A woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue jacket over a black and white striped shirt, is balancing a white pencil on her nose. She is looking upwards. The background is a wall covered in graffiti, including a large handprint and various abstract shapes in red, white, and blue. The overall scene is brightly lit, possibly by sunlight, creating strong shadows.

Master Thesis under title:
Research project on social circus programs.
How social circus programs and institutions are
promoting and respecting children's rights.

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Introduction

Bringing together terms like circus and children's rights may seem at first site uncombined. But what happens if circus get another meaning like...social circus? Circus as a tradition and a way of life is a living universal organism, a worldwide spoken language that is developing and following its own evolution paths. From traditional circus, to contemporary circus and from circus schools for professionals to social circuses, the circus world has a long history in Europe and in the whole world. In the circus communities of today words like "social integration, self-confidence, hope, creativity, taking responsibility, group-work, fun", and many more, are more than familiar. These are the social circus communities that co-exist with other communities of traditional, modern, contemporary circus, bringing a whole new way of perceiving circus arts.

The world of social circus opened for me while I was looking for my internship. Within my studies at Freie University in Berlin under the title "Master in Childhood studies and Children's Rights" the professors were quite open in the fields we could look for our internship. It was up to the students to write on a children's rights matter within the place they chose to do their internship, which of course had to do directly or indirectly with children.

Having worked for years as a clown-entertainer in children's parties, a stillt walker and juggler in numerous performances and voluntarily in Ngo's working with street kids giving theatrical and juggling workshops, the idea of doing my practicum in a circus school for children was more than tempting since nothing like that exists in my country of origin, Greece. During the one month I spent in Cabuwazi children circus in Berlin, I had my first taste on what is a social circus. Having written an article at the end of my internship on how Cabuwazi is a place that promotes and respects children's rights, the idea of doing a dissertation on social circuses and their work with children and their rights was pretty much established in my mind.

Using different tools and facts I will try to support my hypothesis that Social circus projects (SCP) are institutions and organizations that are supporting and promoting children's rights. With bibliographic knowledge, internet articles and research, series of interviews and personal experience from the author, we will guide ourselves within the history of circus, the placement of circus arts in today's societies, an analysis on social circuses, leading us closer to see in which ways SCP are promoting and respecting children's right and which are these rights specifically.

It is important to understand to the filed of children's rights is as wide as it gets. In different categories of children's rights and needs, like fundamental rights of dignity, rights for a child survival, social, political, cultural rights etc, we will focus on some social rights of children and fundamental rights and needs for their healthy psychosomatic development. Understanding the United Nations Convention on Children's rights does not involve all needs and rights of children we will ponder on children's written and unwritten rights along the way.

Our journey in the circus world will start from its origins. It is essential to understand which societal forces led circus mentality closer to children with this social perspective. In order to see how words like "animals, danger, seduction, superficial, challenge", that were combined with circus, are now getting along well with a new category of words with a social meaning, we need to recall some elements of the known history of circus. We need to take a look on the historical elements of the evolution of circus as a living organism, in order to better understand which place circus has in today's societies and how it gained it.

2. Circus and society

2.1. A flash back on the history of circus arts

The circus arts are undoubtedly one of the most widely shared cultural treasures on this planet. In Hugues Hotier's work in the pre-history of circus

we find references of animal training in the 15th Century and Chinese paintings and sculptures of acrobats and jugglers from the 10th century. Additionally contortionists and jugglers appear in the pyramids, from the 4th century BC, while Shamanic researchers, truly travelling pre-history, tell of magic and wonders performed with objects and animals by tribal 'witch doctors' and clowns. So we stretch back to what is possibly the earliest and simplest form of showmanship. We shouldn't forget though, that just as the history of circus is elastic and inconclusive, so is its definition.

Taking it down to the origins of the word circus, it goes back in Rome where entertainments were held in the round or oval arena included chariot racing, gladiatorial combat, hunting and slaughter of exotic animals and Christians, but also trained animals, jugglers, acrobats and clowns. After the Roman Empire fell, so did the occurrence of mass entertainment. However the elements of circus continued throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, mostly by the "tsiganes", the gypsies that maintained the circus mysteries through the years so as to be brought together, with the general exception of the combat and slaughter from the roman times, in London, in 1768.(Bolton, 2004)

The more or less "official" history of circus, like the one taught in circus or performing arts schools and institutions has it, that Philip Astley's Equestrian Arena, at Hapenny Hatch, near Westminster in London was the first known spectacle that could be consider as a circus show. By juxtaposing trick equestrian performers and jugglers, he began to shape the foundations of a new form of spectacle. It was there, between acrobats' virtuosity, gallops of horses and juggling tricks that the circus was born. The show was composed of equestrian numbers, some acrobatic performances and the first comic elements.

Taking refuge in the shelter of buildings of wood, stone and steel as they go, jugglers, clowns and acrobats travelled through Europe. The introduction of the circus tent in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century will give the circus independence and freedom. It became also that much

more popular. The reserve until then of a certain societal elite, it now sought to conquer increasingly larger audiences. It is the time of gigantism in Germany and of boundless expansion in the United States. Beginning in the 1930s, the circus also played an important role in the development of cultural policy in the Soviet Union; the opening of the Moscow Circus School is a major event, instituting an unprecedented pedagogical and artistic vehicle for the West.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the circus arts experienced a new revolution, initiated on the heels of the political and social upheaval at the close of the 1960s. In France, the United States, Australia and Scandinavia, many existing models were questioned, and the circus undergoes an extraordinary revival there. An alternate understanding of acrobatic moves, a new artistic significance granted to technique, will become intrinsic over two decades and contribute to the circus arts gaining a major place on the playing field of Western culture.

What is understood by circus's multiple evolutionary way of surviving is that despite its image of tradition, it has always been a pioneer. Between the earliest and the contemporary forms of circus is a procession of innovations and adventures, many of which have inspired artists and dramatists or in the case of USA have had an effect in the development of the whole nation. It is claimed by USA's modern circus history that the shows of the golden age, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, played a very significant part in opening up the country, influencing the young nation's view of technology, industry, internationalism, education, feminism, and athleticism. This influence is only realized in retrospect, but a reading of programme notes of Circus Oz, Cirque Plume and Cirque du Soleil, that are considered of the best contemporary circus, reveals hints that their shows are not meaningless but they can have an influence in the thinking of a society.

So where is circus placed in common people's minds in societies of today? And how children place was perceived in circus until today? Taking into consideration just the history of circus in Europe, we will find countries

like France or the Scandinavian countries leading the perception of circus as a societal factor of influence while for example the countries in the Balkan Peninsula still hold a whole different perception about circus shows. A general truth though can be that deep in people's minds all over Europe the way they were perceiving circus arts is evolving from the "extraordinary fascinating risk show" into a new age of "super-human clean entertainment".

As far as children are concerned though, things are not as clear in the transmission. Before circus schools came into play, when a circus career was not seen as a possible or appropriate one for anyone, children in circuses were either passing by spectators or dedicated followers of their circus family. In times when children or even human rights were at still at their conceptual womb in people's minds, children performers in circuses was a matter out of discussion for sociologists or specialists. Not knowing whether they had chose the wondering around circus life or not, whether they were enjoying full educational support apart from the fact of constant travel with their circus family, or whether they were forced or not in exhausting practise for a good show to come up, children in circuses were not receiving attention. This started to occur later on when the social talk on children's rights came on a rise and children got another place within the circus mentality.

In the following chapter we will analyse different types of circuses so as to understand better the role of circus in today's societies and additionally which role children had in it.



2.2. Circus in today's societies

The role of circus in today's societies can be met in different forms all of them though applying to the principal believed that circus can play an active role influencing societies. In the evolutionary path of circus in Europe in the course of the last half century we find that under several political, socio-economical, and cultural pressures several trends have emerged from circus forming in this way different "types" of circus all of them playing their active part in society. These different "trends" in circus have coexisted with, and influenced each other. As Paul Bouissac states in his work "Timeless circus in times of change" : "Rather than a linear, dialectic development, circus has branched out into at least three genres: the traditional circus with its complement of acrobats, animal trainers and clowns (e.g. the German circus *Krone*); the purely acrobatic circus with a theatrical and comic component (e.g., *Cirque du Soleil*); and a new genre, the artistic, educational or community circus that takes at times the form of a kind of "studio circus", oscillating between activism and aestheticism, with the usually half-hearted support of various government agencies. These three forms coexist globally as a probe of Internet resources indicates. Indeed, circus fans have created and maintain thorough listings of routes and programs, as well as blogs that show the robustness of the traditional circus. Most circuses now have their own homepages through which they can communicate effectively with their audiences, and address any issues they may have. There are, of course, regional variations that reflect the political economy of cultural policies and the differential political powers of lobbyists who oppose or support the circus on a diversity of grounds"¹

These types of circus stated by Bouissac can be also met by definitions like

¹ Bouissac Paul, (2000), *Timeless Circus in Times of Change*, p.8

“traditional circus”, “new circus”, “contemporary circus” and the newest “community and social circus”. The transitions from the one form to another are nothing but clear and the coexistence of all types nowadays should not be forgotten. But what could be said is that the passage to the new age of “clean entertainment” in circus came when the first activist against animal abuse in circuses found their political and financial ground for action. The new circus, which could have hardly afforded the resources and knowledge demanded by circus animal husbandry and training, appeared as the virtuous introducer of a new age in “clean” entertainment, and claimed to have reinvented this immemorial art.

In former times when traditional circus was the only circus form known, the societal influence the shows and the circus mentality had was limited. And this is due to the nature of these shows. Balancing between animal manipulation and freak shows, between risk involving numbers and seductive atmosphere, traditional circus had nothing to do with the social activism of new circus. Promoting that powerful craftsmanship of men and the seductive and erotic nature of women, traditional circus shows were and still are offering the amusement of a “here and now” happening performance lacking any effort to influence deeper the audience². Walking over walls on a stretched wire, throwing knives accurately, controlling the force of elephants to force fences, and so on, the fitness and charm of the performers exert an irresistible seduction on their audience, sometimes well beyond the appreciation of their artistic skills. This is why in many societies in Europe circus has always been perceived as a threat to the social order because of its subversive attraction. Running away to join a circus has always been a popular place but usually is not the kind of situation middle class families would dream of for their children. These aspects of warfare and seduction are deep rooted to the past of the social perception of circus.

² Thoughts inspired by the interview with Mrs Katerina Flora, artistic director of Social Circus in Paris, Plus Petit Cirque du Monde.

But considering that circus always takes place within a particular culture and displays through its own prism ethical values and social norms, historical and political references, aesthetic standards, the memory of the circus tradition itself started to transform when the first social revolutions started to occur worldwide. Together with the social movement of freedom of expression and the uprising of political awareness, the mentality of circus shows started to take a more active role. This was achieved by the acting and personae of the performers, their symbolic props, and the dialogues of the clowns. During the rebellious sixties circus performances combine social activism with higher level technical numbers, bringing the traditional circus one step closer to modern or new circus.

Within this transformation we see also less and less children performing with their circus families; an indication that stronger societal factors were also occurring towards the direction of more fair treatment to children. The movement for education as fundamental rights for all children started to be applied in circus children. Additionally the mentality of breaking social norms that took place in that period, probably caused a possible mixture of human resources in circus, with children and youth deciding to take their future in their hands and moving either away or towards to become circus performers.

The new circus of today holds its provocative and innovative position, in the new wave of society's attitudes in general. Many could be and was already said about what makes circus attractive and popular. The point now is to clarify what makes new circus a factor of social influence and how new circus and circus schools are being used as tools for social dialogue, co sequencing into changing the mentality of people that circus is not everyone, into circus is for everyone and for the benefit of youth on top.

An interesting theory is being introduced by the author of "Circus Bodies" Peta Tait. Using words from famous sociologists, she argues about the "risk society" of today and how new circus by reinvigorating the meaning of risk is reflecting social concerns and offers resolutions. "The "risk society"

generates disproportionate social anxieties but, in the developed world, these are being channelled into popular drama which personalises and individualises risk rather than exposing the operation of larger systemic forces... They are diverted from perceiving actual risks and risk is reported irrationally in the media. If cinematic and television dramas with narrative resolution dissipate appropriate responses and fears to social risks, the live circus reinvigorates the meaning of risk"³. The physical body of circus is at the same time a social body. The physical body language speaks not only of great athleticism but also within the proper background of a performance, of social messages to resolve and overcome risks.

Circus communicates ideas of freedom through bodily experience. It provides an arena of extreme athleticism – like some team sports. But circus is not about winners and losers in open competition. It is about complicity between performers and spectators. Performers undertake physical acts to entertain, to uplift, and to engage sensorial responses of spectators, in unfolding exchanges. (Tait 2005). Spectators are bodily watching extreme circus action in ways that are fundamentally aligned with how bodies, and therefore their risks, are watched in society. Bodily freedom is a sensory visceral risky action in circus. Therefore bringing spectators closer to the overcoming of risks gives new circus live performances the advantage of communicating social messages.

And not only by introducing the overcoming of risk does circus reveal its social influence. There are some fundamental elements of the circus mentality that on their own make the circus a place and a way for cultural integration. By its very nature it is accessible to a wider public than most other art forms –by using tents instead of conventional theatres circus shows

³ Tait ,Peta, (2005), Circus Bodies Defy the Risk of Falling, La Trobe University, Article given at the Fabulous Risk Conference 1-3 December 2006, University of Wollongong and Australian Canadian Studies Centre

may be performed in places where there are no social buildings and enable people to enter a less intimidating space that generates excitement rather than anxiety. On many occasions there is minimal use of text and circus concentrates particularly on physical body skills, lighting and music, enabling a more sensual rather than intellectual response. Within the circus tent all spectators sit together in the rounded formulation becoming equal. In contrast to the formation of a theatre, where spectators are placed somehow away and separated from the artists, in circus the experience is immediate while the whole circus show is ready to communicate anytime with its audience not only for distracting applause. (Ex. clowns, audience volunteers for numbers)

Additionally a circus show is most of the times hosting artists from different countries and cultures instantly giving the advantage of forming a performance with mixed cultural elements. And this is the reason why a circus performance can travel in many different places and be appealing to so many culturally different audiences. Circus arts is of the few arts forms that is able to make a show that can apply to many different cultures and speak to the people's minds and souls no matter their cultural or social background. By this is understood how circus is becoming a tool for promoting diversity, equality and respect.

In deed the use of the circus as a tool for diversity goes back to the 1980's, and was heralded by the new circus in the wake of May 1968. But performing one's show in another country, or speaking to the audience for half an hour after a performance is not enough to create dialogue. Real time and investment is needed for that, and circus people, since more than 50 Years, have understood that. And here is where the tool of education comes forward for the professionals of circus, to communicate their messages for life's values that if we take a closer look are indeed connected with the fundamental rights of all people.

The matter of children and circus in this point is not whether the rights of children were being respected within a traditional circus environment. The transition from traditional to modern circus inevitably resulted into having

less child performers in official professional shows against their will, just because they were part of circus families. The effort put by circus people in the new era of circus is introducing circus pedagogy as a tool for children and youth to know their self better and to be taught and trained not only in performing circus but in respecting life.

Education is one of the main points of entry on which the circus can rely. Circus schools count more than 50 years of life in Europe and mostly the modern ones are using the circus mentality as pedagogic tool for educating young people an alternative yet improved approach of the world from a social, cultural and artistic perspective. In the following chapter we will take a closer look on the clear pedagogic values of circus practise and on how traditional circus schools slowly introduced schools with a clearly social face.

2.3. Circus schools:

2.3.1. How the values and structures of circus are of pedagogic importance

“Circus is an art form existing in all cultures...accessible to all 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 to situate oneself in a group...Clowning around helps to take oneself seriously .Circus is an encounter. Encounter with the heights and the fear, encounter with 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 is also a circle helping us to become again a child”

Katerina Flora

Artistic coordinator and chief trainer of Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde

Circus is a multidisciplinary art since its birth. Acrobatics and clowning, pantomime and juggling are living together in the same circle of the ring. This plurality and diversity gives to circus education its multi pedagogical face. Circus schools nowadays in Europe are counted over a

hundred in twenty eight countries. Whether using traditional or modern teaching methods and whether introducing an academic or a social face, teaching circus arts goes along with teaching the whole circus mentality which as mentioned before is full of values that are considered significant for the psychosomatic development of children and young people.

In order to have a better overview on these pedagogic values is better to divide them in four main categories and analyse them separately. Starting with practising circus disciplines helps oneself in the better **1) formation of personality**. Secondly the physical exercise is providing **2) better physical condition opportunities**. Additionally, while working in a group like a circus team one can be taught of all the **3) structures existing in group work** and lastly this environment results in adopting attitudes that have to do with **4) universally accepted values**.

1) Training in circus disciplines, (always not considering the strict old circus school), entails the basic element of fun. The new pedagogic theory of active learning through playing and enjoying couldn't find better its application rather than in circus. So by practising different disciplines in circus one of the main achievements is developing self progression. In an inspiring environment children are able to gain confidence for themselves or even their own self awareness of the things they can do (that in many cases maybe thought they couldn't). Also being creative is an essential part of art education and as such is a main value in circus practising too. Within the practise space where safety of yourself and the others is promoted, one is learning how to take responsibilities. Avenues of expression and personal growth are being constantly opened up.

2) Circus training techniques require a good physical condition. As a multidisciplinary art form, people practising the circus techniques are called to build healthy and durable body stamina. For children and youth is maybe one of the best ways to transmit their energy in multiple ways, since the coordination of different parts of the body along with the mind work are needed in all circus techniques. In reminding also should be that the circus

physical exercise has, unlike in many other sports, the elements of having fun and being creative that make it more than tempting.

3) Within the circus mentality exists the value of team spirit as the only way for the healthy survival of a circus group both practising and performing. Within a circus group of young people practising together in the same space, by the appropriate guidance of trainers, mutual respect is being build up, and the group is being implemented in the values of equality and cooperation. When having to take turns in the practising of aerial acrobatics or when having to wait for the fellow juggler to finish his 3 balls tossing for you to take over, gradually the feelings of respecting each other and of helping in cases of danger are being born and a strong group force starts to exist. Any kind of conflicts that is natural to occur is being solved using the powerful tool of dialogue and reconciliation between opposing groups is achieved. Besides this is the only way for a circus group to be in a position to form a performance were all participants will work together for the best show to come up and to be enjoyed by all.

4) As for the universal values existing in circus, more than enough is to make an overview in all said before to realize to the following values are being promoted in circus pedagogy:

- Co-operation and collaboration (no competition, contrary to sport)
- Taking risks in security conditions is always for the better
- Give voice to young people excluded from their community
- Allowing youth to express themselves

2.3.2. From traditional schools to schools with a social face

All these values encrypted in circus mentality were not always applied or understood by circus performers, trainers or students. Falling into the trap of professionalism and high technique achievements, many traditional circus schools were and still are forgetting the values of self expression, equality or team spirit. Following the classical conservative pedagogic tools, a lot of circus schools tented to look like any other educational institution were the

best apodosis are the main concern and the trainers-teachers are considered of somehow a higher elite of people within the school for others to obey. There is no certain period were traditional circus schools started to adopt a more open minded pedagogic attitude and a stronger social face.

Depending on the country and the inspired people in circus schools, the graduate transformation of schools from strict professional training spaces to open training spaces with social approaches, started somehow 20? Years ago and is an ongoing promising procedure. In Europe of today professional circus institutions find a way to adopt modern pedagogic ways of teaching and ways to open up in society and provide programs and projects concerning children and youth that are socially excluded. Social circus programs and institutions are a living reality providing to children and youth not only in Europe but in the whole world, new life possibilities and another perception of the world.

3. Social circus programs (SCP)

3.1. The origins of social circus

“Social Circus refers to the growing movement toward the use of circus arts as mediums for social justice and social good. It uses alternative pedagogical tools to work with youth who are marginalized or at social or personal risk. Through the dynamic approach of art-based education, the Social Circus seeks to expand the opportunities of and teach valuable skills to marginalized youth. The Social Circus recognizes and values the role of art and culture as powerful agents in the education of at-risk youth, producing knowledge, and promoting the interchange of ideas and experiences, impacting society and the public organizations responsible for youth education. With rigorous training, interpersonal dialogue and expression, and the acquisition of goals through dedication, the social circus has the ability to alter the lives of at-risk youth. Autonomy, solidarity, self-esteem, physical-

fitness, communication, and adaptability are some of the skills learned and practiced.

While a career in the circus is one possible future to the youth who participate in the social circus, it is not the purpose. Rather, the objective is to increase self-awareness, individuality and collective unity, self-discipline and many other values through a pedagogical alternative in order to transform the vision and capabilities of at-risk youth.”⁴

In this definition of social circus by Wikipedia one can find a short epitome of what social circus is in a few words. Searching in the origins of social circus programs through the world we can talk about **two pioneering incidents** that set more or less the pole of social circus programming (SCP) around the globe.

The need for art education through circus training, for including social excluded youth into a circus school environment and generally for communication of circus with society’s problems was soon enough felt by the famous **Cirque du Soleil**. Cirque du Soleil leading nowadays the contemporary circus world with worldwide famous productions and numerous social programs was from the first institutions to introduce **its social side: Cirque du monde**. As stated in Cirque du Soleil’s website, “Cirque du Monde is one of the greatest sources of pride for Cirque du Soleil. Set in motion in 1995, this program 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

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Circus

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.”

Social circus communities are found from the Latin American countries to the USA and from Australia to many European countries. In an extended web search there were not found Asian social circus communities without these of course to state a fact that there are not any.

Although SCPs were running in countries around the world for many years before their official come out, a significant year for the social circus world could be considered 2002, when in La Seyne-sur-Mer in France, representatives from thirteen countries drew up and signed a charter of social circus. Reginald Bolton in his Doctorate Thesis “Why Circus works” is giving a useful insight on this conference by providing the **declaration of this creation of the United Nations of Social Circus**. It is useful also in this thesis the full declaration to be provided in the Appendix1. As Bolton states about this charter; “the effectiveness...and the potency of the network are yet to be tested, but the round table that led to this charter was remarkable in itself. The delegates represented a variety of organizations, some rural and some urban, some working long-term some short-term, some inspired by circus arts, others motivated by social intervention with young people at risk. The ethnic and

political backgrounds of these people are diverse and in this heterogeneity lay the remarkable achievement of this gathering. All they have in common is circus. All have discovered that, for them, it is the most effective means for improving the life and prospects for young people in difficulty.”⁵

Social circus turns out to be somehow a bigger issue than one (like the author of this thesis) might expect. For the purpose of the thesis though, it is essential to nail down our analysis and research on the social circus programmes of Europe. To understand the needs that led to SCP and to be able to talk about children’s rights that are applied or promoted through SCP we have to talk about the situation that we know best. And analysing the SCP of Europe, gives us as tools theoretical documents and literature as well as practical base of series of interviews and personal experience of the author in SCP of Germany for supporting our research question.

The fundamental elements of childhood as well as children’s fundamental rights are considered global. We all know though that children in the six continents of the world are facing life, its challenges, and problems in a completely different way. Supporting the fact that a series of fundamental children’s rights are being promoted and protected in SCP in Europe we will then be able to justify that the existence of these same SCP, run by the same principles, can be of benefit not only for the children in Europe but for all youth worldwide as it is already happening.

3.2. How social circus programming work in Europe.

3.2.1. The schools, the networking, the projects.

The social circus institutions in Europe are officially counting 7 member countries. These institutions, organize numerous exchange programmes and different kind of projects for cooperating with schools, and many other

⁵ Bolton, Reginald, (2004). Why Circus Works. Phd Thesis for the degree of doctor of philosophy, Murdoch University, Perth.

educational institutions, creating a large playful net around which directors, trainers, children, parents, youth and everyday neighbourhood people are moving. In Appendix2 we can find a full description of these 7 social circus members of Caravan. In Germany, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Finland, Spain and Luxembourg social circuses are introducing the new era of perceiving circus. Social circus communities as said are spread all over the world. Caravan is the social circus network that involves and supports these circuses work.

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.

All these schools and many official and unofficial circus schools are organizing numerous **projects** that would be interesting to talk about. Since these projects are outnumbered it is essential for this part of the Thesis to analyze the most basic types of them that are running in almost every social circus school. These projects are touching all sensitive social issues, concerning communicating circus with educational institutions like schools, disadvantaged neighborhoods and children with special needs.

When it comes to the communication of circus with society's official educational institutions that is schools there are basically two ways that social circus projects are working. It is either that school goes to find circus or circus comes to reach school. In Cabuwazi, Berlin's social circus, the school project consists of weekly trainings of school classes in Cabuwazi's tops, ending with

a beautiful show at the end of week for the rest of the school to enjoy. In France on the other hand the “circus commandos” is a project where 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 the theater stage and to shatter the benchmarks of the pupils.

Bringing a circus school closer to its neighborhood can be done in many ways. Having circus tops and buildings in disadvantaged neighborhoods of urban areas is on its own a challenge for gathering around the circus children and youth with different and in most cases excluded social backgrounds. Inviting all people to watch the performances is a way for letting neighbors know what is going on, or even organizing street performances can bring circus children, children from the streets and older neighbors closer. The project “come to my neighborhood, there is a big top”, from the circus group “La Rue et Cie” in Paris is a good example of communicating circus with its surroundings! With charge free workshops for the children of the local are every Wednesday and young people presenting their work in front of retired persons, better relations were set with people of the neighborhood because of the existence of circus.

When circus meets families and children with special needs then “PiiPoo” projects from Sorin circus in Finland is maybe one of the best examples to present. [The experimental circus school for families offered the participants shared experiences in circus arts: learning new things, testing one’s boundaries, spontaneity, and experiences of success, planning and training a final performance... The pupils of the circus school explored different circus roles for themselves and different ways to do circus arts. It was noticed that the boundaries of the equipment can be artificial. An assistive device can also work as circus equipment. The equality of parents, disabled children and their siblings was promoted in a way that nobody has to assist the other but instead everyone create and have fun together...The words “this can’t be done” were

unheard words in this school. For the PiiPoo project everything can be done, and if not right away, then at least after figuring out together how to do it]⁶.

The social circus schools in Europe are alive and active. With trainings and performances from everyone to everyone, projects for all social groups and a useful network amongst them that help them communicate exchange ideas and become better, SCP are a growing power for supporting children and youth on their way of discovering life. Doing this, SCP is moving with values and principles of work that we will try now to put together in head titles and epigraphs.

3.2.2. The principals of work

Circus is for everyone:

Equality and mutual respect for everyone. No matter if you are black or white, thin or fat, tall or short, no matter where you come from, circus is a place for you to discover, create and have fun

Circus is a team:

For practicing, performing and living together a team is needed. Help out and support your friends, juggle away your differences and clown around with the trainers. Circus is a team of respect where no adults are to be obeyed but rather everyone is to be heard and respected. Apart from respect a circus team is a trust building team amongst its members since acrobats have to trust each other and in most disciplines you have to trust the person besides you to achieve.

Circus is safe:

With safety regulations, appropriate equipment and educated trainers all you have to do is trust your instinct and go for it. The safety of everyone is an

⁶ Written report from seminar activity, Tampere 2008, "How and Why to start a social circus project", into the Frame of networking action "Caravan".

important value and the feeling of trust is important for children and youth to go beyond their...minds borders.

Circus is creation:

In the magic world of circus imagination has no limits. Create your own world and dive in. Combine all arts under one top and create a performance with your own meaning.

Circus is a game:

Spend some time in a social circus and the word to be heard most would be **FUN**. Come on then. Let's have some FUN. The most important is for children and youth to discover new hobbies, make new friends and enjoy themselves.

Circus is a social tool:

Within circus we learn to socialize and communicate with different cultures. Within circus we are capable to surpass our own difficulties and learn how to take risks like the ones to be taken in life. Within circus we form our personality and live strong experiences. We learn to communicate a universal language that can bring together the whole world!

3.3. An inner look on SCP: Interview analysis from head directors of Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Bagneux, Paris.

To summarize this chapter on the origins and the way of work of social circuses, we will now proceed to an interview analysis taken in December 2009 with Mr Elefterios Kechagioglou, head director of petit Plus Cirque du Monde (PPCM) and Mrs Katerina Flora, artistic coordinator and chief trainer of PPCM. Having an inner look on how a social circus like PPCM started, and what the people, that have dedicated their lives into bringing new circus mentality closer to children and youth, think about social circuses of today will help us sum up some basic elements of how SCP works and support some of the previous statements in best way.

Stating some biographic elements for the interviewees; Born in Greece,

Elefterios Kechagioglou moved to France after graduating from secondary school. He studied Political Science and Contemporary History and collaborated with UNESCO. From there, unexpectedly, he started a career in circus, theatre and writing, working as an artist, trainer and stage director. He also worked with several theatres, circus schools and companies. After following a vocational education programme on Business Administration for Culture, he developed different projects focusing on the social impact of circus, theatre and writing. He is now the director of PPCM.

Katerina Flora also born in Thessaloniki, Greece, is responsible for the educational and artistic department of Plus Petit Cirque du Monde Centre and of the Circus South of Seine. She was awarded a degree in « History » and « History arts » to the University of Sorbonne in Paris. Since 1993 she has worked as aerial artist, comedian and dancer in several companies of circus, theatre, and contemporary dance. Simultaneously, she oriented her studies towards circus and obtained a 2nd master from the University of Paris III. She collaborated with the National Centre of Scientific Research on arts and spectacle and published about ten papers concerning circus (editions CNRS). She has offered her knowledge in circus since 1994. Additionally she was responsible of the amateur sector of the National School of Circus of Rosny, between 2001 and 2007.

For the analysis of the interview we will now use the interviewee's small names in favour of reading fluency and for bringing readers closer to the cosy atmosphere that this interview had.

Starting with how social circus started its "career" in France, Elefterios spoke about the "social needs" that led circus schools in this direction. Considering children with special needs and children with special social backgrounds (immigrants, problematic family environments, extreme poverty, street children etc) as groups of children socially excluded the need for circus to go out and reaches also these sensitive social groups lead gradually to the birth of social circus projects. "These projects were born from the generation

after rebellious 60's...In an atmosphere of the social liberation move, circus people in France went out to reach another audience that the one usually to be met in theatres or circuses till that time" stated Katerina. It was there in the 70's when the "new circus" came into play, challenging and formatting the old circus clisses and patterns.

"It is because people have still in their minds the traditional circus mentality, the reason why following a circus career or even adopting a hobby from circus arts may still seem marginalized in many European countries" said Elefterios. This problematic of having a circus show on the one hand being so popular but on the other hand having sceptic parents on whether their children should adopt circus career, is being overcome by social circus. Using her knowledge on the history of circus and its social approaches through the years, Katerina spoke about the traditional circus clisses and ways of presenting itself in contradiction with the new circus.

"The new circus is renouncing the values of traditional circus". By this is meant that in the new circus the high achievements are not the main goal anymore and the shows are not consisted of macho craftsmanship from men and sensual body exposure by women. "In the new circus the trapeze acrobats will lift each other leaving no implications of strong men and week women". The new circus is not any more a display of power and control of animals or of the over fighting of death. "No animo mas anima" is one of the values of new circus as in "No animals, more soul" said Katerina. With innovative ideas in the shows, the mixture of different arts, the immediate communication with its audience and the denial of any social models new circus is introducing a new way of approaching circus.

Making a useful distinction between "new" and "contemporary" circus Elefterios clarified that social circus comes from the new circus alternative mentality, while contemporary circus and professional schools are maybe falling again into the trap of only high level performing, promoting strong competitive attitudes amongst artists and performers, and losing all other

social meaning that circus started to occur years ago.

Questioning about the pedagogic values of practising circus arts, Elefterios and Katerina, came only to confirm, with their experience and knowledge, what was stated before by relevant literature of other specialists:

- Acceptance of the other, the alternative, the different. Finding a place where everyone fits in.
- Fulfilling the need to play, have fun and take risks.
- Providing new opportunities for children with learning difficulties.
- Building of trust. Cooperation with each other. Relationships building. Tricky implications in matters of boys and girls coexisting and touching each other so as to learn for ex. acrobatics fall apart.
- Learning how to protect one and others.
- Marginalized people are not inculcated.
- Self development. Becoming creative and innovative.

For the directors of PPCM all these are values are of great pedagogic importance for the development of a socially active and sensitive new generation. As for the benefits of the whole community revolving around social circus Katerina says: "The audience of our shows consisting mostly of parents and neighbourhood people see their kids as they have never seen before. They feel proud for them and recognize their effort. In many occasion we also try to involve parents and other adults interested in the preparation of the show. This way they have the chance to come even closer to circus and to their own children in addition. This is of great importance for us".

When we touched the sensitive matter of children's participation Elefterios had a strong say revealing ambitious intentions: "Being open in ideas is a step but is not enough. The quality of social circus projects has a long way to go. Keeping up the good work maybe in 20 years social circuses will be meeting our standards". "Listening to children's ideas is not enough. The shows need to be formed by the inspiration and imagination of children", completed Katerina. "An important part to active children's participation lies

to trainers. Social circus does not need high qualified artists to teach children. We need trainers, educated to new pedagogic tools that will allow improvisations to blossom and let children reveal parts of their soul when forming their shows...when making their own efforts to overcome themselves”.

What are the problems and challenges social circuses in Europe are facing? Having this question as a concluding one, Elefterios spoke mostly about financial problems that most projects are facing. Additionally training social circus trainers is an ongoing procedure, while bringing more and more people closer to circus is an open challenge. Creating a group of professionals and gather a strong network of volunteers are essential elements not only for giving birth to a SCP but also for keeping it alive.

Some of these questions like the matter of children’s participation and the challenges SCP is facing will be also thoroughly analysed in forward chapters.

It is time now to take an even closer look on social circuses. Having followed circus from its first days, through its transformation into a new way of expressive art, and within its social face, we can now focus as a case study in one of these circuses and see what children and trainers think about the life there. Starting from this analysis we will have a solid base to support our assumption based on how SCP is promoting and respecting children’s rights.

4. Social circus and children’s rights

4.1. What children and trainers think about social circus.

- **Case study: Berlin’s social circus school “Cabuwazi”.**

Interview analysis from its human resources.

As mentioned in the introduction, spending in total 2.5 months in Cabuwazi circus in Berlin was my starting point of inspiration for this project. My decision for doing my internship in Cabuwazi came from my inner belief that there is something more happening in this place than training in Circus. I

will cite a part from my internships report considering my imprints of the place and my starting point for the series of interviews.

“In Cabuwazi Treptow it was that I decide to ask for my practicum. Britta Niehaus, the manager director, was friendly and really open to have me there for as long as I wanted to help in the afternoon trainings or even in the school projects of the mornings and integrate myself in the Cabuwazi spirit.

I must admit that although I was pretty sure that this the right place for me to do my internship and integrate with children I did not have any idea of I could combine this with a children’s rights perspective.

So I decided to use the first week more or less as a “get to know the place and the people” week. I was joining daily the evening trainings and helping out with my circus training knowledge. This gave me the chance to meet all trainers of Cabuwazi, but also the people that work in administrative positions, technicians, people working in the café, and of course a lot of the children that were coming regularly there to train. The evening trainings consisted of regular training hours where children could join in and train in different circus disciplines divided in groups according to age and abilities in the specific disciplines. Apart from these regular trainings though, two whole evenings per week are dedicated to “free open training”. In these days anyone can join in to practise whichever discipline they want. This means children of all ages and abilities can come together, have fun and even help each other. After this week I had to think no more of how I could combine this kind of internship with a children’s rights perspective. It was combined on its own...and my talk with Britta made things even clearer.

Cabuwazi is endangered from a decision made by the municipality of Berlin to reduce the funding of all youth and elder people’s programmes. The directors of all Cabuwazi are in constant meetings with politicians and people from the government and the municipality of Berlin, to try and find a solution that will keep Cabuwazi alive, as an organization funded and supported by the state that can provide free training and highly equipped circus activities

for children and youth. After this I had to think no more. My idea was to write an article under the title: “Cabuwazi: a circus for children and youth as a place for respecting and promoting children’s rights”, and Britta agreed enthusiastically on that.

For the following weeks I decided to get to know better the two basic activities that were running at that point: The evening trainings and the school week projects. My second and third weeks were dedicated to the morning school project and my aim was to find out how the procedure is being conducted and what trainers, teachers and most important children think about it..” Finishing the first series of interviews including trainers, teachers and children from the school week projects, I decided to move even further. I had already inside me growing the idea of this Thesis so my next step was to complete my research on my case study. Spending more or less another month in Cabuwazi gave me the time to include in these series of interviews the children from the evening trainings, the teenagers that in a way grew up spending their time in Cabuwazi, and of course Cabuwazi’s directors. Inspired, educated people working for the best of all children in Cabuwazi.

Some words about Cabuwazi: Whatever is considered Circus show can be found in Cabuwazi. Animation, Stilltwalking acts, juggling, dancing, air acrobatics, balancing disciplines, dance, clowning; everything can be practised and performed within colourful inspiring tents. Everything but animals abuse of course...

The training in Cabuwazi is for children from 9 years old and is basically free. Over 650 children and youth train each week on the different locations. What is important is that everyone can join in, equally...

Cabuwazi is a place for social integration, cultural development and individual health support. Cabuwazi is a youth culture centre with social and pedagogic goals. The basic goal is to set a tolerant youth environment, a living world open to diversities and social integration of all youth in Berlin and everywhere.

One of the ways to offer support for the development of children and youth, is to offer in Berlin free space for ideas and the possibility to make artistic ideas come true. As a pedagogically artistic circus, the work aims not only in personal success and self-confidence, but rather in raising social competences such as the sense of responsibility, team spirit and fairness. The acquisition of physical fitness serves the healthy body-healthy mind perceptions.

In Cabuwazi not only projects within Berlin's area are taking place....It is a social and cultural youth network that promotes equality and creativity.⁷

The network of people that consist the beating heart of Cabuwazi are on a first basis its directors, the trainers, and of course its children giving their active presence in all five tents of Cabuwazi within Berlin. The interview analysis consists of a series of interviews taken during the months of my internship from these three categories. Firstly we will focus on the main and strongest comments made by three of the directors of Cabuwazi and on a following part we will analyze the interviews taken by some of Cabuwazi's trainers. But what do children have to say on their own experience of choosing to spend time within these tents will be our main concern. Analyzing the interviews taken by different groups of children will lead us to the first conclusions needed on whether children's rights are respected in a social circus project.

- Notes from interviews taken from three of Cabuwazi's directors:

The directors that took part in the interview series were Britta Niehaus from Cabuwazi in Treptow, Bernd Fettback from the Altglienicke tent and Christine Koelbel from Cabuwazi Schatzinsel and Kreuzberg areas. All of them serving social circus for more than 10 years each, had a lot to say on how Cabuwazi as a special place has a lot to offer to the development of children

⁷ Internship report...

and youth, on what are the best ways to manage a social circus project and what are its challenges for the future. We will present some of their most important statements concerning these subjects while the questions of the interviews are submitted in the interviews appendix.

For the speciality of Cabuwazi:

"Cabuwazi is doing much more than teaching children how to hang from a trapeze – Cabuwazi is teaching life's values...we help to make dreams come true..."

"By building personal relationships with parents, talking and interacting with them in the cafe place we can work together for the best of our children"

"Trainers are the most important part in Cabuwazi. We need motivated people with love for children willing to do a lot of creative work".

Britta Niehaus

"Cabuwazi helps the kids to build their free will...children here have Fun and new opportunities are offered"

Bernd Fettback

"Here is a big room for new ideas..."

Christine Koelbel

For its pedagogic value:

"Understand your way...understand my way...then we can walk together. That's what we want to teach children. New information for their body...new connection with their school and family environment...a new meaning in life"

"Discipline is sometimes needed for children to find their way...trainers can either walk side by side with children or they can be one step forward saying: you see that's a way you could do things. If you like it I will show you how"

Christine Koelbel

"Promote intercultural dialogue, learn to work in a group, raise one's self-esteem, and promote anti racist attitudes are some of the most important values running Cabuwazi's programme. All these of course only through the element of having fun "

Britta Niehaus

Running a SCP and the challenges they are facing:

"Having to deal with different cultural backgrounds is a constant challenge..."

Bernd Fettback

"The trainers to work in this place are being chosen carefully. Studies and pedagogic experience are needed. We want people with a positive feeling for the world, to be creative and to love working with kids"

"Our main problem is the finance which is being reduced. A social project without economic support might unfortunately die..."

Britta Niehaus

"Financial is the main problem of Cabuwazi today...Learning day by day how to talk away problems with children is our constant challenge...Having often meetings with our children, is helping all of us to run this place the best way"

Christine Koelbel

- Trainers from Cabuwazi location Treptow give their vibe on what is social circus

The people interacting with children daily under this social circus environment are of the most important human resources to be heard. Playing a vital role as guiders, educators and friends for children and youth, social circus trainers need to be people, trained in social circus and highly qualified. The training for becoming a social circus trainer is an ongoing procedure being organized by social circus people, in an effort to eventually form a school for social circus trainers where special qualifications will be taught and people will be trained and specialized in working for social circus projects. The trainers in Cabuwazi are people that gained their qualifications through experience of daily work with children and are daily working in finding out the best ways a social circus trainer should act. Their say on the everyday life of a social circus is of great interest.

Ilka, Uwe and Rosalie are people with different academic studies that all work under the same tent. With artistic backgrounds in aerial acrobatics, dance and circus training these trainers learned through the years to work with children and to come over several difficulties.

The reasons why they chose this job are because they all considered it as a new challenge in what they have been doing so far. Combining different art forms and coming together with different groups of children was an inspiration for Ilka that felt really quickly as becoming a family, while the non racist attitudes promoted and the open space for all, where the reasons that attracted Rosalie into entering Cabuwazi's world.

In the actual procedure of coexisting with children in training and in organizing shows the open mind of these trainers' work was more than obvious. Not only by their saying but also from the author's own experience, the trainers were totally open to children's ideas and thoughts and were open to talk and to listen, without forgetting always the rules and regulations needed to be followed for the team work to flow safe and smooth. Improvisation is a tool to be used in training and in the formation of shows leaving space to children to unfold their ideas and inspirations, their talents and will. Putting ideas together is helping children to express themselves and trainers to organize better the shows and trainings.

When talking about discipline within the tent Uwe was strict to say that setting the roles and rules before the training day start is helping everyone to know their limits and how they can work. For all three trainers shouting does not exist as a tool for discipline. Talking with each other and staying calm are always working for Ilka and Uwe tries often the trick of the lower and calmer voice when things are getting too noisy and chaotic. Building mutual trust is a basic tool for working with children without having to force them to be disciplined.

"Being a trainer in circus is a completely different story than being a teacher" says Uwe. "You try to find their strong parts and leave their weakness behind. You have to make these children feel that they can be artist for a week...and is not a fake feeling. Children come here as white paper one could say. It's up to them to write their own story with the trainers help" he completes.

Ilka additionally is not keeping the teacher – pupil distance in her trainings and she thinks that kids can be more creative in circus than in school. For Rosalie what she finds alternative in circus work than the work being done in school, is that children have the ability to move more in circus and that there is not so much theory like in school but more practise.

As far as the importance of a good qualified show is concerned all trainers unanimously said that what is important is for children to have FUN. A good show is not so important. We like to create nice friendly atmosphere in our shows and we don't want to stress the children, says Ilka. Rosalie also supports the idea of letting kids free to choose and form their show even if the result will not be of high quality and Uwe in the organization part states that a good organization of the show by the trainers is preventing the stress of children so that everyone can enjoy best.

Having seen and analysed what the head leading people of Cabuwazi had to say on social circus values and organization, and how its trainers are forming the open minded mentality of the place it is time now to see what do children have to say on their own experiences in Cabuwazi.

- Children speak their minds

Interviewing children was of the hardest parts of this series of interviews. The language gap between me and the kids did not help a lot the understanding. What was surprising though is that almost all children were patience enough to try and translate from German to English and vise versa, and were tempted by the idea that they can be teachers to an adult so as to make her understand what they meant. The groups of children interviewed were three primary schools classes from three school projects. They were in about 10 children in each class aged from 8 to 10 years old. Additionally 4 children from the weekly evening trainings were asked for their opinion and 2 teenagers that have already spent some of their childhood and teenage years in Cabuwazi. The interviews were held in either group interviews or private ones depending on the timetable and the will of the children. In total,

a sum of more or less 40 children spoke their minds on whether they like their neighbourhoods circus or not, if they feel respected and free, and whether they would like something to change and be different. We will first quote some of their statements and onwards we will present the results from the questions in numbered charts.

1) "Do you like it here or not?"

-Yes! We really like it. There are no teachers....the trainers are nice

-No! We are not really allowed to do things...

-We do here a lot of different things...things that we don't do everyday...

-I have been here since 5 years. I join because I like circus. I like it because I meet my friends, I make shows, and I learn new things...

2) "Do you feel respected here? Do you feel your word is counted?"

-Our ideas were not always taken into account

-The trainers decided on our costumes and we didn't like that

-Our ideas were heard. Whatever we asked for happened

-My ideas are always respected...Our acts are formed by combining everyone's ideas.

-We have fun here and play with friends...

3) "Do you feel here freer than in school?"

-We feel freer than in school....when I am moving my body I feel free...

-We always do new interesting stuff....not boring things like at school

-There are no teachers here...the trainers are cool...trainers are a little bit like our friends..

- I have to do no homework here...at school I have to sit and study.

4) "What would you like to be different here?"

-We would like more cooperation between trainers and us children...we would like more time for practising.

- I would like to be able to do more activities...

-We would like to be more free to choose...

-We would like to have more trainers...maybe if they were better payed they could stay more hours with us and train.

5) "Would you like to come again?"

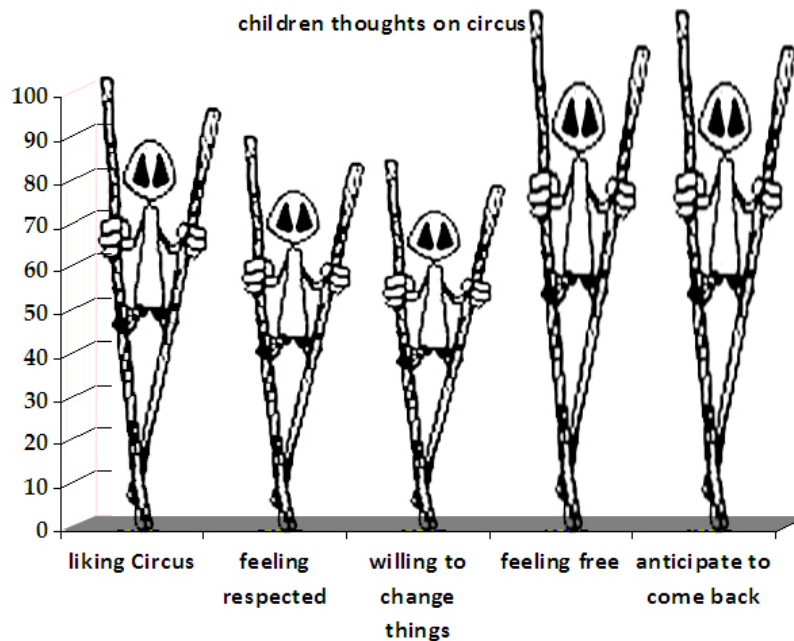
-Yeeees!!!!

-For sure!!

-We can't wait!

-I always come here since years now. Is great!!

All children's answers will be presented in a scale. Their answers will be counted in percentages so as to see in which percentage children are satisfied within Cabuwazi.



As we can see the percentages of children appreciating their time in circus are pretty high. With an 87, 5% of the children interviewed liking circus one can say that is quite a popular place for children and youth. The 75% of children and youth feeling respected within Cabuwazi, is we could say, a rather satisfying percentage, but also reveals a strong 25% percent of children feeling that their word is not taken into account and their ideas are not always put into practise. Quite promising, according to the specificity of answers given in this question, is the fact that a 70% percent of children are willing to change things in Cabuwazi, but only in a way to make it even

better and more compatible to their needs. No radical changes were suggested which is a sign that the root organization of Cabuwazi is satisfying for children and youth. In the question of freedom within Cabuwazi and the will to come again, the unanimity of positive answers gave a 100% percent scale in both columns revealing the good work being done within these social circus tents.

Taking these answers and percentages and all stated in this case study and in all previous chapters, we now have our starting point to see analytically the specific children's rights being respected and promoted within a social circus community. And on we go...

4.2. How SCP are promoting and respecting children's rights

Diving in to the big issue of children's rights one should take careful steps. Taking the United Nations Convention of children's rights as the only official statement containing all of children's rights and needs would be a mistake. On the other hand, having so many definitions on childhood, its characteristics and the fundamental elements needed for all children to become adults, we wouldn't like to get into extensive analysis of theories from sociologists, historians, anthropologists and psychologists so as to define rights and needs of children that are not written within UN's declaration on children's rights.

What we shall do is use some theoretical elements from modern sociology and psychology and other literature to ponder on the rights and needs children have for their healthy physical and mental development many of which are declared in UN's convention and some not. Firstly we will analyse the rights written in the convention that are promoted and respected by social circus programmes and later on we will see which basic developmental factors for a healthy childhood are also being promoted within social circuses.

Freedom of expression

Article 13 of the United Nation's Convention on children's rights (CRC)

1. *The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.*

2. *The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:*

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Considered a fundamental right not only of children but of all people, freedom of expression is an essential need through which a child encompasses self-actualization, self-awareness, self presentation and individualization. Being able to express ones ideas through art in our case, the feeling of raising your self esteem is being supported. When putting children's needs in a hierarchy, most modern psychologists like Abraham Maslow in his "Hierarchy of Human Needs" are placing in the highest range self actualization. Within a social circus where children are not only allowed but motivated to express their minds and ideas, the ability of self expression is growing, improving this way children's progression to self actualization.

Right in leisure and play

Article 31 of CRC

1. *States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.*

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Looking into philosophical, sociological, psychological theories from ancient times to post modern and contemporary eras, theoreticians recognize the importance of play, rest and leisure in people's lives. From the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus to the Dutch sociologists Johan Huizinga they talk of the importance of grace, charm and "free activities standing outside ordinary life as being not serious...promoting social groups..." (Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*). Following Huizinga, French academic Rose Caillois is also talking about play as an activity that amuses and is freed from restrictions of the everyday life. For the importance of amusement in one's life also talks Freud, mentioning that "pleasure is the guide in all that we choose" and "when we suffer from the absence of pleasure only then we feel the need of pleasure".

This right of children in western societies of today seems not to be finding its proper interpretation resulting not to be implemented properly. For various reason children are maybe becoming less and less capable of generating their own fun. With playgrounds and television, observators and teachers, children's opportunities of freely originated play activities are reduced. Additionally the modern way of children's living consisting of family vehicles, educational pressure, electronic games is also a factor for living less space to children to generate their own games.

Children need this time to create and live inside their own games for their healthy mental, physical, emotional, psychological and social development. Setting their rules, deciding on the players, the time and the place of the game, doing their best to win, learning to handle losing are only for the benefit of all youth. Within a social circus school children have this opportunity of playing and having fun. State parties of countries should take into consideration that a SCP is a place for children to engage in play, recreational activities and artistic

life. A SCP actually encourages children to participate equally and freely in cultural, artistic, and recreational activities.

Besides an activity which is strongly recognized as fun, should also present developmental, intellectual and physical challenges, encourage behavior more creative than competitive. (Bolton.2004)

Protection and reintegration of children in need

Article 19 of CRC

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 39 of CRC

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

These two articles are mentioning the need of protecting children from mental or physical violence and of reassuring physical, psychological and social reintegration of a child victim. The measures that can be taken vary a lot. In our argumentation on social circus we could say that having children adopting a new circus mentality could prevent them from allowing maltreating attitudes of any form from adults. Having a healthy body and a working mind, knowing how to speak your mind and that you have a place where adults are friends and not strict educators leaves you space for creating

your own self protection mechanisms.

As a social circus school can be of benefit for the prevention of maltreatment so it can work as a tool for the social reintegration of children being abused and exploited. Bringing a maltreated and abused child into the environment of social circus, gives the child the opportunity through the feeling of having Fun, to smoothly regain trust in people and his or her own self recognition. Children that have exploitation can reclaim self respect, their dignity and their ability to socialize.

Prevent to use of narcotic drags

Article 33 of CRC

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

Taking the same more or less arguments used before there is not much to be said. For children and youth living in a social circus environment the chances of falling into the trap of overusing drugs is nearly eliminated. Keeping a healthy body and working, mind, talking away your problems and aiming high goals in life are not leaving space for drugs to take control neither for a career in producing or selling them to occur. Moreover having the opportunity to live adventurous, risk and extraordinary situations in circus, like the feeling of flying when doing aerials or acting as insane as you like when being a clown, the thrill of having these results by taking drugs vanishes.

Equal rights to children with disabilities

Article 23 of CRC

1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

2. States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension, subject to available resources, to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care, of assistance for which application is made and which is appropriate to the child's condition and to the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child.

3. Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development...

Children with disabilities as said in previous chapter analyzing numerous projects of SCP can find their place within a social circus "top". With projects for children with special need and their parents, open free trainings and performances social circus is here to say "you can do it". Properly educated trainers, proper equipment and specially designed projects to meet the needs of disabled children, are indeed giving to all children equal opportunities for training, recreational activities and social integration.

- On rights and needs of children not written in United Nation's Convention

Childhood or childhoods? Childhood as a permanent social category or a stage of passing through phases in the procedure of growing up? The matter of sociology of childhood is too big to analyze here. In traditional sociology children are defined from the pioneer Piaget as beings awaiting to come into the social world of adults and passing through phases. Modern sociology on the other hand is seeing in childhood a clear social structure standing alongside and not behind other social structures having its own mechanisms of evolution. (Ivar Frones). Additionally the debate of even defining childhood as one structure or realizing the existence of multiple ways of experiencing being a child is an ongoing one. Either way one thing is universally accepted. Children have different needs from adults and that is the reason justifying the very own existence of childhood. Some of these needs considered essential for the healthy psychosomatic and sociological development of children and youth are being supported within social circus environments.

The need for taking risks and living adventures

In order to lead a healthy balanced life, individuals are required to take risks. Risk is always involved in every aspect of our daily lives. Growth, to some degree, involves taking risks and pushing you out of your comfort zones in order to gain new experiences and perspectives. Children, who are constantly growing, developing, and maturing, are also required to take some risks in order to test their strengths and recognize their limitations. The most important thing to acknowledge is that they play a huge role in whether or not the risk taking will spiral out of control, or whether their risks will lead to innovative and creative productions.

Taking risks allows children to understand the concept of trial and error. Success will certainly build your child's self-esteem, and inevitable failures

will not only make them acknowledge their boundaries, it will provide them with opportunity to cope with the negative emotions that accompany failure.

The problem with children is that many are unable to accurately assess the dangers associated with taking some risks. In Western societies of today this problematic behavior of children not taking or not knowing how to take risks lies on the level of protection provided to children. In societies growing with the feeling of danger hiding in every corner, parents are becoming more and more overprotective, and children in safe playgrounds, houses and family vehicles are missing essential survival lessons. That's maybe one of the reasons why liberated teenagers are making up for the lost time with car theft, drugs and other risk behavior.

Within the social circus healthy and logical risk taking is promoted and supported and children learn to overcome their fears. Falling and trying again and again fall and try again till you succeed is in many cases just called...growing up.

The need for making dreams and being inspired.

*"Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams"*

Kahlil Gibran

Inspired by both Gibran's poem and Bolton's work we can talk on the importance of making dreams and being inspired in childhood. More and more sociologists and childhood specialists of today are mentioning that because of a specific socioeconomic promotion of a living with high percentages of dissatisfaction and a future coming of even higher percentages of sorrow, children are abandoning their ability of making dreams for their future. Living in a world where injustice, sorrow, and grief are constantly promoted by media as what is mainly happening in the world's news, we see more and more children and youth adopting a more pessimistic approach for their future. But having pessimistic youth will only lead to a more pessimistic future.

Children do not have as many opportunities to feel creative and inspired by their own and other positive ideas. With television, video games, school and organized activities filling up most of the day of children in the so called civilized world, children are missing a part of generating their own ideas into creating something does not have to do with forming a digital video game character, but has to do with them. Creation is a strong tool for building self confidence which can lead to a more optimistic approach of one's life and of the world. When realizing that you are in a position to create your own projects and make your ideas come true, instantly you are into the procedure of "dreaming" the next beautiful thing that will come in your life. That's what is being promoted within a social circus activity. Mentioned many times before in this thesis, a social circus environment is supporting children to make their dreams come true and is liberating to some extent children's imagination and creativity, giving them the alternative version of a world where not everything is going down but where we can make everything go up again...(like acrobats or juggling balls do!)

The need to overcome adversity. Empower resilience mechanisms

Using as a guide the work of Jo Boyden and Gillian Mann on "Children's

risk resilience and coping in extreme situations”, we will try to describe and define resilience and reasons for children’s adversity. Analyzing these terms we will see the need to empower children’s resilience mechanisms and how SCP do that.

The factors that determine whether and how a child experiences adversity and maltreatment operate in multiple levels. From discriminative attitudes that have to do with social structures to racist approaches concerning gender or ethnicity children globally are experiencing maltreatment for numerous reasons. From within the family, to their social environment, children like all people living in communities and societies suffer from verbal or even physical abuse and deprivation. But due to their youthfulness and specifically to their lack of social power, children and adolescents are often among the most severely affected by these adverse circumstances. (Boyden, Mann. 2000).

It is in these kinds of “risk” situations where children are building up their resilience mechanisms to overcome difficulties. Masten, Best and Garmezy in their “Resilience and development: contributions to the study of children to overcome diversity” are defining resiliency as human capability to recuperate adversity and to restore stability of functioning. In simpler words is the ability to have good outcomes despite high risk status and to recover from trauma as a well, better adapted individual. Resilience is depending on both individual and self competences but also in outer environment social influences.

Resilience mechanisms lay inside every human being in their instinct for physical and psychological survival. But these mechanisms can be strengthened either by fortuitous adverse incidents or by organized activities within educational systems.

Social circus as a pedagogic environment on its own comes to strengthen resilience mechanisms of children. Teaching children how to work hard and be patient, they learn that not everything in life comes easy but that’s not the reason to give up or have our blues. Learning how to fall and fail within the

circus round children are getting prepared for their falls and failures in life and how to stand up and try again.

4.3. SCP counterpoints: Children's Participation

When talking about children's rights and needs, not from a United Nation's convention perspective but in an overview of statements and theories coming from multiple academic backgrounds (sociological, anthropological, psychological, educational approaches), children's participation couldn't escape from our attention. The reason why I decided to talk about children's participation as a counterpoint of social circus is because of my belief after my research that the perception of children's participation need to be revisited by the social circus people. Nevertheless my basic support will still be that within social circus the level of true participation of children in decision making is much higher than in any other traditional educational institutions. Just an even more active role can be given to children, in organizational matters of the projects and the ability of participating in all meetings concerning formations of projects that concern them.

To help us understand better the importance of children's participation and how it is working in society on a first level, we will use as guide, citing and paraphrasing, a research of Niegel Thomas from the University of Wales, "Towards a Theory of Children's Participation", published in the International Journal of Children's Rights in 2007. "The purposes of children's participation have been variously identified. Sinclair and Franklin (2000, cited in Sinclair 2004) offer the following: to uphold children's rights; to fulfill legal responsibilities; to improve services; to improve decision making; to enhance democracy; to promote child protection; to enhance children's skills; to empower and enhance self-esteem. Matthews (2003) distinguishes three alternative arguments based on: education for citizenship; fitting young people into society; and strengthening young people's status in relation to

adults. In each case, he suggests, it is accepted that 'participation is an essential and moral ingredient of any democratic society-enhancing quality of life; enabling empowerment; encouraging psycho-social well-being; and providing a sense of inclusiveness'⁸

Using Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation" as a tool for thinking about children's and young people participation we can see in which rung lays the level of children's participation in different societal procedures and in social circuses additionally. Starting from non participation rungs ('manipulation', 'decoration', 'tokenism'), through the middle levels where children are 'assigned but informed' or 'consulted and informed', to the highest rungs ('adult-initiated, shared decisions with children'; 'child-initiated and directed'; and at the top 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults') representing the challenge for adults working with children and young people, to make their practice truly participatory. To give some examples from Niegel to understand how this ladder works we can talk on how an ordinary family interaction can move through the levels of adult initiated decision, shared with children to child initiated and directed or how a traditional educational systems finds it hard to move away from the level of teachers consulting and inform pupils to the level of child initiated decision making that is shared with adults and so on. The ladder of participation can be applied in any circumstance concerning children.

Social circus is moving, depending on the situations, in different rungs of this ladder. As a pedagogical tool with its trainings, shows and ongoing projects, SCP is reaching the highest level of decision making by children, that are shared and supported by adults. In problem solving also, group discussions with children and adolescents reveal a child initiated and directed attitude in finding solutions. But when it comes to organizational matters,

⁸ The International Journal of Children's Rights, Volume 15 (2007), Towards a Theory of Children's Participation, Author Niegel, Thomas, p.200.

adult meetings for setting standards for trainers or for organizing new projects, SCP seems to be moving in the adult initiated, shared with children, middle level of participation.

In actual decision making children's say is limited although trainers and directors could argue that in their meetings they are bringing the vibe from their children's thoughts. There are no stated directors and trainers meetings concerning organizational matters where children are being represented by children. Picking children for participating in international meetings concerning social circus can be a tricky decision to make. But this also can be through talking with children and letting them choose their own representatives. Letting children deal with financial, political and organizational matters could also raise numerous arguments. How it wouldn't be successful, but maybe also harmful for children to deal with matters outside their childhood free of worries state. But as contemporary argumentation on children's rights has it, the "best interest" of children should be the lighthouse leading all decision making having to do with children. And the best operators of this lighthouse are no else but children and youth themselves. What is left for adults is to just allow them to use it, or even show them how it works.

The people working in social circus are not unaware of all these practices of children's participation. Having already an open minded view on the subject, a re-approach of the fact of letting children participating in the actual decision and policy making on SCP would be a rather satisfying step.

4.4. SCP's challenges and its future

The challenges SCPs are facing are challenges motivating social circus people to do their best for a fruitful and creative circus future. Starting from its main challenge, **financial support** is an essential part of contribution for keeping social circuses alive. Dealing with financial support as a constant challenge rather than a problem, social circus managers and directors are

working with each countries legislation for proper and dignified financial support. Because of the so called “economic crisis” that has been going on since 2008, social circuses in Europe are lacking appropriate funding and economical support to keep providing free training spaces, free shows and opportunities for children with need. Either supported by governments or by European Union’s funding programs as Ngos, or by economic support from private resources, social circuses need to keep a high level of finance so as to be able to keep up offering equal opportunities to all children and to focus into creative work with children and youth.

Secondly the matter of having **properly educated trainers** to work with children in a social circus environment is a challenge that has motivated SCPs into organizing seminars and projects for training social circus trainers and setting the qualifications needed to promoted a social circus trainer profession. Needing both modern pedagogic experience and experience in circus disciplines, social circus trainers of tomorrow will not be gaining their qualifications only through experience but also through procedures of professional education so as to raise the standards of work being done within social circuses.

Having high qualified **equipment meeting safe standards** for all social circuses is being in the first rows in all directors’ agendas. Proper equipment for children and youth means, safer procedures for everyone and a healthy environment of work.

In the matter of **addressing the social circus work and mentality to more and more people** of different cultural and social backgrounds, social circus people are organizing numerous local and international projects. Organizing more exchange programs among social circuses around the globe is a main intention trying to be set into practice. Additionally founding new social circus schools in more countries is also a point of high attention.

Social circus projects want will keep up the good work. With their promising human resources, their inspiring way of work, their projects and

dreams, the future of social circuses is a promising one. Given the fact that social circus is taking its first step we can only wait for positive outcome when SCP starts...flying!

5. Conclusion

At the end of this Thesis I believe that we have reached our argumentation on whether SCP is promoting and respecting children's rights and which specific rights these are.

Starting from the history of circus and its place in today's societies we were able to understand the causes and forces that led circus closer to its social face and additionally closer to children. Realizing the great pedagogic value, inspired circus people saw not only circus's present but also its future through children and realized its great potentials as a social tool for disadvantaged children and youth .

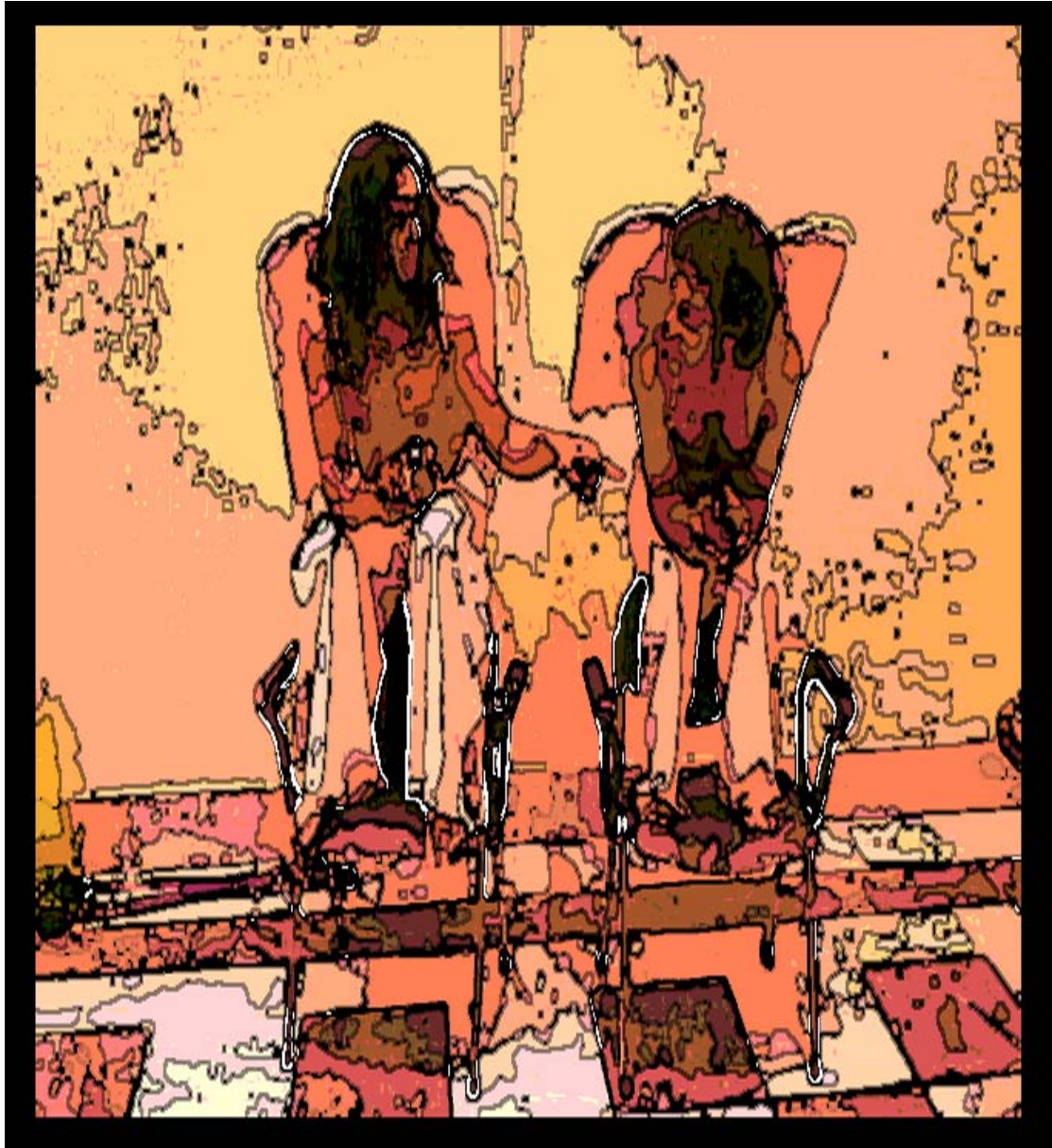
My assumption that some rights and needs of children, considered fundamental for their healthy development, are supported in social circuses was then supported by presenting firstly social circuses in Europe and their principals of work. Like this we came closer in understanding how a SCP can be of benefit for children. Supporting the assumption with empirical analysis of Berlin's Cabuwazi case study, we came to realize how children, youth and adults living within social circus organisms are experiencing matters concerning the rights and needs of children. Having all these data written and gathered together we managed to nail down which specific rights and needs of children are finally respected and promoted in social circuses.

Closing this thesis I will cite a wonderful thought of Reginald Bolton on how Circus life and childhood are somehow fulfilling each other.

"The circus in its infancy was chided by the authorities as being subversive and dissolute, just as adults often scold children for being naughty and dirty. The child and the circus share this status: often loved, but sometimes derided and neglected.

Both are full of unimaginable potential, capable of wonders. Many individuals throughout the world have begun to realize this potential, by providing circus opportunities to young people. Occasionally this work is uninformed and instinctive, driven by enthusiasm, curiosity or desperation". (R.Bolton, "why circus works", p.195)

Just like many other researchers dealing with how circus can and is being used as a social tool I hope I contributed in to seeing circus from a children's right perspective. Maybe this thesis has raised more questions than the ones able to answer but I am hoping in future researches on the matter to enlighten the aspects that did not enjoy much enlighten in this work.



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- Article 31, The Right to Leisure, Play and Culture
- Boyden, Jo, Mann, Gillian, Resilience, Vulnerability and Coping in Children Affected by Extreme Adversity, Chapter 1, Children's Risk, Resilience and Coping in Extreme Situations, p.3-25.
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Useful websites and links:

On Circus:

- www.caravancircusnetwork.eu
- www.circostrada.org
- www.circusarts.org.uk
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Circus

- www.regbolton.org

On Children's Rights

- www.ohchr.org
- www.crin.org
- www.emnrcr.net

Appendix 1

Charter of the Creation of the United Nations of Social Circus:

We, individuals and institutions representing twelve countries (Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Spain, France, Guinea, Ireland, Morocco, Holland) united on the occasion of the 'First International Round Table of Circus and Social Work' held at La Seyne-sur-Mer from 28-31 January 2002, are committed to unanimity and to a confederation of social circus. This confederation is dedicated to cooperating to produce social transformations using circus arts as a tool. The members of this confederation are moved by the conviction that circus is an educational instrument of emancipation and economic development. We also believe that circus is a particularly efficient means of communication. It operates as a magnet for disadvantaged groups and clearly demonstrates its potential for social change. This confederation is naturally open to all people and institutions following the same objectives, once accredited by the group. We recognize that the American and Australian participants are happy with the expression 'social circus', the Irish and Dutch prefer the expression 'community circus' while the French prefer to evoke a meeting of 'circus and social work' to maintain the specific identity of these two genres. The following people and associations witnessed this charter:

Name - Organization - Country

Geraldo Miranda Rally Circo Social Brazil

Rima Abdul-Malak Clowns sans Frontières France

Fabian Hoyes Circo para todos Colombia

Brigitte Bailly Independent France

Reg Bolton Suitcase Circus Australia

Jean-Michel Brayere La Fabrik Senegal

Alejandra Jiminex Castro El Circo del Mundo - Chile Chile

Sarah Cathcart Womens Circus Australia

Will Chamberlain Belfast Community Circus School Northern Ireland

Rosine Feferman Larue and Company France

Laurent Gachet Shems'y Morocco

Paul Laporte Cirque du Monde Canada
Adrienne Larue Larue and Company France
Kathryn Montgomery Independent Northern Ireland
Andrea Ousley Women's Circus Australia
Tortrel Portrona Payasos Sin Fronteras Spain
Jacques Portokalopoulos Les Saltimbanques de l'Impossible France
Marianna Luna Rufolo Circo Social del Sur Argentina
Padre Silva Los Muchachos Spain
Felicity Simpson Cirque Pour Tous France
Isabelle Sage Circo Baobab Guinea Conakry
Adrienne Van Hiltern Elleboog Netherlands
Alain Veilleux Independent Canada
(trans. Bolton)

Appendix 2

The social circus schools, members of Caravan, social circus network, as presented in the website of Caravan:

Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Circus Elleboog



Elleboog's long history as a youth circus started in 1949.

The school has now two buildings in Amsterdam (in the centre and South-East), and employs 35 staff members, plus 55 volunteers and interns.

Circus classes and workshops are organized every year for about 14.000 children and youngsters, from 4 to 22 years old. More than 40.000 people attend the shows and performances of the school every year. The numerous activities of Elleboog include:

- "Circusclubs" (for children and teenagers)
- "Trainingclubs" (for teenagers and young adults)
- Projects with primary and secondary schools (whether at Elleboog's or their school)
- Special projects with disabled children
- Birthday parties for children
- Circus festivals
- Youth performing groups (touring theatres all over the country)
- Parent-child activities
- Teambuilding for companies.

Barcelona (Spain)

Ateneu Popular 9 Barris



Ateneu Popular 9 Barris considers that cultural and artistic action is a tool for social development. Artistic and social training is hence a pillar of

Ateneu's project. Their "Circus School for Children" was created in 1996 and, subsequently, they founded the "Circus School for Teenagers" in 2003. They also organize a wide range of activities related to circus teaching, such as trainings for trainers, workshops for youngsters (on their premises or in hosting schools), workshops for mentally disabled students and open workshops.

Berlin (Germany)
**CABUWAZI Kinder- und
Jugendzirkus e. V.**



CABUWAZI is one of the leading youth and social circus schools in Europe, active since 1994. Present under five big tops all over Berlin, it hosts each week classes for more than 650 children and youngsters (aged between 8 and 17).

CABUWAZI also proposes a comprehensive social circus program for schools from disadvantaged areas, characterized by their religious and cultural diversity. In the morning Circus CABUWAZI offers project classes for schools, from one week up to one year, ending with a circus gala.

The afternoon training is mainly free, to ensure the participation of the greatest number (without financial restrictions)...

Luxembourg (Luxembourg)
Zaltimbanq'



Luxembourg's only circus school has over 200 students, aged between 4,5 and 50 years old, taking part in one (or more) of the 20 weekly classes. These classes include parent-child circus, multidisciplinary classes, specific classes (acrobatics, unicycle, trapeze...) and performing group workshops.

Furthermore there is an open training class once a week.

The school also provides workshops for children and/or adults with

foreign teachers during school holidays and on weekends. In May, Zaltimbanq' organizes the festival "Cirque sous Chapiteau". During 10 days a number of international artists visit the big top to perform on stage and to work with the youngsters of the school. The festival also gives the students the possibility to show what they have learned to their parents and friends...

Bagneux/Paris (France)

Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde



Founded in 1992, Le Plus Petit Cirque Du Monde (PPCM) - Centre des Arts du Cirque Sud de Seine develops and promotes circus arts in the field of youth and social circus, vocational training for trainers and international exchanges. Our structure is located in Bagneux (a suburb in the South of Paris), in the heart of a disadvantaged area. PPCM was born thanks to a group of people having a passion for the universal values and language of circus. The core of this group of volunteers has been active for seventeen years.

Our public is mainly composed of children from three years old and above, and young adults. About 320 students attend the weekly courses, 280 participants take part in the holiday workshops, and an average of 450 persons per week join in the outreach projects (workshops in schools, collaboration with social and leisure centers, projects with disadvantaged suburbs, workshops in jails, regular courses with handicapped children and young people).

Tampere (Finland)

Sorin Sirkus



Sorin Sirkus was founded in 1985. Recognized by the Ministry of Education, Sorin is in charge of providing Basic Education of Circus Arts in Finland. 350 students, aged from 4 to 20 years old, attend the classes every

week. The school employs four full time teachers, plus ten part time employees (trainers, producer, financial manager and stage manager).

Sorin Sirkus offers about 2300 m² as rehearsing, learning and performing space. It organizes more than one hundred performances every year, and collaborates with different circus and art schools around Finland.

Belfast, Northern Ireland (UK)



Belfast Community Circus School

Founded in the midst of Northern Ireland's conflict, Belfast Community Circus School has more than twenty years experience of working with circus as a means of bringing together young people from different cultures.

In 1999, Belfast Community Circus School took possession of the only circus building on the island of Ireland. Since that time, the organization has expanded into providing professional development for circus artists; running an agency for performance and staging street theatre events including a five day international Festival of Fools.

The work with young people now includes a regular Youth Circus with 70 members between the ages of 8 and 18; Itty Bitty Circus with 50 members aged 2 to 7 and an extensive outreach program working with young people from disadvantaged communities across Northern Ireland and with cross community groups. The outreach program works with around 120 young people each week. Young people learning circus have opportunities to participate in a range of shows and parades.

Brussels (Belgium)

Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles

Founded in 1981, the Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles teaches circus arts with the aim to favor personal development. It has developed over the years its own philosophy, methodology and pedagogy.

The Brussels school is a pioneer in providing training for circus teachers. It offers a specific training program unique in Europe, called the « Formation Pédagogique », aimed at bachelor and master students in the field of pedagogy.

The school offers as well circus lessons, in the form of weekly classes and holiday workshops, for children and youngsters. It has also put in place many social projects, such as “Cirq’ de Quartier” (circus for youngsters from underprivileged areas) and “Handicirque” (circus for mentally and physically challenged people). The school is hence, in the image of Brussels, a real melting pot...