

92-053



# DISCUSSION DOCUMENT



## INTRODUCTION

Within this folder is a discussion document produced as part of the process of putting together a national strategy for the arts and media. It does not form part of the strategy. Neither does it express any sort of 'official' view. It was written in order to focus discussion and stimulate ideas.

## WHY?

*The arts and media in Britain are in renaissance. Over the last decade, they have shown a confidence and diversity never seen before. In quality of work and audience demand, the arts and media have never looked healthier or more central to people's lives. More than ever before, the arts are a source of civic pride as well as personal enrichment.*

*The arts and media in Britain are in crisis. Scarcely a day goes by without press stories of theatres facing closure, grants being cut or audiences declining; of a lack of good innovative work in all art forms; of the absence of a sense of direction, purpose and adventure.*

These views may not be incompatible, and each has some truth. What is beyond doubt is that ideas of what is art have expanded; that demand has rightly grown for access to the arts, film and broadcasting to be the right of all rather than the privilege of the few; and that resources, both public and private, have struggled to keep up. Growth in the variety of the arts contains its own problems. So how can the strategic injection of public money, and the growth of partnership with the private sector, encourage new developments? What should the priorities be? How do we make sure that the opportunity to enjoy the arts is spread ever more widely throughout society?

This is where the national arts and media strategy comes in. In 1990, the Minister for the Arts asked the arts and media funding bodies (the Arts Council of Great Britain, the British Film Institute, the Crafts Council and the Regional Arts Associations/ Regional Arts Boards) to prepare a national strategy. One of its purposes is to provide the basic framework for their work. The Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils are conducting parallel exercises; and the local authorities and museums funding bodies are also associated with the strategy.

A further purpose is to consider whether the public money spent on the arts and media has been used to best effect, and how those responsible can do better in the future. It is important that all those with experience of and a passion for the arts and media provide support, assistance and advice to get the strategy right. Most important, it must be seen as a strategy for the arts and media, not for the bureaucrats.

## HOW?

The paper in this folder is part of this process. It is one of a series of discussion documents; each is available free on request. Responses to them will be collated by the National Arts and Media Strategy Unit. Arising from this, a draft of the strategy will be prepared by Spring 1992. This too will be available for comment. The final version of the national arts and media strategy will be completed by Summer 1992. The hope is that the resulting document will be slim, challenging and readable - and that it will provide a mission statement for the arts and media over the next decade, as well as setting out clear goals and targets.

The national arts and media strategy will not write a single novel, put on a single play or make a single film. What it can help bring about, if the funding bodies receive the help of those who care about the arts and media, is the maximum opportunity for such creativity to flourish and for it to enrich the lives of ever more people. Your contribution to this process will be valuable and valued. Please send your views on this discussion document to the address below, to arrive by 30 November 1991.

For further information on the national arts and media strategy, please contact:

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## THE ARTS IN RURAL AREAS

Diana Johnson

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aangevraagd is verlenging met een maand moge-  
lijk, tenzij de publikatie inmiddels is besproken.

De uitleentermijn is verstreken op:

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## NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY: DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON THE ARTS IN RURAL AREAS

This paper has been written in order to generate discussion and debate. It is not a chapter of the national arts and media strategy or a definitive statement. The views it expresses are those its author, Diana Johnson.

We should like to hear what you believe may be the key issues in developing the arts in rural areas over the next few years. With the paper as background, we should welcome views on all or any of the following questions, as well as on any other matters connected with the topic on which you wish to comment.

### The paper

1. Does the paper raise and deal adequately with the key issues? If not, where and how could it do better? What are your views on the author's recommendations?

### Principles and developments

2. What have been the most important and exciting developments in the arts in rural areas over the past five years, in Great Britain or elsewhere? What may be possible exciting areas for development over the next five?
3. When considering this subject, to what extent should we be talking about making 'mainstream' arts activity more widely available, and to what extent about supporting the **indigenous** activities of rural areas? Is there a tension between these two aspects, and if so, how is it to be resolved?

### Public funding

4. Is the **current** public funding of the arts in rural areas (including funding by the local authorities) spent to best effect? If not, how could it be improved?
5. If there were a significant increase (say, 30% in real terms) in the public funding of the arts in rural areas, what should be the priority areas for these additional resources? What effects might this have?

6. A common complaint is that the public funding bodies focus resources too much on arts in towns and cities and do not concern themselves enough with the arts in rural areas. Do you agree with this view, and what would it mean in practice if this emphasis were shifted? Do the arts in rural areas have an adequate profile in the press and media? Is the absence of this inhibiting development?

### **The broader context**

7. What lessons can be learnt in this country from international developments in rural arts within Europe and elsewhere?
8. What will be the main issues over the next ten years for the arts in rural areas in relation to amateur arts, cultural diversity, women, and disability?
9. Is there a helpful and positive relationship between arts development in rural areas and the education sector (including schools, further and higher education, and informal education)? How would you like to see this develop over the next ten years?
10. What are the key areas for partnership (eg between the arts funding bodies, local authorities and the Rural Development Commission) over the next ten years if the arts in rural areas are to flourish?

### **Management, training and resources**

11. What are the major needs in terms of physical infrastructure (such as buildings and equipment) if the arts in rural areas are to achieve their full potential? How are these needs likely to change over the next ten years?
12. Are there needs in the areas of training and management for the arts professions in respect of the arts in rural areas over the next ten years?

**NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY UNIT  
AUGUST 1991**

# **NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY**

## **DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON THE ARTS IN RURAL AREAS**

**DIANA JOHNSON**

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## I SUMMARY

*The arts in rural areas:* that sounds like the sort of subject which we all ought to understand. We think we know what rural is; we're almost sure we know what the arts are.

In fact most people's perceptions are founded on false images.

This paper argues that a proper understanding of the reality of rural place and people throughout Great Britain is needed before any meaningful debate can take place. Similarly, an appreciation of the variety of rural cultures, embracing forms of expression way beyond those currently accepted as art, is essential. Such shifts in attitude will require the relinquishing of comfortable generalisations, and specialist arts and crafts approaches. We are in fact not talking about a single issue at all.

It is crucial, therefore, that this paper is read and discussed not only by those already involved in the arts in rural areas, but also those with wider rural remits at local and national level: community development workers, agencies concerned with rural regeneration, local authorities, teachers, tourist organisations, the church, to name but a few. It is they too who are presently or potentially involved with the practice.

Additionally, this paper will submit that arts experience in rural areas has much to offer others within the arts who may not have thought rural practice was of relevance to them: art form specialists, those working in urban areas, marketing officers, for example. It will be instructive to all concerned if they too can be drawn into the debate.

Arts policy for rural areas has tended to be divided broadly into two approaches:

- 1 Provision-based response from arts agencies - increased touring to rural areas, establishment of arts outposts etc - **outside-in** thinking.
- 2 Cultural development-based response - developing existing cultural activities as a tool of community development - **inside-out** thinking.

While the former response is based on notions of access in the face of deprivation and disenfranchisement, the latter builds on a recognition of inherent strengths and opportunities.

It is those strengths (relationship to place, cross-sector involvement and many others) which this paper explores most fully. In particular, it examines them in relation to the probable future which rural people will be facing.

That future offers threats and opportunities. It seems likely that we shall experience increasing migration from city to country and continued erosion of traditional sources of employment. That migration could simply recreate all the expectations of city arts provision in new locations, and smother local cultural activities.

On the other hand, 'green' thinking is gaining ground. That thinking could bring more sensitive approaches to housing, planning, services and the features of rural life which attract outsiders in the first place. In this scenario cultural development-based activities, which already work interdependently with other spheres of life, could become not only relevant but central.

That relevance is already being recognised and utilised by a number of agencies concerned with rural regeneration.

But in order to play its part fully alongside the provision-based policies which are well established, the cultural development-based approach will itself require development.

It is a process that requires a breadth of knowledge and experience beyond the narrow confines of 'the arts'. It needs lateral thinking and cross-sector collaboration on a formal basis. 'Local' needs to become a national issue.

This paper submits that our present arts agencies are not equipped to undertake that development. The National Arts and Media Strategy process, with its discussion of familiar single artforms and hackneyed topics such as marketing and touring, indicates that the sort of imagination that will be needed is in short supply. In any case, the opportunities to alter ACGB and RAB structures and staffing in response to any Strategy proposals would appear to be limited, since these decisions are being taken in advance.

This paper therefore puts forward for discussion the establishment of a new cross-sector Commission with a five year life-span to promote the development needed. It sets out possible terms of reference, and indicates other areas for debate.

Mindful, however, that artists and craftworkers in rural areas require help now, it further suggests that Lord Palumbo and the specialist arts agencies identify now a year within the recently announced Millennium programme when not a city, nor a region, but cultural activities in rural areas throughout Britain are celebrated with all the clout and resources those agencies have at their disposal.



## II A STRATEGY FOR A STRATEGY

2.1 The purpose of this discussion document is to provoke thought. I have been asked to be "visionary and controversial". However, if that thought is to be turned into imaginative action, I have to say I wouldn't have chosen to start from here.

There are some fundamental questions which demand discussion and answers before any meaningful debate on the arts in rural areas (or any other topic within the strategy) can take place.

### Structure

2.2 By the time this is read, a structure and staffing levels - at least for the Arts Council of Great Britain and Regional Arts Associations/Boards (RAA/RABs) - will have been pretty well decided. A determined stride will have been taken down a certain path.

What if the strategy debate indicates that steps should be retraced, that a wrong turning has been taken?

2.3 If this exercise is to be truly "visionary and controversial", one possibility must be to suggest shifts which result in a totally different structure. Is that possibility really acknowledged, or do we have to be visionary within strict boundaries?

2.4 This way of setting about things would appear to fly in the face of all the business-like advice which has been flowing from arts funding agencies to their clients in recent years. The cart and a lot of the passengers seem to be galloping ahead of the horse. Hardly a mistake a farmer would make!

- What flexibility is there in the new structure to adapt effectively to any revolutionary strategy emerging from this exercise?

### A National Strategy

2.5 The exercise of which this paper forms a part, has been entitled the *National Arts and Media Strategy*. Yet the line-up of organisations taking part would not, on the face of it, wholly justify use of the term "national".

The Scottish Arts Council is - quite appropriately - undertaking its own related exercise. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland will undertake its own strategy - later on. The Welsh Arts Council, having prevaricated for some considerable time, will, I understand, now be joining in.

The Crafts Council, British Film Institute and the English Regional Arts Associations/Boards (RAA/RABs) through the Council of Regional Arts Associations (CORAA) are closely involved.

2.6 However, it appears that local authority involvement, at their own request, will be limited to production of a discussion document on local authorities and the arts. This level of involvement would seem to be inadequate on two counts:

i) Local authority expenditure on the arts in England and Wales alone "is broadly similar to that incurred by the ACGB" ("Local Authorities, Entertainment and the Arts", Audit Commission). They are playing a part in all the aspects of the arts under scrutiny through the Strategy.

ii) Local authorities are not arts specialists in the same sense as the organisations mentioned above. Their support of the arts goes alongside their concerns with housing, roads and other services, which can, or should, allow the arts to take their place within local planning strategies.

2.7 In my opinion these two features of local authorities make their full and formal participation crucial to a national strategy formulation for all aspects of the arts, not least for the arts in rural areas, where - this paper will argue - the arts sit quite naturally amongst other aspects of life.

2.8 This all gives a very chequered impression. So:

- What is meant by "national" in this context?

### **Discussion Documents - Themes**

2.9 To encourage debate, more than thirty discussion documents are being written in England alone.

But why do they dwell on themes which have been around for ages? - single artforms such as music, literature; hackneyed general subjects such as marketing and touring. Even cross disciplinary subjects such as women in the arts and - heaven knows - arts in rural areas, are hardly innovative. They all suggest we shall be staying at home in the comfortable pigeon-holes in which we have always roosted.

2.10 Would it not free the mind to consider, for example:

- The implications of not having national and regional arts agencies by the millennium?
- Creativity and money?
- Are the arts like the weather?
- The arts and science?
- Buildings or people?

- Why are the arts so often ignored in other people's reports?
- Today's innovation, tomorrow's heritage? Or yesterday's heritage, tomorrow's heritage?

2.11 Some of these may sound flippant, but this is the great opportunity to bring the imagination to bear on a very serious subject - the whole future of the arts in Britain. We are supposed to be creative people and organisations, aren't we?

- Then why are we being so unimaginative?

### **Discussion Documents - By Whom, For Whom?**

2.12 Furthermore, I find it difficult to recognise any method in the allocation of themes to writers.

A substantial number are being written by ACGB/CORAA officers or groupings - those single art forms, for example. Are these the themes on which they feel most confident, or which are most cherished?

- Have the arts in rural areas, for example, been allocated to "outside" writers because they are not yet part of the arts bloodstream, and if so, will they ever be properly integrated without a major realignment of thinking and priorities?

### **Discussion Points**

2.13 The above questions leave me feeling distinctly uneasy, because they beg further, disturbing questions:

- How willing are the national and regional arts bodies to bring about radical change?
- Isn't this just another "excuse me" dance? A reshuffle of the cards so that the same institutions and the same modes of thinking can bumble along for another few years?
- Underneath that, is this not simply a means of tightening control on the arts, justifying positions?
- Which is more important - maintaining the arts or maintaining their support structures?

These questions need to be answered.

2.14 They should be answered by those with authority to give the official line at the beginning of each consultation session.

### III WHAT IS RURAL?

#### Prologue

*"We don't really get involved in the arts here"*

This was said to me by a resident of a Durham mining village.

It is a village which holds an annual festival (hosting up to fourteen bands of different kinds), has compiled an anthology of poetry, and sewn a quilted map of the area.

I suggest this quotation encapsulates the misconceptions which bedevil the whole subject of the arts in rural areas. False perceptions abound of:

- What is rural?
- What are the arts in rural areas?

It is a muddle. Can a mining village be rural? Is what they do "the arts"?

This section will try to separate the realities from the prejudices. However, those who like or need tight definitions will be disappointed. The essence is, or should be, diversity and distinctiveness.

#### What is rural?

3.1 Those already involved will not need to be told. But as I hope that others not living in rural areas will be reading this. "Rural" includes, for example, industrial as well as agricultural villages, mining, fishing, and crofting communities, Welsh hill-farming families, Northern Irish townships, market towns, and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

3.2 There is no single definition which can be agreed by all. There is no uniformity about "rural". A resident of many of the Scottish islands would consider Easington in Humberside (pop. 500) a metropolis. A Devon farmer leads quite a different life from a worker in a Durham coke works. Welsh mining villages may once have been considered urban, but are now more rural. A native of Kent surrounded by affluent commuters might wonder whether she was 'rural' at all.

3.3 *Tackling Deprivation in Rural Areas*, a report prepared for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1990 by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE, to which the English Rural Community Councils are all affiliated), acknowledges - some would say fudges - the problem:

"It is difficult to find an agreed definition of the word 'rural'. Some people argue that a rural area is defined by the density of its population while others feel there is

a rural continuum from non-suburban right through to very sparsely populated. It is important however that physical remoteness is not equated with the experience of isolation. People often feel isolated even when living in a big city. For the purposes of this report.....therefore, we will include all areas which are physically not urban or suburban."

3.4 We should remember, however, that ACRE deals only with England. There are other parts of the country where there is no doubt about 'rurality'. Many areas of Scotland have a population so sparse as to make some English rural communities appear congested.

So much for geographical and demographic characteristics. What about the *images* of rural areas?

### Image or reality?

3.5 In recent years there has been a timely and much needed backlash against the chocolate box images of the countryside. Brian McLaughlin's unpublished, but widely circulated findings on rural deprivation for the Department of the Environment in 1985 have become something of a touchstone. They showed that in many instances people in rural areas were experiencing a level of deprivation equal and sometimes exceeding that of urban areas. It was not what the government wanted to hear, however.

3.6 Other reports have appeared:

*Tackling Deprivation in Rural Areas* (1990), A Report by ACRE for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

*Rural Development in Scotland*, A Review of Trends and Issues (1990), Scottish Development Agency

*Faith in the Countryside* (1990), the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas.

and more locally, for example:

*The People, the Land and the Church* (1987), edited by Richard Lewis and Andrew Talbot-Ponsonby for the Diocese of Hereford.

*Rural Deprivation in Devon* (1990), a report commissioned by the Community Council of Devon and the Diocese of Exeter.

3.7 All these studies point in particular to the colossal upheaval presently being faced by rural people throughout the U.K. It is an upheaval which threatens to destroy the individuality which makes rural areas attractive in the first place.

3.8 Change has come rapidly and will continue to do so. New people are moving into rural areas. Manufacturing is relocating from city to country. Retired people are leaving town for village. More affluent people are buying second or holiday homes - bolt holes from their day to day urban life. They bring with them more spending powers than many local people, different expectancies; in some areas of Scotland and Wales, a different language.

3.9 Furthermore, because their former sources of employment - farming, fishing, mining - have dwindled, taking with them distinctive rhythms and patterns of living, rural communities have become especially vulnerable to these trends. They are having to diversify, turn to tourism and other occupations previously foreign to their culture.

### Deprivation or opportunity?

3.10 But stop! These are fairly well-aired worries. Isn't there another way of looking at the picture?

3.11 Firstly, what is new about incomers? For centuries rural communities have had to adapt - to the Vikings, Normans and, in Wales and Scotland, to the English.

Can the in-migrations of the 1990s be as violent as these? Don't they bring opportunities? A chance to engage with new skills and technologies, to stimulate new sources of employment?

Television, for example, can and does invade the home with a bland, suburban monoculture; it can, and often does, re-inforce stereotypes of rural life and people. But it can also provoke and challenge; it can be a vehicle for self expression, or open learning, say.

Ironically, it is often the incomers who are holding back progress. They want to preserve their images of the rural idyll, to block developments which may alter the chocolate-box picture.

But if we are to cling on to the heritage of the past, who is to form the heritage of the future?

3.12 Secondly, rural people are not necessarily downtrodden, deserving of pity or guilt-tripping benevolence, any more than they should be the butt of 'hillbilly/yokel' jokes.

Townies (we call them grockles in Devon) would do well to know that country people often look down on them in a mildly tolerant way - the way one is indulgent with children. "You can tell they're incomers" says Sue in Pentabus' video "Borderland". "They take sterilised milk. Can't stand the stuff, myself."

3.13 The point of this is to emphasise that rural people are entitled to argue from a position of strength. Too many of the recent debates have focused exclusively on their deprivation. It will be argued later that this can have a profound effect on attitudes

towards supporting the arts in rural areas. Rural people have a lot to be envied for - and it is neither the thatched cottage, nor the Monarch of the Glen. It is something infinitely more valuable.

### **Control, or rather, lack of it**

3.14 To live in the country still engenders a closeness to natural things. Whether you are farming, fishing, mining or even working in the tourist business, your life is governed and to a significant extent dependent on the elements. Nature is hard to please; she reminds you constantly that you are not in control.

To my mind, that is a lesson which urban dwellers and policy makers have forgotten. They need to relearn it.

3.15 Ultimately, you cannot contrive. You can go only so far before chaos takes a hand. To many people living and working in rural areas, the idea of a strategy for anything, let alone the arts, is absurd.

I would suggest that this is a humility, a knowing of one's place in the shape of things, which strategic planners should contemplate.

3.16 I recently acted as a census enumerator in a part of mid Devon dotted with comparatively isolated farms. Time and again I was greeted with courtesy but amusement at "they townfolk" thinking they could plan on the basis of mere facts and figures.

3.17 Ultimately, the need to inhabit the countryside - whether physically or metaphorically - is crucial to our spiritual well-being. If this link with nature, or the influence of its memory on our behaviour, is ignored, or worse, allowed to die, we all - city and country dweller - run the risk of moving into a man-made, surface-deep environment of cynicism and control.

3.18 Two recent anecdotes illustrate that some people are living there already.

Rurally-based electricity workers from less affected areas were moved to the home counties to help restore power after the hurricane of October 1987. They returned with tales of the anger that had been meted out to them by suburban residents unable to cope with their lack of control over the elements which had robbed them of hair-driers, washing-machines and other facilities they took for granted. Someone should have warned them; someone should have prevented it; something should be done now.

Meanwhile a family in Sussex, cut off for two weeks, described it as the happiest period of their lives. No TV, no microwave. They had rediscovered the art of playing games, making things, and talking to each other.



#### IV WHAT ARE THE ARTS IN RURAL AREAS?

4.1 The arts in rural areas are exactly that: - arts and crafts activities taking place in rural areas. They may be brought in by visiting artists, practised only by local people, or a mixture of both - professional and non-professional.

They do not constitute a separate aesthetic.

4.2 The term "rural arts" suggests that they do, as though we might be talking exclusively of hedge-laying, ceilidhs or morris dancing. To speak of "the arts in rural areas" is perhaps less misleading. But it is nevertheless a classification which has been invented for official convenience.

4.3 The arts in rural areas are not concerned with a single issue. Anyone who asks "What's the main issue with arts in rural areas?" is missing the point. They are, if anything, about local distinctiveness of people and place; they are about diversity and individuality. It is therefore impossible and irrelevant - as with the term "rural" - to reach a universal definition.

4.4 From the point of view of practitioners, we are talking about people with the ambition and talent to become internationally-famous names living amongst enthusiasts of every kind: from expert cornet-players to amateur actors; from professional animateurs to unpublished poets.

#### Some background

Let us examine the recent growth of interest in the arts in rural areas.

4.5 While Brian McLaughlin's findings about general rural deprivation were beginning to circulate, the Arts Council published its *Glory of the Garden*. Those of us working in rural areas were incensed at its metropolitan attitudes. It singled out regional cities for development, expecting that somehow they would cater for the outlying rural areas as well. I believe I am right in saying that the word rural did not appear at all.

4.6 A lobbying force began to build up. I can remember issuing Richard Wilding with wellies to negotiate the Devon mud; driving ACGB representatives through narrow lanes at milking time; meeting with Richard Luce, the then Arts Minister, in out of the way cottages to press home the point that life was by no means easy in what townies considered their playground idyll, and that we were not getting a fair share of resources.

4.7 Arguments at that point tended to revolve around what I would call the "I was born in a hole in the road" syndrome: an anxiety to demonstrate that the inner cities were not the only places suffering poverty and crippling lack of services.



4.8 Some specific reports on the arts in rural areas were commissioned:

*Rural Arts* (1989), a discussion document for the Gulbenkian Foundation by Trevor Bailey and Ian Scott

*Think Rural, Act Now* (1989) by Sally Stote for ACGB

4.9 The Community Council of Lincolnshire hosted *Out of Town*, an East of England conference on the arts in rural areas in 1990 and subsequently published a report. The Arts Development Association in the same year held a national conference in Durham on the same subject entitled *Pride of Place*, and commissioned a book of case studies which is due to be published in 1991.

4.10 The principal observations from this work show that many arts activities in rural areas are:

- Interdisciplinary - they cross boundaries between art forms and between the arts and other interests
- Related to a particular place, its history and people
- \* Small scale (but not necessarily so)
- Peripatetic. They reach people where they are
- \* Not dependent on purpose made buildings - they use schools, churches, village halls, spaces where people are used to going for other activities
- Practised by non-professionals with or without professional input
- Contributing to the economy, e.g. through festivals, crafts workers, tourism
- Interactive with environmental concerns
- Happening anyway, without arts agency intervention

4.11 Among the main obstacles to development are:

- Physical distances - extreme in Scotland

\* *These points are largely seen as a problem under the first argument, but as an advantage under the second.*

- Lack of transport. This particularly affects women with or without small children, disabled and young people
- Attitudinal distances - neighbouring communities are often very separate, expectations of indigenous residents and incomers frequently conflict
- \* Lack of people with arts and community development skills
- Inadequate buildings for formal performance and exhibitions - fire precautions, disabled access etc. patchy and expensive to instal
- \* Comparatively small attendances, though often high in terms of percentage of population
- Lack of equipment
- Lack of marketing and distribution facilities for local publications, recordings etc.
- Isolation of artists and practitioners
- Lack of information about what other people are doing elsewhere
- Dependence on project funding
- Lack of recognition.

4.12 As time went on, it became clear that the arguments were gravitating towards two distinct approaches:

1 There are those who see the arts in rural areas as a question of access (or lack of it) to arts services, to the best the country can provide. This approach is what can result from a desire to reduce the deprivation of rural areas. Country taxpayers have the same rights as London taxpayers, and so on.

Let us call this the *provision*, or *exporting the arts* approach.

2 On the other hand, there are those who would rather develop the cultures (and I use the plural deliberately) that are already there, on their own terms. Such people use the arts, directly or indirectly, as a tool of community development.

Let us call this the *cultural development* approach.

\* *These points are largely seen as a problem under the first argument, but as an advantage under the second.*

## **Provision-based policy**

4.13 This line of thinking sees the remedy in terms of increased touring by national companies, or regional outposts of national galleries, and leads in turn to a preoccupation with the need for dedicated buildings, or transport schemes to the nearest urban arts facility, and so on.

4.14 It is perfectly valid to ensure that the Royal Shakespeare Company, or parts of the Tate's collections can be enjoyed well outside London. How to present opera to rural audiences in small, inadequate facilities is a genuine problem. The Arts Council/RAA system must be given great credit for the huge advances in the distribution of such arts over the years. The framework we have could not have been achieved without them.

4.15 I shouldn't need to dwell on this provision approach. It is relatively simple to understand, and much of the effort of the postwar public sector arts establishment has been devoted to it. Indeed, we have a whole generation of arts administrators who have been schooled this way.

## **Cultural development-based policy**

4.16 However well-intentioned the motives of the approach described above, it is based on outside-in thinking. The more militant would call it "cultural colonialism".

4.17 The cultural development approach takes as its starting point the distinctiveness of the place or the people in question, their diversity, individuality, and the resources - in the widest sense of that word - which belong to them. Inside-out thinking.

4.18 Some cultures within rural Britain are easier to distinguish than others. The Gaelic and Welsh languages may provide a clarity of cultural identity in remoter areas, but again, generalisations should be avoided.

4.19 There is neither time nor space to give here a comprehensive list of the variety of activities practised in rural areas using this approach. For those wanting more details, I would recommend *Rural Arts; Think Rural: Act Now*; and the Arts Development Association's forthcoming *Pride of Place* publication, all mentioned above.

4.20 It may be helpful to glance at some of the Gulbenkian Foundation's recent grants under its new arts in rural areas policy *Making A Song and Dance About It*.

- Alverton County Primary School, Cornwall, Mazey Day project - working with Kneehigh Theatre Company to create new dance and music for an ancient celebration

- Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council pilot project to decorate rural bus shelters
- Pensthorpe Waterfowl Trust, Norfolk, collaborative theatre project
- Renishaw Environmental Action Group, Derbyshire, video about an ex-colliery village
- Take Art! rural craft development project with isolated women and children in Somerset.

4.21 Even from these five examples, two main characteristics of the cultural development-based approach emerge:

- 1 A wide range of concerns being expressed - transport; the environment; employment (or the lack of it); traditional celebration; women and children.
- 2 An equally wide range of forms of expression. These embrace all the usual art forms - video, visual arts, crafts, theatre, but go beyond them to include wider forms of cultural expression - custom, local history etc.

### Some false assumptions

4.22 It is important to dispel the myth that arts in rural areas are old-fashioned or quaint. Contemporary art forms such as video are appropriate and widely used (by Pentabus in Shropshire, for example, and by numerous non-arts groups). Rock music is not the preserve of urban areas (see Actiontrack's work with young people throughout the South West). There is a plethora of photography projects too, a practice which was widely encouraged by the old Manpower Services Commission through its countless archive projects, and which has continued, probably because it is accessible and can directly reflect changes in time and place.

4.23 Furthermore, the themes and content of many arts activities by no means concentrate on nostalgia. Change is a common feature. For example the play *A Day by the Sea*, by Sheila Yeger and produced by the people of Easington in Humberside in conjunction with Remould Theatre, addressed the impact of newcomers to the community, from Vikings to British Gas. (Incidentally, this play was subsequently broadcast on radio.)

4.24 Neither is refuge necessarily taken in cosiness. Many of the sculptures created through Common Ground's *New Milestones* project are challenging, to the extent of not being wholly accepted or appreciated yet by the rural communities who commissioned them.

4.25 Nor are the arts in rural areas politically spineless. Around the country the arts are helping people articulate their concerns, take action and produce results.

Amongst the most notable are the activities of the National Gaelic Arts Project, which have led to a huge increase in Gaelic television programming under the Broadcasting Act; and the way song, storytelling, and poetry were used as part of an integrated and successful protest against the threat of lignite mining at Lough Neagh, County Tyrone.

### **Epilogue**

Although it is essential to understand that there are two distinct approaches at work - provision-based and cultural development - I do not wish to set up a false antithesis. Both schools of thought can and should complement each other, indeed cross-fertilise each other.

Which brings me back to the miner from Durham.

So long as he feel unconnected with the arts, most of the opportunities I have referred to in the section What is Rural? will be beyond the reach of a National Arts and Media Strategy.

Why did he think he was not involved in the arts? And what can a National Arts and Media Strategy do about it?

## **V WHO IS BACKING WHAT, AND WHY?**

The previous section looked at two schools of thought which, while not mutually exclusive, tend to concentrate mainly on either:

- exporting arts to rural areas (provision)
- or:
- cultural development.

Before discussing what the future might hold, we need to examine briefly who is doing what. We also need to examine why they do it.

### **National bodies**

#### **(a) Arts specific**

5.1 Clearly the principal agency here is the Arts Council of Great Britain (of which the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils are technically committees). It is a specialist arts body. Its Royal Charter defines its aims as:

- to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts

- to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Great Britain

- to advise and co-operate with departments of government, local authorities and other bodies.

5.2 Since the 1940s the Council has chosen to concern itself with the professional arts. It has sought to develop an infrastructure for those arts throughout the country, the work of its touring department being a high-profile example. "Raise and Spread" has been the theme.

5.3 Although the seventies and eighties saw considerable activity on the community arts and education fronts, the Council has never shaken off its provision-led approach. One reason may be that it has continued to preserve specialist artform departments, in spite of periodic waves of thinking pointing to alternative approaches.

5.4 Where a regional tier exists, as in England and Wales, it has been easier for the Arts Council - and indeed the British Film Institute and Crafts Council - to devolve responsibility for local arts activities to the RAA/RABs. (This of course is not the case in Scotland, where the Scottish Arts and Scottish Film Councils appear to be closer to local practice than their English counterparts. It should, however, be mentioned here that since the demise of the Scottish Development Agency, Scotland has at present no national organisation responsible for crafts at all.)

In the course of the devolution mentioned above, however, it has been difficult to avoid giving the impression that such activities are not of national importance, are somehow second class. Why otherwise all the recent wrangles about delegation?

#### (b) Non-arts agencies

5.5 Many non-arts agencies give support to arts activities in rural areas. Some have a specific rural brief; others have a wider remit, such as tourism. Their motives are, however, founded on a recognition - or at least an acceptance - that the arts can be used as a means to their own ends.

5.6 Unlike the specific arts agencies which see their role as supporting the arts, these bodies generally focus on supporting community development or rural regeneration through the arts, and in particular through local arts activities.

Examples include:

- The Forestry Commission
- Development Board for Rural Wales (Mid Wales Development) (DBRW)

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
- Countryside Commission (of England)
- Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)

5.7 Not all have explicit policies for the arts. ACRE has recently formulated one; HIE is in the process of doing so (though whether its local points of delivery, the Local Enterprise Companies, will be sufficiently resourced and motivated to carry it through, is open to question.) Some simply get on with it. In one recent year the DBRW gave £700,000 in grants to 450 social and community development projects, of which several were arts related.

Examples of the kind of practice supported include animated walks, sculpture trails, publications, craft workshops, video projects, photographic exhibitions, festivals, feisean and celebrations involving all forms of performing arts.

5.8 But a great many non-arts agencies and, indeed, government departments, have as yet no involvement with arts activities of any kind, although their remit would suggest that they too could usefully involve the arts as a means to their ends.

Furthermore, because rural deprivation runs counter to policy-makers' (most of them distant city dwellers) images of what the country ought to be, rural regeneration itself is still held back by unhelpful strategies. Take, for example, the newly-formed Scottish Enterprise, which unlike its northern counterpart, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, does not even have a social policy remit.

There is therefore much scope for development.

### **Local authorities**

5.9 A growing number of rurally based local authorities is formulating policies, and appointing arts development officers. The Audit Commission has recently said all local authorities should set a policy, so the process is not finished yet.

Local authorities can act as recipients of the arts exported nationally and regionally, and at the same time, encourage cultural development-based practice.

5.10 A survey of published policies shows that their reasons for supporting the arts of either kind vary, but tend to feature the ability of the arts to develop:

- economic potential, often in relation to tourism
- employment
- cultural and social identity.



It is important to note that as in urban areas, arts support within rural local authorities comes under the aegis of many different departments, including: leisure, planning, tourism, recreation, amenities and education, as well as specific arts departments.

Given this broad spectrum of motives and the recognition of the widest possible purposes the arts can fulfil, there is obvious scope for development here too.

5.11 Education, like culture, is about growth. When they have allowed themselves to do so, Education Authorities have played a central role in many of the best examples of cultural development-based activities. In this respect, village schools are of particular importance as community focal points. Three interesting examples out of many must suffice:

- Hereford and Worcester County Folk Animateur (teaching history through folksong and music)
- West Cumbria Arts in Education (which is also working with women in remote communities)
- Fermanagh Traditional Music in Schools Project (Northern Ireland, funded by Western Education and Library Board)

all of which are using participatory arts activities within the National Curriculum, in some cases to teach non-arts subjects.

Whether, in the future National Curriculum era, Education Authorities will be able to participate is open to question.

### **Rural community councils**

5.12 In England the Rural Community Councils (there are no such organisations in Wales or Scotland) could make far greater use of the arts in their rural development work than is currently the practice. It is a matter of will and inclination. Some have, however, appointed arts officers (Shropshire, Dorset and North Yorkshire, for example), and I understand that a considerable part of the impetus leading to the drafting of an arts policy by ACRE (to which they are all affiliated) came from the RCCs themselves. Their support to village halls helps to provide some of the most valuable venues for arts activities.

### **Regional arts associations/boards**

5.13 It is pertinent to remember that the English RAAs were established, from the mid 1950s, as a protest against the Arts Council's closure of its regional offices. Even so, they were cast in the Arts Council mould. Yet from the beginning they have looked two ways: loyalty to their regions, and loyalty to the arts.



Some have more recently occupied the middle ground between the provision and cultural development led schools of thought. Some have adopted enlightened policies which have done much to develop the arts in rural areas.

5.14 Northern Arts' Local Arts Development Agencies are a case in point. Now established in 31 out of 33 districts within the region, funding of local arts activities has been devolved to them: decisions regarding local arts practice are taken at local level; arts development officers are there to support and stimulate local work.

5.15 There are many projects over the years which demonstrate RAAs' valiant attempts to become involved in cultural development-type activity. Nevertheless, their antecedents, and the fact that the bulk of their income is from the national arts-specific bodies, still draw them towards the provision-based approach. Since they are to assume more responsibility for delegated Arts Council clients, can non provision-based operations be anything more than marginal to them in the foreseeable future?

### **Arts practitioners' fora**

5.16 While examining the variety of official bodies giving support to the arts, it should not be forgotten that artists and arts organisations around the country have formed, and are still forming, fora through which to assist themselves. Again, there is space only to mention a few. They may, for example, be:

- county-based, such as the Cornwall Arts Forum
- region-wide, such as the Highland Region promoters' forum
- based on a particular artform or activity, such as the Feisean Association.

The sharing of information and training are important functions of these fora. However, it is the potential for national networking which has yet to be realised.

### **Other bodies**

5.17 Although space does not permit a detailed analysis, I think it is important to recognise that many independent trusts and foundations also give considerable support to the arts in rural areas.

Amongst them, the Carnegie Trust has for long espoused the non-professional cause, assisting community plays, for example, and more recently announcing a policy to help village hall committees start up new activities - which could include the arts. The Gulbenkian Foundation is currently assisting a number of local arts agencies to be set up. And for several years the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust and Scottish Rural Forum have included local arts activities amongst their grant recipients.

The support of such bodies is invaluable. Their comparative independence, at least from public accountability, permits them a greater freedom. However, it is arguable whether all of them interpret that freedom in a way that is most compatible with the needs of cultural development in rural areas.

### **Why are they doing it?**

5.18 Since the motives for involvement in the arts differ widely between the different kinds of body mentioned above, so naturally do the criteria by which they judge whether to support an activity or not.

It is here that arts activities in rural areas can run into trouble.

5.19 On the one hand, arts agencies, national and regional, will be looking for evidence of artistic excellence, for innovation, as well as accessibility. More recently there has also been an emphasis on increasing financial self-sufficiency. To that end various schemes have been established (such as the Incentive Funding Scheme or the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme). Although some rurally-based arts organisations have benefited, cultural development-based activities being discussed here have mostly been left out in the cold.

5.20 On the other hand, non-arts agencies will be giving consideration to the extent to which arts activities contribute to, for example:

- valuing the countryside
- creating employment opportunities
- improving the economy
- helping rural communities articulate and tackle problems.

5.21 Local authorities will be looking for high standards when employing professional artists, both visiting and local, but they will also be measuring activities according to their community benefit. They will be looking at:

- the quality (not necessarily the quantity) of rural community involvement
- whether anything longlasting (a skill or a piece of art) is being created.

### **How are they doing it?**

5.22 This paragraph looks at financial enabling. I have purposely not mentioned funding earlier because money, or more realistically, the lack of it, can so easily prevent circumstances from being thought through from other angles.

Frequently it is a question not of what needs money, but of what needs recognition, or who can unlock other resources. Often it is not only the amount but the kind of money.

There is a real need for:

- Continued funding. Too much is short-term project funding. The need for many funders to see new things and quick results is hopelessly out of kilter with rural rhythms.
- Programme as well as salary/fee money. The country is dotted with artists in residence having to raise their own programme money.
- Flexible funding schemes. Why are there no financial rewards under the British Sponsorship Incentive Scheme, for example, equated to the value of non-cash fund raising?
- A willingness to administer and distribute small grants. Sometimes (but by no means always) a couple of hundred pounds can make so much difference to the viability of a local activity.
- Funding of child care to enable women with children to participate in arts activities.
- Creation of sponsorship pools into which small initiatives can tap.
- Further devolution of funding control to the local level.

### **How/why inter-action**

5.23 Much fruit has been borne from partnerships between different combinations of the funding bodies. One example from hundreds would be the present storyteller in residence in the North Pennines, whose work is funded by both Northumberland and Cumbria County Councils, Northern Arts, the Rural Development Commission, the Countryside Commission and six district councils.

But such partnerships are often uneasy relationships.

5.24 Deciding whether or not to fund a visit to a rural area by a national touring company is, for example, a relatively clear-cut process. Where cultural development-based activities are concerned, however, there is an inherent tension between the criteria by which these bodies will decide on their involvement.

If the arts activity under consideration is tackling, say, transport, some will be asking: "But is it art?" Others will say "If it's art, why should we pay for it?" Where does that leave the artist or local group?

This is not a creative tension, not least because artists and arts organisations can be dismissed as supplicants rather than being regarded as the catalysts by which non-arts agencies can achieve their objectives.

5.25 So, when it comes to formulating a National Strategy, who is giving the lead to whom?

I submit that until this tension is resolved, the potential of cultural development-based growth is seriously stifled.

## VI WHAT WILL THE FUTURE HOLD?

6.1 The previous section described the tension between the starting points and objectives of the current players on the stage. If that tension is not a creative one, is actually impeding the development of the arts in rural areas, one aim of any arts strategy - perhaps the fundamental one - must be to release that tension, to convert it into positive energy.

To help identify opportunities for doing so, a brief review of factors likely to influence future thinking and behaviour might help.

6.2 We are already experiencing the early stages (in some cases, the more advanced stages) of general trends which could increase in significance:

These include:

- Migration from cities to the country
- Increase in 'green' thinking (I am not happy with this adjective but it is a useful shorthand)

I would suggest these two trends are more likely to affect rural areas than any others, but we must also consider:

- Continuing advances in technology
- Broadening of horizons - thinking more about the global impact of what we do
- Working together internationally (Europe, etc)
- Reorganisation of local government

- Financial recession - the need to discover alternative ways of paying for things.

Let us return to the two arts approaches previously identified and examine some possible consequences.

### **Provision-based activities**

6.3 It could be that the migration of people into the country simply recreates all the expectations of city arts provision in new locations.

If so, a number of possibilities might present themselves:

- a) Artforms requiring large scale premises - such as galleries, concert halls, opera houses etc might remain in central headquarters to which people would travel.
- b) They might further develop their touring into rural areas.

or:

- c) Increased demand (predominantly from those who had left the cities) might lead to more locally based dance companies, galleries, theatres etc.

In the case of (a), transport would be a necessity. In the case of (b) and (c) there would be a danger that these imported arts activities would swamp local cultural activities, which contribute to the attractiveness of rural communities to outsiders in the first place.

On the other hand:

- d) Advances in technology could bring performances and collections right into the home through enhanced videos, recordings, broadcasts, fax etc.

or, in time

- e) Orchestras, opera houses and so on might disappear altogether - the cultural dinosaurs of the twenty-first century?

6.4 The conditions to progress any of these (including (e)!) are already in place. What happens depends on the priorities which the system confers, inevitably a political question.

### **Cultural development activities**

6.5 On the other hand, it could be that a more creative - a more 'green' - response to people's desire to move to the country could safeguard the characteristics they ought to value most, while also encouraging rural areas to develop positively.

This would call for a new approach to housing, planning, architecture, services and so forth, an approach which was infinitely more sensitive to the needs of indigenous people.

6.6 This approach would be governed by principles which have already gained ground in recent years, first out of altruism, more recently from a recognition that our survival is going to be dependent on them. For example:

- A development of the spirit of the 'caring nineties'
- A relinquishing of dependence on monetary and material values
- A concern for place and distinctiveness
- A search for new spirituality.

It is here that cultural development-based activities could come into their own.

Several features already identified in the section "What are the arts in rural areas?" are very much in tune with 'green' thinking:

- They develop whole cultures
- They work collaboratively, are interdependent with other activities and interests and so forth.

6.7 Furthermore, many characteristics presently counted as problems, could, when viewed in a 'green' light, become positive strengths:

- Smallness of scale provides a highly appropriate intimacy
- Sponsorship in kind, bartering, etc. lessens dependence on money. Rural areas, by force of circumstance, often make use of alternative ways of 'paying' for things. Skills are exchanged, products and services bartered. A different approach to finance could unlock new resources and point a way forward to others.
- Adapting spaces already available saves expense and energy, and prevents activities from becoming too separated from each other.

6.8 Of the other trends listed in para 6.6 of this section, most could offer further opportunities for the development of these kinds of activities. For example:

- Advancing technology will narrow distances, provide greater opportunities for training (through distance learning), and for networking, nationally and internationally. Televillages are already pointing the way. Additionally, the arts of film, video and broadcasting could become increasingly accessible and appropriate means of expressing different rural cultures.

- Increasing European and global co-operation will open up new contacts and collaborations, the chance for rural communities to interact to a far greater degree than before - either in person or through technological contact.

- Local government reorganisation in England could well move authority down to a level more compatible with the needs of local activities.

- There is one consequence of the migration from city to country which has hitherto not been much considered. If, as is to be hoped, this will include Asian and Afro-Caribbean people, the alliance of the minority cultures should produce especially powerful effects.

6.9 So, in this way of thinking, it is quite likely that cultural development-based activities in rural areas would be not only relevant to the society of the future, but actually central to it.

The moment has probably come to point out that this approach is just as appropriate in urban areas as in rural ones.

### **The need for change**

6.10 At present specialist organisations at national and regional level proselytise for the arts throughout Britain. As well as working to maintain the experimental cutting edge of the arts, much of their efforts are directed at making those arts relevant to present day circumstances: hence courses in marketing, incentives for raising business sponsorship or increasing earned income. In short they try to assist artists and arts organisations to adjust to the market economy.

It is tempting, therefore, to see the 'problems' of the arts in rural areas in terms of how they measure up to these yardsticks. Of course, they find it a struggle: sponsorship is virtually non-existent, comparatively small audiences limit earned income, and so on.

6.11 However, in the previous paragraphs, I have suggested that cultural development-based activities are poised to occupy a central role. But if advantage is to be taken of their strengths, much further development will be necessary now. Are we in a position to bring about that development? I would submit that our present specialist arts agencies are not.

The scenario which I can foresee will require entirely different sorts of approaches and structures:

- Lateral thinking
- 'Local' becoming a national issue
- Cross-sector collaboration on a formal basis.



We shall be looking for a breadth of experience and knowledge beyond the arts. We may even need to abandon 'the arts' as a separate specialisation.

6.12 Yet to contemplate such a vision, a willingness to entertain radical change in the structures of national and regional arts bodies and the relationship between them would be fundamental. Such a willingness seems extremely unlikely.

6.13 After at least twelve years of wrangling, none worse than the last two, the immediate future would seem to consist of more of the same. Only £1 million will be saved on administration. In England 12 RAAs will be reduced to 10 RABs. Staff cuts miraculously equate to those lost through the abolition of Merseyside Arts and Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts. (The latter, with its record of enlightened support of cultural activities in rural areas, seems to have become a martyr to a non-existent cause.)

6.14 Meanwhile, the Arts Council of Great Britain seems determined to hang onto as much of its previous role and status as possible. Lord Palumbo's introduction to the Council's 1989/90 annual report begs the question whether we are encouraging the arts, or in the business of encouraging the Arts Council:

"Whilst the final form of the delegated structure is not quite in place, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Arts Council will be left with a respectable portfolio of clients - essential if it is not to lose touch with its grass-roots constituency in the form of the arts and arts organisations throughout the country - as well as responsibility for touring, experimental and innovative art, education, cultural diversity, and disability. Add to that its new and most welcome strategic role, and it is not difficult to see that the Jeremiahs who predicted an early demise for the Arts Council, have been well and truly confounded."

Could it be that one person's grass roots are another's bindweed?

6.15 So, if our arts bodies are not appropriate agents for the change that is needed to bring about the unchoking of opportunities which exist in rural areas, how can that change be brought about, and who will do it?



## VII WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

7.1 I have already pointed out that an essential part of strategy formulation is some crystal-ball gazing at the likely conditions in which any strategy will be carried out.

7.2 I would submit that the future of the provision-based approach is a relatively straightforward matter. All the antecedents are in place; it becomes a question of whether the necessary additional resources will be devoted to it.

7.3 Where the cultural development-based approach is concerned, research has already established that much excellent work is being carried out (see *Rural Arts* by Trevor Bailey and Ian Scott). There is also evidence that some useful schemes are already in operation (see Who is Backing What, and Why?).

7.4 I would submit, however, that support for this approach has not achieved what might be termed 'critical mass' in national arts strategic thinking, and will not do so until the tension, to which I referred earlier, has been resolved.

### What stands in the way?

7.5 The very word 'arts' stands in the way.

It has been pointed out earlier in this paper that arts in rural areas tend to cross boundaries, are often multi-disciplinary in character, and embrace wider forms of cultural expression (such as flower festivals, food etc.) than the present arts world is equipped to accommodate. This makes them difficult to assign to individual artform or indeed pure arts categories; they will always be pushing up against the demarcation lines, spilling out over the edges.

Such activities can end up in a 'Catch 22' situation, trapped by the "Is it art?" or "If it's art, why should we pay?" syndrome.

7.6 If instead we were to act in terms of cultural development, and allow our thinking to be influenced by its diversity, we would be released from restraints which only paralyse or distort.

But we should not underestimate the nature of the challenge.

7.7 The way different bodies pull in different directions (as referred to earlier) is directly related to the accountability demands under which they operate. In the wrong hands, these can be made to be very limiting.

7.8 Most criteria one reads are quite broadly drawn. The trouble is that those who apply them frequently interpret them rigidly. However comforting and useful this may be when it comes to justifying decisions, a more relaxed approach is needed.

7.9 For example, arts bodies place much importance on 'innovation'. However, the 'innovative' criterion is so often applied in terms of some national absolute.

How much further local arts practice - urban and rural - could progress if 'innovation' could be judged more in terms of inside-out thinking. It's not as if useable criteria which meet the need have not been devised. (See Appendix.)

My observation is that there is plenty of scope to increase cultural development-based activity so long as officials have faith: faith in the participants (active and passive), and imagination.

### **What might be done?**

7.10 I have already shown that the arts specific bodies are not equipped to give the backing needed to reach the 'critical mass' which will stop cultural development-based policies from being dominated by provision-based ones.

7.11 Arts agencies need to be more open to rural thinking, to the development of whole cultures. Non-arts agencies need further encouragement to value cultural development as a means to their ends.

Each sector can benefit from the other's expertise. But neither sector possesses the whole answer. In particular, both need to learn from artists and community development workers active at a local rural level, and the officials who have had the breadth of mind to support them.

7.12 Above all, we need to have a setting in which the cultural development approach can be properly examined and the techniques for its validity fully worked through.

7.13 I suggest this requires a cross-sector Commission (or some other body as might best fit the purpose) of which shared experience, peer-group pressure and lateral thinking would be the predominant characteristics, and through whom local practice would become a national issue.

7.14 Since shaping this suggestion at the early stages of planning this paper, I seem to have been somewhat overtaken by recent developments. The Arts Council has recently announced the setting up of the Arts Foundation (to encourage innovative and experimental arts), and a special unit to promote architecture, both in response, as I understand it, to a need the Council perceives for special attention to be given to these subjects.

The cultural development approach to encouraging arts in rural areas is, I submit, a subject of equal national interest and importance on its own terms.

7.15 The Commission (I shall use that title for the sake of argument) would be given a five-year life span. (I have no wish to create yet another self-perpetuating arts institution.) It would be given very specific tasks to carry out. It should not duplicate

existing research, but examine means of progressing practice.

7.16 It must be for the National Arts and Media Strategy consultation process to determine whether this is an idea worth adopting and if so, what the terms of reference should be.

To start the ball rolling, however, I would like to make some suggestions under the following three broad but inter-related headings:

### **1. Control**

- i. to explore new models for devolved power and resources.
- ii. to identify ways by which accountability can be seen more broadly. What alternatives are there to making assessment criteria more stringent the smaller the funding pot is?
- iii. to develop means whereby those involved in rural cultural activities can support each other at local, county, regional and/or international level through networking.

### **2. Resources**

- iv. to improve sustainable resources of all kinds for rural cultural practice.
- v. to encourage fuller use of communications technology and media arts in practice and as support tools.
- vi. to create opportunities for greater international co-operation.
- vii. to explore non-financial sources of support and further their acceptance as legitimate funding alternatives.
- viii. to set up a national database providing information on good practice as well as mistakes to be avoided.
- ix. to establish training schemes and exchanges of expertise e.g. arts/community development skills.

### **3. Advocacy and Recognition**

- x. to further cross-sector thinking and practice amongst arts and non-arts bodies at all levels.
- xi. to extend that thinking into government departments and other agencies which have not yet considered cultural activities as relevant to their remit.

- xii. to work with the media to create more opportunities through them for public expression of our diverse rural cultures and to bring about more consistently positive perceptions of those cultures.

These might contribute to an overall aim, which could be:

- xiii. to draft a charter or code of practice, and to get it accepted by arts and non-arts agencies at all levels as a guide to supporting cultural development-based practice.

### Questions which arise

7.17 The purpose of this paper is not to present a blueprint. However, if my suggestion strikes a chord, the National Arts and Media Strategy consultation process could be the starting point to press for an alternative approach to our present system. It could be the place to discuss around the country whether such a cross-sector body could be helpful, and if so:

- What sort of body would be most effective
- How its members might be chosen
- How it might relate to or represent existing arts agencies and interests
- How its remit could be improved
- How it could be funded - perhaps through the very in-kind provision which it might further explore, or through contributions from the national bodies whose interests would be represented, as a sign of good faith.
- How it could be given greatest political clout (there are undoubtedly lessons to be learned from those who have already brought about change through cultural activities).

And so on....

Whatever the thoughts of those being consulted, I remain convinced that we need to lift the debate beyond the present day preoccupations and structures to which the procedures of the National Arts and Media Strategy appear to be confined.

### What might be done now?

7.18 Of course it is relatively easy to sit at a desk and suggest strategies for the long term future, forgetting that those involved in the arts in rural areas - artists, craftworkers, community development workers and local groups - need help now.

I would therefore like to make one further suggestion for the short term:

7.19 I suggest that Lord Palumbo and all the specialist arts agencies identify **now** a year within the recently announced Millennium programme in which not a city, or a region, but cultural activities in rural areas right round the U.K. will be celebrated.

I would envisage the organisation of this event to be delegated to the Commission as a practical task.

Emphasis should be on sustaining and developing practice already in existence, rather than creating new projects for the sake of it. Too often schemes favour the new and ignore the needs of current good work.

This recommendation is not suggested as a smart way of releasing resources for the arts in rural areas. It is put forward as a practical way by which the specialist arts agencies around the U.K. - and in particular the ACGB and RABs - can test their resolve to find ways of making the cultural life of the whole country an integrated one.

7.20 We are, when all is said and done, talking about a particular approach which has been undervalued since the war.

Let the last word be with an artist who understood its value well:

*The more local something is, the more universal it is.*

Joan Miro

## **VIII APPENDIX**

### **General indicative assessment criteria**

The following guidelines were recommended by the Gulbenkian Foundation's Arts in Rural Areas working party. All of the criteria need not be satisfied on each occasion, but a 'best fit' approach adopted. They are not given in any order of priority.

#### **Projects should:**

- Reflect the identity and special nature of rural areas with particular regard for the fragility and vulnerability of indigenous cultures in such areas.
- The project itself need not necessarily continue, but its effect should.
- Motivate and inspire.
- Be celebratory, reflective or campaigning.
- Create and utilise links between traditional and new skills, activities and experiences.
- Inform the local community. Everyone should know but not necessarily take part. There should be no conditions relating to percentage of population supporting the project.
- Enhance the sense of place.
- Contain an element of self-evaluation.
- Have the potential to develop links with and to influence a wider understanding beyond the immediate community. This should not, however, be a condition of grant aid.

# NOTES

# NOTES



# NOTES

