

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CONCERTA Project



In 2016, Arts Council England (ACE) launched the second round of calls for proposals to the Research Grants Programme. The call sought proposals aimed at collaborative research work to develop the evidence base around the impact of arts and culture. The role of the Research Grants Programme is to generate evidence:

- to better understand the impact of arts and culture;
- to make the best case for arts and culture in the context of reduced public spending; and
- to promote greater collaboration and co-operation between the arts and cultural sector and research partners.

CONCERTA has been a national study of the benefits, for local community development, of a relatively under researched form of creative activity: rural touring arts.

Devised by the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) (Lead Applicant), in collaboration with the Centre for Business in Society (CBiS) at Coventry University (Research Partner), the CONCERTA project (Contributing to Community Enhancement through Rural Touring Arts) was provided with funding of circa £150,000 by ACE under the terms of the Research Grants Programme for the period from December 2016 until March 2019. NRTF was the Lead Partner and accountable body, with oversight provided by a Steering Group, chaired by NRTF and including ACE and the NRTF Board.

CONCERTA has been based on a mixed methods research design, combining the development of a national, geo-referenced data-driven evidence base of professional rural touring activity with the production of a series of more qualitative case studies of the impact of touring rural arts.

The choice of case studies included a return to some of those areas studied by Matarasso (2004) *Only Connect* in consideration of the potential of the cumulative impact of rural touring through time.

The project was designed to support NRTF and its Scheme members in their professional activities.

The project encompassed five methodological strands:

- ***Rural Touring Schemes organisational characteristics, activities and impacts:*** An online questionnaire was sent to all 24 English Rural Touring Schemes funded in 2016.
- ***Mapping the patterns and characteristics of English rural touring arts activity:*** a comprehensive, geo-referenced evidence base of five years of English Rural Touring Scheme activity, for all 24 English Rural Touring Schemes funded in 2016. This comprises over 700 digital maps.
- Activity data collected through the scheme survey has been combined geographically (using ESRI ArcGIS) with socioeconomic data from sources such as Census (census.edina.ac.uk), Neighbourhood statistics (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk) and Employment (www.nomisweb.co.uk).
- ***Case Studies of the impacts of rural touring activities:***
 - Five Core Cases were selected reflecting levels of 'rurality' in Rural Touring Schemes;
 - Two 'Cumulative' Cases and an interview with François Matarasso – representing a return to local rural touring areas previously studied by Matarasso (2004); and
 - Two 'Non-Scheme' Rural (touring) Arts Investigations to investigate the possible benefits and impacts of other, often amateur, arts-based activities, rather than professional Touring Schemes. In the spirit of co-design and partnership, these cases were undertaken by NRTF with oversight by Coventry University.
- ***Supporting professional touring development and wider dissemination:*** a range of knowledge transfer and technical expertise activities to support NRTF, their membership Schemes and broader understanding of the characteristics and benefits of professional rural touring.

