic team went, they engaged with people who are usually not accustomed to reception of contemporary art - especially not of something that specifically needs their contribution - and through involvement in a participatory game, turned them into keen audiences.

“We believe that art should be accessible to everyone regardless of gender, economic status, age or geographical position. Contemporary art should be available and created not only in the existing cultural hubs, but also on the micro-regions. Play! MOBILE wishes to offer a solution for this phenomenon by making contemporary art available anywhere to anyone.”, the team behind Play! MOBILE states.

Contemplating on the ‘bottlenecks’ this international collaborative project s had to undergo, the team outlined as a major challenge reaching people beyond access. Distance - both geographical and that of lifestyle and cultural consumption patterns - was the primary issue they had to tackle when working in rural areas. The team members have observed that in rural areas people often tend to have strict and deeply anchored ideas, which are not easy to shift, on what ‘art’ and ‘theatre’ have to be and it is even harder with their initial approach to interactive and contemporary creation as something distant, abstract and mostly unnecessary.

Finding an engaged local contact way before arrival solved most of the issues with logistics. Local contacts at the settlements helped in finding participants, accommodation, etc. and to make all the necessary steps before the implementation of the tour has started. They assisted the creative team during their stay - which contributed to building their capacities as well, hopefully having the effect of them taking the initiative to set up their own projects in the future.

As for overcoming cultural differences and bias, it was the artists who were responsible to ‘go the extra mile’: “An important detail is what we mediate to the locals, how we put our intentions into words and what is our attitude. It is extremely important for us to work together with the locals and not to take something away from them that is selfishly transformed by the artists.”

It is typical for the fast pace of large-scale collaborative projects to quickly outline the main impediments that need improvement, both in project design and in working environment. The team behind Play! MOBILE outlined several recommendations regarding needed policy changes to foster the development of such artistic projects in the countryside. Cultural organisations and independent artists should have more opportunities (calls, network of villages, organisations and artists, etc.) to create or take part in cultural programmes. It would be helpful to activate artists to look for unseen possibilities in the micro regions by promoting such actions and raising awareness on the dynamism of interdisciplinary art projects in civic communities. It is important to make these calls and opportunities are not exclusive and are formulated and disseminated in a way that makes them accessible for the civils and cultural operators of small, rural, and detached settlements as well.



Photo: Play! MOBILE



Photo: Play! MOBILE



Photo: Play! MOBILE

Taking interdisciplinarity in the core of the artistic practice

IDD 105



EARTHWISE RESIDENCY CENTRE

Secret Hotel

A small village near Mols Hills national park,

Denmark

Other project Links

- [Earthbound](#)
- [Trailer for "Vandringsforelæsning om myrer"](#)

Christine Fentz and the participatory performing arts company Secret Hotel have been facilitating residency activities at Christine's farm and home since 2014. The residency is open for artists working on 'green' topics, turning the focus on any – not just human - inhabitants of the planet, on landscape, land, territory, climate issues, etc. Secret Hotel encourages interdisciplinary work, therefore scientists working in these spheres are welcome at the residency too.

Splitting its activities between Aarhus, the residency village, and international networking and collaborations, the Secret Hotel company develops participatory projects exploring the pressing topics of climate change, sustainability and the future of our planet, which take inspiration from the rural artistic residency.

For instance, in 2018 the residency hosted the first edition of the international symposium [EARTHBOUND – The Multispecies Paradigm Shift](#) to delve into any topics concerning the planet's wellbeing. The three-day interdisciplinary programme was developed in collaboration with School of Communication & Culture – Aarhus University, Aarhus Performing Arts Platform, Institute of Meals Ebeltoft, and AURA – Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene and gathered together performing artists, visual artists, biologists, anthropologists, landscape historians, human geographers, philosophers, researchers of science & technology and all other citizens with an interest in this essential topics. As presented in the announcement, the programme consisted of "various performances and work-in-progress, talks and debates, video, sound art, a live concert, morning yoga, two horses, lectures on busses, workshops and locally produced vegetarian/vegan food three times a day". The symposium broadened the horizons both for artists and scientists, and everyone involved by showcasing how the sensitivity of the art can be used for conceptualising the future of the planet and by demonstrating how science can build narratives and transcend in aesthetic gestures.

Next edition of EARTHBOUND is expected in autumn 2020.

An example of the interdisciplinary participatory work created by Secret Hotel is [Walking Lecture on Ants](#). Next, Secret Hotel developed [Banquet for Bees](#), in collaboration with the Hungary-based Pro Progressione whose work in rural settlements has been featured in this case study collection (IDD 102).

Speaking of the challenges experienced in the development of artistic projects in rural areas, even companies in well-developed states as Denmark suffer from funding shortage when it comes to art in rural areas. In order to achieve well-functioning interdisciplinarity of the projects, one has to keep the frames flexible and open for changes, believes Christine, founder and director of Secret Hotel. Unfortunately, current funding programmes rarely allow such flexibility. Sometimes artistic projects created by/ with "non-professionals" are not eligible for funding, which definitely hinders joint interdisciplinary and participatory art projects.

Therefore, art funding for rural areas has to be flexible, interdisciplinary, and participative itself...

Art transforming the valley: positive change starts with the small steps

IDD 125



MONDEGO ART VALLEY - RURAL CREATIVE HUB - RURAL ART WEEKS

Association Dominio vale do Mondego

Faia, Guarda, Portugal, near Serra da Estrela

Nature Park

Other project Links

- [Estival Webite](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Catharina Slighting video](#)
- [Estival 2018 video](#)
- [Estival 2018 video](#)
- [Projections and aria's in Dominio Vale de Mondego, Angel Festival 2010](#)

The ecological domaine Vale do Mondego, situated in a remote valley, surrounded by small villages with an aging population - in a very rural area of central Portugal - functions as a cultural and agrotourist destination since 2008. An important activity of the Association has been the initiation of site-specific artistic projects. The small-scale international art festival, with the participation of numerous artists and locals, has established the domaine as a dynamic centre of art, agriculture and nature. People seem to visit the place for three reasons: to take part in workshops - felting, art, music, yoga, nature exploration, poetry; to spend a few days or a whole holiday at an organic farm, sometimes joining in particular farming activities as herding sheep or harvesting, sharing home cooked dinners; and to participate in guided walks in the Serra. And quite a few visitors go there especially for the annual summer art festival. Besides tourists and art lovers, the domaine has hosted groups of students on a natural leadership programme, an international course on beekeeping, and an international conference on Nature 2000, among others.

In the last few years the Association seeks to extend its activities in collaboration with cultural organisations, art institutions, and international independent artists by developing art projects at remote locations in the area, counting on the participation of the local community and focusing on the natural environment...

To achieve this, the Association has to change from an inward-oriented organisation doing site-specific works to an outgoing professional initiator, who is sharing knowledge and expertise, working on location, with local communities and resident artists, within an extraordinary nature, promoting remote natural and cultural heritage, building new cross-border relations and attracting alternative tourists. It has to become a rural creative hub...

Historically, art and art centres are situated in the cities, within the urban context: there you find the national museums, the grand theatres as well as the alternative stages, the avant-garde galleries and the famous concert halls. The last decade witnesses the growth of large scale festivals and international blockbuster exhibitions as an important tool for city marketing. And the last urban trend is the evolution of FabLabs, Impact Hubs and Creative Spaces for digital nomads, creatives, designers, architects and multidisciplinary artists. The city is the place to be, for art, artists and art lovers.

Then why setting up a rural creative hub? - The rurality needs art, artists and art lovers too - in order to reverse the trend of high unemployment, abandoned farms, decreasing populations and dilapidating traditional buildings, we need to re-discover the rural territory countryside again, to revalue its qualities, to renegotiate its relevance. Artists and creatives give new meaning and significance to old traditions, redefining spaces, intervening in everyday life.

So, to accomplish this vision for a positive change through arts and creativity, Association Dominio Vale do Mondego has undertaken a series of coordinated activities. It has established an artistic residency, workshops, rural art festival, rural weeks... These activities allow for the three main target groups – artists, locals, visitors/tourists/ participants – to interact with each other.

Catharina Sligting, the artistic director of the Association, shared a detailed description of these groups, namely artists, participants, and local citizens, through the IETM Art in rural areas survey.

Artists comprise of national and international professionals of various disciplines (location theatre, site-specific performances & public interventions, street dance & contemporary circus, land art, community art). They are invited for residencies at the domaine, from 2 weeks to 2 months duration, where they can work on location, in nature, on the farm, in the community. Artists can engage in cooperation, collaboration and co-creation on an international level. Artistic groups and individuals benefit from having a space for experimenting, rehearsals, training, exchanging and sharing knowledge, experiences on location and within the community of the domaine and of the villages nearby, interaction with schools and regional institutions.

Participants in the artistic activities usually become amateurs/ semi-professionals who want to improve their skills/knowledge, but also, diverse audience groups: young families, older couples and singles, students, people from different nationalities, culture lovers, nature lovers, and those who want an active and authentic experience; i.e. visitors, interested in sustainability, aware of the issues of climate change, open-minded to other cultures, eager to interchange urban scenes for rural ones.

Locals, obviously, are the people from the communities nearby, who are invited and welcome at the festival, the workshops and any activities going on in the domaine. Local music groups are being invited, regular cultural activities for the primary school are organised. In some art workshops, local people are co-creators of the works of art. "The genuine interest of foreign visitors in the life and work of local people enhance their awareness of the beauty of their living conditions, the uniqueness of their own cultural identity, their pride in their traditions.", Catharina stated.

Speaking of outcomes, Catharina underlined that albeit having artists and participatory projects in the picturesque valley of rural Portugal may seem incredibly romantic, it is a matter of survival.

"We do understand better than anyone that it is a matter of survival to come up with alternative activities that motivate the local people to stay, invest and engage with their communities, and on the other hand, to stimulate visitors to come to stay a while, spend time and money and engage with the locals. Remote and rural locations are dying out because of their perceived unattractiveness to youngsters and the lack of economic subsistence. And the result in the whole of Europe (and worldwide) is the negligence and extensive exploitation of agricultural land with devastating consequences for the nature; along with a permanent loss of cultural heritage and the disintegration of communal life. Reaching out, inspiring with real experiences, transferrable actions, acknowledgment of the peculiar and particular situations: this process is what is social innovation in rural areas is about. If a small Association like us can make this happen in a remote valley in Portugal, then we have a possibility, an opportunity to implement a successful model all over Europe's remote rural areas."

Mondego Art Valley's six guiding principles:

- **Small is beautiful (from Schumacher):** the scale of its localities, the vulnerability of the natural environment and the wish to maintain its authentic character determine the size of the activities and the scope of the Rural Creative Hub.
- **Genius Loci:** The uniqueness of Place is the starting point of any artistic intervention or process. It becomes an integral part of its articulation.
- **Site-specific:** created on location, whether on the farm, in the valley, in the village or high on the mountain ridge.
- **Co-creation:** The Rural Creative Hub functions as a place for encounter, among (international) artists, artists and the regional institutions, with the local communities.
- **All the world is a stage:** the valley, the landscape, the animals, the inhabitants form part of the artistic environment...
- **Leave a trace:** we explicitly request the participating artists of the Rural Creative Hub to leave their mark, in whatever way, to build up a collection.

Go where the people are if you want to make art together

IDD 133



FILMMAKING WORKSHOPS FOR INDIGENOUS FILMMAKERS IN NEPAL, 2019

Asmita Shrish Freelance Artist/Filmmaker

with the support of Nepal Magar Filmmaking

Association, Tanahu Cultural Association,

Sinchi Foundation

Nepal

Asmita Shrish, freelance artist and filmmaker, is the initiator of “Filmmaking Workshops for Indigenous Filmmakers in Nepal, 2019”, a demanding project made possible in cooperation with Nepal Magar Filmmaking Association and funded by the British Council.

Most of the indigenous people in the scope of the project live in remote and rural areas and make a living out of subsistence farming. Indigenous communities are not well represented in politics and the government of modern Nepal, their voice is not being heard. Being an indigenous filmmaker, Asmita Shrish's main mission was to increase the awareness for the local voices by encouraging communication and self-expression through audio/visual storytelling. “When storytelling gets connected with indigenous cultural practices, it becomes personalised and meaningful. Community members feel validated and hence, more engaged to link with their own selves”, Asmita believes.

The workshop was devised to engage young indigenous filmmakers into telling their own stories. For instance, a two days' workshop took place in a small village in Tahanu, densely populated by Magar ethnic group who are known to be the indigenous people of Nepal. It consisted of two parts, Practical art of Filmmaking and Discourse on Storytelling as an empowerment. In the end, the facilitators and the participants made a film together.

Six films exploring themes like gender minority issues, issues of women in a patriarchal world and their struggles, war and sexual violence, endangered cultural heritage were created as a result of the project workshops.

Traditions do not exist by themselves, they have to be communicated, contested, challenged, processed, constructed, and re/invented. All the storytelling workshops of the project were aimed at creating an inclusive environment for participants by discussing their favourite films, some important local stories, folk stories and contemporary stories revolving around Indigenous communities. “Our goal was to create a safe and welcoming space for participants to share their stories and have the opportunity to explore elements of their own identities.”, Asmita explains.

Although the target participants of the workshops were from the population of 125 caste and ethnic groups, comprising Nepal, the short documentaries produced in result are open to wider audiences, and through modern digital technologies, to the global audience.

As for the challenges experienced, Asmita shares: “They cannot be described in few words... One was transport. Sometimes I had to trek 4 days non-stop in quite harsh conditions, from 6 am to 5 pm up to the altitude of 4500 meters. It is physically exhausting up to the point that you cannot even think sometimes. Then, there were communication and connection issues. Of course, there was the inconvenience of lack of sanitation and lack of water as you go up. There was no electricity so if I was to film I had to rely on my batteries. Some villages however do have solar power where we could charge our gadgets”.

Obviously, artists have to be prepared physically and mentally for such challenges when the artistic pursuit leads them to Nepal Himalayas...

Art opens new perspectives of thinking, it is not a mere tool for solving local issues

IDD 140



BÆKKELUND INTERNATIONAL RESIDENCY CENTER FOR ARTISTS/BIRCA

Danig Performing Arts Service

Klemensker, Bornholm, Denmark

Bækkelund International Residency Center for Artists/BIRCA is placed in the rural countryside of the remote Danish island Bornholm. The center has two big spaces and living areas to accommodate research processes for resident performing artists. International collaborations, contemporary dance, new circus, all work experimental – that is the artistic scope of BIRCA. As Susanne Danig, the founder of the residency shares, the place was established in 2017 with the idea to “give artists the possibility of leaning into the quietness and serenity of this place to connect more strongly with their own creativity”.

The island of Bornholm is an interesting place by itself. Situated in the Baltic Sea, the island is a home to about 40 000 inhabitants, but during the summer season, it attracts more than 600 000 tourists. Its main towns are located along the coastline, with museums, music venues, a medieval fortress, restaurants, cafes and such. The island’s main town, Rønne, hosts the oldest still functioning theatre in Denmark, *the Bornholms Teater*. In Nexø, another town on Bornholm, are the workshops and the campus of the *School of Glass and Ceramics*, part of KADK. The Royal Danish academy of fine arts, architecture, design and conservation.

That, as well as the relatively low prices of ex-farming estates has contributed to the growing number of artists who come to live and work on the island.

The challenge to bring experimental pieces to ‘unaccustomed audiences’

The region where BIRCA is located though, the inner part of the island, seems isolated from these invigorating cultural offers. It is a farming region and with the industrialisation of agricultural techniques, it becomes increasingly depopulated. The four villages near BIRCA (about 500 – 700 inhabitants each) have joined efforts to find ways to make their settlements more attractive for people to come and live there. For now, they envisage some sports and recreational facilities and Susanne from BIRCA is searching for ways to bring arts and culture in their agenda as well. Having in mind the advanced experimental nature of the works presented at BIRCA, that would hardly be the first choice of the local people to attend to. “It is difficult to put the focus of artistic development and at the same time, reach out to local audiences. Different tools have to be developed for this and artists have to be interested in engaging with the local population”, admits Susanne. Yet she has a strategy to overcome these difficulties and to make BIRCA an integral part of the cultural life of the island.

Have a plan, allow time for relationships to develop, seek collaboration

“When we opened up in 2017, our focus was on bringing international artists, as well as Danish performing arts professionals, to come and work at our centre”, Susanne recalls. It was crucial to put BIRCA on the world map of artistic residencies that foster advanced art and experimental practices in performing arts. Therefore, BIRCA entered into international networks and collaborative projects, like the IETM network or the Island Connect project, where they collaborate with CINE at Mallorca, Spain, Domino in Croatia, the Irish Aerial Creation Centre in Limerick, Ireland, Entropia in Greece.

In 2018 and 2019, while continuing its international programme, BIRCA actively seeks collaboration with the local artists and art organisations on the island of Bornholm. BIRCA invited local cultural workers and artists along with experts in Danish and Nordic performing arts scene in its advisory board. Resident artists at BIRCA hold open-door events, attended rehearsals and workshops. Susanne makes sure that local art professionals and ‘ordinary’ people are invited and feel welcome at the centre. “Everybody, artists and audiences alike, enjoy the feedback sessions we organise after the open-door events and the performances. It is always inspiring to look at a piece from another person’s point of view, especially if that is an artist from another art field or a non-professional.” Apart from the artistic offer towards the local artistic community, BIRCA hosts workshops on artistic entrepreneurship, performing arts workshops, engages with the local circus group and with other artistic makers.

A stream of activities is directed towards introducing and opening up BIRCA’s artistic offer to the ‘general audience’ of the local communities.

In summer 2019 BIRCA hosted a Contact Zones festival in the nearby city of Gudhjem. It was a street art festival, which attracted the local press attention and was attended by numerous visitors; and BIRCA took the opportunity to introduce new formats like one-to-one and immersive performances, and new topics, like the topic of refugees and what it is to be a stranger. Some of the pieces presented were created by artists from the island. The festival received a lot of positive comments. People were sharing that they did not expect and were not prepared to see what they did but nonetheless, they enjoyed the experience.

Another fruitful collaboration that BIRCA has achieved during these three years of its existence is with the local Bornholms Teater. The theatre features a text-based, more classical type of repertoire and has already built a substantial audience. As its artistic director Jens Svane Boutrup stated many times, Bornholms Teater is making theatre for the locals, not for the tourists. Yet when BIRCA opened, he expressed his interest in finding ways to interact. “He sees the potential of our new circus and dance programme to attract new audiences to the theatre, while we see an opportunity to achieve more visibility in the local community”, Susanne explains their mutual interest. In 2019, Meaninglessness, an experimental piece created at BIRCA by a resident artist from Australia, will be presented on stage at Bornholms Teater.

Live in the community, be open to new ideas, think in long-term perspective

Speaking about engaging the local communities with BIRCA’s activities, Susanne deliberately notes that it should by no means be a forced interchange: “Now, in the third year of our residency programme, we can start opening up towards the local communities. It takes time, it takes building relationships so that we are not regarded as ‘some strange artists doing stuff in that farm by the forest’. Gradually, I spend more time here at BIRCA, shop locally, get involved in the local life. There has to be good communication to build trust and to awaken genuine curiosity for our work so that people actually come and see it. And one has to select carefully which pieces and formats to begin this conversation with...”



Photo: Danig Performing Arts Service

Engaging with the local community should not be forced on the resident artists either. "Of course, BIRCA welcomes artists who are interested into interacting with nature and the serene environment of the place or who would like to work on projects, which take their topics from the local community, but that is not an obligatory requirement – as our focus as an artistic residency is put on fostering the exploration of the artists' creativity and artistic expression and not on local community development." Susanne sustains BIRCA on her own, with support from Creative Europe and the Danish Arts Foundation for specific projects. She is a bit reluctant to seek funding from rural development funds for instance, because they don't recognise art as a contribution and an element of development, but insist on defining how many new working places for the locals a certain project would open instead. "And what we want to do in BIRCA is not about opening new working positions but about opening new perspectives of thinking: both for the local community and the artists. We are not here to 'teach the local community something new', we are here to learn from them and exchange ideas."

The residency programme will surely benefit from having artists for longer stays, especially for artistic projects that would delve in the local stories and surrounding and would engage the local people more actively. More time is also necessary for the community at the four villages near BIRCA, and the citizens on the island on the whole, to build trust towards the 'newcomers', to grow an interest and build a habit to eagerly explore new artistic formats and new topics.

Gradually, over time running, people might feel their views are being broadened by the new experiences the art here at BIRCA has offered. Artists might notice their artistic practices have changed due to the work in the specific surroundings at BIRCA. Maybe some young people might decide it is worth staying or spending more time on the island, once they see it is not a culturally isolated place anymore – as Susanne has witnessed on several occasions by now, when youngsters visit the international artists performances by BIRCA. But all this takes time and patience to develop. And joint forces to sustain it.



Photo: Danig Performing Arts Service



Photo: Danig Performing Arts Service



Photo: Danig Performing Arts Service

Who Killed Szomna Grancsa?

IDD 141



THEATRE PERFORMANCE

Giuvlipen

Romania

Other project Links

– [Official Trailer](#)

The show “Who killed Szomna Grancsa?” (2017-2019) is a theatre performance that tells the story of a young Roma girl from a remote village who believes in the importance of education and does everything she can to stay at school. She lives in a patriarchal Roma community which denies girls the right to education or even choose for themselves, so she encounters a lot of difficulties. The play follows the true story of a 17-year-old Roma girl from Harghita, who is found hanged in the shed of her parents’ house. Throughout the play the audience is presented with the versions of several characters. The parents, the teacher, the prosecutor, friends and neighbours, a sensationalist journalist or the village priest, all try to decipher the tragic story, giving an explanation about the girl’s death. Their statements seem all true, but they still contradict each other. Everyone pleads “innocent”, although everyone lives with the feeling of guilt.

What can a young student do if her family does not support her? How can she fight prejudices in school every day? What is our responsibility for the youngsters and in providing equal opportunities for everyone when starting their lives and be able to study? The play critically explores several important themes which lay in the responsibility of the whole society: racism, poverty, depression and suicide among adolescents, closeness of traditional Roma communities, superficiality and sensationalism of the press...

The play was performed in Bucharest and with the support of Roma Party Association, National Centre for Roma Culture, FRIDA Feminist Fund, National Cultural Fund, also toured the country, targeting rural areas and Roma communities.

So, what is so particular in this case? First of all, Giuvlipen, the group behind the project, is the first independent Roma feminist theatre company in Romania – a country that has one of the largest Romani communities in Europe. Furthermore, this community is notorious for depriving women and girls of their basic human rights. Putting on stage the issues of school drop-out, depression, suicide, rural poverty and isolation faced by Roma teenagers from the countryside, and then performing the piece for Roma audiences has taken a big step towards giving Roma girls and women a voice in their everyday lives. Then, there is the added value of creating critical contemporary Roma art, which is so different from the stylised traditional Roma folklore or from the entertainment pop folk pieces Roma people are known for in the region. Having a professional collaborative project with both Roma and non-Roma artists (actors, director, stage designer, musicians) and showing it on city stages and at theatre festivals is still an innovative practice in Romania. It sends a clear message that contemporary Roma arts are by no means inferior to the majority culture, and that Roma people should be acknowledged as an equal and integral part of society.

You have to make ambitious art if you work in such a small community

IDD 145



THE FREEZER CENTRE

The Freezer

Rif, Snæfellsbær, Iceland

Other project Links

- [Facebook](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Video](#)

It seems that since 2010, when [Kári Viðarsson](#) opened the Freezer: “hostel – theatre – culture centre” in a closed down fishing factory in Rif, a small village of 130 inhabitants 2 hours away from Reykjavik, it manages to keep the interest of the locals alive. How? Is that a result of a targeted strategy to answer all the community’s needs and please their tastes or is it the pure luck of having the most art-loving audience, concentrated on the Snæfellsnes peninsula of West Iceland? Actually, neither is valid.

“In a small community, when people don’t like the show, it just won’t have a life. You have to work hard and present art of a high standard”, Kári, actor, writer, producer, and founder of The Freezer explained. Through the years so far he has been solely responsible for the artistic choices and the programme at the centre, which has evolved into a multi-functional company, combining professional theatre, outreach programmes for the local community (funded by a 4-year contract with the municipality), artists residency, live music and a few festivals, and a social hostel.

An example of such an artistically aspiring work that became loved by the local community, as well as the art critics in the city, and is still on stage, is [Hero](#), Kári’s first performance at the Freezer. Back when he developed the piece, one man shows were all over theatres in Iceland but Kári and his director, [Vikingur Kristjánsson](#), wanted to present something unseen: a true roller-coaster of characters and costumes that depicted the 700-years old story of the first settler at the peninsula and his family of humans, trolls and vultures. Audiences from all over the area, as well as from Reykjavik, came to see the show.

Besides being ambitious in his artistic pursuits, Kári has another advantage on his side: he is deeply rooted in the local community and maintains an ongoing informal conversation with the locals on any matters concerning the centre. In fact, the centre stemmed out from his desire to keep the community together: “The Freezer came alive because I feared that culture and togetherness (sense of community) would soon disappear from my hometown if nothing would be done.”

Indeed, Kári has been doing a lot. During the summer season there are several events each night. Yearly, it is more than 500 different events, from professional theatre to concerts, cinema, music, graffiti festivals, talks, quizzes, karaoke nights, parties - with audiences ranging from 2 to over 300 people and more from the village of Rif, the near-by town of Snæfellsbær, the whole

peninsula and beyond. That interest has grown during the years. In the beginning the Freezer was the strange place with the strange art happening there but through an open dialogue, in informal meetings with the artists, through taking part in certain artistic projects, the local community grew an interest and fondness for the centre. "The local inhabitants attend our events in great numbers as this community understands that without them, The Freezer would not exist... This gives locals a big sense of ownership over the work we do and this pride translates into us usually getting a lot of people from all over to see our work and our runs being longer than most of the other independent theatre in Iceland.", Kári explained.

The Freezer collaborates with artists based in Iceland and from all over the world. It is the musicians who contact Kári with a request to make a concert at the Freezer, especially now when it is professionally equipped. Sometimes, the locals would ask for a certain band to appear as well.

As for the artistic residency, Kári aims to keep it as free-flow as possible. Typically, artists stay for a month, although there have been residences of a week and of four months. Without setting it as a mandatory requirement, Kári would select artistic projects, dealing with the local surroundings or researching the stories of and interacting with the local community. For instance, a theatre company from South Africa made a series of workshops with the kindergarten children and social meetings with the elderly about South African and Icelandic music, the outcome of which were several concerts with a take on one or the other.

Over the past ten years, Kári has established a working routine for engaging the local community in various artistic endeavours. He simply talks with people or posts a message online or calls the local school that the centre would wish to invite some elderly persons, or teenagers, or the local choir to take part in an artistic project – and they pop by. Yet, that ease of involvement took years of building trust and cultivating curiosity and excitement towards participation in all kind of art projects that happen at The Freezer. As Kári puts it: "Local people already know that coming to our place gives them an opportunity for adventure, to experience something new, that is out of the ordinary day-to-day life in a small town."

Bringing excitement, liveliness and high-standard professional art to the small town is already a lot, yet, it is not the only way The Freezer contributes to the well-being of the local community. Currently, the centre is involved in a four-year contract with the municipality, which envisages several projects like involving work with the elderly people, workshops with the kindergarten, a music festival, a theatre show and more. The municipal funding is part of the overall sustainability mix of The Freezer which includes funding from West Iceland Culture and The Icelandic theatre association, as well as the centre's own contribution through ticket sales and from the income that the hostel generates. The centre implements

a community outreach project, funded by local companies which pay for a year pass for the young under 16 years and the elderly in town, providing them with the chance to attend every event at The Freezer for free.

Speaking about the future of the place, Kári is confident that many new exciting art projects are to come, now that the centre is well-established and well-known, winning multiple awards for their work, including Eyrarrósin, a national award for outstanding cultural projects in rural Iceland in 2015. If for some reason Kári decides to move out of town and close the place, he knows it will be greatly missed by the local community. But he is not going anywhere because he believes, like his fellow citizens at the Snaefellsnes peninsula, that "this area is alive and it's worth living here".



Photo:



Photo:

aMORE festival

IDD 146



AMORE FESTIVAL MORU

(AMORE FESTIVAL FOR THE SEA)

Association Zona

Istrian peninsula, Croatia

Other project Links

- [aMORE 2019](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)

Since 2017, aMORE festival moru (aMORE festival for the Sea) takes place yearly at various locations on the Istrian peninsula and other areas in Croatia. The festival team believes this is the first festival dedicated entirely to the sea where art, culture, science, new technologies, innovations, stories and legends intertwine. aMORE wishes to draw attention to the environmental, social, economic and cultural importance of marine ecosystems and the causes of their deterioration, with a view to their preservation and restoration. It offers an interdisciplinary mix of arts, culture, science, and ecology and gives its audiences the opportunity to become participants in various science workshops or art projects.

For instance, the 2019 festival edition initiated the Hydrophones workshop where anyone can build a simple DIY hydrophone device for non-invasive exploration of the vibrations of the underwater world – “a starting point to rethink our understanding of life in the world’s oceans and the human impact on the marine environment”. ‘Noise Aquarium’, the solo exhibition of Victoria Vesna in the premises of the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria further delved into the theme how noise pollution affects plankton, the primary base of marine life – presenting the 3D art project Victoria has been developing since 2016.

The festival aims to attract above all young people and children, because the future of the sea depends on their awareness of its amazing biodiversity and how fragile it is, yet it offers plenty of events of interest for the numerous tourists and the local citizens as well.

The interdisciplinary programme has drawn the attention of arts and science professionals, educators, local authorities. As a result, the festival has been supported by numerous organisations like The Istrian Region (Department of Culture, Department of Tourism), the Istrian Cultural Agency (IKA - ACI), The City of Poreč, the Poreč city tourist board, the Tar-Vabriga city tourist board, the Open University Poreč, the Museum of the Poreč territory, the City Library of Poreč, the Local action group for fishing “Istarski švoj”, the organisation “La Revolution Albatros”, the association Batana - Rovinj, the Historical and Maritime Museum of Pula, The Pula Aquarium, the Center for Invasive species Poreč, Zeus Faber Diving Centre Lanterna-Poreč, the athletic club Maximus Poreč, the Caffe bar Lapidarium Poreč, Bura Brewery Poreč, Deklič Wines, the Touristic School “Anton Štifanić” Poreč, the Austrian Cultural Forum...

Organising a festival dedicated to the sea in a highly touristic area, with all the partner support, might seem a winning decision, but still, certain challenges transpire. Tourist audiences kind of expect to be entertained the way this is done in any touristic attraction while aMORE festival aims to break this stereotype. It persists in creating and offering varied content of interest for different groups of people, with different backgrounds, different levels of awareness of the scientific matters presented. Double checked scientific-based facts, the intertwining of educational, cultural and fun events, ambitious and critical art projects – this actually turned out to be the recipe for success, as everybody in the audience and the participants seems to find ‘their thing’ in the festival offer.