



HANDBOOK

# CircoVerso...

Outlooks in Social Circus  
for the development of Active Citizenship



Associazione  
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& Dintorni

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# Preface

In recent years, the potential of 'social circus', a practice which draws together the performative dynamics of circus arts and strategies of social intervention to promote social cohesion and community development, has been extensively acknowledged. Recent debates, seminars and exchanges at the European and international level, as well as research in the fields of education, anthropology and sociology, have highlighted the ways in which circus practices contribute to personal growth, self-confidence, free expression and physical conditioning, creating a basis for cohesion, solidarity, respect and teamwork. All over Europe, social circus projects have been used successfully to foster reconciliation between opposing groups, reducing fear, building trust and change the perception of youth at risk within the community. The multi-disciplinary, hybrid character of circus arts (acrobatics, aerials, balance, juggling and body expression) that underpins social circus practice and which makes it an 'extreme' and fun-based art, cultivates creative spaces in which boundaries can be blurred and conventions up-ended, but which are also 'safe' environments underpinned by a sense of precision from clear rules and structure.

Thus, if on the one hand the discussion on social circus is still lively unfolding at the European level, in the attempt to define a common conceptual and methodological basis for the different countries and organizations involved, it is clear that circus has a strong potential to foster fertile encounters between different social and cultural groups. At the same time, as it emerges from the cases included in this handbook, social circus projects often become spaces of identity building and re-building, fostering processes of individual emancipation as well as social inclusion and integration.

The Circo Verso... seminar represented a step further in the complex process of social circus definition and acknowledgement developing at a global level. Within this broad scope, it brought to focus ethical dilemmas connected to the issues of violence, handicirque, and staging social circus. This handbook attempted to report as accurately as possible on the key questions raised during the seminar, and on the debates which followed. It includes a number of cases illustrating the problematic issues selected for discussion, as well as suggestions and reflections about strategies and methodologies to work with disadvantaged targets, roles and skills required within a team, and ways to assess and monitor social circus projects. Unfortunately, it is hard to account for the inspiring working atmosphere that an exchange between circus operators is always able to create.



# Introduction

*"It took Einstein two minutes to write his formula  $E = mc^2$ ;  
it took him 15 years to prove it.  
Social circus is in its infancy, we need to build it,  
discuss it little by little trying to avoid patronising the field,  
keeping the dialogue open"*  
(Ian "Albert" Scott Owens)

This quote is significant of both the intent of the seminar and the ways it unfolded: on the one hand, the starting discussion on social circus at the European level attempts a definition of common conceptual and methodological references for the different countries and organizations involved. On the other, the objective of the Circo Verso... seminar was also to create opportunities to exchange, debate and reflect while avoiding fixation and rigidity.

The seminar revolved around three main themes relevant to social circus. The first one concerns violence, as something often suffered by the targets of social circus projects, and as something directly affecting classes and workshops due to the aggressive behaviours which might be adopted by the participants. The second theme dealt with the different strategies and methodologies of handi-cirque. Finally, issues related to the performance of social circus were discussed.

As for the structure and the methodology of the seminar, the participants were involved at all stages, from the formulation of the key points for discussion, to the planning of the activities. Moreover, workshops given by local social circus operators enhanced the relation with the territory where the seminar was located. As such, inputs for debate were provided by different social circus operators in the shape of stories, experiences, practical activities and games. These were usually followed by moments of discussion in small groups, to make sure all the participants had the opportunity to express their views. The main issues raised during these group discussions were then shared with the rest of the participants, and a debate usually followed. This methodology ensures that the information reported in this handbook emerged directly from the

competences and the everyday experiences of the social circus operator involved in the project.

The following points were highlighted for each theme: Strategies and methodologies adopted by different social circus organizations and projects.

The roles of the different professional figures involved in social circus projects, the required skills, and the issues related to team work.

An open list of suggestions and possible criteria which could be useful to assess and monitor social circus projects in Europe.

The handbook is structured as follows: section 1 deals with violence within social circus, and is divided into two subsections, 'Dealing with people suffering violence' and 'Managing aggressive behaviours'. Section 2 deals with handi-cirque, while the last section confronts issues related to the social circus performance. Each section is introduced by stories related to the theme engaged, which were told by the participants, and touches on the three themes indicated above: roles, skills and team work; strategies and methodologies; assessing and monitoring social circus projects. Each theme is developed highlighting the key questions raised during the discussions. Finally, two boxes are dedicated to the issue of sexual harassment, and to specific resources to deal with aggressiveness.

To conclude this brief introduction, it is important to remind that the purpose of the Circoverso Seminar was not to draw fixed conclusions in the domain of social circus, nor to achieve conceptual or methodological innovations, but to exchange views and report on the ongoing discussion on social circus in Europe.





## THEME ONE

# Violence

## CASES

### FIRST CASE

Luca Sartor **Fondazione Uniti per Crescere Insieme**

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#### Context

"Casa Circostanza" is the permanent location for social circus projects of the UCI ONLUS Foundation. We run workshops addressed to young people under the age of 21, mostly foreign students from disadvantaged neighborhoods and youngsters followed by social workers. Mario participates in a project to promote the integration of people with disabilities. He is a 29 years old man with hemiparesis and parkinsonian pathologies as a result of trauma. As we know from his educator, Mario is going through a difficult period characterized by frequent moments of depression, caused mainly by the problematic acceptance of his physical and mental state. This lowers Mario's ability to concentrate and pay attention during the circus class.

While teaching a workshop with 6 participants, a volunteer and Mario's educator, I noticed that Mario did not participate in the initial games, while was very active during the technical part of the class which involved hats manipulation. Mario established positive connections not only with the operator, but also with the volunteer, smiled and used his physical abilities. He continued to train with the hats during the following technical module with unicycles.

#### Story

Mario went to the bathroom with his educator at the end of the class, while we were closing the unicycle module. We heard dishes breaking in the bathroom, and as the rest of the group got worried, me and the volunteer tried to reassure them bringing the attention back to the lesson. When we asked Mario's educator if she needed help, she

replied no. As we went through the final part of the workshop the noise in the bathroom continued. When the door slammed, the educator called me. I opened the door which Mario pushed with the wheelchair, so both of them could come out of the bathroom. Mario was absent and behaved in a stereotypical way. The educator explained the situation: Mario had made a request, and after her negative answer, Mario reacted angrily and had become aggressive, attacking and scratching her with a shard. According to the educator, this was the first time that Mario had acted aggressively against a person: he had often expressed aggression before, but always against himself or against objects. The educator showed that she had accepted the incident, and realized that the relationship between her and Mario had become closer and more intimate. After this episode, she needed to establish a distance again, although it was likely that Mario would not remember what had happened once he would get better.

After this event, I put myself in a position of active listening towards the educator, accepting her emotional state and showing my closeness. In the meanwhile, the other operator took care of the group, which still seemed to be worried about the incident. The operator explained Mario's delicate situation and the support provided by the educator and operators of the project. The group seemed to calm down, some of the girls wrote in the logbook of "Casa Circostanza" and thanked us for the class. Mario's educator said that the situation was now under control, and brought Mario home ensuring we would see him the following week. The day after I contacted the educator to show again the importance we attribute to proximity and networking.



## SECOND CASE

Sarah Hudson, Silja Kyytinen **Circus Magenta**

### Context

Sirkus Magenta runs two back-to-back 'suburb circus' sessions each week for youngsters living in the outer suburbs of Helsinki. Unlike the city centre, the population in the suburbs is quite culturally diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged – although it is worth noting that Finland *does not* have the serious poverty issues of some other European countries.

A two-trainer team from Magenta has been working out there for over a year and a half teaching two groups. One is with kids aged from 7 up to 10. The second is with adolescents from 10 to 15 years old. Both groups are very multicultural, with kids from African, Asian, Russian, Eastern European, Arabic, Baltic and Finnish backgrounds.

### Story

The kids are particularly wild and especially when the sessions first started there were a lot of fights. Kids tended to hang out with their cultural peers and did not mix much. Fights – physical and verbal – were both cross-cultural and within the 'cliques'. They didn't listen to instructors, were not committed to the activities and were generally pretty out of control. Bullying was also a big problem.

Over a long period of working with the groups the situation has improved a lot. One of the things that has helped has been the introduction and enforcement of a very simple set of rules. This is the "stick" side of the equation:

1\_Listen to instructor – don't talk when instructor talks

2\_No bullying of any kind

3\_There is NO ONE who CANNOT do it

1 and 2 are pretty self-explanatory. Rule 3 works two ways. A child can not use "I cannot" as an excuse not to try something. Also, they cannot tell other children in the group that they are not good enough to try/succeed.

On top of the introduction of these rules, which are gone over at the start of EVERY lesson, there is a very careful planning of the classes. They were split into a "kiddie" group and an "advanced/youth" group – each with about 25 kids, and with one group running earlier than the other. This is the "carrot" side of things as kids have the incentive to progress through to the advanced group.





### In practice

Instructions **MUST** be VERY short, simple and reachable and the kids get a lot of positive reinforcement if they manage to follow even the most basic of directions.

All of the above rules are subject to a "3 Strikes and You are Out" condition, although in practice sometimes it would be impossible or impractical to enforce this religiously. For some kids it is impossible to follow these three guidelines, so some discretion has to be used.

After three strikes a child will often have to be physically removed from the space, meaning that sometimes they literally have to be picked up and carried out of the room! Sometimes all activities will be stopped until the entire class has agreed to settle down and behave. Admittedly, sometimes the instructors simply lose their nerve and shout at the kids. In the case of the trainers totally losing their nerve (which will sometimes actually shock the group into better behaviour) they always apologise and explain: "We do not want to scream at you, but if you do not listen we have to."

### Outcomes

The rules provide discipline and consistency and the kids know that they will miss out on things if they break them. Group cohesion is much better and bullying is less of a problem.

Time has helped a lot. The kids have become more used to each other and they have developed a commitment to circus over time. Many of the worst, most uncontrollable

and disinterested kids lost interest and left. The older group now functions really well and are very enjoyable to work with.

The younger kids know that they can advance to the second group – as they get older and as they work hard, behave well and develop their skills. This has proved a really good incentive and instructors have successfully generated a sense of "mystique" surrounding the "advanced" group. The younger kids often ask: "when can I go to the other group? What do they do there?"

Actually that group does not really do very many different things than the younger group in the regular sessions. However, the older kids are given more freedom to set their own goals and they have access to special excursions. For example, they are taken to specialised circus training spaces every now and again, are allowed to put together special performances for the public (which the kids love) and have been taken to see professional performances like Cirque du Soleil.

### Overall

Simplicity, consistency, time and the age-old "Carrot and Stick" approach have been key to successes with these groups. The younger group is still very difficult to work with but it is definitely obvious that instructors have a lot of power to improve the experience for the youngsters (and for themselves!) if they plan carefully and tailor the methodology to suit the situation.





### THIRD CASE

Stefke De Wit **Circustheater Stoffel**

#### Context

Circustheater Stoffel has a small training center for children and young people with social-emotional, physical, psychological and / or psychiatric vulnerability or physical or mental disability, who have difficulty connecting with regular leisure. Most of our students have a treatment at one of the health care institutions in Arnhem.

#### Story

"Anna" (fictitious name), 8 years old, is with us for the first year at the course center. She is a very creative, fanatical, energetic and playful girl with a huge dominant character. Anna has constantly the need to manipulate others so they do what Anna wants.

Within the first two lessons she had 'conquered' a fellow student as her boyfriend. The lesson after they talked about getting married and having babies. Anna always wanted to sit next to her boyfriend and preferably on his lap and holding hands. With clear agreements we managed to make Anna and her boyfriend behaving physically appropriately during the lesson.

The mother of the "boyfriend" was not happy with the situation. She saw that her son was completely 'snowed under'. Anna's parents recognized her behaviour and reported that Anna could be helped with very consistent corrections

and rules to be repeated at the earliest possible stage.

If the boyfriend of Anna was not there, then Anna went directly in search of a new boyfriend or a 'girlfriend for life'. If Anna could not deal with her boyfriend, then she tried other ways to control the others or the class. In her creativity, she managed to manipulate us in ways that we only found out after the class.

During a circus festival, we went with our students visiting a number of performances. Anna had a new victim chosen and they were over the moon together. The boy (six years) made sexual innuendos while Anna was whispering in his ear.

During the show, Anna sat between her new "boyfriend" and me. So I was able to keep an eye on how it would develop. I corrected Anna several times. Anna always tried a new distraction for shifting everybody's attention.

After the last warning, Anna sat on the floor below the grandstand. She sat beside my legs. After a few minutes she touched my calf. Very unnoticed and almost unaware. Then the hand of Anna, as if it was an unconscious act, went upwards. When her hand went just above my knee, I admonished Anna not to touch me. On an unconvincing way she let me know supposedly not to have noticed. This showed me indirectly that she did it deliberately.

After the show Anna threw herself back on her new boyfriend. The sexual innuendo continued.



## DISCUSSION

*The topic of violence within social circus can be related to a variety of conceptual, methodological and ethical issues. During the seminar, two specific sub-themes were considered: 1) dealing with people who suffer or suffered violence and 2) managing aggressive behaviours.*

### SUBTHEME 1

## Dealing with people suffering violence

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The discussion revolved around different strategies and methodologies a social circus instructor should adopt when dealing with people who suffered different kinds of violence or when suspecting abuses towards a participant in the circus activity, as well as his or her role and responsibility. The comparison between different national legal contexts and organizational protocols or practices represented one of the main starting points. After a general discussion on the different forms of violence suffered by the targets of social circus (including discrimination, exclusion, bullying, verbal and physical violence, sexual abuse) the discussion touched on specific issues related to the points outlined in the introduction.

### Strategies and methodologies

*Does the circus teacher need to be aware of the family and social background of the participants?*

The ways confidentiality and privacy is legally treated varies across different European countries. Within a social circus project it can often help be informed about specific problems in order to plan the classes, know how to deal with specific cases, and improve the quality of teaching in general. However, some teachers state they prefer personal information to remain confidential in order to prevent labelling and assess the children on a more instinctive basis.

Being aware of the specific problems and special needs of a participant can help the trainer to select the most effective strategies to include her or him in the group. This is particularly important to prevent accidents and dangerous situations. Moreover, networking with families and other important figures for the participant enhances the level of support he or she can count on, as well as the quality of the social circus

project. For example, the possibility to work with an educator who participates in the workshop as an assistant for the whole group and, at the same time, for one specific participant can be very helpful. On the other hand, it is important to limit the influence of the information about the participants' background to what can be useful for his or her integration into the group.

*How is it possible to detect warning signs of suffering?*

Games can be a very useful tool to enhance the understanding of individual situations and group relations. Games can also be used to transform a situation and enhance trust and self-confidence.

*Should the group of participants be informed about particularly problematic cases?*

It is generally considered to be ethically and morally wrong to discuss the case of a particular child with the group he or she is part of. Moreover, often there is no utility in doing so, as an attentive group should not need explanations and one of the pivotal characteristics of any social circus project is to enhance inclusive behaviours, collaboration, and trust. On the other hand, if the group is affected by an episode of violence or aggression, it is important to discuss it and share views and feelings, in order to prevent future cases and keep the unity of the group.

*How is it possible to balance 'challenge' and 'safety'?*

The participants in a social circus workshop often need to be motivated and challenged to a certain extent in order to feel like trying tricks which look very difficult at the first impact. In order to achieve this, the physical and emotional safety of the environment is essential. This involves another pivotal aspect





of circus, that is, the “family dimension”. Within the extended circus family the participants learn about supporting, trusting, caring, and nurturing the others.

However, safety does not entail protecting children from any kind of risk: in order to teach the participants how to avoid injuries and perform risky activities, it is important to insist on safety precautions, while at the same time avoid protecting children too much, allow them to experiment, fail, and fall. As such, teachers need to know until which point they can insist and push a child (or an adult), accept rejection and be patient, and they should be able to encourage and stimulate the children through praising and showing trusting, rather than fostering rivalry.

### Roles, skills and team work

*Does the social circus instructor need to be an educator or a social worker as well?*

According to the organizational protocols, the social circus instructor may or may not work with other figures such as educators, psychologists, social workers. However, in general he or she will need a further set of skills, besides the technical ones, to be able to deal with disadvantaged groups or individuals. Specifically, he or she needs to be able to deal with the group in a positive way, intervene in problematic situations and cases of aggression, be aware of the single individuals and of the group. Whenever the instructor feels he or she needs the support of a professional from a different field, he should be able to get it and know where and how to find it. As for what concerns the intervention with people suffering violence, the roles of the different figures involved should be clearly stated in advance.

### Assessing and monitoring

*Is an organizational protocol on violence needed?*

An organizational protocol explaining the procedure of intervention in cases where violence bursts or abuses are suspected is essential to protect both participants and instructors. However, the protocol should include principles, codes of conduct, and procedures to be generally followed, rather than rigid, very specific rules. In other words, space shall be left for adapting the ways of intervention to diverse situations and specific contexts. Moreover, beyond the definition of a protocol, it is important to keep the dialogue alive among the circus operators throughout the year, in order to discuss problems and visions, and constantly re-think strategies and procedures.

*How is it possible to make sure that signs of suffering are detected successfully?*

Social circus instructors need to develop good observational skills in order to detect signs of suffering. Attention and awareness need to be very high at all stages of the class, including minor activities (such as division in groups or pairs) and breaks.

*What is an effective pedagogical approach?*

An effective pedagogical approach should involve the network developed around the child, and, as such, be underpinned by a coherent, shared direction between the different actors involved (for example, social services, school, families, etc).



## SUBTHEME 2

### Managing aggressive behaviours

This theme was introduced by a discussion on the different meanings of aggression and violence, and by an attempt to define the idea of prevention.

The concept of prevention refers to the set of actions intended to impede or reduce a risk, or rather the probability of unwanted events (in this case, aggressive and violent behaviours). Drawing from the healthcare domain, three levels of prevention may be identified. Primary prevention includes those actions and attitudes that can avoid or reduce the occurrence and development of aggressive behaviours, such as the adoption of common, clear and shared rules, the use of games to facilitate group cohesion, the attention of the trainer to the entire group and to the possibilities to break or change group dynamics, the preparation of a suitable and comfortable space. Secondary prevention refers to the intervention in cases where aggressive attitudes exist but have not yet emerged as aggressive actions against oneself or the others. This level involves exercises and games that promote a positive contact between the participants, or the use of circus skills such as group acrobatics or passing as a tool to mediate and build relationships. Tertiary prevention concerns the consequences of occurred episodes of aggression and violence. In this case, specific strategies may be adopted such as interrupting a class to discuss the situation with the whole group, searching for an exchange of views between operator and participant, or providing welcoming and comfortable spaces, suitable to calm down and relax.

### Strategies and methodologies

*What are the effective strategies for dealing with aggressive behaviour?*

It is often hard to stop aggression as in some disadvantaged contexts it becomes a normal way of communication. This is why in social circus special attention must be paid to the enhancement of healthy physical contact. Aggression can be transformed recurring to a number of tools, such as theatre, games, training of corporeal expression, choreography, group acrobatics. The instructor should use these or try to find other ways to provoke surprise and break everyday dynamics, also drawing on personal or artistic resources. Other points raised as central for decreasing aggression are: Rules should be clear, limited, shared and consistent.

Appropriate behaviour can be fostered, for example, through the creation of more advanced groups where only those who really deserve it are included.

Children should feel that the circus space is their own, and participate in the creation of a circus culture which rejects violence.

Peer to peer education is usually very effective.

It is pivotal to foster cohesion within the group.





*Is it right to promote a “circus culture” as clearly separated from everyday life?*

On the one hand, it is very important to create a protected, safe environment where the participants feel free to do everything they like, even things they would not do outside the circus class (such as physical contact between girls and boys, wear or take off certain clothes, etc.). In this way, a clear separation between circus and everyday life, between the artist and the ‘ordinary child’, may be established. On the other hand, it might be desirable to spread the changes outside the circus class. It can be hard or impossible to involve the families of the participants in the circus school, and it might not always be necessary or ethically right. In any case, it is important to accept the boundaries and limits which are important to the participants (in terms of culture or personal beliefs), and to keep in mind that changes need time and that, as circus operators, we often speak from a privileged position.

### Roles, skills and team work

*What skills do we need to appropriately manage aggressive behaviours?*

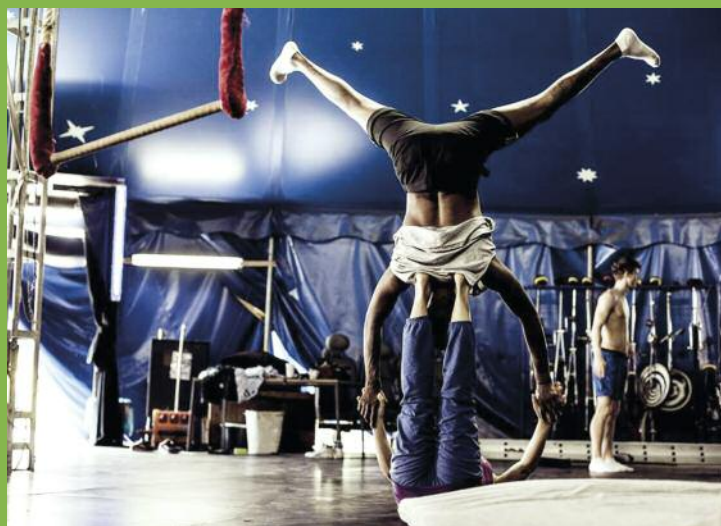
Social circus instructors need to develop adequate skills to be able to quickly assess group dynamics as well as individual qualities, difficulties and processes. They also need to be able to foster healthy behaviour and inclusion, for example through pair or group juggling, group acrobatics and spotting.

### Assessing and monitoring

*How should social circus projects’ effectiveness be assessed in relation to the reduction of violence?*

It is important to reflect on and discuss with colleagues the developments of a specific social circus project in relation to the decrease of violence and aggressive behaviours and the enhancement of group cohesion. In particular, it is important to:

- \_ observe whether the participants feel protected, and change their attitude once inside the workshop space;
- \_ make sure that all the participants are active, and no one is excluded;
- \_ pay attention to the development of existing conflicts among the participants, and make sure a solution is found.



## THEME TWO

# Handicirque

## CASES

### FIRST CASE

Daniele Giangreco **Circo Instabile, Perugia**

#### Context

Circus/theatre project "Samurai", held at the day care centre for disable people in Panicale, Perugia.

Promoters: cooperative society Polis in partnership with Association Circo Instabile

Participants: 24 people from the day care centre and 6 educators

The workshop I hold every Wednesday is part of a circus/theatre project which is now in its fifth year.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2012 the class developed as follows:

- \_ Warm up
- \_ Musical games
- \_ Flowerstick games
- \_ Group pictures (theatre exercise)
- \_ Closing up

The morning workshop developed in an atmosphere of harmony and relax. After the warm-up, the participants worked on the music, respecting the rules given. The main body of the class focused on the flowerstick. The participants had done all the proposed exercises before, and the class was dedicated to a revision and reinforcement of the techniques acquired.

At a second stage, the participants, in groups, had to show theatre pictures composed with their own bodies to the rest of the class. This exercise worked very well too, the energy was very high.

Thus, I decided to close the class with a Maori dance. The energy got even higher and in the end we were all very happy and the participants went back to their centres full of energy.

#### Story

Once back to the centre, one of the participants had a violent crisis towards his peers and the educators. Two people were injured and the participant was taken to the hospital for a psychiatric treatment.

This person suffers from schizophrenia, I have knowing him for 4 years and we have now a very informal relationship. He has always followed the rules. After a period of absence the educators decided to bring him to the workshop again and they were very satisfied about his reaction.

Personally I felt guilty for the episode, and strongly believed that the cause of his violent reaction was the workshop. The educators excluded this hypothesis, and continued to support my work.

However, I believe that closing the workshop with a highly energetic exercise really triggered a reaction. For this reason, besides working in collaboration with a psychologist and, where possible, seeking her supervision, I now try to calm the participants down at the end of each workshop with relaxing exercises.





## SECOND CASE

### Severine Baudan **Swiss Federation of Circus Schools**

#### Context

One of the kids in our circus school has a deficiency of ambulation and he does not speak so much and clearly. While he is in a special class at school, his parents wanted to integrate the boy in a circus school, thinking it would be excellent for his development. We suggested to first try to integrate him in a vacation workshop during one week. The boy, who is very quiet and open minded, attended the workshop with a full-time assistant, taking part in the activities at his best, and this was an excellent experience for all the participants. Thus, we decided to integrate him in the annual classes of two hours a week with other 28 children of the same age, without his assistant. The four teachers in his class were informed about his special needs, and the energy that we had to spend to integrate him as much as possible.

#### Story

The other children in the group gave him a warm welcome, and he was very well integrated in his group. When he was not there we spent time discussing with the other children to make sure everything was ok, and found out that most of the children were fine to work with him, or to help him at his level. Teachers also adapted the way they taught to involve this boy as much as possible without slowing down the rest of the group.

His main problems were a lack of coordination and very soft muscles. With a lot of patience the boy has made a lot of progress, but he will never be at the same level of the other children. However, he has now his own place in the group.

Now after 3 years the boy is perfectly integrated. His level is still very low but he is always willing to try again and again, and he is a very sweet boy. He does not get tired of repeating the same exercise for a long time, even if he just sees very little progress, moreover, he is very happy to practice and try to overcome himself and his limits, while he develops self-esteem and confidence. Activities such as balancing allow him to enhance his strength, coordination, and body confidence. Group activities foster cooperation, collaboration, and respect towards the other.

When we prepare the final exhibition for the parents once a year, it can be difficult to find a place for this boy without frustrating the rest of the group with activities which are not challenging enough. However, most of the times the group itself suggests the role he could have and the things he could do, and the audience is always very supportive. Everybody can tell he is 'different', but at the same time he is clearly part of the group as well. Performing and being on stage is very helpful, especially in this kind of situation, as it is a way to show your progress and be proud of it.

For the Christmas show, where the children show a personal work on stage, the boy and his sister performed. They created the story and the costumes with their parents. His place in this performance was very clear, very simple and very poetic, while his sister did the technical part. The Duo was a great success. The circus school decided to show the performance in a youth circus festival in Geneva and they got a prize, the boy did a great job. He came back to the circus school full of energy and happiness for his circus life.



## DISCUSSION

*The term handicirque refers to projects which draw on circus techniques to provide 'self-confidence and renewed energy' to 'mentally and physically challenged students' (Caravan, 2009). During the seminar, the discussion focused on the different strategies which may be adopted according to the different objectives of a handicirque project (integration, enhancement of trust and self-esteem, break of stereotypes etc.).*

### Strategies and methodologies

*What terms should we use?*

The way language can be used is very important. Often participants to workshops of handicirque are referred to with misleading terms, for example, many times adults are called kids, or boys and girls. Moreover, it is important to reflect on labels such as 'special', 'normal', 'able' or 'disable', and keep in mind the context where these definitions are attributed. For instance, in Italy only the public health system has the power to certificate somebody as a disable or a person with special needs.

*Is there an effective strategy for handicirque?*

The strategies vary extensively across countries, organizations and instructors, and they can all be successful depending on the context, on the characteristics of the target and of the instructor, and on the purpose of the project. The latter assumes central importance: it is pivotal to establish very clear objectives, and to discuss and assess achievements openly and continuously. Moreover, both the participants' and the instructors' feelings and emotions acquire peculiar importance in the context of handicirque.

*Is it possible/desirable to involve the families of the participants to a project of handicirque?*

It can be hard to work together with parents and educators, as they are often scared, they don't trust their son, daughter or student and worry too much. However, circus can help them see things from a new perspective, and this is pivotal to break stereotypes and fixed views and spread the effects of handicirque outside the circus workshop.

### Roles, skills and team work

*What skills may we consider essential to develop a handicirque project?*

As stated before, objectives and strategies vary. In some cases, integration can be the main goal of a handicirque project, whereas other workshops aim at enhancing possibilities of movement, coordination and interaction as well as self-confidence among a group of people with different kinds of disability, or among a group challenged by a specific kind of disability. Some instructors work with the support of a psychologist; in some cases, the educators participate in the workshops as active peers of the participants, in other cases they observe passively. Moreover, some projects develop within public or private health care institutions.

However, generally speaking it is important to start with simple, very clear tasks, and non-verbal language is often a very effective tool. Moreover, the trainer of handicirque needs to be able to draw on specific resources and knowledge in order to engage with different levels and kinds of disability.





## Assessing and monitoring

*How can we assess handicirque projects?*

Circus can play an important role both in providing new perspectives and incentives to people with disabilities, and in breaking fixed, stereotyped images and taken-for-granted attitudes towards disability. In order to assess a project of handicirque, the instructor and his or her team need to take into account:

- \_ the level of emotional and physical safety of the workshops: this entails considering the premises and the consequences of each session;
- \_ the developments in terms of possibilities of movement, coordination, self-expression;
- \_ the enhancement of self-esteem and the changes in stereotyped behaviours and attitudes on the side of both participants and professionals involved;
- \_ the changes in the relationship between participants, parents and educators;
- \_ the group dynamics, how different people are integrated and the group cohesion.



## THEME THREE

# Staging social circus

## CASES

### FIRST CASE

Maël Durand **Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris**

#### Context

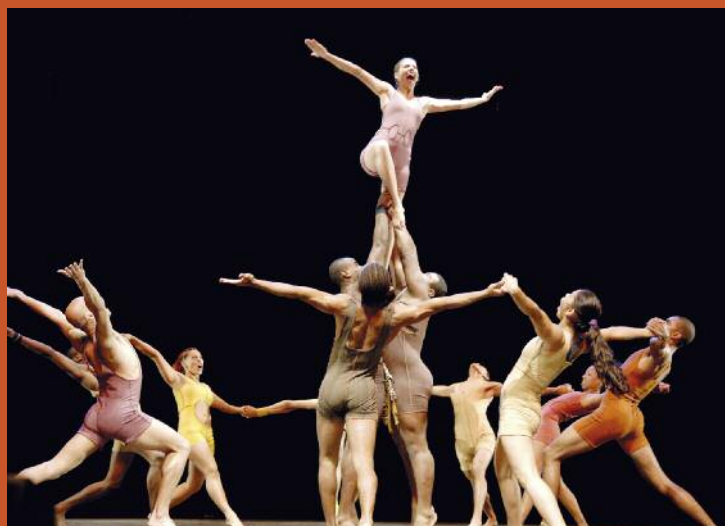
I was giving a globe class during a week of circus summer camp (8 kids between 6 and 12 years old). The problem came from the set up of the show; we had 5 days (Monday to Friday) for training and preparing a show to perform on Saturday.

#### Story

I decided in this week to let the kids as free as possible about the themes and preparation of the show but in this case this produced confusion because every day the children started to change and change the ideas. All this produced that the last day before the show, nothing was really prepared so I finally had to organize the show by myself for getting something ready for the show...

This story made me think about where is the limit between encouraging the creativity and autonomy of the kids and putting the limits to improve the preparation and presentation of the show, or how the circus teacher can organize the preparation of the children show without cutting the creativity, fun and ideas of the children. Also because in a social circus project, I think the process is more important than the show itself. But on the other side when the parents come to see the show, there is an expectation...

Does it make sense in a social circus project that the children must present something to the parents, public at the end with no choice about if they want to do it or not?...





## SECOND CASE

### Maria Teresa Cesaroni **Circo Corsaro**

#### Context

Circo Corsaro is a social circus project funded by the Foundation "L'Albero della Vita". It involves children and adolescents living in the neighbourhood and in the Romani camps of Scampia (Naples). It addresses the issues of the existing social risk for youth from disadvantaged families, the low rates of school attendance and completion, and, more generally, deviance among young people.

Circo Corsaro operates in Scampia, in the outskirts of Naples, one of the most problematic territories in southern Italy. This area is sadly known as a Camorra stronghold, and it hosts the broadest trafficking of drugs and weapons in Europe. The rate of school attendance and completion is very low, as children and adolescent get involved in the criminal organizations at a very early age.

In 2006 I founded the Circo Corsaro school, and I have been running this project since then. Every year the final performance represents a very important moment both for the young participants and for the encounter with the neighbours and the families. For us, this is also an important "calling card" for the institutional acknowledgement of our work.

#### Story

At the beginning of last year I wondered about the weight I wanted to give to the final performance. We have always said that the performance is not the most important part of our work, that what counts is the process. This has been taken for granted, nevertheless, the performance entails a lot of energy both for the operators and the participants, and it allows different emotions to emerge. It is an instrument of great improvement for the children, and a powerful means of personal expression, but also a very delicate moment requiring a good management of individual and group sensi-

tivities. Observing artistic outcomes such as shows performed by participants in social circus projects, I have often seen them staging social issues which often seemed to have been "stuck on them" by the adults' willingness to reinforce a message of social denounce. I wondered, though, to what extent they were aware of what they were saying.

Through the final performance, I also wanted to give the kids a possibility to denounce their often hard living conditions or the disadvantage of their community, and I started interrogating myself about a good way to do this without imposing something on them.

Of course I could not simply talk to them because it is not so easy for an adolescent to tell something that makes him feel uncomfortable, even when he or she needs to. Moreover, we must keep in mind that children living in disadvantaged communities often have not developed the awareness to recognize this as an external negative factor, on the contrary, they often feel responsible for it.

I had very clearly in mind the words of Roger Hart, psychologist and pedagogist who investigated children's participation to events, including performances, and described the risks of exploiting children as a decoration or a support to a cause, without them being fully aware of it. Hart's ladder of participation is a fundamental instrument in all phases of my work, as it clearly states the different levels of participation and the potential risks entailed.

Thus, I needed to think about a path to achieve the final performance. I decided to involve a social theatre director in this investigation about the possibility to make a circus performance about social themes and the participants' conditions of living.

When we started working on the show, more or less half way through the year, the kids had already been working



on the meaning of being part of a group and, although with some difficulties, Romani and Italian kids were able to work together. In the beginning we thought that, in order to “activate a channel of expression”, it would have been useful to use a short story or a fairy tale. Reinventing a tale, we thought, would have allowed the kids to tell their own story without exposing themselves too much. However, every time we tried this we realized that we were taking a wrong direction, leading them far away from themselves. We tried with more simple themes, but realized that we were still far away from what we wanted, although both myself and the director had been working with children for years. Nevertheless, in the meanwhile the group had begun to show a lot of interest for the inputs we were giving them, their curiosity aroused, and at the same time emotional reactions had become common and even dangerous, and we often had to interrupt the work in order to avoid awkward situations.

Once there was a discussion because some of the Romani kids had not come to the rehearsal, we sat in a circle and felt that confidence and trust had reached a very high level, thus we let them talk. Somebody said that it was normal, that Romani kids often had to miss for quite a long time due to their travels, but that they would be back, they always come back...then a discussion started...one of the kids raised his voice and said that not all of them come back, sometimes people we love just leave and cannot come back. But the kid that surprised us the most was Gabriele who talked for the first time. Gabriele is a very talented kid that loves aerial acrobatics, but does not like talking to his peers, who often make fun of him saying he looks and behaves like a girl. That day he started talking and said that it was possible to “disappear” even while be-

ing in a place, and that often he felt invisible, unseen, unheard, misunderstood, like a ghost, like somebody who left against his own will and cannot find the way to come back. That was the spark that triggered the right direction. We started improvising and the scenes took shape one after the other, everything revolved around the idea of disappearance and absence, being far away and desiring to be found. At the same time the discussion continued but what we all knew, and nobody wanted to say, was that Luigi would have had to leave his family soon, he had to enter a protection program and he would have not been allowed to come to the circus school any more.

Some very poetic scenes came out. For Gabriele, who had a hard time talking to an audience, we employed voice-over and the effect was really striking. While we investigated the lives of the kids we realized that the goal of social denounce had been achieved even without mentioning specific data or facts about the neighbourhood, and invisibility had become a metaphor of children's condition.

The show was a success, the neighbours were very happy with it and the kids were very good and proud of themselves, Gabriele went over his fear of the audience and his talent achieved broad recognition. His condition has changed since then: he is now known as “Gabriele the aerial acrobat”.

The show ends with a very moving scene, in which everyone can finally see Gabriele and everyone comes on stage, but Luigi has a suitcase in his hand, and he is ready to leave. The process he went through helped him accept his new condition and separate from the group in a positive way. This process was possible thanks to a very good team work. The team included myself, the director, and social workers operating in the area.





## DISCUSSION

*The choice of this theme answers to the need for discussing a dilemma: on one hand, the opportunity to use the performance of social circus to denounce a situation or a condition, on the other hand the risk of imposing or reinforcing labels and stereotypes.*

### Strategies and methodologies

*Does the performance of social circus need to denounce or take on stage a socially relevant theme?*

The performance in social circus is widely considered to be a central tool to improve group cohesion, team work, self-expression and self-confidence among the participants. As such, the process leading to the performance is more important than the performance itself. However, the performance of social circus is also a powerful tool to make the community aware of the children's potential, transform prejudice and discrimination, and attract the attention of funders and politicians. In this sense, the choice of the topic and of the ways it is represented are important too.

*How is it possible to deal with the process leading to the performance, and with the issues related to participation, inclusion, and frustration?*

The instructor needs to make sure everyone participates in all phases leading to the performance, from the choice of themes and disciplines, to the creation of the acts, and to the final results. He or she should be able to balance freedom to research, try and create, with the need to respect deadlines and achieve a satisfactory final outcome. It is important to keep in mind that failure is an essential part of circus, and it can even be turned into a part of a performance.

*Is quality important in a social circus performance, or as long as the participants have fun, everything is allowed?*

For many reasons, stating that the process is more important than the final outcome does not exclude a search for adequate levels of quality for social circus performances. The latter affects the perception of the participants to a social circus project within their community, as well as the level of self-confidence and satisfaction among the participants.

### Roles, skills and team work

*Who should be involved in the creation of a social circus performance?*

In order to allow all participants to take active part in a performance, to deal with frustration and conflict, and with ethical issues related to representation and denounce, other professionals, besides the social circus instructor, may be involved in the process leading to the final performance. Among these, some organizations employ directors, choreographers, technicians, psychologists and educators. However, depending on the context and on the objectives of the project, social circus productions can be very simple and do not always require these figures.

### Assessing and monitoring

*What precautions might be taken to ensure attention is paid to participation, representation, objectives, selection of audience and right moment for performing?*

Important precautions might be:

- to carefully select an appropriate time, place and audience for the performance;
- to make sure the participants take active part in the choices related to the show;
- to make sure objectives and demands are clear to the participants. Ask everyone's opinions and feelings, and, if needed, reformulate tasks and change initial ideas;
- to make sure the group finds effective ways to communicate and work together;
- to get the participants started with working practically and physically rather than getting lost in endless discussions.



# Final reflections

In the last years, contemporary circus has become very popular in Europe. Not only young people and the civic society, but also financial and political institutions are paying growing attention to this form of art. As such, funding for the development and implementation of circus projects has been progressively increasing, enhancing the artistic dimension of circus (productions, festivals, etc.) and highlighting its potential in the fields of education and social inclusion, both in disadvantaged urban areas and isolated rural villages. Thus, besides representing a powerful and effective tool to foster social integration and appreciate personal identity and cultural diversity, social circus has become a pivotal element for rewriting our territories, being able to modify the "urban" texture of our towns and surrounding areas.

Within such a framework, social circus can be seen as an effective pedagogical instrument with disadvantaged youth. Social circus projects employ contemporary circus arts (juggling, acrobatics, balancing and clowning) to enhance the physical, psychological and emotional development of the participants, and to foster social inclusion.

From this perspective, the Circo...Verso project focuses on one of the annual priorities of the 2012 Youth in Action program, "tackling poverty and marginalisation". Sharing experiences among trainers may, in fact, effectively contribute to the main objective of social circus, that is, promoting social inclusion and spreading a culture of well-being.

The Circo...Verso project attempts a reaction to widespread problems within the European society, such as racism, violence, exclusion and social inequality. The seminar provided opportunities for discussion and equal exchange between the participants (20 from 9 different circus organizations from 8 different European countries), fostering European values such as democracy and respect for human rights and freedom.

Three main themes were examined and investigated during the seminar: violence, strategies and methodologies of handicirque, the performance in social circus. These themes represented lively platforms of discussion engaging key issues to enhance youth participation and fight exclusion, poverty and marginalisation.

Violence concerns different national, cultural and social groups. Moreover, it is a generic term referring to a variety of forms and meanings: it includes physical and psychological abuses, aggressive behaviour, coercion, etc. In any case, it often has highly disturbing effects on children's psycho-physical development, causing anti-social behaviours during adolescence and adulthood. For these reasons, while working with children it is important to be able to prevent episodes of violence, recognize signs of suffering, and contain the damages, thus combating its consequences in terms of poverty and social marginalisation. The seminar tackled these problem and focused particularly on the eth-





ical issues arising from the need to recognize signs of suffering and abuse among the participants to social circus projects, as well as the strategies to prevent or solve violent conflicts.

According to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, violence perpetuates poverty, illiteracy, and early death. The physical, emotional and psychological scars of violence deprive children of the opportunity to learn and grow into adults who can create sound families and communities: thus, from a broader perspective, violence restrains society's development potential (ONU Italia 2006).

The participatory approach of the seminar also supported learning processes in the field of handikirque, focusing on strategies and methodologies for working with disable people. The sharing of different European experiences was taken as a starting point to reflect on the issue of inclusion between and within different groups.

Together with social integration, inclusion represents a pivotal determinant of social cohesion. However, on the other hand, adequate conditions for social differentiation also need to exist within a sound social system. This is true particularly for young people, who need to feel included and integrated, but also to experience deviance and distinction from the group, due to their specific role within society. In this sense, within social circus projects, the performances

represent a powerful tool to provide opportunities for the audience to understand and reflect on the potential of disadvantaged children, and for young people in a situation of "social vulnerability" to feel appreciated and included. As such, social circus undermines the effects of social and economic stress, and deconstructs and rebuilds the meanings of social and cultural differences. In other words, the circus becomes a space of identity making and re-making, an opportunity of socialization, and a way to tackle social complexity as a resource rather than a risk.

To conclude, the Circo Verso... seminar contributed to the development of an active European citizenship; the exchange between european social circus projects allowed the creative and powerful emerging of cultural differences and the valorisation of the principles of freedom, democracy and human rights.



# Sexual abuse: working safely for children, instructors and organizations

One of the stories reported above deals specifically with a situation which led to the suspicion of sexual abuse on the girl involved. Thus, one of the group discussions revolved around the definition of sexual abuse, the responsibilities of the circus instructor when dealing with suspicion of sexual abuse, and the strategies of intervention. The intention was to move the first steps of a long process which will lead to the definition of a protocol on sexual harassment within European social circus, aiming at the protection of the participants in the classes, of the instructors of social circus, and of other actors involved (organizations, institutions, educators etc.).

One of the most important issues at stake concerns the definition of sexual harassment. Besides what may be defined as clearly appropriate or non-appropriate behaviours, a discussion is needed about a number 'grey areas', concerning issues such as: how friendly should the relationships with the participants in a social circus project be? Is it ok to have a favourite kid? Is it ok to discuss private issues with the students? May it be allowed to wear sexy clothes? What if a participant triggers erotic feelings in the teacher?

Another point for discussion concerns the starting of procedures when a suspicion of sexual harassment raises about one of the participants in the social circus project. In this case, the legal framework plays a pivotal role, but it is also important to define and discuss an organizational protocol of intervention. Given the ethical dilemmas involved (it is often problematic to call the social workers, since the participant's future and well-being is at stake), it must be kept in mind that rigidly fixed rules can be counterproductive and even dangerous, and that the procedure leading to the definition of a protocol should be transparent, democratic, shared, always available for discussion, and leave space for flexibility and possibility to adapt to different contexts. The crucial points that any organization should include in the protocol concern the need to discuss suspicions with colleagues in the first instance, to be informed about the procedures indicated by the law and the social services, and the possibility to count on specific professional help. Moreover, circus instructors should be aware of their own responsibilities, be informed about privacy issues and be able to contextualise the different cases and understand the behaviours of the participants as related to their family situation and everyday life experiences. On the other hand, the instructor needs to develop tools to reflect and be aware of her/his own role, limits, values and beliefs.





# Resources to deal with suffering and aggressiveness

## Games

### The dog and the house

*Objective: breaking fixed groups and making new friendship*

Two people stand one in front of the other, holding hands. They are the house.

The dog stands in the middle between them.

When the conductor says: "Dogs!" dogs have to move to another house. When he/she says: "House!" then the houses have to break (pairs change) and move to a different dog.

### The climber

*Objective: Foster trust*

One of the participants is the climber, he keeps walking but can never touch the floor. The others are rocks which move in order to allow the climber to reach his destination.

### The cat and the mouse

*Objective: start a session, channel the energy, observe the group dynamics*

All the participants sit in pairs on the floor (A-B). The conductor indicates the cat and the mouse, who start running. If the cat catches the mouse, the roles switch. When escaping, the mouse can sit close to one of the people sitting in pairs (for example, A). In this case, B becomes the cat and has to stand up and catch the mouse.

### Bulldog

*Objective: start working on physical contact, observe the group dynamics*

All the participants stand side by side in a line, their back against one of the walls. The bulldog stands in front of them. The other participants have to reach the opposite side of the room without being caught by the bulldog. Those who are caught become bulldogs.

### Magnets

*Objective: cool down, end a session, observe the group dynamics*

All the participants lie on the floor, closing their eyes. The conductor touches some of them who become negative magnets. The others are positive magnets. At the conductor's signal, the magnets start moving keeping the eyes closed. The positive magnets try to get close to the others, whereas the negative magnets try to escape physical contact. When all the magnets achieved their objectives, they stop. The conductor stops the game and the participants can open their eyes and see their position in the space and in the group.

## Tips

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- Make the participants work together as much as possible: make them spot in acrobatics, and juggle in pairs or groups.
- Allow children to be shy and adopt passive roles at the beginning. Be patient, wait, and use distraction and diversification of roles in order to include everybody.
- Rethink safety rules in order to allow all the participants to be active and safe at the same time.
- Plan and organize the class to prevent aggressive behaviours.
- State clear rules at the beginning of each session. Create a ritual to enter the circus space and start the class.
- Take care of the one who starts the fight, as he/she could misbehave because of a stressful situation. For example, use a 'time-out space', like a mat where the participants can sit when they break the rules, or when they need a break.
- Draw on unconventional and illogical reactions, humour, physical games to prevent and solve aggressiveness.



# Youth in Action 2007-2013



Youth in Action is the Programme the European Union has set up for young people. It aims at inspiring a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans and to involve them in shaping the Union's future. It promotes mobility within and beyond the EU's borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourages the inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background: Youth in Action is a Programme for All. Every year, thousands of projects are submitted by promoters in order to get financial support from the Programme; a selection process aims at granting the best projects.

The Youth in Action programme is the EU's mobility and non-formal education programme targeting young people aged between 13 and 30 years. Its general objectives are the following:

- \_ Promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular;
- \_ Develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to foster social cohesion in the European Union;
- \_ Foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries;
- \_ Contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organizations in the youth field;
- \_ Promote European cooperation in the youth field.

In order to achieve its objectives, the Youth in Action Programme foresees five operational Actions. Depending on the Programme Action, the selection process of projects is initiated in one of the following ways: for most Actions, the Programme Guide acts as a permanent call for proposals; for some Actions, specific calls for proposals are published.

## Responsible entities for the management of the Programme

**DG Education and Culture** is responsible for the running of the Youth in Action Programme. It manages the budget and sets priorities, targets and criteria for the Programme on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, it guides and monitors the general implementation, follow-up and evaluation of the Programme at European level.

**The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)** is responsible notably for the implementation of the permanent and centralised actions of the Youth in Action Programme and for launching the specific calls for proposals. It is in charge of the complete life cycle of selected projects, from analysing the grant request to monitoring projects on the spot.

**The National Agencies** are responsible for the implementation of the permanent and decentralised actions of the Youth in Action Programme. They are in charge of the complete life cycle of selected projects, from analysing the grant request to monitoring projects on the spot. Every country member of the programme has its own agency. In Italy it is *Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani* which covers this role. To know more about the roles of the Executive Agency and the National Agencies, please consult Part A of the Programme Guide.

[http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth/doc152\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth/doc152_en.htm)



# Presentation of partners and participants



## Associazione Giocolieri & Dintorni

**Ass. Giocolieri e Dintorni (IT)**, founded in 2002 and based in Civitavecchia (RM), has been coordinating the promotion and growth of social circus projects in Italy for the last ten years. Through its social circus working group it has been involved in the following activities: outline the area of interest, activities and development which falls within the term Social Circus; share a code of ethics of intervention and responsibility; publish a survey on the activities, projects and operators active in Italy; provide opportunities for discussion and growth of the field; recognize the different methods of intervention and develop a "best practice" reference on national and international level; define, improve, train and recognize (in order to get recognition) the skills of the operators of social circus; implement a training program for operators in the field; promote the projects of Social Circus active on the Italian territory; establish contacts and collaborations with international projects dealing with social circus; organize exchanges, collaborations, discussions with international realities; lobbying and represent the Italian field into international working groups and networks.

[www.jugglingmagazine.it](http://www.jugglingmagazine.it)



**Scuola di Circo Corsaro (IT)** is a project founded in 2006 and directed by Maria Teresa Cesaroni. The location of the project is one of the most problematic suburbs in Europe: its name is Scampia, at the north periphery of Naples. In this area 5 Romani Camps are present

with more than 3000 inhabitants. The purpose of the project is to gather children and teenagers coming from those camps in Scampia and Naples. Italian and Romani learners together began to approach and learn disciplines like juggling, acrobatic, balancing, clowning, aerial acrobatic on trapeze and tissue, attending different courses according to their ages. Scuola di Circo Corsaro is supported by teachers and directors coming from other circus and theater realities and it performs both in structures which are located close to the famous buildings "Le Vele" in Scampia and on the elegant stages of Napoli's theatres. At the moment the project is financed by the "L'Albero della Vita" Organization and supported by "Giocolieri e Dintorni" Association.

[www.circocorsaro.it](http://www.circocorsaro.it)



**Cabuwazi (DE)** is a hands-on circus for children and youngsters between the ages of 9 and 18. Around 3000 children and young people attend training sessions each year in Berlin at the five circus tents in Marzahn, Altglienicke, Trepow, Kreuzberg & Friedrichshain.

Cabuwazi offers young people a constructive way of spending their leisure time at the city's social hotspots – free of charge. The organization is actively involved in the prevention of violence and addiction and is realizing social integration, cultural education and promotes, of course, all the fun of the circus. In 2009 Cabuwazi was awarded with the "Berlin Prevention Prize" and the Federal Ministry of Health (Germany) honoured Cabuwazi with the IN FORM-Award as Germany's best project for healthy nutrition and creative-sporty activities for pupils and kindergarten-kids

[www.cabuwazi.de](http://www.cabuwazi.de)



**Uniti per Crescere Insieme Onlus (IT)** is a foundation for participation. Mission: Youth leadership, development and social integration. The UCI Foundation works to bring out the qualities in youths by strengthening their artistic and creative skills.

The Projects: Circostanza Project, "The circus in a room to change the circumstances of life". Laboratories of social circus led by educators and professionals in collaboration with Juvenile centers of Justice, Juvenile Penal Institutions, Social Services, Centers for groups of young people, Community educational and therapeutic youth community in Bologna, Milan and in Turin. "Oltre le circostanze" is concerned with the reintegration of minority subjected to alternative measures of punishment and of youths placed by the Juvenile Court in Therapeutic and educational Communities; Casa Circostanza, a permanent center for Social Circus in Turin. It offers the possibility to youths with or without disabilities free access to lessons of Social Circus; Circospedale, a project of social circus that takes place weekly in long term care (Turin, Milan, Rome, Bologna). Other Projects that have been activated in the province of Sassari. External Projects: Project Sponsorship of the Sisters missionary of Providence in Argentina and Myanmar, "Tone La Maji Circus Project" in Kenya.

[www.unitipercrescereinsieme.it](http://www.unitipercrescereinsieme.it)



**Circus Santelli (NL)** is a youth circus with 160 members. Alongside the lessons for the members we have developed formats to teach circus in schools and for special target groups. In schools we use a program for strengthen group cohesion, getting to know each other or enhancing collaboration. It can also be seen as enrichment of physical and/or cultural education. For grownups with cognitive disabilities/special needs we create circumstances where participants can slowly but gradually master 'normal' circus techniques and make a show. We've also developed a format where young kids are working together with elderly residents in a retirement home. This prize winning project manages to include both age groups thus serving as tool for breaking group boundaries. The young people learn that elderly people can be talented, witty and active, while the young people running around on a weekly basis brought a lot of joy and excitement and physical activity among the elderly.

[www.jeugdcircus.nl](http://www.jeugdcircus.nl)

CIRCUSTHEATER



**Circustheater Stoffel (NL)**, circus for special people.

The mission of Circustheater Stoffel is to guide special people to successful experiences through circus. Our activities are housed in a project and a training center. For institutions and organizations working with special people we offer projects in the form of courses, training and workshops. In addition, Circustheater Stoffel works in consultative and coordinating functions in projects of these organizations. Circustheater Stoffel focuses on organizations within care, education, special labour, justice and leisure. The training centre offers sheltered leisure for children and youngsters with social-emotional, physical, psychological or psychiatric vulnerability, or because of their physical or mental disability.

[www.circustheaterstoffel.nl](http://www.circustheaterstoffel.nl)



**Teatro C'art (IT)** is an association active since 1997 in the field of education, research and theatrical production, founded by André Casaca, Teresa Bruno and Stefano Marzuoli, artists with a background on research of gestures, comic expressiveness through clowning. C'art works within the socio-educative sphere, developing their artistic and educational methodology on non-verbal comic language, called "Clown: Comic Identity of the Body" and running up-dating courses for teachers, workshops and teaching expressive activities with disabled children. This is an integral part of the project "Being well at school", coordinated by the PIA, funded by the Region of Tuscany, which has involved more than 20,000 children and teen-agers. This methodology, being applied also in the training of health workers and volunteers, has been recognized in the University of Bologna and University of Bolzano, within the Master Degree in the Department of Psychology in the field of Education. and as a framework for international cooperation through projects undertaken in Brazil, Cape Verde, Israel and Palestine

[www.teatrocart.com](http://www.teatrocart.com)



**Abrax Kadabrax (DE)**, founded in 1998 and based in Hamburg do not form artists but use circus pedagogy to promote key competences. Children and young people can identify their strengths in our projects and further develop personal and social skills. Socio-cultural oriented neighborhood projects also have an important role

and we have organized for two consecutive years a Osdorfer Kulturfesttag on inclusion issues. Throughout the years we have been supported by many important foundations and have created several pilot projects that have been awarded regional and national awards. Circus and leisure is at the heart of children and young circus, and we allow a special quality of educational work circus. Both in collaboration with schools, groups or extracurricular circus inclusive projects with people with and without disabilities - the innovative strength of the circus pedagogy gives everyone the chance to discover their strengths and abilities. Our social circus project provides a versatile framework in which adolescents can develop their individual capacities.

[www.abraxkadabrax.de](http://www.abraxkadabrax.de)



**Circ Menut (ES)** is a Catalan company that develops a project of circus training and performance circus. With the aim to disseminate the circus and its disciplines, organizes courses for children, youth, children and groups with special needs. Great attention in his work is placed in

working with disadvantaged groups in the local area. The goal of Circ Menut is to help children, young people and their families in establishing a contact with the game, imagination, diversity, emotion and magic of the circus. We believe that the circus is a recreational and educational tool to help children in the learning process, in strengthening their self-esteem, in fostering the individual and group work, in supporting their integration.

[www.circmenut.org](http://www.circmenut.org)



**The Swiss Federation of Circus Schools (CH)** was

created in 2007 having as its main purposes the promotion, the development and

the recognition of circus arts in Switzerland by supporting the education, the pedagogy and the creation. The Federation has more than 33 members coming from the three linguistic regions. In order to enhance the development of the circus and its education, the Federation is an active member of the FEDEC and of EYCO. These are its main goals: to promote the membership and to support of circus schools; to discuss needs and difficulties of each school; to enforce the respect of the chart on the points of health, security and pedagogy; to develop a modern platform of exchanges and information; to develop circus pedagogy (structure formation in circus arts in Switzerland, train the teachers); to organize cultural events (meetings among schools, exchanges among young people); to promote and value the arts of Swiss circus arts at the national and international level.

[www.fsec.ch](http://www.fsec.ch)





**Cirkus Tvaers (DK)**, founded in 1990, is Gellerup international children's and youth social circus. It is free of charge to join the circus, you pay with good behavior and participation and hard training. We believe in the saying "all different all equal", we also believe that with a good culture you create a good environment. We believe that knowledge sharing and communication is the key for innovation ownership and talent development and much more. We work locally nationally and globally. We believe in circus for peace in the world, apolitical but with a position on social responsibility.

[www.cirkustvaers.dk](http://www.cirkustvaers.dk)



**Albert & Friends Instant Circus (UK)**, London's Premier Youth

Circus, exists to develop the creative potential of young people, irrespective of their socio-economic environment or physical ability through practical engagement with circus and theatre arts. Established in 1983, A&FIC has played a leading role in the development of Youth Circus both within in the UK and Europe. The Charity is actively involved in the development of both 'Social Circus' and the Physical Arts, having established a certified 'Teaching Circus in the Community' course and a Physical Arts curriculum aimed at Key Stage 1,2 and 3. A&FIC offers young people a wide diversity of experiences through it's extensive training programme which covers ground and aerial skills, music, movement, mime and drama. The Charity has also gained worldwide recognition for presenting highly skilled, innovative circus theatre performances with young people.

[www.albertandfriendsinstantcircus.co.uk](http://www.albertandfriendsinstantcircus.co.uk)



**Sirkus Magenta's (FIN)** mission is to bring the joy of circus to everyone! We work with special needs groups, children, families, adults, mothers and babies and in the work-

place. We can also bring our professional performers or trainers to your event, whether it is a public, private or corporate function. We hit the ground running in 2011 and our twenty-strong travelling team is now working in scores of schools, community centres and cultural houses as well as a refugé camp in Jordan. We are a non-profit organization, gaining around a third of our resources from Finnish and EU funding sources such as Myrsky and the European Social Fund. The rest of our social circus projects are funded with money raised from private and corporate courses, events and performances. We believe in what we do and we know it changes lives for the better. We have gone from a team of one to a team of twenty in the space of two years and better still, we were recently awarded the Uusimaa Region Prize for our work with children and youth throughout southern Finland.

[www.sirkusmagenta.fi](http://www.sirkusmagenta.fi)



**The Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris (ES)** has been in operation since 1978 and is managed by the non profit asso-

ciation "Bidó de Nou Barris". It works the education with the circus and culture to promote a social transformation. "Bidó de Nou Barris" is governed by a board elected by the assembly members and several working committees, in which anyone who is interested can participate. The various committees respond to different concerns, needs and facets of the project. And in areas such as organized training in circus, theatre and percussion, programming, communication, or artistic criteria. Nowadays the promotion programs and creation of circus activity are: Training and Social Circus, a tool for education in values and the transformation of society benefiting around 4,500 children, adolescents and youngsters. It includes a Children and Youth Circus School, educational proposals with groups in danger of social exclusion and a proposal for training of trainers in Social Circus in collaboration with the department Social Circus du Cirque du Soleil; Production of shows: "The Winter Circus", a circus extravaganza for all ages over the Christmas period and "Combined Circus" spaces for experimentation of new proposals in the circus field.

[www.ateneu9b.net](http://www.ateneu9b.net)



**Ass Son Circ / Acirkaos Social Circus (ES)** is a non profit organization created in Ciutadella de Menorca in 2010. At our premise, intended to be a magnet

for young people and a meeting point of different disciplines and arts, circus professionals and fans have a space for training, testing, research, creation. exchange of experiences, knowledge and interdisciplinary cooperation. Our members have participated in numerous social, charity events, workshops, youth activities, cultural events in Barcelona and Menorca. In 2010 and 2012 we set up a Social Circus International Meeting, supported by the Youth in Action Programme, where we held workshops for the Foundation for People with Disabilities of Menorca, shows theatre, vaudeville shows geared to the general public, a Training of Trainers workshop on Social Circus, Social Circus Workshop aimed at young people of the island. In 2010, we run a two months Social Circus workshop for the Social Affairs Service Menorca, for a target group of young people aged 12-15 years. Our main objective is promoting participation, integration, and mutual acceptance of the people coming from different social backgrounds, using circus art as a tool.

[www.acirkaos.org](http://www.acirkaos.org)

# Further reading/studies/projects on Social Circus

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Circo Verso... Outlooks in Social Circus

**Caravan network** (2009), *HANDICIRQUE or Circus with mentally and physically challenged students*, available from: [www.caravancircusnetwork.eu](http://www.caravancircusnetwork.eu)

**Caravan network**, *Publication resources*, available from: [www.caravancircusnetwork.eu/objectives/CARAVANNetwork/publications.html](http://www.caravancircusnetwork.eu/objectives/CARAVANNetwork/publications.html)

**Cirque du Soleil** (2011), *Community Workers Guide, when Circus Lessons become Life Lesson*

**University of Tampere, Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre** (2011), *Social Circus - a Guide to Good Practices"*

**For insights into Social Circus projects in South America**

[www.circodomundo.org](http://www.circodomundo.org)

[www.redcircosocial.cl](http://www.redcircosocial.cl)

[www.circosocialdelsur.org.ar](http://www.circosocialdelsur.org.ar)

**Dal Gallo Fabio** (2008), *Il Circo Sociale*, Edizioni Simples,

**Dal Gallo Fabio** (2013), *Fondamenti del Circo Sociale*, Edizioni Simples

**Centro Studi e Ricerche in Clownterapia e Circo Sociale, Viviamo In Positivo** (2009), *Circostanza, il circo in una stanza, esperienze di circo sociale in un carcere per minori*, Torino

**Centro Studi e Ricerche in Clownterapia e Circo Sociale, Viviamo In Positivo** (2009), *Circostanza, il circo a scuola - esperienze di circo sociale in una scuola media*, Torino

**ONU Italia** (2006), *Studio del Segretario Generale delle Nazioni Unite sulla violenza sui bambini*, available from: [www.onuitalia.it/events/Sintesi.doc](http://www.onuitalia.it/events/Sintesi.doc) (7 May 2013)

More information about these and other publications, resources and links is available from "**circo sociale**" section on [www.jugglingmagazine.it](http://www.jugglingmagazine.it): [www.jugglingmagazine.it/new/index.php?id=840](http://www.jugglingmagazine.it/new/index.php?id=840)





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