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CONCLUSIONS ON THE CUMULATIVE CASES AND MATARASSO

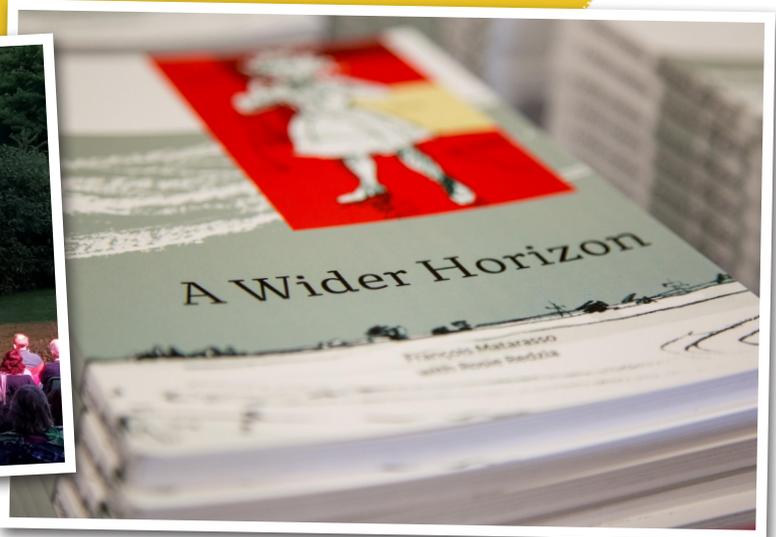


In Only Connects Matarasso outlines a whole range of ways in which rural touring supports local communities and community development. Many of his findings are echoed strongly by our Case Studies. Rural communities are (complex) 'places' and in a state of constant change and while rural touring events add something special to community life, they can only be viewed as one contributing factor to changing rural life. Matarasso argues rural touring can contribute to reducing the effects of isolation and to developing community cohesion in communities while also strengthening the capacity of local communities to organise and to develop themselves.

While the quality and the professionalism of the work is important, it is equally of value to look at the reason why people attend rural arts events and how they benefit. He argues that the social reasons for attending are as important and the contribution that the events make to village life in general are as powerful as any artistic reasons. Moreover, he believes that in a time of reducing expenditure we should not be trying to justify their existence through simply demonstrating its impacts, rather he believes we should be arguing that people who live in rural areas have the same rights as people who live in towns to attend and enjoy the arts.

On revisiting areas Matarasso's research project had visited fifteen years ago, it was possible to gauge some of the cumulative effects of continued touring activity. We found that rural touring arts had:

- Enabled communities who would otherwise be excluded to attend and enjoy arts events;
- Increased participation in the arts through participatory projects and events;
- Increased the audience for the arts by developing a taste for attending arts events from people who would not otherwise attend them;
- Contributed to people's wellbeing and sense of community by developing safe spaces to socialise and meet people;
- Directly supported the development of assets, primarily through the improvement and development of community facilities;



- Brought financial investment into communities in the form of arts grant, local fundraising and investment in related projects;
- Contributed to local economies through increased spending in the local community and through the need to acquire goods and services to support events through local suppliers;
- Contributed to the capacity of communities through increased volunteering, and the development of allied and related projects; and
- Empowered individuals to take a more active role in organising and decision making in their communities.

It was of some concern that in two of the four communities we visited promoters had stepped back and arts promoting had come to an end. In one of these communities it was possible to see the potential of a relaunch of the scheme through a former volunteer whist, in the other, the remaining volunteers had moved on to promoting other activities to promote community life.

In trying to understand rural touring, Matarasso argues that we should not draw strong conclusions from communities in which promoting stops. The point Matarasso makes is that nothing good lasts for ever and we should not be judging the success of rural touring simply in terms of its ability to sustain a continued programme of events over time. Rather we should take the long view when looking at Rural Touring Arts and understand that every community has its life cycles and that rural touring is no different.