Research keynote – LTG national conference 2025.

Please find the slides for the keynote. We are asking for your help.

We are interested in **stories of change** - in particular, how you are including more local people in your theatres (as theatre-makers and audiences). This could be anything - from festivals to new buildings; from working with other local groups to new partnerships; to outdoor performance to changing the repertoire. And so much more.

We also discussed **mapping theatre** in your area – where it happens, and who makes theatre, and exploring links and collaborations across the amateur, professional, youth, and community theatre sectors.

Please drop us an email to say you're interested, and we'll get back to you.

Helen Nicholson: h.hicholson@rhul.ac.uk

Anne-marie Greene: anne-marie.greene@york.ac.uk

https://localtheatres.wordpress.com/



Theatres and Local Communities

Helen Nicholson, Royal Holloway, University of London

Anne-marie Greene, University of York

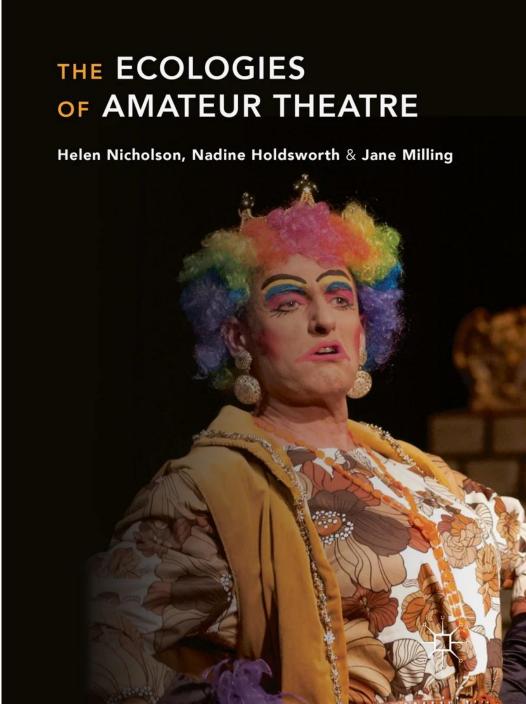
Kay Hepplewhite, University of Sunderland

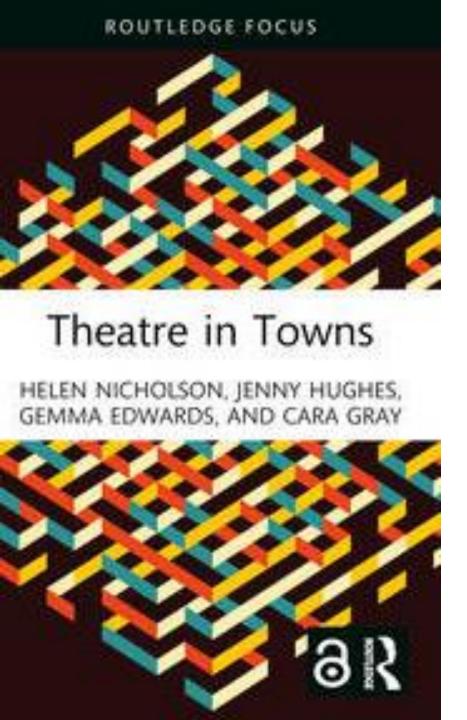
What do we know? (2017)

Amateur theatre contributes to the creative and cultural life of the nation, providing creative opportunities and sustaining the national repertoire of plays (and playwrights), including new writing.

Amateur theatre contributes to the social life of the nation, increasing wellbeing, strengthening feelings of belonging and creating resilient communities.

LTG member theatres have deep roots in their local communities, with loyal membership often over generations and strong bonds between people and places (including its heritage and beautiful theatre buildings).





What do we know? (2023)

https://creativetownsresearch.wordpress.com

- A healthy cultural life in towns is best sustained by a 'hybrid' approach, when amateur, professional, youth, and community theatres work together.
- Collaboration between the town's creative communities and Little Theatre Guild reimagines amateur theatres as places of creative experimentation, apprenticeships, and spaces for Research and Development.
- Theatres are beacons of hope that connect and communicate a town's cultural life, histories, and identities. They are spaces where townspeople can re-imagine their towns for the future.

Theatres in towns and small cities also face challenges (2025)

- Many places have changed over the years, and attracting new people from different local communities is often a challenge for theatres (including LTG theatres).
- Professional theatres are struggling to attract audiences for plays and new writing.
- The theatre industry is currently facing skills shortages and gaps in technical, operational and production teams, which affects particularly touring.

Research led directly to Local Touring Theatre Alliance (established 2025) https://localtheatretouringalliance.com/



Arts and Humanities Research Council

Local Theatres:
Participation,
Inclusion, Imagination
(September 2024November 2026)

Research Team

Royal Holloway, University of London. Professor Helen Nicholson (research lead), Professor David Gilbert, Dr Cara Gray, Dr Yvonne Robinson.

University of Sunderland: Dr Adelle Hulsmeier, Dr Kay Hepplewhite

University of York: Professor Anne-marie Greene

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama: Professor Selina Busby, Dr Sidonie Carey-Green

Local Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination

This research aims to understand the value of theatre to local people, including

- supporting new writing that tells local stories;
- sharing inclusive approaches to rehearsals and theatre-making, including youth theatre;
- investigating how producing and programming might attract a wider local demographic to the theatre;
- Exploring how theatre buildings are used in ways that are welcoming and inclusive.





Four deep-dive Case studies

- Slough (Made in Slough Community Play, 2026)
- Young Londoners (Domnar Local, 2025)
- Coastal towns (Made in Hastings. The Stables Festival 2026)
- Sunderland, National Theatre Public Acts; Theatrespace; mapping Sunderland's theatre.

Addressing: skills agendas/ local careers; local stories; regional inequalities; role of local authorities; effects of place-based cultural policies; local, regional, national partnerships.



Producing Local Theatre: Serving a Wider Local?

Springboard Festival 2025

Professor Anne-marie Greene

Artistic Director, Criterion Theatre

by Anne-marie Greene

Saturday 10th -17th May Tickets £10/£5 Under 25's





Springboard as a Creative Community Hub



Performance poetry with enhanced dramatic elements Exhibitions and literary conversations about local themes



Representation and Diverse



Local Themes and Stories



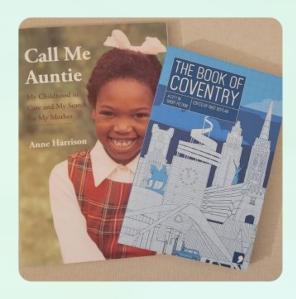
Cultural Heritage

Local landmarks
Scientific discoveries
Green Spaces



Social Issues

Migration experiences
National Front protests (1980s)
Youth gang prevention
Knife crime reduction



Personal Narratives

Trans and queer identities
Food and family traditions
Care system experiences
Refugee journeys



Developmental Approach to Creative Work

Recruitment & Assembly

Bringing together diverse artists from across with no previous theatre experience but strong to local communities.

Material Creation

Developing original works that reflect local perspectives, with an emphasis on authentic artistic quality.

Skills Development

Providing training in theatrical techniques, collaborative collaborative creation, and performance skills through through regular workshops led by experienced facilitators. facilitators.

Performance & Legacy

Presenting polished work at the festival and creating pathways for continued artistic development and community engagement beyond the event.

Impact and Legacy

10%

40%

Legacy Programmes

Youth Audience

New Artists

Double the regular season average

Performers new to our theatre space Poetry and playwriting workshops created



Challenges and Limitations





Volunteer Resistance Resource Burden

Limited engagement and some poorer than desirable desirable attitudes from regular company members members suggests resistance resistance to new initiatives initiatives

Complex production requirements stretched technical resources, machine to their limits



Financial Model

Lower profit margins with 67% audience versus the 75-75-80% mark average across across the year.



Support Structures

Insufficient guidance for artists unfamiliar with processes

Made with GAMMA

Key Takeaways and Next Steps





Mapping the ecology of local theatres





What do the Mack'ems mack, now that the shipyards have

Well, we mack cranes and lifting frames So when people aim to mack something new We can mack what they need to see it through.

We mack cars,

We mack the beer in our bars

We mack places for people to grow their ideas

We mack the guts that you need to craik on when it knacks

We mack pink slices

We mack great coffee

We mack a stadium roar

We mack beautiful shores to explore

We are one of those places

where people mack spaces

for other people to be themselves.

We mack community

We mack memories

We are mackin' our identity

We are creating a future where

You can mack new beginnings.

We're building the bridges.

We're building the new buildings

Soon, we'll be mackin' the next generation of storytellers

We've not been awaiting a reinstating: we are the Mack'ems, and we are still creating.





Culture changes: LTG as part of local theatre ecosystem (2025)

- Young People: Generation Z's social and cultural lives
- Audiences: late booking; more risk averse on repertoire, particularly for new works (professional theatre)
- Professional theatres need smaller performance spaces and spaces for festivals, R&D
- A joined-up strategy for audience and skills development across the sector
- And so much more...





How can you get involved?

Stories of success, opportunity, collaboration, partnership, and change.

new writing that tells local stories;

approaches to rehearsals and theatre-making, including youth theatre;

how producing and programming might attract a wider local demographic to the theatre;

how theatre buildings are used in ways that are welcoming and inclusive.

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