

NETWORK

STUDY INTO THE FUTURE OF A DRAMA PRODUCING
CONSORTIUM OF MIDDLE-SCALE THEATRES IN
ENGLAND

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1. NETWORK

Network is an affiliation of middle-scale touring theatres¹ which, in 1998, produced its first play, Claire Luckham's *Trafford Tanzi*. This performed in seventeen theatres,² between 25 March and 30 May, with financial assistance from Arts Council Touring and Barclays New Stages.³ There were nineteen member theatres in this unincorporated consortium:

Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds	(352 seats)
Central Theatre, Chatham ⁴	(645 seats)
Arts Centre, Darlington	(375 seats)
The Playhouse, Harlow	(400 seats)
Harrogate Theatre ⁵	(500 seats)
Courtyard Theatre and Arts Centre, Hereford ⁶	(400 seats)
Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham	(400 seats)
Horsham Arts Centre (Capitol Theatre)	(450 seats)
Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield	(477 seats)
The Corn Exchange, Newbury	(420 seats)
The Harlequin Theatre, Redhill	(494 seats)
The Music Hall, Shrewsbury	(398 seats)
Stag Theatre, Sevenoaks	(700 seats)
South Holland Centre, Spalding	(372 seats)
Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage	(506 seats)
Arts Centre project, Stratford East, London ⁷	(300 seats)
Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton	(352 seats)
Theatre Royal and Opera House, Wakefield	(508 seats)
The Castle, Wellingborough	(505 seats)

¹ For the purposes of a previous study, middle-scale theatres were defined as those touring theatres with average capacities of 540 seats. They were seen as part-of a continuum with large-scale theatres (average capacity 1,507 seats). The category with the greatest number of theatres is middle-scale. See Crispin Raymond, *Beyond Survival: a Management Agenda for Middle-Scale Touring in the 1990s*, Crispin Raymond Associates, Bath, 1991, p.32. Raymond sampled 21 middle-scale theatres. Nevertheless, the average capacity of the 19 theatres featured in this consortium study is 465 seats.

² *Trafford Tanzi* performed, additionally, at Forum 28 Theatre in Barrow-in-Furness (485 seats) and the Middlesbrough Theatre (486 seats). Middlesbrough was a Network member: its manager, Laurence Sach, moved to Harlow Playhouse in 1998. The production did not perform at Hereford Courtyard Theatre, which was under construction during this tour. The South Holland Centre, Spalding was being re-built.

³ Arts Council Touring: £27,305; Barclays News Stages (Kallaway) £27,305 - total subsidy £54,610.

⁴ Seating capacity excludes 300 seats in the Gallery, not used for drama.

⁵ Harrogate Theatre was, effectively, a continuous repertory theatre, but has reorganised itself to present visiting companies for half of the year. It did not present *Trafford Tanzi*.

⁶ Hereford Courtyard opened on 18 September 1998: its artistic director, Jonathan Stone, had participated in planning for the Network consortium.

⁷ Under planning/construction throughout 1998: its director, Jon Harris, had begun work as a convenor of Network whilst general manager of The Playhouse, Harlow.

Network has four aims:

1. To enable theatres to initiate and produce touring shows, by co-operative means, which fill gaps in national middle-scale touring provision - to be a middle-scale version of The Touring Partnership.
2. To strengthen and deepen the relationships between theatres and companies, for mutual benefit.
3. To create marketing and education campaigns which have a national (rather than local) focus and a stronger impact, though they use resources which already exist.
4. To enable the creative aspirations of those who work in theatres to be met more frequently.⁸

The consortium state that it is, potentially:

a partnership able to solve some trenchant problems in middle-scale provision. The basis of Network's activity will be producing its own tours, and conducting a coordinated, long-term relationship with selected touring companies, A partnership of this kind will help to re-invent a fresh identity for touring theatre, This the best way to:

- Actively ensure that gaps in provision are filled
- Pool all resources, financial and human
- Allow theatres and their staff to feel a sense of artistic ownership of the material they present
- Encourage companies to grow and be more creative, and have deeper relationships with them
- Get more audiences, and new audiences, by initiating the missing work and letting middle-scale knowledge work nationally as well as locally
- Get value for money from development schemes, because the group's projects reach more people: *Trafford Tanzi*, the first project, has a potential audience of over 20,000.⁹

⁸ As described by Jon Harris, *Network: Research Project Brief*, Stratford East, London, May 1998.

⁹ *Network, Research Project Brief*, op.cit., p.5.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Purpose of the Study

This paper sets out to discuss four main questions for the future of the Network consortium:

- Objectives and Philosophy.
- An evaluation of *Trafford Tanzi*.
- Funding.
- Organisation.

It may be considered as a *Stage 1 Research and Development Initiative* of the Arts Council of England Venue and Promoter Development Funding Schemes 1998/9. These “support venue managers and promoters in increasing and broadening audiences through the quality and diversity of the programming of touring performing arts work”. The scheme encourages good management and marketing practice and the development of integrated education programmes and its purpose is described as:

To establish the base position of venues/promoters, research programme and audience potential, assess expertise and facilities and define objectives so that the most productive new directions and realistic targets may be set. Research and development projects which identify the benefits of changing direction for the organisation and the audience are positively encouraged. The development of strategic marketing plans and ways to develop education activities related to new programming can be part of such initiatives.

Research and Development Initiatives are designed to allow venues/promoters to make creative choices about development on the basis of detailed information and understanding of their potential.

Research and Development Initiatives will normally precede either Pilot Development Schemes or Full Plans.¹⁰

¹⁰ See *Venue and Promoter Development Schemes 1997/8 and 1998/9*, Arts Council of England Touring Department, Arts Council of England, London, 1997.

The study is written principally for the managers and staffs of the Network theatres, as a discussion document to assist them in making decisions on the future work of the consortium and its contribution to the creation of middle-scale drama productions.

2.2. Methodology

The study was commissioned by Network in August 1998 and formally administered by the Wakefield Theatre Royal and Opera House, with financial assistance from the Arts Council of England Touring Department. (Reference 9802759A), Southern Arts Board, Yorkshire and Humberside Arts Board and the member theatres.

2.3. First Stage

Jon Harris and Murray Edwards met with the author in Wakefield on 18 June to discuss the scope of the study and again in Edinburgh on 20 August, to finalise the brief. The aim of the first stage was to collect quantitative data relating to each Network theatre and the production of *Trafford Tanzi*. It included a production questionnaire and box-office analysis sent to each theatre. Statistics from eleven responding theatres are given in *Appendix 1*.

2.4. Second Stage

The second stage was to enlarge upon this data with qualitative research including discussions with the managers of each Network theatre. It comprised three half-day meetings as follows:

8 September 1998 at Harrogate Theatre: Lynda Winstanley (Darlington), Sheena Wrigley (Harrogate), Geof Keys (Hexham), Murray Edwards (Wakefield), with apologies for absence from Huddersfield, Jim Beirne, Head of Performing Arts at Yorkshire and Humberside Arts and Brian Debnam, Head of Performing Arts at Northern Arts Board.

18 September 1998 at Theatre Royal Bury St. Edmunds: Colin Blumenau (Bury St. Edmunds), Laurence Sach (Harlow), Bob Bustance (Stevenage), Jon Harris (Stratford East arts centre project),

with apologies for absence from Wellingborough, Spalding and Alan Orme, Drama Officer of Eastern Arts Board.

23 September 1998 at Horsham Arts Centre: Kevin Parker (Horsham), Michael Bewick (Newbury), Aletta Barry (Redhill), Terry Shaw (Sevenoaks). with apologies for absence from Chatham and Judith Hibberd, Drama Officer at South East Arts Board. Jon Harris was in attendance.

These meetings included a discussion of artistic, managerial, marketing, education and technical lessons learned from *Trafford Tanzi*, as well as their application in future productions and the implications for future organisation of the consortium.

Interviews were held in person or by telephone with other individuals, as shown in *Appendix 3*.

The study was supported and guided by Jon Harris and Murray Edwards who formed a Steering Group.

Research into the objectives and operation of other formal and informal consortia has also been undertaken, including consideration of The Touring Partnership, The Touring Consortium, the Merseyside Alliance of Producers and Pilot Theatre Company's 1998 production of *Lord of the Flies &c*.

2.5. Third Stage

A draft report was circulated to Network theatre and discussed at a meeting at The Castle, Wellingborough on 5 January 1999. The following managers were present:

Jon Harris (Convenor), Colin Blumenau (Bury St. Edmunds), Glenys Gill (Taunton), Michael Bewick (Newbury), Laurence Sach (Harlow), Graham Brown and Pat Souster (Wellingborough), Kevin Parker (Horsham) and Audrey Ryan (Redhill). There were apologies from all managers not present, as well as written submissions from some of these theatres.

This meeting received several recommendations from the author, and the study includes a statement of approved resolutions, adopted for the future development of the consortium.

This final report was approved by Jon Harris on 21 January 1999.

3. OBJECTIVES AND PHILOSOPHY

3.1. ARGUMENTS FOR TOURING THEATRES AS CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS

The promoter, the artist and the audience must all be represented in the formulation of any policy in order for the activity which springs from this policy to be relevant.¹¹

Many factors in the changing touring theatre scene have made extension into the entrepreneurial and producing field a matter of enlightened self-interest and expediency. Also obvious is the necessity for the widest possible service to the public by keeping the theatres, which are usually significant public buildings, working at full-blast all the time. 'Dark' weeks are the bane of any theatre management, and especially the managers of independent or trust operated theatres whose bottom-lines are exposed through their limited company accounts, for all theatres have to produce a positive contribution to their overheads: none have sufficient subsidy to maintain the costs of resident staffs and overheads whilst a theatre is idle.

There is an acknowledged shortage of attractions available for touring in sufficient quantity and quality to keep the programmes filled over the year, even with some regular visitors.

Touring theatres have never been eligible for revenue funding from the Arts Council and many theatres believe that their position and function have been

¹¹ Colin Blumenau, 'The Creation of a Hybrid' in *Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds, Business Plan, 1998-2001*, St. Edmundsbury Theatre Management Limited, Bury St. Edmunds, 1998, Part 3, 1.9., p.4. This management has adopted an over-riding objective, "to ensure that the artistic policy will be informed by discussion with both artistic partners and audience representatives". Blumenau describes the permeating crisis in the theatre industry, arguing that the Theatre Royal would be acting against its best interests if it does not try to do whatever it can to reverse the trend of fewer good productions being available. Jon Harris has written that the status quo of "reps are reps and touring theatres are touring theatres and never the twain shall meet" is no longer adequate. The current tendency is for the wishes and needs of the theatregoer to be subjugated to the ambition of the producing company. Several theatre managers have expressed dismay at the "hard to sell" repertory of the "matrix" companies (e.g., Oxford Stage Company, English Touring Theatre and Method & Madness) where the theatre is offered continuity by contracting all productions but has no say in their choice of play. This "take-us-or-leave-us" on a fixed guarantee approach ignores the key factor in the successful cooperation of audience, theatre and artist: the manager as promoter. The promoter is the conduit of information between the other two and must reconcile the ambitions of all partners. The promoter is interpreter of the one to the other.

taken for granted by the arts funding system, including the regional arts boards. Theatre managers often believe that the arts funding system's emphasis on the production as having greater significance than the theatre has hampered a theatre-wide cooperation which would assist industry advocacy. Yet theatres are by far the largest providers of theatre in all its manifestations, and their survival depends, in the main, on support offered by local government and the skills of their managers.

The problem of finding attractions in sufficient quantity and of good quality has led to this comparatively new entrepreneurial aspect of a manager's role: a desire to influence the choice of play. In some countries, including England, the nature of touring theatre has led directly to the formation of new companies to move from one theatre to another as a form of core theatre activity, supplemented with one-off visits from other users, amateur and professional, as available, across all the performed artforms.¹²

How does a manager decide which play or company to book into the theatre? After a while the manager and the producing company have an idea of what does business in a certain town. After the manager books shows enough, he or she has an idea that there are certain plays or companies that the people just will not like. It is a question of experience. The manager will either have a flair for this or not. The manager has to make a study, to read all the arts pages and judge plays by what they do in other parts of the country. Then the manager tries to figure out what kind of community their theatre is in, and who the audience for a particular show will be.

Other selection criteria are considered, such as the company's reputation, named actors, local relevance, the performance interpretation, number of performances to be given, the quality of the publicity material available, the availability of local sponsorship or subsidy, the education programme offered by the company, timing and the programme mix within the theatre's other artforms.

¹² For example, four theatres in the Australian cities of Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Rockhampton, North Queensland, acted in consortium to establish a music-drama company, New Moon Theatre Productions (1981-1988), which staged four productions annually. The respective theatre managers were the executive board of the company, with local authorities providing subsidy and guarantees against loss, with elected councillors being representative trustees on the company's council. The theatre managers agreed the choice of play, hired a producer and director and provided general management services. The consortium's producing work was discontinued when its originating theatre managers moved on. Other consortia are considered under 4.4.

Although these criteria for contracting a show will vary, finance is the most important factor: a presenter's fixed seating capacity and the commitment to make performances available to diverse communities make it all but impossible for a middle-scale touring theatre to break-even, even with significant local authority subsidy. Inevitably, the cost of the production and the margin to be retained after paying the company - whatever the deal - is paramount.

Despite considering these criteria, it is no longer possible to "book a sure thing" and the managers therefore ought to be involved with the choice of play.¹³

Efforts to provide greater equity and access for diverse communities dictate lower ticket prices for many drama productions. In a best-case scenario, touring theatres can inspire a sense of "house trust" in their communities, a comfort level among theatregoers that can build audiences. A long term presenting theatre-community relationship can be the result of momentum established through careful attention to community taste balanced by the manager's programming vision and awareness of the broad range of performing arts activity.

A sense of balance is required of the successful touring theatre. To present good theatre requires blending artistic commitment with managerial savvy. Theatres dominated by the first quality are likely to live under the constant threat of extinction. Theatres dominated by an undiluted business approach - the risk averse, the staid, the conventional - are destined for a theatrically arid and boring stability.

The focus of work for the managers in the Network theatres is both on the practical and the programming. During the past ten years the theatre managers, along with the companies they present, have initiated and developed new levels of artistic activity which were unknown when managers "waited for the phone to ring". Their job is no longer a matter of routine.

¹³ The Business Plan of the Harlequin Theatre, Redhill (1997-1998) continues the discussion of manager as programmer by adopting a key drama policy objective "To achieve more control over what productions we would like to present rather than just having to accept what is on offer".

This year, for example, the Theatre Royal at Bury St. Edmunds produced its own production of *Othello*, with a full education programme, producing a tour through the Eastern counties with assistance from the Eastern Arts Board and five other partners.

This increased emphasis on the programming and creative development functions of the *presenting*¹⁴ theatre has involved close cooperation with artists and, in drama, a need to understand the practicalities of the production and touring processes.

The vitality of a production is dependent upon a life beyond its premiere; its significance is enhanced by exposure to different audiences facilitated by the stability of presenting theatres throughout the country. The Network consortium emerged because the theatre managers have become more aware of their role as an essential link between artists and audiences.

Many of the managers have marked artistic ability, drawn from previous experience as actors, directors, showmen, managers, stage managers, technicians, marketers (and gamblers) in producing companies. They also understand the commercial imperatives of the productions bought by their theatres. Their background in production has been balanced by greater awareness of their theatres' particular communities than is usually the case in the nomadic touring companies where, often, an artistic director chooses a play for reasons to do with personal interest and its scope for the company's artists.

Good theatre managers also gives consideration to the needs of the artists they present and, further, to the nature of the community in which they live

¹⁴ Managers in producing theatres, as well as administrators in the arts funding system, frequently describe "touring" theatres as "receiving" theatres or, with overtones of their supposed fatiguing blandness: "venues". The descriptions are labels, but have been known to excite surprising passions late-night at theatre conferences. This tension began when Miss Horniman, founder of the repertory movement at the Gaiety Theatre Manchester, had to disband her permanent company in 1917. She described the Gaiety's new touring role as being a "lodging house theatre", for she was no longer responsible for the *mise-en-scène* of visiting companies that played there. The Arts Council now describe the best of these theatres as "presenting" venues. The term "presenting" was first used by Warwick Arts Centre, c.1991, and was probably imported from the United States, where the National Endowment for the Arts restyled its Inter-Arts Program as "Presenting" in 1988. They initiated a *National Task Force on Presenting and Touring the Performing Arts*, which was administered by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, the goal being to strengthen the field of presenting and the relationship among presenting organisations, artists, audiences and communities.

and work and the well-being of their theatre buildings as economic partners in the community.

The theatres usually occupy a significant physical presence in the town: it is therefore vital that their response to the community is not passive, but that they engage with the community in a positive way. Their boards of directors are representatives of the community, often with a majority of councillors and rarely anyone from the theatre profession. Theatre managers have greater knowledge of their towns and theatregoers than do visiting companies. They are therefore significant players not only in the facilitation of theatre activity but also in the development of performance seasons which can communicate an artistic viewpoint to diverse communities in ways which expand participation in and appreciation for the *art* of the theatre.

Thus the best presenting theatres have potential for being learning centres in the arts for people of all ages: education work is a significant conduit through which a theatre interacts with the life of the town.¹⁵

Many presenting theatres work with schools and have the potential to develop their own arts classes and programmes. The theatre managers are recognising that the audiences of tomorrow must be nurtured today - this is a responsibility of theatre as well as company - this long-term view of audience development is much in evidence in the large touring theatres who have, mostly, appointed education officers in the past five years. But resources have not yet enabled their recruitment in the middle-scale theatres.¹⁶

Nevertheless, to a greater degree than ever before, presenting theatres are engaging artists for “residencies” which often involve master classes, discussions with students, open rehearsals and collaborations with local artists. This is easier to accomplish in the large touring theatres which host one week runs than the ‘one night stand’ drama engagement common in the Network theatres.

¹⁵ An impressive range of education activities in arts centres is described in Joy MacKeith, *The Art of Flexibility: Arts Centres in the 1990s*, Arts Council of England, London, 1996, pp. 35-36. This research report also emphasises the programming flexibility of arts centres: in practice, Network theatres are closer to these ideals than are many of the No.1 touring theatres and might be better described as arts centres.

¹⁶ Only one Network theatre currently employs a full-time education officer: the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds.

The Network theatres are all very lean operations with low overheads and relatively lean administrative structures. They have adopted mission statements with high ideals (but are not blinded by idealism), employ experienced managers, have talented and skillful staffs, and are increasingly adept at careful planning and the hard work needed to make theatre. Of course, these factors are inextricably entangled with and often compromised by various economic exigencies, by the pressures of competition, by audience tastes and interests, and by other factors which, for lack of a more concrete term, can only be labelled human. They interact with any organisational structure for presenting theatre, but the organisations and individuals who make up the Network consortium have come of age. They can get together and launch a constructive programme. Given time and a chance to grow, the consortium may succeed in contributing something of lasting value to their theatres.

3.2. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF THE STATUS QUO

There is an appealing logic in the desire for theatre managers to produce their own work, but there are also considerable disadvantages. We must bear in mind that there are not enough good (meaning popular and artistically imaginative) productions to go around, and that most of the theatres (as indicated in the box office summaries for drama programming) have great difficulties in attracting patrons for most of the plays that are promoted. Nevertheless, we must be realistic about the situation, because theatre management is an enterprise in itself - distinct from play producing.

Managers are usually preoccupied with finding up to 100 productions annually, across all professional and amateur performing arts. As programmers, they adjudicate between the conflicting, complex demands of many organisations and companies whose schedules are intertwined with each other. They also have to run the “bricks and mortar” management and are often preoccupied with refurbishment programmes as well as marketing, personnel, technical and catering management.

In the show calendar, professional drama often accounts for only ten per cent of attractions.¹⁷ It is unfortunate that theatre management has little or no control over the production side, but whether a manager likes this or not, this happens to be the fact. Whilst England has a theatre system where a large proportion of the theatre companies are theatreless, then we are bound to have the consequence of theatre managers having to present what is on offer.

No theatre can programme plays which appeal equally to everyone and no producing company can programme choices which appeal to the required number of theatregoers in every theatre visited: the choice of any play for a nationwide touring circuit is inevitably tedious or objectionable in one town and a thrill in another. If a play fails, the theatre manager’s presumption is that it was badly chosen and staged. The theatre company’s presumption is that the theatre sold it badly. These vagaries exist whoever is the producer.

¹⁷ See Annual Programme Summaries in appendices for details of the artform mix and attendances in a sample of completed Network theatre questionnaires.

Would the additional responsibilities, logistical efforts and financial risks of Network productions make a difference? Would the boards or local government recreation departments sanction the additional speculative work? Should there always be specialisation in production or theatre management? Will theatre people always do what they predominantly do best? Does the enlarged conception of theatres as arts centres make a difference? In a difficult national subsidy situation, which some commentators describe as meltdown, does the separation of theatre building costs from the costs of the art of the theatre create improved transparency about the real costs of making production and operating theatres? Would *one* annual production by the Network theatres be worth the planning? Aside from the choice of play, how different is the Network production process to that of a company? Would the energy required be better put, for instance, to community work? Would the subsidy required, if available, be best awarded to artists-in-residence? After all, the theatre managers, to use a stereotypical expression, are certainly no longer described as “janitors”. Admittedly, the Network managers are not people who utter those two celebrated if slightly worn phrases that “We give the public what it demands” or “Art does not pay”. (Many other managers do, but more from habit than belief in their worth). But do the managers have enough “creative” tasks already?

Should the theatre managers concentrate on improving the conditions in which the touring companies’ work can flourish; such as finding the money to support the appointment of education officers with programme budgets and enhancing their theatres’ distinctive characters through better hospitality to artists and the public, as well as better salesmanship? Would the development of Network lead to another central production service bureaucracy which imposed a need for more subsidy?

Would *twenty* theatres really have more sense of ownership of a production? Do the companies really operate to the disadvantage of the theatres? Do mutual respect, cooperation and compromise between theatre managers amount to more than consensus? Cooperation and consensus is not vision. Generally, the history of the modern theatre has demonstrated that successful theatre has been created by companies led by forceful, single directors or sometimes by a harmonious partnership of joint-artistic directors. It might be impossible to create a Network management structure which does not diffuse authority, thereby weakening the potential for strong leadership and the ability to effectively respond quickly to the crises which always occur in

production. Will it be impossible to create a management for an artistically and economically risky enterprise? Who could be the real leaders of Network? In some circles, the idea of Network is controversial: an experienced manager of a *small*-scale touring theatre suggested that:

All managers want to present better theatre, but it is a vain ambition for the theatre managers to play at being producers, because so few of them have experience of production and cooperation is hard because each theatre has its own agenda. Necessity often dictates vision, instead of the other way round. Imagination and vision are hard to find in most touring theatres. Cinemas do not make films. The Network scheme is an arts-political ploy: if the consortium is set-up to spend less money on the grounds of efficiency it will fail because the managers do not know what plays they want to do, why they want to do them and which artists to engage. It is the best directors and companies which need more money for artists and organisation.¹⁸

From these observations springs another consideration. Does a theatre manager/promoter choosing a play weight the power in decision making disproportionately to managerial rather than artistic imperatives? Is that a good or bad prospect? Does “project-based” play, director and creative team selection place the real choice in the hands of the Arts Council officers and panelists, as they discriminate for or against an annual production application? The theatres would need revenue funding in order to achieve continuity and artistic independence for Network-produced plays. In reality, this is unlikely to occur: the nomination of plays will be judged individually. Do theatre managers have the time to undertake the political dimension of Arts Council subsidy as well as that of dealing with local government? Does the continuity of an artistic director’s consistent involvement with artists nourish creative thinking and encourage a better vision than project based productions?

It is questionable whether the existing touring framework seriously interferes with the art of the theatre. When a play is chosen, cast and staged by a presenting theatre, the proximity of this process to audience preference may be no better guarantee of success. Theatregoers have always shown a tendency to accept the ready-made or obvious, rather than embark on an occasional adventure of discovery for themselves. This creates a vicious

¹⁸ Interview with Tamara Malcolm, Director, Chipping Norton Theatre Limited, 20 August 1998.

circle and will affect the middle-scale theatre manager as well as the producing companies. However great their financial or artistic leanings both have a body of stakeholders to satisfy, and both must achieve results. A theatre manager has to earn bread and butter and naturally is afraid to take risks. Without Arts Council or Regional Arts Board revenue subsidy, the theatres work on very slender budgets and are constantly facing financial difficulties: it will take tremendous courage for them to choose the more ambitious plays.

Perhaps the theatre managers could influence the artistic policy and choice of plays by becoming board members of some subsidised touring companies: this would certainly strengthen the relationship between a theatre and production company.¹⁹

If we permit the free play of supply and demand, there will be times when the theatre interests will be in a position to exact better terms and influence play choice; and there will be times when the boot will be on the other foot. Steps could be taken by the Arts Council to systemise and standardise relations between theatre and company, for the long-term benefit of both interests. The formation of Network, in particular its potential for advocacy and representation of the middle-scale theatre management sector, as opposed to production activity, is a step towards that day.

There is a strong case for the theatres working more cooperatively together to address management issues. Refreshingly, unlike the No.1 circuit which is more commercially oriented because of the dominance of private operators such as Apollo Leisure, no manager has suggested that there is rivalry between the theatres: the large number of Network members confirms the cooperative approach (even though each theatre is potentially the competitor of every other theatre in respect of the production it wants at the time it wants it). But there is a stronger case for an occasional forum for the theatres

¹⁹ My own experience of managing touring companies and theatres might be of interest. In a company touring four productions to six theatres, four theatre managers were on its board and were consistently supportive and helpful in making it feel welcome in their theatres. The managers contributed expertise in marketing, finding direct local authority subsidy for the company and, in turn, the company understood better how to devise educational work for their communities. Later, as a theatre manager, I was a board member of three companies which toured regularly to the Grand Theatre, Blackpool, and I found this was helpful to me in remembering the problems of touring and in keeping continuous contact with the artistic directors and theatre makers. Through this means, I aimed to inculcate (with varying degrees of success) the values of a producing company to the staff of a touring theatre.

and companies to work collectively on programming issues and I return to this subject in the recommendations.

Where does the balance of the argument lie?

Unquestionably, a large proportion of the Network managers will disagree with these arguments as being old-fashioned. And a proportion of the touring companies will disagree with the earlier explanations of theatres as creative organisations. I suspect that in many cases attitudes are largely fixed by an acceptance of traditional touring company practices. Examination of these pros and cons may assist the managers in the composition of a smaller Network membership.

Before suggesting conclusions and recommendations, there follows an examination of the work of other theatre consortia and the lessons to be learned from the experience of *Trafford Tanzi*.

4. OTHER CONSORTIA

The following are descriptions of existing consortia. Productions tour under many different mechanisms and auspices.

4.1. THE TOURING CONSORTIUM LIMITED

The Touring Consortium is an affiliation of The Churchill Theatre, Bromley (785 seats), King's Theatre, Edinburgh (1,336 seats), Darlington Civic Theatre (909 seats), Nottingham Theatre Royal (1,186 seats), Wolverhampton Grand Theatre (1,200 seats) *and* the general managers - Centreline Productions Limited. Its policy is to produce a play each autumn which tours to its five theatres and, additionally, to other large touring theatres that want the production. It is a non profit distributing company limited by guarantee, with the following Directors: Michael Grayson (Nottingham), Ian Ross (Bromley and Cambridge Arts Theatre), Peter Cutchie (Darlington), Brian Goddard (Wolverhampton), Stephen Barry (Edinburgh) and Jenny King (Producer of Centreline Productions). Mark Everett (Canterbury Marlowe Theatre) is an associate director.

The company tries to select a play which will attract schools' audiences and then offers a simultaneous education programme which includes schools'

workshops and classes in the theatres. These are led by the company's education officer and are accompanied by schools' packs mailed in advance to all schools in each theatre's catchment.

The formation of The Touring Consortium was assisted by Barclays' Stage Partners, which part-financed its first productions: *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Crucible*. These large-cast productions sold over 105,000 tickets and grossed over £1,000,000 at the box office. Ticket prices are a big consideration in the policy, because schools students have so far comprised 30 per cent of attendees. The object of the consortium is not to make money, but each theatre must not lose money: they each aim to recover the guaranteed fee for the week and make a positive contribution to standing costs. Thus far, because of the subsidy from Barclays New Stages and Arts Council Touring, the theatres have not made a loss. The consortium has also toured to No.1 theatres in High Wycombe, Sheffield, Bath, Cardiff and Norwich although the managers of these theatres are not involved with the management of the consortium. The productions are now an expected event in the theatres' programmes.

The proposed 1999 production is *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Like the first three productions, the play is recommended reading for schools' drama. This play also offers links to the Personal and Social Education curriculum up to 'A' level. The choice of each play has been made after careful consultation with teachers, although the commitment is to curriculum-related plays - choice of GCSE texts would soon be exhausted. This policy will lead to a science-based multi-media production in 2000, commissioned from David Freeman: *The Big Bang*. This commission indicates the intention to pursue cross-curriculum links. The Touring Consortium reason that grants need to be secured six months ahead of rehearsals, in order to mail schools packs and arrange teachers' and community leaders' INSET days at each theatre in the spring. They recognise that schools are faced with increasing financial hardship and are finding it harder to justify the cost of a theatre visit to a play other than a set text (albeit curriculum related) when at least one theatre trip is made to a Christmas show and a second trip may be made to a Shakespearean production. (It is not Touring Consortium policy to produce Shakespeare).

The productions are contracted to each theatre on a guaranteed fee. A freelance director is engaged for each play, with experienced actors,

including “television names” often billed above the title. Jenny King is producer: this role is not undertaken by member theatres, although the Churchill Theatre, Bromley may be regarded as a creative “off-West End producing house”. The Directors of the Company include a number of managers whose earlier experience has been in producing or repertory companies.

4.2. THE TOURING PARTNERSHIP LIMITED

There are eight touring theatres in The Touring Partnership: Plymouth Theatre Royal (1,296 seats), Bath Theatre Royal (940 seats), Newcastle Theatre Royal (1,294 seats), Norwich Theatre Royal (1,318 seats), Sheffield Lyceum Theatre (1,099 seats) Woking Peacock Theatre (1,338 seats) Cardiff New Theatre (1,186 seats) and Richmond Theatre (840 seats). It is a non-profit distributing company, with a board comprising each theatre manager, or in the case of Woking/Richmond which are programmed by a commercial operator - a representative of Ambassador Theatre Group. The Directors are presently Adrian Vinken, Danny Moar, Peter Sarah, Peter Wilson, Rosemary Squire, Grahame Morris, Giles Ballisat and Michael Lynas. Although theatre managers may change, the directorship of The Touring Partnership is inherited by any manager’s successor. It began production in 1994 with *The Provok’d Wife*, and was propelled in part by the loss of Compass Theatre Company (Anthony Quayle) and the English Shakespeare Company. Managers decided not to wait for the Arts Council to conjure up a new company to provide big productions of plays for the No.1 circuit. The formation look a long-time and a great deal of planning. Six interrelated policy heads were agreed:

- Good plays which could be both classical and new writing
- Essential high production values, *arising from*
- Distinguished directors, *who would ensure*
- Strong casting, *which would assist in*
- Marketability of the product, *and hence provide a*
- High box office potential²⁰

²⁰ Quoted from Adrian Vinken, *Policy for The Touring Partnership*, Burgh Island managers retreat, 1994.

At first, The Touring Partnership was coordinated by its chairman Jack Phipps, the first Director of Touring of the Arts Council of Great Britain. Attempts were made to engage an artistic director but according to Phipps, this proved a disaster because he was not interested in choosing the play in conjunction with the theatre managers. The choice of play is always a difficult issue, and the managers often disagree. The formation was largely driven by the theatre managers' frustration at being pressured by touring managements into either taking second rate work or productions from commercial managements such as Duncan C. Weldon who was, at the time, demanding guarantees of £60,000 - £70,000 plus royalties per week. Phipps had tried to set up something similar, a Theatres Royal Company in 1984, when he was at the Arts Council. He could not get the managers to agree. He had been dispirited by the Arts Council *The Glory of the Garden* study because this made no reference to touring or to touring theatres. The first play, a restoration comedy, was not successful. The commercial managers admired the theatre managers' enterprise but predicted it would be the last production, suggesting that there were too many bosses to make a dynamic artistic choice. [The question of consensus play selection has already been discussed, but is clearly a predictable issue in a theatrical milieu where artistic directors have usually had the say]. In fact, the Partnership has gone on to stage a play each year, including *Peace in Our Time*, *Broken Glass*, and *Make Way for Lucia*. It has been subsidised by Arts Council Touring, making separate applications for successive productions - which have been turned down on occasion - and sponsored by Barclays New Stages. It also produces with other partners: the next production will be *Brassed Off* (originally a Crucible Theatre, Sheffield production) which will be toured in association with three film companies. Each theatre pays a guaranteed fee (and royalties where applicable) with strict limitations to the "contra" account (often a contentious surprise to producers on the No.1 circuit). Centreline Productions (Jenny King) is retained as a staff producer and is, unlike the relationship to The Touring Consortium, not a Director of The Touring Partnership.

4.3. OBSERVATIONS ON THESE TWO CONSORTIA

It is notable that the member theatres of these two consortia number five and seven theatres respectively and that the membership does not overlap. The consortia have decided that expansion to include more theatres will be taken at a modest, prudent and appropriate scale - perhaps not all. This is because

five to eight weeks is the optimum period for attracting good actors to tour their one-week run dates.

Does Network need more theatres because it will present plays for shorter, part-week runs? A similarity of all twelve theatres in these first two consortia is an unavoidable weekly standing cost in excess of £22,000 and are all geared to one week, seven or eight performance seasons. The choice of plays is therefore based upon the financial necessity of redeeming their weekly overheads as well as aiming to pay for the guarantee itself. Their stages are all proscenium circa. 28 to 32 feet wide and share similar technical facilities, enabling designs to suit the stage without adaptation from theatre to theatre.

The theatres all have experienced marketing departments which are commercially focused. As with the Network theatres, they believe that they can make a significant contribution to the debate about drama provision by reaffirming the needs of the theatregoer as a prime factor in the equation of artist, audience and promoter.

The consortia are leading the No.1 theatres towards a more permanent relationship with Arts Council Touring²¹ as well as between each theatre. The world of individual No.1 theatre's management practices has been, hitherto, extremely insular: exchanges of information between the singly-managed theatres can only be helpful as they face competition from the colossus of the large-scale circuit: Apollo Leisure.

These two consortia are models worthy of imitation or adaptation and their organisation has influenced the conclusions and recommendations of this study.

²¹ The Arts Council of England Touring Department has a thirteen-person Advisory Panel. Although its touring officers deal with middle-scale presenting theatres through a number of venue development grants, managers of middle-scale theatres are under-represented as members of the panel. Detailed understanding of middle-scale touring theatre issues is undoubtedly brought to discussions by officers and by panelist Ruth Eastwood (chief executive of Poole Arts Centre - a 2,500 seat concert hall and 669 seat theatre). Nevertheless, if one acknowledges the theatre manager/promoter as the middle person between the artist and theatregoer, it is significant that there are not more managers on this panel, from whatever size of presenting theatre.

4.4. OTHER CONSORTIA

International comparisons might include the Riksteatern in Sweden, a consortium of five producing companies based in a headquarters south of Stockholm and the “receptive production centres” in Flanders, Belgium where active producing complements the function of receiving - whether by putting together an hoc ensemble or by producing extra work for an existing company and where each activity is thought to be necessary and to mutually influence the other. This way of producing has developed into an alternative to the normal producing company structure and the touring houses are now obliged by decree to produce at least one annual production themselves (albeit from dance, opera or music-theatre *or* drama) as well as to receive touring productions.

Historically, the best example of a consortium is, doubtless, the early years of Die Volksbühne movement in Germany, where several Weimar Republic receiving theatres were affiliated to this audience development organisation in order to present the work of directors such as Reinhardt and Piscator. It became the most influential *audience*-led theatre organisation in the world and organised far-reaching education programmes for working class audiences. Attempts to transplant it have generally failed, but there are many pertinent ideas for contemporary consideration. These include the audience development-agency consortia: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Theaterbesucherorganisationen.²² The Federal Theatre Project in the United States (1935-1939) was the first example of government sponsored and financed theatre in that country, employing 10,000 people in a consortium of 40 theatres. This aimed to rejuvenate the stock system and bring professional drama back to small cities and civic theatres.²³

Other English consortium projects are less relevant to the Network model. Pilot Theatre Company of Castleford, Yorkshire have produced *Lord of the Flies* in a partnership with York Theatre Royal and the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. This show then toured other theatres on a “sell-off”

²² See Cecil W. Davies, *Theatre for the People: The Story of the Volksbühne*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1977.

²³ See Barry B. Witham, ‘The Economic Structure of the Federal Theatre Project’ in Ron Engle and Tice L. Miller, (eds), *The American Stage: Social and Economic Issues from the Colonial Period to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp.200-214.

arrangement. The production has been artistically driven - originating in a small touring company - and aimed at schools' audiences. On their initiative, and after buying the rights to create a new stage version of William Golding's novel, Pilot approached York Theatre Royal, a building based repertory theatre-cum-touring house, and these two partners made the successful grant application to Barclays New Stages and Arts Council Touring. Pilot were pleased that York were involved with every decision, although the process of collaboration took a frustratingly long-time. The Lyric were comparatively "hands-off"; it has been difficult to interest other theatres in taking the production.

The Merseyside Alliance of Producers is a consortium of seven producing companies who, in part, seek new arrangements with theatres elsewhere in England and abroad. The companies are Handstand Actor-Musician Theatre Ltd., Hope Street Ltd., Kaboodle Productions, Merseyside Young People's Theatre, Merseyside Dance Initiative, Rejects Revenge and Urban Strawberry Lunch. They have completed a feasibility study to identify new markets in the United Kingdom and abroad. This research included a presentation by Network. The Alliance is hoping to engage a producer to identify interested theatres and to act as liaison with them. The final report about this consortium will be distributed to Network theatres.

In Scotland there is an unincorporated presenting venues' consortium. This comprises Cumbernauld Theatre (306 seats), Brunton Theatre Musselburgh (304 seats), East Kilbride Village Theatre - Strathclyde - (333 seats) Paisley Arts Centre (150 seats) and Ayr Gaiety Theatre (584 seats). These theatres have also worked with the Hawkswell Theatre in Sligo, Ireland. Other theatres will contribute to its future work: Greenock Arts Guild Theatre (449 seats) together with the local authority arts programmers in South Lanarkshire Council - Hamilton Town Hall - the Selkirk Theatre in the Borders, the touring agency for North East Scotland: North East Arts Touring, Dunfermline Carnegie Hall (590 seats), Harbour Arts Centre Irvine (96 seats), MacRobert Arts Centre at the University of Stirling (500 seats), Magnum Leisure Centre Irvine (323 seats), the Palace Theatre Kilmarnock (503 seats) and the Adam Smith Centre, Kirkcaldy (475 seats). The consortium is currently too large to incorporate, but this is not considered to be an issue at the moment. Theatre managers meet regularly and the membership is characterised by theatres in suburban, outer urban or rural areas. This consortium has produced five plays to date, including Jim

Cartwright's *To* (1998), Stephen Thomas' *Sweethearts of the Yellow Rose* (a popular play about country and western music fans), *Onions Make You Cry* and *Three Steps To Heaven*. They have proved that it can work. The Cumbernauld Theatre and The Brunton Theatre are producing and receiving theatres, and alternate the rehearsal and premiering of plays, which are chosen by the theatre managers after consultation with theatregoers. The consortium is planning to make application to the Scottish Arts Council's new Scotland on Stage fund which aims to increase the number and extend the life of productions; there is £400,000 to be awarded in 1999/00 for the revitalisation of Scottish drama. The guidelines specifically include encouragement to groups of theatres and promoters who wish to commission work via new alliances.

The consortium has complained to the Scottish Arts Council Drama Committee about its favouring grants to new and "innovative" work by the fixed-term funded companies (such as 7:84 Theatre Company, TAG, Theatre Cryptic and Boilerhouse) who are, according to the managers, not interested in "popular" plays. The consortium's last application, to stage a "mainstream" play, was declined; the theatres then complained that Scottish Arts Council was out-of-touch with theatregoer needs and that the Drama Committee was dominated by artistic directors and administrators from producing companies, with no current representation from programmers in touring theatres. They have asked Scottish Arts Council to broker a meeting of theatre managers and artistic directors. Plays shortlisted by this consortium include an update of Aristophanes' *A Parliament of Women* to coincide with the opening of the new Scottish Parliament, *Spurt!* to be commissioned from Tangerine Productions, *Torch Song Trilogy*, *The Slab Boys*, *David Copperfield* and *The Capulet Files*, a courtroom drama based on *Romeo and Juliet* for schools' audiences. The theatres will also be touring the Brunton Theatre productions of Dario Fo's *Can't Pay, Won't Pay* and Rhona Monroe's *The Bold Girls*.

These managers are concerned to get to people to return to their theatres: most theatregoers in these towns are within drive time of the city centre theatres in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, where they pay £22 or more to see expensive, nostalgic, elaborate visual-musical spectacles in smartly refurbished, welcoming No. 1 theatre or, for content, £6 or less for a studio production at a hip-theatre locale such as the Arches, Glasgow or Traverse, Edinburgh. Theatregoing has become polarised between the large 1,500-

2,000-seat theatres and the small 100-seat studios; between the commercial blockbusters and the new plays staged by fledgling companies. Commercial theatre, traditionally, reinforces the views of its paying customers, rather than challenging them with the social and political activism which characterises much of the work in the small-scale companies. Perhaps the plays on offer in the mid-scale theatres, like many productions in the similar-sized, small city, building based repertory companies, appeal to patrons who seek a reminder of the theatre's past: an occasional "costume" revival for instance. The problems of Scotland's mid-scale theatres are similar to those in England: this consortium expressed a keenness to work with the Network theatres on production exchanges.

The role of the creative promoter is also the spine of Eastern Touring Agency. This is an agency which works with twenty-five small-scale spaces in the Eastern Arts Board counties, and a number of cathedrals which promote secular and religious performances. They commission work for sub-networks of this grouping. They approach each tour as a training opportunity for venues and companies.

They received a £250,000 Lottery grant for their 1999-02 "Creative Promoter" scheme which, they say, "concentrates on innovative projects designed to encourage young people to participate in and enjoy the arts". Twenty-two of the regions' promoters and venues will work with the Agency over three years to involve young people in planning, marketing and distribution of new work which their regional and international peers have to create. They are committed to turning their venues into "centres of innovative programming and up-to-the-minute practice". They want young people to see the arts and their venues as "an attractive and enjoyable alternative for their leisure time and personal development".²⁴

Offices are in Cambridge and publications include a booker's guide and touring pack for touring companies. The agency information includes details of middle-scale locales, such as two repertory theatres Mercury Theatre, Colchester (499 seats) and the Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich (410 seats) - which are increasingly reorganised to take touring productions - Ipswich Corn Exchange (900 seats), Chelmsford Civic Theatre (525 seats), South Holland Centre, Spalding and the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds (also Network

²⁴ See *News*, Winter 1998, Issue 3, p.1. This Eastern Touring Agency journal contains more information about their activities.

members). The Agency's stated objectives are to tour unfamiliar work and to create marketing networks. They provide marketing support to venues and promoters and have developed a data-base of mailing lists, distribution systems and poster sites. This saves theatre companies time and frustration trying to contact staff at individual theatres.

5. TRAFFORD TANZI: AN EVALUATION

The following tables summarise the financial and statistical results of the tour. Theatres financed the production by a “stakeholding” arrangement, whereby total profit or loss was shared by the members according to the size of their stake. It was, as the figures show, a disaster at the box-office. The managers exercised strict control over expenditure, which ran close to budget.²⁵

5.1. FINANCIAL RESULTS AND SUMMARY ACCOUNTS

<u>INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SUMMARY</u>	
<u>Expenditure</u>	
Salaries/ Fees	58,888.08
Transport, Travel and Subsistence	13,987.59
Physical	23,552.60
Production	
Running	593.27
Costs	
Press / Marketing	5,291.45
Administration /	
Royalties	21,249.37
<u>Total</u>	£ 123,562.36
<u>Income</u>	
Grants	56,885.50
Net Box Office (exc. non-member theatres)	12,069.00
Guarantees from non-member venues	5,100.00
<u>Total</u>	£ 74,054.50
<u>Net Operating Loss</u>	
<u>(Paid by Stakeholdings of Member</u>	
<u>Theatres)</u>	£ (49,507.86)

²⁵ I studied the full income and expenditure account, with actual compared against budget. This was prepared by the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds and has been sent to Arts Council Touring. I also read Arts Council artistic assessments: these were not all bad, but neither were they all good. On the whole they were judicious assessments of the merits and shortcomings of *Trafford Tanzi*, but such critical perceptions are not part of this study.

**MEMBER THEATRES' STAKES, BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS,
PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL STAKEHOLDING,
CONTRIBUTION TO LOSS (after Grants and Sponsorship) and SEATS SOLD**

	Stake	Net Box Office Receipts	% of Stake	Contribution to Loss	Seats Sold
Stevenage Gordon Craig	5,276	1,732	8%	3,868	424
Redhill Harlequin	4,748	1,389	7%	3,481	219
Hexham Queen's Hall	4,210	183	6%	3,086	75
Middlesborough Little	5,128	368	8%	3,759	86
Horsham Arts Centre	4,221	509	6%	3,094	118
Chatham Central Theatre	5,392	253	8%	3,953	103
Harlow Playhouse	4,221	636	6%	3,094	106
Newbury Corn Exchange	4,221	2,142	6%	3,094	354
Taunton Brewhouse	3,672	553	5%	2,692	129
Wakefield Theatre Royal	5,409	278	8%	3,965	61
Sevenoaks Stage Theatre	4,780	501	7%	3,504	143
Shrewsbury Music Hall	2,814	192	4%	2,063	34
Wellingborough Castle	5,276	690	8%	3,868	113
Huddersfield Batley	4,463	1,006	7%	3,272	203
Bury St. Ed. Theatre Royal	3,693	1,637	5%	2,707	414
TOTAL	£67,524	£12,069	100%	£49,500	2,582

Note: The production also toured to one non-member theatre, the Forum 28 Theatre, Barrow-in-Furness where it sold an additional 162 seats over three performances and to the Darlington Arts Centre which is a Network theatre but was not a stakeholder (52 seats sold; one performance) but are members of Network. These two theatres' receipts totalled £1,565 net of VAT, bringing the overall net box office receipts to £13,634. Middlesbrough Little Theatre is not presently a member of Network. Network received a guarantee from the theatres which were not stakeholders. The total seats sold overall was therefore 2,796. Eight performances were cancelled because of poor advance bookings.

TRAFFORD TANZI: ECONOMIC PROFILE	
STATISTICS	
Number of theatres played, including non-member theatres <i>Regional Arts Board distribution</i> [EA:3, SEA:4, SA:1, EMA:1, SWA:1, WMA:1; NWA:0; NA:4, YHA:2, LA:0]	17
Number of performances (over 10 week tour)	42
Number of paid attendees	2,796
Average number of paid attendees per performance	67
Total theatres' capacity for the tour	20,409
% Capacity achieved overall	13.69%
MONEY	
Net Box Office Receipts	£13,634
Average payment per paid admission (net of VAT)	£4.87
Barclays New Stages Sponsorship	£27,305
Arts Council Subsidy	£27,305
Theatres' Contributions via Stakeholdings	£49,500
Average Net Box Office Receipts per performance	£802
Arts Council Subsidy and Barclays per performance (£)	£3,212
Arts Council Subsidy and Barclays per attendee (£)	£19.53
Subsidy, Sponsorship and Stakeholding per attendee (£)	£37.23
RATIOS	
Earned Income as % of Total Income	11.57%
Sponsorship as % of Total Income	23.19%
Arts Council Grant as % of Total Income	23.19%
Stakeholdings (Theatre grant/losses) as % of Total Income	42.05%
	100.00%

5.2. THE EXPERIENCE OF TRAFFORD TANZI

The affiliation of Network is characterised by goodwill and cooperative working, as evidenced by the “stakeholding” financial arrangements between the theatres, where loss was shared equitably across the consortium, irrespective of an individual theatre’s result. Managers readily acknowledge that the production was poor, and suggest that they did not properly estimate the flavour of the play which, in Network members’ traditional theatre spaces, did not work as well as in its first production at the Mermaid Theatre, London. Given the box-office failure, the theatres have been anxious to discuss what went wrong. How and why the production failed illustrates the difficulties of organising a commercially viable show. But failures can be more instructive than successes. The following are the main points learned from this experience.

5.2.1. Decision Making, Planning and Ownership of Project

1. Not enough attention was paid by the membership to the selection of the play. There was enthusiasm for the project as a whole and this clouded the decision making process.
2. Managers suggested that Network succumbed unduly in the nomination and choice of the creative team (director, designer etc.) to the influence of the Arts Council.
3. The relationship of Network with the play director became an issue. Managers reported that she did not seem to accept that the production belonged to the theatres. They felt as if the production ran as her own project, rather than the director working collegially with the theatre managers, a new process which had been emphasised at interview. The director and the managers disagreed over issues such as their attendance at rehearsals and access for press interviews etc. The managers were left with the feeling that they had bought in a company rather than having produced the play themselves.

5.2.2. Staffing

1. The staffing structure for *Tanzi* was not ideal. The Technical Manager doubled as Lighting Designer and, therefore, may not have been sufficiently objective and determined in resolving technical issues which were bound to include the unexpected, given that this was the first Network production.
2. The production lacked a fully dedicated staff producer: the importance of this role has been highlighted in the observations of other consortia. The tasks were undertaken by a theatre manager member who continued to be responsible for the demands of his own theatre. This led to a lack of communication and consultation.
3. Although there was a nominal steering group of managers, it is retrospectively thought that there should have been one person with the overall perspective of the needs and wishes of the theatre managers: namely a staff producer or general management.
4. The set construction was contracted to a specialist, which was satisfactory. But there was neither a Production Manager nor a Tour Manager, and there should preferably be both.

5.2.3. Marketing

1. All theatre managers were emphatic that the marketing was a disaster. The managers and the marketing agency (Magenta) did not liaise sufficiently. The play director was, in the opinion of the managers, too involved in the print design and concept. Some theatres, the Sevenoaks Stag and the Yorkshire collaborators, redesigned and reprinted their handbills after receipt of the main print material.
2. Responsibilities should have been better stipulated in the contract with Magenta: that they were not resulted in print which did not reflect the show or the selling points that led Network to chose the play in the first place.
3. The handling of print was a missed opportunity to improve on the managers' familiar complaint that producing companies and marketing

agencies fail to be sensitive of local publicity requirements. For instance, as has been noted, Sevenoaks Stag Theatre and the Yorkshire theatres reprinted leaflets to their own design and at additional cost. Some managers felt that Magenta ignored them, took advice from the director, and failed to pursue the target audiences, such as clubbers, who should have been identified from a reading of the play.

4. There was a marketing sub-committee of Network but it only met once.

5.2.4. Rehearsal, Production Week and Get-Ins

1. There was four weeks rehearsal. The managers consider that the three weeks may have been sufficient. (*Othello*, the Bury St. Edmunds production, had only three weeks rehearsal, though I am conscious that many factors contribute to this decision). I understand that the “matrix” companies (Oxford Stage Company, Method and Madness, English Touring Theatre) have five weeks. There was a three day “production week” at Stevenage, which the managers consider adequate. (*Othello* had four days at the Theatre Royal in Bury St. Edmunds).

2. Managers reported that the design of *Tanzi* did not take sufficient account of the diverse stages.

5.2.5. Casting

1. Managers now believe that a casting director should have been engaged.

5.2.6. Education Programme

1. The education work was "bolted on" rather than integral to the production. The play is, arguably, of no relevance to the curriculum. Such efforts as might have been made were left by the wayside as the production momentum made for other priorities.

2. The managers complained that the marketing agency did nothing to promote the play to schools. Magenta did not have a written brief. In any

event, an integrated education programme should have been discussed at the outset.

3. The theatres are poorly resourced for education work, relying in the main on part-time education officers. (It has been noted that only theatre, Bury St. Edmunds, employs a full-time education officer).

5.2.7 General

1. The managers considered that production quality (related to the scale of investment in staging) was consistent with the achievements of the matrix companies.

2. To some managers the experience of *Tanzi* was little different to that of a conventionally received show: "I received the play, the actors, the print".

3. *Trafford Tanzi* was the first middle-scale tour of its kind: the affiliation of managers was, at the time, inexperienced and, therefore, likely to make mistakes. Members have already learned from these as has been evidenced in one management's production of *Othello*, a process which absorbed some of the experiences gained from Network.

6. ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE OF NETWORK

6.1. Purpose and Function

The managers' meetings discussed the following policy issues, which informed their later consideration of the draft of this study:

- Can Network have an artistic policy or is it merely wanting to have an expeditious financial arrangement to put on occasional plays?
- The group is large and disparate: different theatres have different needs and programming objectives.

- Theatres face different problems at different times and develop at different paces.
- Disparities arise from factors such as managers' backgrounds and experience, differing controlling interests, different business plans, different art form priorities, different board perceptions.
- The membership might be reduced into two smaller groups producing work for a five week tour which might suit different needs and size of theatre.
- The managers agree that their motivation is personal involvement in “business management” and “art”.
- There appears to be a bias towards skills in drama production in the Network, but drama does not achieve an annual positive return in any members' programmes, and is scheduled spasmodically.

6.2. Meetings

- It is extremely difficult and expensive to convene meetings of members.
- There should be a small steering group; this could be one theatre alone or two or three, not necessarily from one region.
- The steering group membership should rotate, changing project by project.
- It should be flexible, like the Touring Partnership.

6.3. Staff Producer

- There is a future requirement for a staff producer, a position that could rotate project by project. The managers would prefer this be one of their member theatre managers (perhaps released from day to day theatre management responsibilities) but consideration might be given to engaging a specialist such as Jenny King/Centreline Productions who is now very experienced through her work with two other consortia. Additionally, a repertory-touring theatre member, such as Harrogate

Theatre, may be able to provide the back-up to the staff producer for the whole production cycle, although managers acknowledge that repertory theatres are inexperienced in touring.

6.4. Marketing

- Marketing is acknowledged by all managers as fundamental to the raison d'être and future success of Network. A hot rocket sales approach is essential. Anyone can book a theatre, but it takes someone special to sell a show.
- Network could, in future, use its own marketing resources, for example, seconding a marketing manager from one theatre to a project, their wages to be paid from the project budget. But available staff time could be a restriction. Or a sub committee of marketing managers could be established who could develop the print over an extranet.
- Staff would need to apply the skills and values of a producing company within the business parameters of a theatre. This is preferable to engaging a London marketing agency.
- An interim project should be to second a marketing manager from a Network theatre to a touring producing company. This not be of similar scale to companies touring the middle-scale: the person would benefit from working with a commercial touring management.

6.5. Technical

- A technical manager could also be seconded (see above) from a theatre to a project. The training gained in a production company would be of great value to the Network theatre.

6.6. Education

- It has been noted that only one education officer is employed full-time in a Network theatre. This hampers the development of education and access work for future productions, as well as the service to those companies touring with education programmes.

- Use of freelance education officers will be investigated.
- Plays must be selected for their potential for an integrated education programme, which must be devised at the outset.
- The managers agree that education work is not only for young people.

6.7. Legal Incorporation and Charity Status

- The production work of the informal consortium is viable only so long as it does not tour to or enter into financial relations with a non consortium member.
- The “stakeholding” formula of financing *Trafford Tanzi* succeeded, in part, because all theatres fared badly. If future productions result in more variable receipts, successful theatres may come under strain from their boards, who may be reluctant to contribute to losses in others.
- Incorporation for the organisation, preferably as a registered charity, might be advisable. Membership of an incorporated body may be difficult for some local authority controlled theatres. It may be unrealistic to expect individual managers to take personal responsibility as directors of a limited company.

6.8. Criteria for Membership & Size and Spread.

- A theatre size of between 300 - 700 seats seems appropriate for membership but seating capacity ought not be the only factor.
- Managers agreed that repertory theatres should be eligible, but noted that building-based producing companies are rarely experienced in touring.
- The membership is geographically too large, although being a national organisation is a strength. Network should be an investment in creative management, not a pseudo-arts-bureaucracy.

6.9. Funding Arrangements

- Managers suggested that an annual subscription of £500 would yield about £10,000 for statutory expenses, travelling expenses, secondments, setting up an extranet. The benefits of the subscription will need to be clear, but the sharing of skills and experience reduces the isolated nature of theatre management.

6.10 Accountancy

- The Theatre Royal Bury St. Edmunds acted as formal employer, bookkeeper and accountant for *Trafford Tanzi*. If one member administers a production, contracts should be made between each theatre and the administrative centre. Moreover, the other members must be prompt about making their payments.
- Incorporation of Network would protect any individual theatre undertaking this management function.

6.11. Sources of Funding and Responsibility for Fundraising

- This is a big responsibility for a staff producer, who would be responsible for making the grant applications to Arts Council Touring and Barclays New Stages, as well as investigation of grants from Regional Arts Boards and other sponsors. Future underwriting will no doubt need to be from several sources (*Othello*'s funding came from six different sources).

6.12. Programming and Artistic Issues

- Choice of Network repertory should be agreed with the play's director. The audience preference for choice of play, especially that of schools, must be taken into account.
- Network theatres are seeking middle-scale touring attractions which they are, largely, denied by the "matrix" companies (this is discussed earlier). Overall, their size of production is suited to many of the Network theatres' stages, but these companies refuse to discuss their choice of play; and are considered inflexible, especially with regard to duration of seasons and

availability of individual plays, expecting theatres to commit long-term to their whole repertoire. Network theatres want to discuss this issue with Arts Council Touring. Managers consider that there are too many companies offering similar style of production. They are not aiming to beat the national theatre companies at their own game. Some theatres have been able develop relationships with existing companies.

- There is virtually no consolidated information to assist managers' selection of touring productions.²⁶ The Arts Council Touring Department is generally well-regarded by the managers, but they would like it to circulate their theatres with company repertoire planning schedules and, further, ask that ACE consider creation of a web page to update these plans weekly with production availability.
- Managers would like to be invited to the ACE Drama Companies Coordinating Forum, so as to encourage discussion of artistic directors' choice of plays and advise companies about opportunities in their theatres.
- Do the Arts Council maintain a priority list of middle-scale theatres?
- Managers consider that continuity of good professional drama is more important than regular visits by one company. (except for the RSC and RNT, very few ensembles are recognised as "brands").
- Children's theatre productions are scarce: Network would like to discuss this issue with Arts Council Touring.
- It is difficult for the managers to identify plays suitable for young adults; are there touring successors to *Trainspotting* and *Shopping and ****ing*?
- Future meetings of Network managers will discuss training and the importance of youth theatres amongst the membership.

²⁶ *Prompt*, the Theatrical Management Association quarterly journal, details lists of last-minute availability of theatres and productions. *Encore!* and newsletters published by the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management concentrate on light entertainment availability. The Independent Theatre Council, whose membership is mainly small-scale companies, include news of productions in their newsletters, but no middle-scale theatres are in membership. These are the principal, unreliable sources.

- Future meetings of Network managers will discuss internationalism and how foreign companies can be programmed and financed for the circuit, including links with British festivals willing to “sell-on” appropriate productions. Managers also want to create opportunities for staff exchanges with overseas touring theatres.

6.13. Audience Development

- The theatre managers are closer to their theatregoers than are the companies and are therefore in the best position to maintain and develop their own audiences. But Network will need the continuity of producing two or three plays a year to consistently fulfil an audience development programme.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The managers discussed the foregoing issues at their meeting in Wellingborough on 5 January 1999, whereupon I made the following recommendations which were adopted:

- The membership of Network to comprise the following theatres:

Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds
The Playhouse, Harlow
The Courtyard, Hereford
Harrogate Theatre
Horsham Arts Centre
The Corn Exchange, Newbury
Harlequin Theatre, Redhill
Stag Theatre, Sevenoaks
Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage
Stratford East Arts Centre, London
Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton
Theatre Royal & Opera House, Wakefield
The Castle, Wellingborough

- Network be incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity, by 30 June 1999.
- Membership of the limited company would comprise these thirteen theatres; each theatre would nominate a Director to join the Board, who must be the theatre's principal programmer.
- The Convenor will be Jon Harris.
- The Directors will fix a joining fee of £250.
- The Directors will determine an annual subscription to begin in the second year.

- The articles of association will include the objective “to respond dynamically to the programme needs of member theatres”.
- Network will ask to attend the Arts Council of England Touring Forum.
- Programming issues will be the central work of the consortium. Network will produce touring work and the choice of play will be made by the Directors after questioning theatregoers. Criteria of choice will be developed, including the part that creative directors and other artists play.
- An aim of Network will be to improve staff training and to inculcate transferable skills between theatres’ and production companies’ staffs. The functions of staff producer and all production back-up, such as design, stage and production management and marketing, will be undertaken by the staffs of Network theatres. When production functions are undertaken by these staff members, the theatres will arrange cover where possible.
- The next Network production will be in March and April 2000. Dates are to be pencilled by the Convenor and the theatres, as soon as possible.
- The financial arrangement for sharing risk between the Network theatres will continue to be a “stakeholding” arrangement.
- Applications to Arts Council Touring and, where appropriate, Regional Arts Boards, are to be made by April 1999.
- An education officer will be appointed to a production team at the same time as the play director. The person will develop a strategy appropriate to the play. The production budgets will have education expenditure integrated.
- Audience Development will be paramount. Consultation with theatregoers will be the first step in play selection.
- Network will seek to influence the choice of play made by the artistic directors of subsidised producing companies. Network will advocate the role of manager as promoter and the preferences of the audience.

- The next meeting of Network managers will be held on 11 February 1999 in London.

APPENDIX 1.

A BOX-OFFICE PORTRAIT OF NETWORK THEATRES

The member theatres, like everyone else in the theatre industry whether producing companies or theatres, have been hit with a triple whammy in recent years, with cutbacks in funding at local government, regional arts board and the Arts Council. The box office has not been able to compensate for these reductions. Unfortunately, our grasp of these changing conditions is limited by the existing state of theatre statistics, which offer only rudimentary approximations of the data which managers should ideally have at their disposal.²⁷

A comprehensive overview of drama attendance at a sample of the Network theatres, together with its position within their overall programme mix, is included hereafter. This reveals the volume of activity and other measures of financial condition. An inference is that contractual arrangements are dominated by guaranteed fees (the smaller the theatre, the larger the division to the company - whereas the No. 1 theatres have a wider portfolio of deal structures and retain more of the box-office receipts). This, allied to poor attendances, leads to the theatres losing a lot of money on a majority of drama productions, without any positive contribution to their standing costs. The production company has, in the main, not shared the risk. From an economic viewpoint alone, this suggests that theatre managers ought to be

²⁷ See Michael Quine, 'The Business Section' in *Prompt*, Theatrical Management Association, London, February 1998, pp.14 and 15. The TMA has collected and analysed data of member theatres for seven years. The number of performances and seats available has been falling. Reasons for this include shorter seasons, and changes in the periods closed - especially now with Lottery funds having supported refurbishments. The Network managers should aim to improve the tracking of results in their theatres: who is doing what kind of work, to what end, and how efforts are measured up against other theatres as well as earlier generations of managers and artists. It is difficult to take a longer historical view; hard core statistics would be invaluable in revealing problems. Although crisis is a way of life in the theatre, comparisons tend to be anecdotal about "the good old days". A continuing, reliable analytical system and unified database for middle scale touring theatres would be a useful task for the Network members to undertake, perhaps with the assistance of a university arts research centre such as the Department of Arts Policy and Management at City University, London. The Arts Council Drama and Touring Departments, because of the funding system's grants to companies, maintain comprehensive, detailed statistical profiles of building based repertory theatres and touring companies, but not touring theatres.

more involved in the choice of plays which the theatres *buy-in*. Most other productions in the programme mix are unsubsidised by the arts funding system. Future study could compare the financial condition of middle-scale theatres to these benchmarks.

APPENDIX 2: NETWORK Membership at January 1999

Steering Group Members

Jon Harris	Director, Stratford East Arts Centre Project (Convenor)
Murray Edwards	General Manager, Wakefield Theatre Royal & Opera House

Other participating managers, their theatres or arts centres

Geof Keys	Arts Manager, Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham
Lynda Winstanley	Manager, Darlington Arts Centre
Sheena Wrigley	Executive Director, Harrogate Theatre
Ron McAllister	Artistic Director, Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield
Nigel Hawkins	Arts Manager, South Holland Centre, Spalding
Bob Bustance	Arts and Entertainments Manager, Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage
Colin Blumenau	Theatre Director, Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds
Laurence Sach	General Manager, The Playhouse, Harlow
Graham Brown	Executive Director, Castle, Wellingborough
Tony Hill	Central Theatre, Chatham
Kevin Parker	Manager, Horsham Arts Centre
Terry Shaw	General Manager, Stag Theatre, Sevenoaks
Michael Bewick	Acting General Manager, The Corn Exchange, Newbury
Audrey Ryan	Marketing Manager, Harlequin Theatre, Redhill
Jonathan Stone	Artistic Director,

	Courtyard Centre for the Arts, Hereford
Lezley Picton	General Manager, The Music Hall, Shrewsbury
Jim Robertson	Chief Executive, Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre, Taunton

APPENDIX 3: OTHER INTERVIEWEES

Jack Phipps CBE, President, The Touring Partnership Limited.

Jenny King, Centreline Productions (general managers for The Touring Consortium Limited and the Touring Partnership Limited).

Elizabeth Adlington, Senior Touring Officer, Arts Council of England.

Carrie Carruthers, former Touring Officer, Arts Council of England.

Veronica Bailey, Administrator, Pilot Theatre Company, Castleford.

Richard Cragg *et al.*, Merseyside Alliance of Producers, Liverpool.

Lynne Williams, Artistic Director, Eastern Touring Agency, Cambridge.

Tamara Malcolm, Director, Chipping Norton Theatre Limited.

Simon Sharkey, Artistic Director, Cumbernauld Theatre, Scotland.

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