

## **“The Development of Social Circus”**



**Meeting organized by  
Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde - Centre des Arts du Cirque Sud-de-  
Seine  
Salle des Fêtes, Bagneux, France  
Tuesday, 18.11.2008**

**Local activity into the frame of the networking action “Caravan”,  
Financed by  
the European Youth in Action Programme**

**Supported by  
CARAVAN, European Youth Circus and Education Network  
and the Town of Bagneux**

# *Journée de réflexion sur le cirque éducatif et social*



**MARDI 18 NOVEMBRE 2008**  
**Salle des Fêtes Léo Ferré**  
**Rue Charles-Michels - 92220 BAGNEUX**



DG Éducation et culture  
Programme «Jeunesse en action»

## OPENING

- **Daniel FORGET**, President of Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (PPCM) - Centre des Arts du Cirque Sud de Seine

### Wellcome and official opening of the meeting

- **Gabriela NUNES**, Deputy-Mayor of Bagneux

**Short History of the links between PPCM, the Town Council of Bagneux and the Community District of Sud de Seine.** Presentation of the projects for the new building.

## MEETING - Speakers

- **Eleférios KECHAGIOGLOU**, Director of PPCM

### **Presentation of Caravan (European Youth Circus and Education Network)**

CARAVAN is an international non-profit association set up under the Belgian Law. The aim of CARAVAN is to improve the quality of youth and social circus throughout Europe through the following objectives:

- Contribute to the improvement of the quality of circus arts teaching with a formal and non-formal educational purpose in Europe;
- Promote the importance of the inclusion of artistic practices, including circus arts, in the education of young people throughout Europe;
- Support personal development of young people, create pathways and promote their confidence to engage with each other across Europe

### **Presentation of the 7 Members**

- **L'Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles** (Brussels, Belgium), [www.ecoledecirquedebruxelles.be](http://www.ecoledecirquedebruxelles.be) a pioneer in providing training for circus teachers in Europe. About twenty years ago (shortly after its foundation in 1981), it developed a specific training programme for circus teachers, called the « Formation Pédagogique ».
- **Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde** – Centre des Arts du Cirque Sud de Seine (Bagneux, France), [www.petitcirque.org](http://www.petitcirque.org), one of the schools that introduced youth and social Circus in France.
- **Circus Elleboog** (Amsterdam, The Netherlands), [www.elleboog.nl](http://www.elleboog.nl), the oldest youth and social circus in Europe. It has been delivering youth and social circus classes and workshops since 1949.
- **Circus Cabuwazi** (Berlin, Germany), [www.cabuwazi.de](http://www.cabuwazi.de), one of the leading youth and social circus schools in Europe, active since 1994. Present under five Big Tops all over Berlin, it hosts more than 1000 participants each week.
- **Sorin Sirkus** (Tampere, Finland), [www.sorinsirkus.fi](http://www.sorinsirkus.fi), leading organisation in Youth Circus in Finland recognized by the Finnish Ministry of Education and is also a member of FEDEC (the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools)
- **Belfast Community Circus School** (Northern Ireland, United Kingdom), [www.belfastcircus.org](http://www.belfastcircus.org), also a pioneer in the field of youth and social circus for the last 25 years, bringing together young people from different sides of the community.
- **Zaltimbanq'**, Ecole de Cirque de Luxembourg (Luxembourg), [www.zaltimbanq.lu](http://www.zaltimbanq.lu) Most of the trainers of Zaltimbanq' have attended the vocational education programme proposed by Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles (i.e. the "Formation Pédagogique").

### **Objectives of the meeting**

This meeting is part of a Networking action, financed by the European Youth in Action Programme. The aim of this action is to develop youth and social circus in Europe as a tool for personal and social development of the young people and for an intercultural dialogue.

The target of this meeting is to present different experiences on local and international level, and to work on, together with our local partners from the social and cultural field, on the conditions of development of social and youth circus in our local community.

There are three main level of action on which we are going to work:

- the young people: local projects, youth exchanges, voluntary services;
- the instructors, teachers and youth workers: training for trainers, vocation training, exchanges of knowledge and experiences
- the institutions and organizations: exchanges, evaluation of the projects and their social, cultural and economic impact, networking,

- **Vincent WAUTERS, Director of « L'Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles »**

### **Presentation of L'Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles**

The school was created on 1981 by teachers and sport trainers having the same goal of creativity, which is a way to help the personal development, praise the importance of the body, leading by this way to autonomy. At the beginning, there were no specific artistic goals. Circus was considered as a medium.

The school first started to work for children, but as the public was getting old, the new courses concerned teenagers and adults. Facing the big development of the school and the lack of the circus trainers, a vocational training for trainers was set up for the persons who had already had a teaching diploma (1300 hours/year).

Since 1999, the school receives people with special needs. The energy that they emanate is as strong as the one of a circus artist.

Social work: the school was situated in a well-off area and it moved, 7 years ago to a more disadvantaged area. We had to get in touch with the people living there and domesticate one to each other. With the "Neighbourhood Circus", the school receives the children of the neighbourhood free of charge, in structured courses (respect of the timetable, of the rules...). The school is now integrated in the neighbourhood and works in partnership with instructors from the local organizations.

### **Training for trainers still remains one of most important part of the school:**

- With reference to Jacques Dalcroze Institute (music and movement education) and also because rhythm and movement work is primordial in circus, a three years training was set up.
- Training for social trainer: three times three months, in the purpose of vocational reintegration. The problems are concerning the funds.
- Training of circus assistant: twice the three weeks (for the youngsters, the teenagers...) intending to help the trainers during their courses.

**The "Ecole de Bruxelles" today:** 800 persons per week, 52 members of the staff of whom 23 full-time; 23 students in the different training programmes.

Projection of the film "Cirque Maboule", concerning people with special needs.

- **Pauline Gacon et Tina McSween**, co-ordinators Cultural Action Service of Parc de La Villette <sup>1</sup>

### **Presentation of « Villette en pistes ! »: artistic and cultural project**

- « Villette en pistes ! », is an artistic and cultural project involving circus arts, conceived by Sylvie Cadenat, Chief of the Cultural Action Service of Parc de La Villette

The project is responding to the mission for “cultural democratisation” given to Parc de La Villette by the Ministry of Culture. It started on September 2002 in partnership with the Ministry of National Education and non-profit organisations from the greater Paris region ( Ile-de-France). The main target public is school classes in priority education areas (disadvantaged suburbs). Every year 10 different school groups take part in the project (about 200 pupils from 6 up to 18 years old).

« Villette en pistes ! », it’s “a journey with different steps”, about 8 steps for the school year. Every educational team is multidisciplinary and imagine an original “journey” linking the school class with Parc de la Villette. Every team is free to adapt the frame of « Villette en pistes ! » to its own educational project

The key moments of every project:

-every school class assist to three circus performances. One of the main objectives of the project is to discover, through circus, what it means to be member of the audience and to become capable to express its own appreciation of the performance.

-In October, the persons in charge of the project (teachers and instructors) participate in a 2 days circus workshop at Parc de la Villette. This year workshop was focused on clowns. That workshop is a very important moment for the “journey”, as it sets the tone and the global dynamic of the project. During this time, the teachers can get pore familiar with Parc de la Villette, circus and the global project and exchange their ideas.

-Between November and April, every class participate to a circus workshop of 2 days with 2 to 3 circus, from one or different disciplines. The artists are chosen according to the wishes of the teachers and the profile of every class. The objective of this workshop is not to acquire circus skills but to explore a new way of expression and to enable the encounter with an artist and its commitment.

- In April, take place the “**circus commandos**”: 3 artists interrupt the school classes, propose a short performance in the class room and disappear as they came! The idea of the commando is to propose a new circus experience, in a different context than the big top or a theatre stage, and to shatter the benchmarks of the pupils.

- The **final encounter** takes place at La Villette, in May or June. All the school groups (about 200 pupils) meet and discover all the projects by watching videos and photos, the texts of the pupils are exposed; it’s also the opportunity for every class to present a short performance. It’s a way to end the project. By this moment, it appears clearly that the children feel like at home. The bridge-building seems successful, not only with circus art but also with a cultural institution.

There is a will to change the relations between the teachers and the children. The project is a stepping stone with the objective to encourage other projects.

What results and Impact on the children?

The school teachers have already been introduced to contemporary circus, there are activities in order to present and explain the performances, then it’s possible to bring the children to more ambitious projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Parc de la Villette is the leading cultural institution concerning Contemporary Circus in Paris

- **Thomas HUGON**, Circus group « La Rue et Cie »

The circus group was founded in 1984, in a disadvantaged neighbourhood

They installed a big top for 4 years in the north east of Paris (19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement). Since 2000 they have been settled Porte de Clignancourt (a disadvantaged area, northern Paris) Into the frame of the specific programmes for the disadvantaged urban areas, the City of Paris asked to the group to occupy the territory et propose some answers to the difficulties of inclusion of the young people of the area

There were 4 level of action:

- The artists;
- The community;
- Circus (positive proposals, rules, point of reference)
- Communication (be visible in the neighbourhood, stay in tight relation with the partners)

Project: "Come to my neighbourhood, there is a big top"

"The artist is me"

Charge-free workshops for the children of the local area every Wednesday

Artists-instructors implicated in the action and knowing the frame

Some difficulties and conflicts, but good results

Objective to link the generations:

The young people presented their work in front of retired persons in order to improve their image

Non-profit organisations from the territory were coming in order to present their work and services. There were also organised community events, cabarets, shows...

The subsidies program is finishing in 2009, so there some uncertainties concerning the possibility of the project to go on.

- **Katerina FLORA**, Artistic coordinator and chief trainer of Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde

### **A small history of the PPCM's social project**

a) In the beginning there was a strong community project. The PPCM was born in a neighbourhood of the suburbia town of Bagneux by inhabitants of the local community in order to develop a cultural and artistic project for the community and mainly for the children, the young people and their families. There was, from this very beginning a wish to bring informal and non-formal artistic education to the disadvantaged suburbs. For that reason, PPCM collaborated with professional artists and integrated artistic actions into his project.

b) This social component of PPCM's project has been reinforced by the local economic and social environment. The Municipality of Bagneux, sustained the project from the start and offered to PPCM the possibility to begin the project in the municipal Sports Centre Marcel Cachin, situated in the most disadvantaged area of the town. This area has been covered by the successive national projects for the disadvantaged urban areas ("Politique de la Ville"). This decision was very important for the identity of PPCM on the level of the links between informal education, art and social involvement and responsibility: the target groups, the actions that have been developed and the first public subsidies came mainly from the programmes for the disadvantaged areas.

Example: the youth camps in urban areas. The target of this action (led from 1999 up to 2002) was to change the perception of the urban space through an artistic step. We proposed to the young participants (from 13 up to 17 years old) to live a real voyage experience in the centre of their own town! The young participants were living in motor-homes parked around the circus big top dressed in the central place of the town.

Second example: the itinerant circus youth camps allowing to our young students to make a « real » circus tour, performing and improvising workshops for other children.

### **The « Centre des arts du Cirque » project**

In the late nineties, in a very favourable context for artistic education, PPCM started new activities in schools, youth, leisure and social centres. By the same time, after the first experiences, it became evident that the PPCM needed:

-to develop a new philosophy based on partnerships and cooperation with other organisations working in the social field;

-to grow up, in order to be capable to lead long-term projects.

By this moment the quality of PPCM's work started to be renowned. The impulse from the first year's voluntaries has been confirmed; the volunteers took even in charge all the administration's tasks during two difficult years.

These voluntaries and the members of the Board conceived at the same time the first idea of a building. This extraordinary dream, became in 2007 the actual project, through the co-operation with professionals, the help of the Town of Bagneux and the support of the Urban Community Sud de Seine.

In 2007, PPCM engaged a director in charge of the development of the new project.

This project of the Centre for Circus Arts is based on 5 axes:

- Youth circus;

- Social and educational circus;

- Training for trainers (specialised in youth and social circus);

- Intercultural and international exchanges;

- Partnerships with artists and cultural institutions

We may assert that the actual project aims to combine art with social and intercultural work.

As we have seen it previously, PPCM's identity has been outlined at the border between the social and the artistic field. While the social identity was being reinforced through the local activities, its artistic and intercultural vision was being confirmed. This position was difficult to maintain, because, for several years, there was in France a strict separation between art and the social field, as if they were antagonist to each other.

These questions are in the centre of our project: What should be the artistic requirements for a circus project with social aims? How do intercultural activities may enrich social and artistic actions? How can we bring together all these aspects?

These questions led us to the following decisions:

-An active investment into intercultural education through international actions and the establishment of CARAVAN, European Network for Youth and Social Circus.

-An active investment in vocational training. The frame is given by the new Diploma for circus activities instructors established by the French Secretary for Youth and Sport (BPJEPS Activités du Cirque). In association with « Cherche-Trouve », a Youth Circus School in the Greater region of Paris (Vauréal, Val d'Oise), we are preparing the beginning, in October 2009, of this new vocational training specialized on social circus activities.

In this effort to combine the social and educational objectives (common rules, respect of the other persons, self-confidence and confidence on the others...) with the artistic objectives (self-development, development of creativity, capacity for pleasure and research...), we look to circus as a specific art, intercultural, composite et fun-based, art of the risk, of effort and surpassing oneself, art of solidarity and collective experience.

### **The specificities of circus art and social circus**

Considered for a long time as a “minor” art in comparison with the “major” arts (music, theatre, dance), circus has been at last recognised as an art apart. Circus is **a multi-disciplinary art** since its birth: equestrian acrobatics and pantomime for example, were living together in the same circle of the ring. Today, we speak about the five big circus families of activities: acrobatics, aerials, balance, juggling and “body expression”. This hybrid character of circus, considered as a weakness for a long time, can become a major force in the work with young people and children, because it allows introducing plurality and diversity. This composite character of circus and its international identity allow a large variety of junctions between the different circus activities or between different arts: circus and dance, circus and theatre, circus and music, circus and fine arts, circus and puppets... Also, circus as an extreme art and art of reality, without tricks, art of high level of performance, requires a very important level of security. The great variety and particularity of circus activities helps to involve all kind of target groups. In social circus for instance, the fun-based character of circus is essential, as it helps to reach groups in difficulties and work for values as team-building, cohesion, solidarity, respect of the rules and of the others.

In the school projects for instance, one of the main objectives is to reconsider the “body” of the pupils and to facilitate their socialisation. However, even if circus activities propose a parallel path to school apprenticeship, they are complementary and not opposite. The young participants work, through these activities, on the construction of themselves, of a personal and social identity based on similar values and conceptions of the society as in school.

In order to reach the artistic and intercultural education in social circus, we may consider that there are two main and linked axes:

- the encounter with the artistic form and the artist;
- the active participation: practicing the art through artistic activities. Making cultural visits and assisting to different shows and exhibitions on circus arts bring a plural and critical vision with open, curious and demanding eyes. These cultural activities are even more necessary, because for a large part of the public, circus is still associated to its more traditional image, concerning animals and magic.

But even if these cultural activities are necessary, they are not sufficient. We don't consider that it is sufficient to get in contact with the artistic work in order to change immediately its own perception. A feedback, an analysis of the performance is necessary in order to place it on a historical, social and cultural level.

Self-experience should help to complete this process, by practicing itself circus activities and perceive the particular relations that may be introduced by circus arts with the space, the time, the objects, or the others. Through practice, the temporality of the action becomes longer; it's not anymore a single event. A regular practice of circus arts it's the best way to get this knowledge into its own body. Through the activities of apprenticeship, the experience can be transformed to knowledge and opening,

As it has already been said, circus is an art form that exists in all cultures. It is also accessible to all the social classes. Art of achievement, federating different cultures, circus builds because it turns upside down the rules. Learn to find its way when your head is upside down, helps to improve its capacity of situate himself in a group. Circus is an encounter. Encounter with the heights and the fear, encounter with the partner, encounter with its own absurdity, with its own animal. Encounter with the game. Circus is a circle that helps us to grow up. It's also a circle helping us to become again a child.



- **Esther GAGNE**, Coordinator Europe, Asia and Pacific, Citizenship Department of Cirque du Soleil.

*(The following articles are coming from the official website of Cirque du Soleil)*

<http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/about/global-citizenship/community/social-circus/cirque-du-monde.aspx>

## “Cirque du Monde



“Cirque du Monde is one of the greatest sources of pride for *Cirque du Soleil*. Set in motion in 1995, this programme is now operating in more than [50 communities throughout the world](#) in partnership with Jeunesse du Monde, Oxfam International and many community organizations recognized in their milieu for the quality of their work with young people.

Cirque du Monde does not claim to be a panacea for all social problems. Nor is it an entertainment designed to make young people forget the difficulties of their situation for the duration of a workshop. Cirque du Monde enables young people to achieve their full potential. It is an opportunity for its participants to experience positive personal growth and can be a catalyst in boosting their self-confidence and their sense of personal identity.

The pedagogical approach of Cirque du Monde is founded on the crossroads of circus arts and social intervention. At that nexus we create a training curriculum centered on respect, safety and pleasure. At the same time we set incremental, proportioned challenges in circus training techniques for young people. This develops better physical conditioning and opens up avenues of expression and personal growth.

The impact of Cirque du Monde goes beyond individual benefits. Working as a group the participants learn about cohesion, teamwork and respect for peers. Its effects are also visible at the community level through reconciliation between opposing groups of young people, change in the perception of the community toward youth at risk and the implementation of a dialogue between the community and its young people.”

<http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/about/global-citizenship/community/social-circus/training.aspx>

## “Training in Social Circus



In 2000 *Cirque du Soleil*, in association with circus schools and other interested partners, set up an international training programme aimed at developing the teaching skills of instructors in youth-oriented social circus initiatives.

The difficulty of finding circus instructors able to work in a social context and the need for increasing the skills of those already involved was the driving force of this project. The installation of a social circus training programme seemed to us the next logical step to ensure the continuity of the *Cirque du Monde* programme and to support the development of social circus through other networks.

With this in mind, a set of contacts called the International Network for Social Circus Training (INSCT) was initiated to disseminate the theory and practice of social circus – first and foremost to support the development of children, young people, teenagers and others who are at risk or excluded from society. INSCT brings together ten organizations from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Canada, Burkina Faso, Australia and South Africa. In addition to *Cirque du Soleil* and *Jeunesse du Monde*, an international cooperation NGO, its members come from professional and social circus schools.”

Esther Gagné presented an excerpt from the Circus for Life documentary.

She explained that the main goal of *Cirque du Monde* is to give back to the young people their self-confidence, help them to become citizen of their community. In order to achieve these goals, there is a close cooperation between the local organisations and the circus instructors in order to work with these young people before and after the circus workshops. Circus activities are very often at the service of a global purpose like drug-prevention, detox treatment or social integration

Mongolia, Chile, South Africa... There are a lot of demands from very different places all around the world. Is it appropriate to start circus projects in countries where there is no circus tradition? Certainly yes, as circus contains universal values:

- co-operation and collaboration (no competition, contrary to sport);
- taking risks in security conditions;
- give the voice to young people excluded from their community.

The training of social circus instructors :

After the rapid development of *Cirque du Monde*, it became necessary to give a structure to the training of trainers.

There are two different possibilities:

- 1) An intensive programme of one week for the partners
- 2) A 365 hours training, part of the studies programme of L’Ecole de Cirque de Montréal, recognised by the government.

In the question, how to retain the target groups, the answer was that it is a long process. Concerning social circus projects of *Cirque du Soleil* in France, Esther Gagné explained that there are no exiting projects, because there is already an important network of circus schools. But, there is now a possible co-operation with the Caravan network.

## **WORKING GROUPS**

- **Working Group A:**  
**Social circus and vocational training - How to train social circus instructors?**

The BPJEPS (Brevet Professionnel Jeunesse Education Populaire et Sports) - Circus Activities is the first Diploma recognized by the French government that provides a common methodology. This vocational education programme lasts one year (about 600 hours in the training centre and 650 hours work-based). It includes general and specific on circus activities modules: Communication, Project Management, Educational Methods, Circus Skills, Security, Professional and Cultural Framework. Every teaching centre is free to choose a specific module corresponding to the needs of the local environment.

### **After the presentation of this frame the discussion turned around the different problems:**

- Absenteeism of the target public;
- Security;
- Define the place of everybody;
- Difficulties of the first contacts;
- How to increase young people awareness of contemporary circus?

### **Questions:**

- Should the instructor be a skill's expert or an educationist?
- What's the need of a Diploma for trainers that have already a long experience?
- What are the objectives of the new vocational training?

### **Ideas for projects:**

- Working together
- Cross-generations projects
- Discussion time in the circus classes
- More communication, creation of networks
- Create solid job and career opportunities
- What kind of training for the voluntaries?

Circus instructor, especially in the field of youth and social circus is a new profession, that's probably the reason for the lack of answers to a lot of these questions.

- **Working Group B:**  
**Circus Arts and intercultural education**

### **1/ What's intercultural?**

- Relations between different cultures
- Mixture, exchange
- Discover and bring others to discover (its own culture and the culture of the others)
- (What is a culture?)
- We live frequently in an intercultural environment; but we discover what intercultural means in a very different manner outside of our usual frame. We discover better our culture, when we face another culture.
- Getting out of its familiar environment makes possible to discover again its own identity. There is no cultural development without the intercultural factors.

### **2/ What does the intercultural factor bring?**

- The link with the others
- Self-confidence and confidence on the others, complicity
- Learn how to respect the other professions.
- Live together, share the everyday tasks
- Apprenticeship of life
- Solidarity, pleasure to be a part of a group, of a community
- New relations: art brings smoothly rules that are usually compulsory
- Artistic, poetic and creative dimension is a source of education and transformation
- Dialogue between the different arts
- One art enrich the other
- Choice of the participant to find its place
- Helps to prevent school dropout

### **3/ What social circus can offer to intercultural dialogue?**

- Circus is the acceptance of the others, of their strangeness
- A Positive answer to the desire to take risks
- Through circus we can understand that we are capable to surpass our own difficulties
- Circus is a universal language, a creation of new codes and benchmarks
- The specificity of contemporary circus is that it's a multidisciplinary art.
- Breaking down the boundaries between different arts leads to break down the boundaries between the different cultures.

### **4/ What could be the objectives of a social circus project?**

- Social inclusion parallel to inclusion in the local community
- Self-development
- Communication between different social backgrounds and cultures
- Socialisation
- Participate into the social transformation of the persons
- Professional inclusion for young people searching for new possibilities

### **5/ What are the necessary means?**

- Human means: artists, instructors, teachers, inhabitants, networks
- Financial means: public and private subsidies, fees, partnerships, performances, sponsors, corporate philanthropy
- Network of professionals working in similar projects

## OUTCOME

- Propose regular meetings
- Develop the work in small groups
- Receive more information concerning the new French vocational training for trainers programme (BPJEPS)
- Some frustrations, because the subjects were very interesting, but there was not sufficient time for the discussions.
- Interested to learn more about the expectations of the persons working in the social field
- Very remarkable presentations
- It's very motivating to meet professionals coming from different fields and to discuss the fundamental values and the global philosophy of the projects
- How can we still keep communicating?

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