Circus Transformation Advanced

Research Report on the Impact of Circus
Training for Trainers Programmes

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- Strengthened the international network between project partners in the youth circus with social work, and health care sectors.

- Evaluated the impact of the CTF training program, 4th 5th and 6th cycles (2018–2021).

- Developed and enhanced the pedagogy of the training.

- Improved practical arrangements.

- Created a platform for the CTF alumni network.

Circus Transformation in Action (CTF) was originally developed as a training program for social circus trainers. The CTF training is based on the curriculum "Guidebook for Social Circus Trainers", which is the outcome of a 5-year European research project (2009–2013) carried out by 2 universities, 8 Caravan members, and the Caravan office. Later, the program was developed further with the 'Extending CTF' project in 2018. More info on CTF training program on the Caravan website at www.caravancircusnetwork.eu.
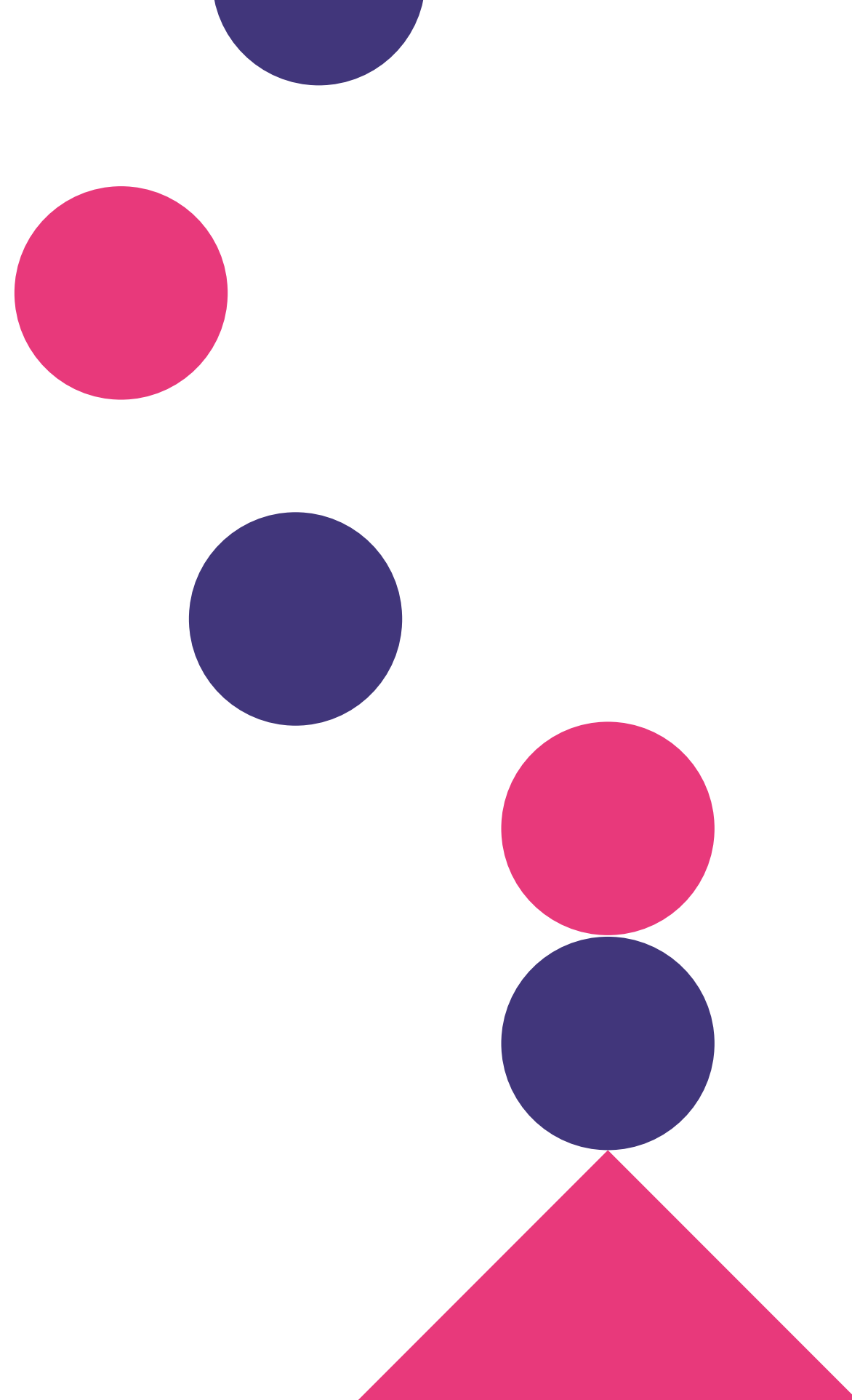
Circus Transformation Advanced – Research Report on the Impact of Circus Training for Trainers Programmes

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Introduction

1. Contexts

The *Circus Trans Formation Programme* (CTF) came about in response to a growing need for youth and social circus trainers' work to be recognised and standardised. The first European project took place from 2009 to 2011 under the Leonardo Da Vinci Partnership Programme. It set itself goals to include: research in the field of social circus; bottom-up methodology based on field analyses; and identifying the specific competences a social circus trainer needs to acquire. A framework of competences for social circus trainers and a definition of social circus were the significant outputs of this project. This led to a Transfer of Innovation project (TOI) to the European Commission with the aim of creating the first twenty-day European training programme for social circus trainers. This was prepared, tested and evaluated in eight European countries and also included the writing of *The Guidebook for Social Circus Trainers* (see Caravan Circus Network 2014).

CTF continues to this day and is now on its seventh iteration. The training is structured according to four modules (A) Social Context; (B) Act of Teaching; (C) Management/Steering of Teaching; and (D) Circus Techniques, Creativity and Foundations. Each module aims to cover between 4–8 of the competencies identified in the abovementioned guidebook (see illustration). The training has taken place in different European
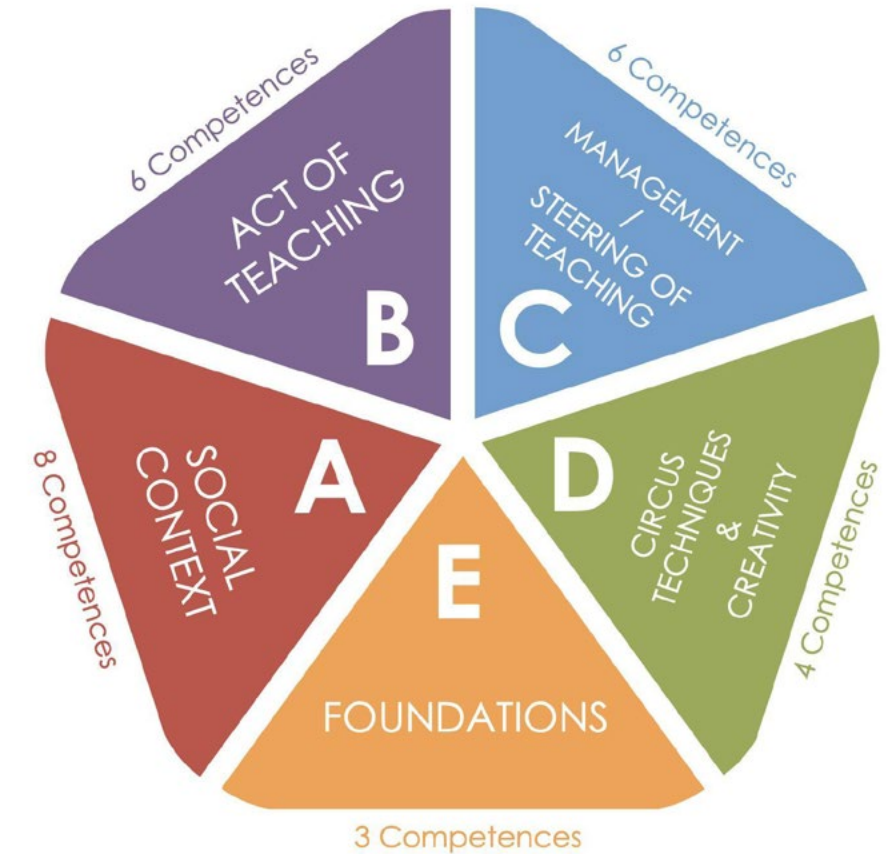
Illustration of core competences from CTF Guidebook

countries over the years, including Belgium, Ireland, Italy, and Finland. After the first three iterations of the programme (CTFs 1-3) there was a project called *Extending CTF* in 2017 that reviewed the impact of the training programme and resulted in a report. The participants in Extending CTF also created new pedagogical tools such as a portfolio and communication schedule model for future iterations of *CTF in Action*.

CTF Advanced is a two-year project funded by Erasmus + that aims to evaluate the content and impact of CTFs 4–6 by building on the evaluations done in Extending CTF and to update the guidebook with particular emphasis on the input from social sector bodies in the different countries. The main objective of this research report – as a part of CTF Advanced – is to evaluate the impact of CTFs 4–6. As the impact of CTFs 1–3 was already evaluated as part of Extending CTF, these iterations of the training programme are not part of this current evaluation. Every effort has been made to write this report in a comprehensible style, while at the same time maintaining academic integrity by citing scholarly work to add context and support points made. As a result it is hoped that the report will be accessible to a wide readership of practitioners, academics, administrators, and educators.

Research Objectives

- To evaluate participants' experience of CTFs 4–6 (i.e., the programme now and its impact over the past few years)

- To evaluate trainers' experience of CTFs 4–6 (i.e., teaching the programme)

- To evaluate stakeholders' experience of CTFs 4–6 (i.e., identifying challenges and future needs)

2. Research Process

The research team started the evaluation process by analysing the weekly evaluations, collected from participants during the CTF training cycles 4–6, organised between 2018 and 2022. The weekly evaluations included relevant information on topics such as group cohesion, structure of the training, and how participants experienced the delivery of their training. However, the data from just the weekly evaluations was insufficient to answer the key research questions concerning the participants' and trainers' experiences of CTF, or to investigate the short- and long-term impact of CTF for participants, trainers, circus schools, and the sector. As a consequence, the research team chose to design a mixed-method approach (Creswell & Plano Clark 2017). This included sending surveys out to participants and trainers; organising focus groups and embodied research workshops with stakeholders; and working via tableaux and circus practice with a selection of participants from CTFs 4–6. Our methodology is fully outlined in the following section of this report.

Galway Community Circus (GCC) Youth Led Workshop. Photo: GCC.

The research began with defining, in collaboration with the partners and stakeholders, the terms to be used throughout the project: what to call those who attended CTF; what to call those who taught the modules on it; and what was meant by the term 'stakeholder'. It was agreed that circus trainers who attended CTF would be called 'participants'; those that led the teaching of modules would be called 'trainers'; and 'stakeholders' would describe anyone who has a stake in CTF. Thus, stakeholders can be participants, trainers, circus schools, project partners (such as other organisations) and end-beneficiaries (the circus groups). However, it should be noted that the stakeholders in the project's focus groups and workshops were primarily circus school administrators, directors, project partners, and trainers.
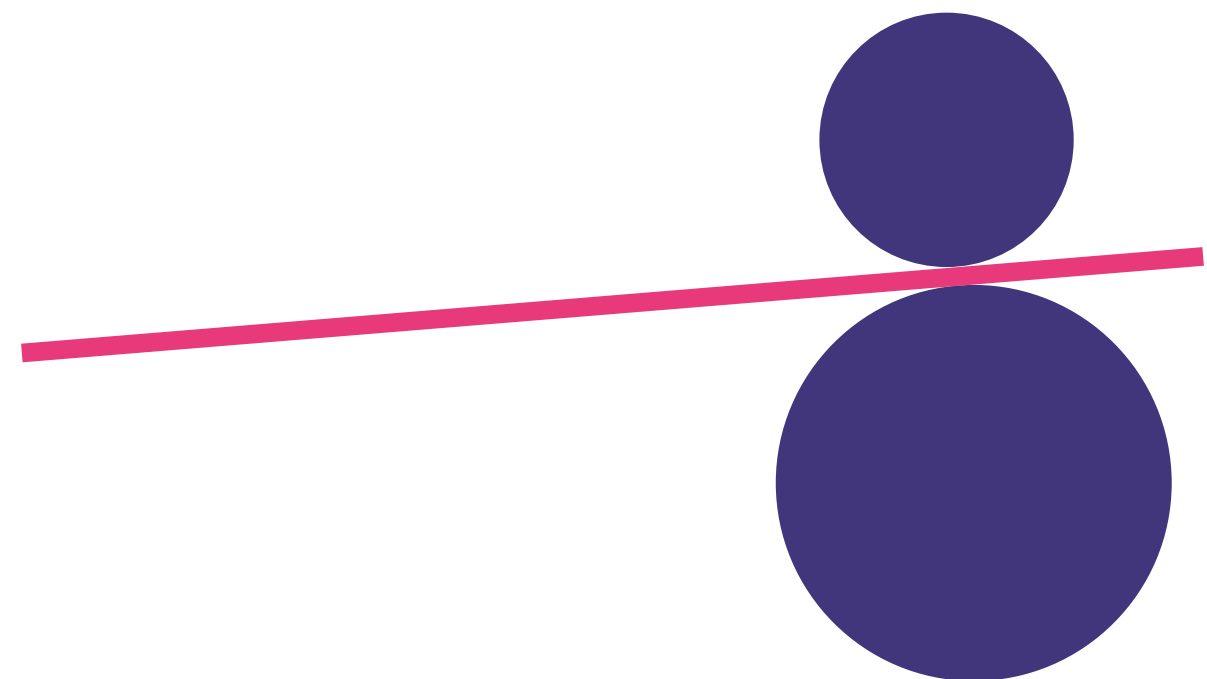
Human pyramid at Cirqueon. Photo: Tristan Ben Mahjoub.

3. Youth and Social Circus

Youth and Social Circus (YSC) refers to programmes offering circus activities (juggling; floor, aerial and partner acrobatics; balancing skills; and clowning). YSC is focused more on personal and community development, mental and social well-being, and social change than on training professional artists. The underpinnings of YSC are: physical and emotional safety; accessibility; playfulness and creativity; the autotelic and embodied character of circus practice; the centrality of collectivity and community; and the imaginary which connects the circus with extraordinariness and marginality.

YSC creates 'bubbles' – or physically and emotionally safe environments – by shifting away 'from ordinary social norms – such as those regulating a formal educational or institutional setting – towards the "new" rules and goals of the game' (Bessone, 2017a: p.660). Circus disciplines thus provide opportunities for participants to not only explore unknown potentials, play different roles, break schemes that limit and exclude, acquire out-of-the-ordinary skills, and manage risky situations (Funk 2021); but also to express themselves, create freely, and gain confidence and trust in others. While extensive research demonstrates the general value of art in 'building social capital, improving the health and well-being of individuals and communities, enhancing cohesive social bonds, and creating a shared identity' (Spiegel & Choukroun

2019, p.33), circus practice has certain features that make it particularly effective at enhancing social well-being (Bessone, Mulari & Walsh 2023).

In its diversity of modalities and disciplines, its physicality, and its playful creative character, circus practices make it easier to see oneself as 'free' or 'capable' of playing, stepping outside the rules, thinking outside the box, or of making mistakes. This is the opposite of remaining still and seated, learning by rote, by reading, and by holding back until you get things right.

Combined with the 'autotelic' (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) and embodied character of circus practice, the centrality of collectivity and community make it especially effective at transforming modes of interacting and relating to others. According to Agans et al. (2019) relatedness is a strong predictor of intrinsic motivation, affect, and positive youth development in youth circus arts programmes in North America. For Spiegel and Choukroun, circus 'draws upon and exploits kinaesthetic sociality – a mode of creating collectively whereby multiple bodies and voices combine in acts of performance' (Spiegel & Choukroun 2019, p.11). Research on social circus insists on the importance of interactions, friendship, trust, and participation in fostering well-being. For instance, Frédéric Loiselle et al. (2019) explored the perceived benefit of a social circus programme on nine young

Research on social circus insists on the importance of interactions, friendships, trust, and participation in fostering well-being.

adults. With physical disabilities in transition to adulthood. The life-habit domains mostly enhanced by social circus were found to be communication, mobility, interpersonal relationships, community life, and responsibilities. In this sense, social circus, like other forms of sport and arts, seems well placed to support the development of social capital, as it provides a focus for social activity, an opportunity to make friends, develop networks and reduce social isolation (Spiegel and Choukroun 2019). It has the potential to contribute to processes of inclusion through bringing together people with different social and cultural backgrounds; providing a sense of belonging to a group or team; facilitating the development of social skills; extending networks; and improving community cohesion through increased civic engagement.

Due to the challenging character of circus arts, as well as their association with marginality and the universe of extraordinariness, social circus is particularly attractive to the disen-

franchised, who stand most to gain in terms of social inclusion, a sense of belonging, collective health, and becoming agents of transformation within one's own community (ibid).

Finally, circus performers provide a source of inspiration 'whom spectators may wish to emulate', rather than being presented 'as oddities' or exceptional (Spiegel 2016, p.268). The possibility of becoming circus performers turns marginalised youth into a source of inspiration, amazement, and fun, thus providing unique possibilities to break stigma (Spiegel 2016; AltroCirco 2020).

3.1 Decolonising Social Circus

As we have seen above, YSC promotes social sustainability through offering opportunities to play, learn, participate and belong as individuals to groups for whom intersecting axes of social differentiation create barriers that prevent inclusion, solidarity, and cohesion (Bessone 2017a; Adolfova and Agans 2023). However, the historical and social context of social circus undermines its potential for social transformation, as there is also a risk of reinforcing power dynamics and discriminatory labels. Despite the complexity of this topic, which would merit a book of its own, we can nonetheless outline three of the biggest concepts which undermine social circus in contemporary society.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberal ideology wishes to advance 'liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2007, p.22). This ideology 'leads to a change in subjectivity whereby people are no longer thought of as citizens but as consumers and/or entrepreneurs' (Bessone, Mulari & Walsh 2023, p.99). Sociologists explore how neoliberalism (also called post-Fordism or late capitalism) expands both in depth – towards individuals' emotions and personality – and in scope – towards the 'increasingly subcultural, marginal and even deviant worlds' (Sassatelli 2007, p.80).

Research (Bessone 2017b, Stephens 2012) has also highlighted the specific relation between these tendencies and the recent changes in the circus field. Neoliberalism is characterised by the increasing commercialisation of everyday life, the growing importance of creativity, innovation and culture in both consumption and production, the movement of governance and economics to the intimate spheres of the body, affect and the emotions and the blurring of once separated categories of art, labour and politics. In this sense, neoliberalism and contemporary circus foster values through keywords which are astonishingly similar: creativity, participation, sharing, reconquering public space. Thus, what

makes circus different and alternative to other forms of art and practice, simultaneously places it at the core of late capitalism dynamics. Circus requires its practitioners to be disciplined, creative, authentic, multi-tasking, committed, highly performative, perfectly in line with the neoliberal demands of affective, immaterial and passionate labour (Arvidsson et al. 2010; Gill & Pratt 2008; Stephens 2012).

Awareness of these neoliberal dynamics is important because, although research has highlighted how social circus can counter neoliberal tendencies towards competition, individualism, homogenisation, and exploitation, it should not be taken for granted that circus in general, and social circus in a particular, is separate, alternative, and resists hegemony.

Decoloniality

CTF and social circus at the beginning of the 21st century are situated in a historical moment whose characteristics, according to Gaztambide-Fernández 'are neither spontaneous nor natural, but the outcome of complex dynamics of colonization and the resulting diasporas and genocides produced by United States and European imperial expansionism' (2012, p.42).

As Sorzano (2022) states, colonisation has marginalised, excluded, appropriated and exploited not only people, land and natural resources, but also voices, ideas, and systems of

knowledge. It has defined what it means to be 'normal' and what counts as 'difference':

> Decoloniality [...] advocates for the need to understand and to approach the world from diverse perspectives. In other words it aims at transcending western systems of knowledge which are based on the rational, the secular, the serious, the measurable, the written text, the individual. Going beyond this perspective is also transcending the duality between "a norm" and "the other" and a white heterosexual male gaze. Instead decoloniality accounts for those voices and ideas that were marginalised, excluded and oppressed during colonisation times up and remain so until now (for example: spiritual, emotional, communal, embodied, shamanism, feminine, fun, humour, ancestral, Afro, Celtic, among others) (: p.49).

Awareness of colonial legacies questions the assumptions that circulate within circus and social circus environments: that circus is a space free of racism, sexism, ableism and other forms of discrimination and exclusion, a space where social justice has been achieved and all voices are equally heard. On the contrary, arts practices (including circus) are situated in a neoliberal society and – unless engagement towards decoloniality is constantly and actively renovated – they run the risk of reproducing hierarchies, dynamics of othering, and logics of inclusion and exclusion.

Existing literature shows how decolonising the structural, financial and administrative, as well as the pedagogical and cultural aspects of social circus improves the levels of participation in circus programmes and their effectiveness (Lavers et al. 2022). Decolonisation requires reflexivity at every stage of a circus project and every level of an organisation (e.g., creation, management, research, evaluation), as well as an awareness of positionality, context, and history (see Caravan Circus Network 2022). Decoloniality offers new ways to encounter the other; 'an encounter that both opposes ongoing colonization and that seeks to heal the social, cultural, and spiritual ravages of colonial history' (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012, p.42). In other words, it cultivates interconnections and a sense of real exchange and trust, rather than simply reproducing established categories, labels, and violence.

Privilege and Intersectionality

Colonial modes of human relationality are violently enforced by white supremacy and the hetero-patriarchal order (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2012). This creates regimes of domination and oppression that reproduce systems of power and privilege. Privilege refers to certain social advantages, entitlements, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by merit of the group they belong to, rather than anything they have done or failed to do. Awareness of privilege does not imply a deterministic view of life, but the recognition that a certain gender, race, class, sexuality,

ability, or nationality makes it more likely that whatever talent, ability, and aspirations a person with privilege has, will result in something positive.

> *I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks (McIntosh 1989, p.10).*

These privileged social identities – that have historically occupied positions of dominance over others in Western societies – include 'whites, males, heterosexuals, Christians, and the wealthy' (Garcia 2018).

Intersectionality is a framework that describes how our overlapping social identities relate to social structures of racism and oppression. These take the form of 'intersecting and interlocking discursive regimes of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability' (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2012, p.42), age, ethnicity, religion, and more, to create a more truthful and complex identity (Crenshaw 2016; see also Caravan Circus Network 2022).

> *Intersectionality shows us that social identities work on multiple levels, resulting in unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers for each person. Therefore, oppression cannot be reduced to only one part of an identity; each oppression is dependent on and shapes the other. Understanding intersectionality is essential to combatting the interwoven prejudices people face in their daily lives (University of British Columbia 2021).*

Within the circus community of practice, hierarchies are also based on circus knowledge, popularity and reputation; on being an insider and an 'old timer'. Circus practice builds boundaries around what counts as knowledge and ability, what bodies should look like and how they should work, notions of art and performance, and how people should behave and interact. This 'contextual rank' (Mindell 1995) intersects with regimes of social differentiation to build hierarchies and privilege within the circus community.

Why do neoliberalism, colonialism and privilege matter to circus and social circus in particular? Because, although social circus is often defined as a 'bubble' (Bessone 2017a),

Why do neoliberalism, colonialism and privilege matter to circus and social circus in particular?

it is embedded and reflects the power dynamics of inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation that shape human relations in contemporary society. Critical literature highlights, for instance, how the label 'social' reinforces othering through 'infantalization' (Spiegel 2016, p.60), with an emphasis on the 'integration' of 'vulnerable individuals' (ibid: p.59) rather than the active participation and social transformation of all parties, or through ascribing an inferior status via cultural differentiation and attributing or denying artistic skills based on hierarchies of power and privilege (Sorzano 2016, Bessone 2017b).

Moreover, circus and other youth practices are going through 'multiple, interdependent processes of institutionalization', domestication, and civilization of art and sport practices which are otherwise marginal and deviant (Shapiro 2004, p.317; see also Bessone 2017b). Circus does not escape the critique of being 'infused with pervasive disciplinary discourses serving to produce normative "healthy" […] self-responsible and productive neo-liberal citizens' (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011, p.127) through an 'inclusive discourse' (Spiegel 2016, p.51) and cultural policies that foster active citizenship (Shapiro 2004) promoted from above, as well as the critical view of 'participation as tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari 2001) which highlights how, without a 'genuine and rigorous reflexivity' (ibid), the discourse of participation may mask manipulation and push 'authoritarian dynamics to a higher structural level' (Spiegel 2016, p.1).

CTF Advanced has attempted to take these risks into account, by not only creating the necessary space on its programmes to address the limits and challenges of CTF in terms of accessibility, the imposition of meaning, and reproducing privileges, but also through more immediately practical, short-term procedures for enabling smoother communication and evaluation. Two aspects of YSC (and particularly CTF Advanced) may have increased awareness about neoliberal dynamics.

Firstly, training trainers is broadly acknowledged as a key element in ensuring quality YSC. Among others, Spiegel (2016, p.206) demonstrates how 'programs that provided extensive training to an adequate number of instructors […] had greater impact than those in which the social pedagogical approach was less firmly entrenched'. Training is key because it provides a place where theories from diverse fields and social movements can inform YSC, encourage collective reflection, and improve practices. Secondly, CTF Advanced used a model of leadership and modes of operation that followed the YSC emphases on participation, on listening to marginal voices, and on valuing a diversity of skills, life experiences, views and ways of expression which always exist in a group.

4. Structure of Report

This report is organised into four main sections. Following the introduction, we introduce our research methodology: surveys and art-based methods, including visual methods, tableaux and circus approach. The third part of the report introduces research outcomes and major impacts of CTF in four thematic sections, including Modes of Implementation, Diversity, Clarity of Goals, Recognition and Vulnerability. Lastly, the fourth section discusses recommendations, based on the research outcomes.

CTF 7 Module A at Sorin Sirkus.
Photo: Aleksanteri Mikkola.

Methodology
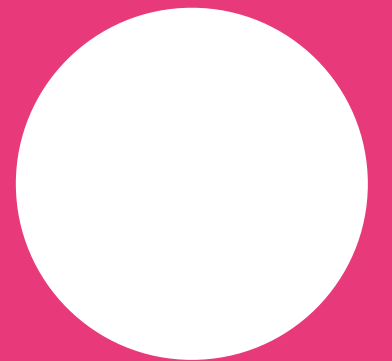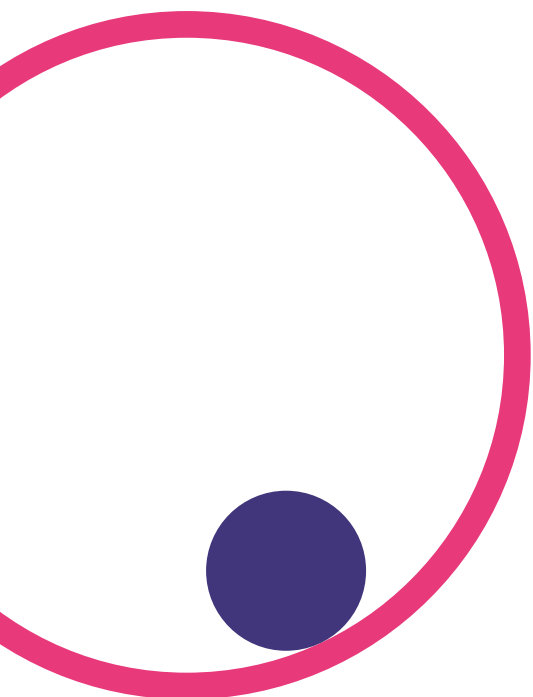
1 Introduction

Because it combines both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark 2017), a mixed method approach was applied to enable a more comprehensive exploration of the CTF programme and its impact.

Surveys helped to map out the profile of participants and trainers and provided insights into questions to be further investigated through qualitative methods, concerning experiences and representations. Surveys also drew a connection with previous research (Extending CTF) and to build on the feedback collected from participants and trainers during CTFs 4–6.

Art-based methods and focus groups supported the collective creation of knowledge, taking into account bodily movements, senses, and emotions. This allowed participants to experience the ontological implications of subjective meanings and physical experience, affecting not only practical possibilities, but also cognitive mechanisms and their epistemological assumptions about reality (Wainwright & Turner 2004). In other words, how they assign central value not only to constructions, representations, everyday interactions and subjective meanings, but also to the biological and physiological components of bodily experience, and to connections between the subjective, embodied, and structural implications of YSC practices.

The table below summarises the methods employed. A total of 65 participants and 16 trainers took part in the three editions of CTF under analysis (4, 5 and 6).

Method	Where/When	Who
Online surveys	November 2022 – January 2023	Sent out to 65 participants, 38 responses Sent out to 16 trainers, 10 responses
Visual methods and focus groups	Prague, November 2022 Stockholm, February 2023	2 groups of 6 and 7 stakeholders 2 groups of 5 and 5 stakeholders
Tableaux	Stockholm, February 2023	10 stakeholders
Circus workshop	Galway	9 participants in CTFs 4–6

2. Surveys

During CTF training cycles 4–6, daily and weekly evaluations were collected from participants. These evaluations (handwritten and in English) were used as a starting point in our research, but they proved insufficient to cover the key research questions, so two further surveys were devised and sent out to CTF participants and trainers in different countries, to get a wider range of international contexts and experiences.

Surveys are frequently used in the social sciences to gather responses so they can be standardised and quantified as data (Gideon 2012; Joye et al. 2016). There are several possibilities on how to plan, create, implement and analyse surveys: in the case of CTF Advanced, two online questionnaires were created using Google Forms: one for the participants and one for the trainers. Before sending the questionnaires out, feedback was collected from one participant and one trainer and adjustments made accordingly. A total of 65 participant and 16 trainer surveys were then sent out and we received 38 participant responses and 10 trainer responses back. The response rate among participants was 58 per cent, and among trainers 63 per cent.

The questionnaire began by introducing the research team, stating the background and goals of the project, and describing how data from the survey would be used. Informed consent was then obtained from all respondents. To address the research questions, the surveys were split into 9 sections: (1) Profile; (2) Learning/Teaching experience; (3) Structure of Training Programme; (4) Trainers; (5) Participants; (6) Guidebook; (7) Suggested Changes/Additions; (8) Impact on Careers and (9) Impact on Sector. Each section had a mixture of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions, and responses to the latter were analysed using content analysis and manual qualitative coding (Coffey & Atkinson 1996; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019: 259; Saldana 2009).

3. Art-based Methods

Art-based methods of research provide ways of accessing and representing a wider range of perspectives than traditional methods, via experiential and alternative ways of knowing. Art may enable researchers to generate multiple meanings and a more holistic view of reality by posing new questions and opening up new channels of communication with every participant in the research process (Pentassuglia 2016).

In the focus groups, images were used to convey a clearer idea of the object of study, stimulate reflection and discussion, and unveil ambiguities, conflictual interpretations, and subjective meanings. The same devices also provided the data for analysis.

Snowber (2002) argues that improvisation in dance can be used to open up spaces of dialogue, as it mirrors multiple meanings and dimensions of self, which cannot otherwise be observed, since 'there are kinds of data that our bodies experience before our minds' (Foster 2011, p.188). In this respect, performance art (theatre, dance, circus) became the tools in our research both for generating meaning and data, and for representing the research outcomes.

Images and corporeal experiences seemed particularly apt methodologies for researching the impact of a circus training programme that involves multisensory and phys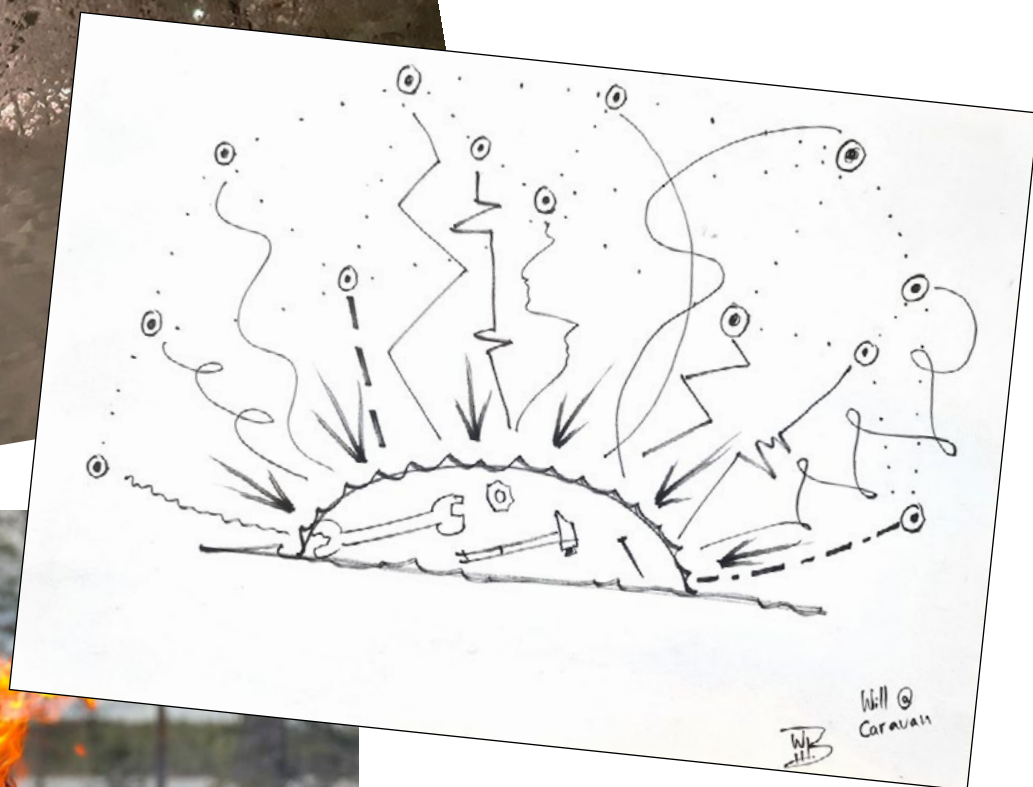ical experiences. Mason and Davies (2009) illustrate the importance for participants 'to evoke their sensory and corporeal worlds, and to reflect on their tangible and intangible experience' (Mason & Davies 2009, p.590). The underlying assumptions are that our senses overlap; that the sensory is inseparable from the social, cultural and political world it perceives; and that sensory experiences involve both tangible and intangible outcomes (Mason & Davies 2009; Pink 2011). In our case, using a sensory methodology translated mainly into strategies that focused on perception, spatial relations, bodies, and movement.

Youth performance at GCC.
Photo: GCC.

3.1 Visual Methods in Focus Groups

Two focus groups were organised to explore the broader impact of CTF with stakeholders in Prague, and two more focus groups were organised in Stockholm (with almost the same stakeholders) to look at the obstacles to CTF.

Focus groups foster reflexivity and offer a less exploitative interaction with respondents (Montell 1999), giving them the opportunity to formulate their own feelings, beliefs and perspectives so that new considerations emerge. Group interviews allow both researcher and respondents to reflect, interact and question their assumptions. Discussion is sought, rather than a definitive answer, and participants are allowed to control it. This reduces the risk, always present in research, of 'presumptuous' and 'authoritative interpretation' (Kaptani & Yuval-Davis 2008, p.22).

At the same time, focus groups are shaped by power effects and their specific context. These create a certain discourse that expresses social positions (Colectivo Ioé 2010), and there is a risk of 'censoring, where individuals hold back the contributions they wish to make, instead conforming to an apparent consensus or the opinions of a self-appointed "expert" within a group' (Jowett and O'Toole 2006, p.455). The research team tried to reduce this risk by giving voice to all participants, using visual methods to enlarge accessibility,

Pictures chosen by stakeholders to reflect the impact of CTF training. Focus group in Prague with stakeholders.

and by explicitly stating that the diversity of voices (e.g., CTF in different countries) was beneficial to the research process and would help improve the programme. Moreover, the distributed leadership model created a safe space not only in research sessions, but in all the spaces of encounter that opened up during the two years the project lasted.

Given the broad, indefinite sense in which the impact of CTF was to be investigated at the beginning of the project, focus groups were suitable as they make it possible 'to explore not only what the participants are talking about, but also how they are trying to understand and conceptualize the issue in question' (Wibeck et al. 2007, p.259).

Moreover, the exploratory as well as evaluative research question pointed to focus groups as an effective method as they

> […] allow for greater control on the part of the researcher to determine the trajectory and focus of projects. […] Whether it is intentional or not, the combined contributions of the members of a focus group might point up new directions and questions to challenge or alter the style, remit or trajectory of a project. There is then potential within the method to subvert and problematize epistemic authority allowing space for participants to

> articulate their own priorities, and to explore how those might be worked out through talking with others (Jowett and O'Toole 2006, p.455).

In addition, this method of data generation reduced the risk of imposing meaning, as 'focus groups enable researchers to study and understand a particular topic from the perspective of the group participants themselves' (Wibeck et al. 2007, p.250).

Visual methods were used to elicit reflections, representations, and experiences of the training programme and its impact. Before the Prague sessions, stakeholders were asked to send to the research team a picture which for them was representative of the impact of CTFs 4-6 in terms of staff development, pedagogical development, community engagement, or other.

After a moment of reflection about why they considered themselves to be stakeholders in the project, they were then asked to present their image to the group and share their reasons for choosing the picture and the connections they imagined with the impact of CTF.

In Stockholm, the stakeholders were asked to collectively draw a treasure map of CTF, starting with the goals and role of CTF (that emerged from previous focus groups) and leading

CTF Advanced tableaux workshop in Stockholm with stakeholders. Photo: Heta Mulari.

to the potential and actual impact of CTF (again, using data analysis from Prague groups) and to include risks, obstacles, resources, changes, new needs, unexpected turns. This 'treasure map method' derives from the picture/photo elicitation method (Harper 2002; Pyyry, Hilander & Tani 2021) that is widely used in qualitative social research.

In both cases, the pictures represented an effective starting point for discussion, reflection, and sharing of thoughts. In Prague, they elicited personal narratives, gave a visible shape to thought and connections, making them easier to share out loud, and triggered the collective construction of meaning (Schwartz 1989). In Stockholm they were the result of a collective process of knowledge production, and helped views and feelings to be shared.

These devices were used to elicit answers about personal choices and views; subjective meanings and definitions of self; and embodied, sensory and emotional experiences. Images can be catalysts and repositories of meaningful human experience, intertwined with lives, identities, memories, and desires (Turkle 2007). They help participants to make sense, express experiences and emotions which are difficult to articulate, and reflect on connections between their practice and the context of 'society, culture and history' (Harper 2002, p.13).

The process of selecting, looking at, drawing, and discussing images provided insights that might otherwise have been inaccessible for at least two reasons. Firstly, it allowed a deeper understanding of sensory categories in the expe-

CTF Advanced tableaux workshop in Stockholm with stakeholders. Photo: Heta Mulari.

rience of designing and organising a training programme, instructing trainers, or going through a training process. Because vision occurs in conjunction with other senses, images are both the outcome and the reminder of a multisensory experience (Pink 2011). Moreover, vision is 'skilled' in that it depends on various social constructs, power relations, routines, interactional contexts, and one's practical knowledge and relation to a certain community of practice (Grasseni 2010). Using pictures to evoke multisensory experiences and question social constructs makes it easier for researchers to grasp the sensory categories participants use to understand and communicate their experiences.

Secondly, due to its concrete character and 'intrinsically collaborative' nature (Lapenta 2011, p.202), this process allows researchers to elicit subjective meanings in an easy and spontaneous way, without needing to ask awkward or intrusive questions – overcoming what Schwartz (1989, p.151) has called the 'strangeness of the interview situation'.

3.2 Tableaux as an Art-based Research Methodology

In one workshop that was part of the Stockholm meeting, researchers examined possible obstacles to the ways CTF could have an impact. In line with applied theatre practice

(Saxton and Prendergast 2013), process drama, and drama in education (Branscombe 2015), Christine Mayor's (2020, p.1044) 'embodied tableaux method' for art-based social work research was employed as the primary mode of enquiry. Tableaux are embodied frozen pictures or still sculptures where participants 'use their bodies to express a range of gestures and postures to signify meaning' (Branscombe 2015, p.322). According to Saxton and Prendergast, having students 'or participants illustrate their "concretized thought[s]" (Morgan & Saxton 1987, p.110) in tableau form allows a facilitator to immediately see how understanding is being shaped in response to a prompt' (2013, p.108).

After some warm-up exercises, the Stockholm workshop participants were randomly split into two groups and given the same prompts based on the CTF obstacles that had been identified. Each group was given time to devise their tableaux and then asked to present them to the research team and other group. One of the researchers acted as a facilitator getting the group who were not presenting to interpret what they saw and what they understood as being communicated by the presentation group in their tableaux; then it was the turn of the presentation group to explain their tableaux and the choices made when creating them.

Mayor points out that this 'varies from many ABR [Art-based research] methods where the creators are typically imme-diately asked to discuss their art and what they intended to create', whereas in this methodology, those presenting are invited 'to offer additional words or phrases as a form of member-checking only after the [other] group had read and responded to the image' (2020, p.1048). In this way, data could be gathered in a way that challenges 'post-positivist epistemologies and quantitative paradigms' (Mayor 2020, p.1060). Participants also found this approach to be a livelier mode of enquiry than that of a typical focus group.
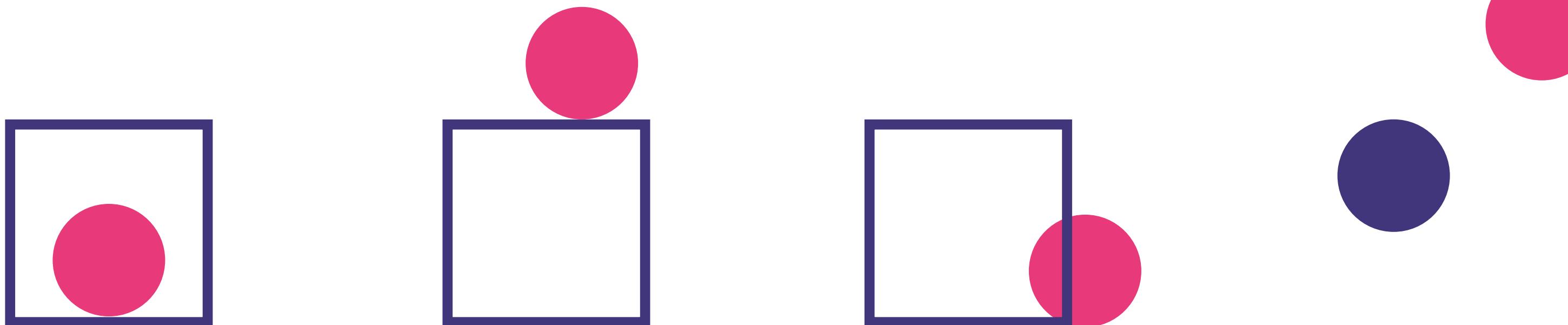
3.3 Circus Approach (Workshop)

The circus workshop in Galway was divided into three parts, and the instructions were as follows:

1. Introduction and Warm up:

Short presentation about what we're doing and why; that there's no obligation to participate in every part of the workshop; invite participants to respect privacy of others in group by not repeating what's discussed outside focus group. Session will be recorded and transcript and video used for research purposes and by pedagogy team to improve CTF programme; no personal information or anything that can identify you personally will be shared with others or published. Participants in workshop are invited to keep a journal at hand to jot down thoughts at specific moments.

Warm up: move in the space using different levels and speed. Awareness of others (contact).

Stop and think about impact, marks… where on your body, place hands… share.

Write in the journal.

2. Creative Work

Choose a prop/apparatus which, for some reason, represents CTF for you.

Take some time to train, play with the object, warm up, and then write your sensations and feelings in the journal.

Choose a place to put the object in the space and choose where to place yourself (near, far, above, below etc).

When the music starts, find a way to get close to the object and touch it or be touched by it.

Continue the interaction in the way you want. Use circus skills, or don't, as you wish.

When the music ends, find a place, and a way to leave it.

Take some time to reflect and write about your journey.

REHEARSAL: try charting your journey again to confirm it, and clarify the movements.

Sharing: divide group into 3 subgroups, and get each to show their journeys to the others.

3. Feedback/analysis

In trios: discuss what you saw and lived.

In a circle, 'harvest the wisdom' (about experiences, what CTF represents, & kind of impact it's had).

CTF Advanced circus workshop in Galway with trainers and participants. Photo: Heta Mulari.

The workshop drew on embodiment as an opportunity 'to understand in a most profound way: sensuously, human to human, fully present, open, ready to take in what others have to offer' (Pelias 2008, p.192). This method both enhanced understanding and fostered reflexivity as well as emotional engagement for both participants and researchers.

Similarly to dance and physical theatre, circus is 'the art of the body' as 'raw material' for the practitioner (Lobo & Cassoli 2006). People cannot avoid using their body, situating it, paying attention to it, and putting it at stake in a very practical way (one does not need to be able to read, write, or think in a certain way). At the same time, participants need to be aware of the contingency of what is happening around them in that particular time and place.

However, unlike other performing arts, a further element was found to facilitate research in circus – interacting with objects, props, and tools through guided improvisation can bring to life the traces and marks left by the experience of CTF on and inside the bodies of participant and trainer alike. This facilitated the exploration of individual experiences as well as the construction of a collective space, inhabited by each performance and the interactions between them. It highlighted the complexity of both intimate and social spaces, and of the research process itself, inviting the group to embrace it rather than try to fix, solve or reduce it.

Like other performative arts-based methods, the circus approach provides a source of 'intersectional and decon-structive' analysis, 'undermining essentialist and reified con-structions of subjects' and producing 'situated' knowledge and imagination. It also provides 'spaces for both participants and the research team to reflect on the situated nature of their gaze' and creates opportunities for reciprocal learning and knowledge building (Kaptani and Yuval Davis 2008, 4.1).

CTF Advanced circus workshop in Galway with trainers and participants. Photo: Heta Mulari.

Improvisation was also key to exploring the meaning, experiences, and marks left by CTF, as it implies 'the development of listening, not only with the mind, but with every cell of the body' and going beyond 'predictable vocabulary'. Creating short performances based on circus improvisation, performing them in front of the other participants, and watching others' performances enabled participants to uncover 'layers of insights', created 'an embodied ritual' which led both participants and researchers 'into not-knowing, and ultimately into knowing' (Snowber 2002, p.28). The group discussion following the workshop highlighted the complexity and ambiguity of such experiences, discussing the joy and pain of certain memories, a sense of increased awareness, of vulnerability, and of losses and discoveries. Improvisation and sharing drew on a process where a 'continual unfolding of images and thoughts' solidified into 'bodily wisdom'.

This bodily wisdom highlights with extreme clarity what feels right and real, and what is not convincing enough. It makes people 'remember and realise some stuff' (as one participant noted in the Galway circus workshop).

In the quote below, another participant illustrates how her body was telling her to change her position in relation to a ball, as if it knew before she herself realised what the answer was.

So I did the circus thing but actually CTF is constantly changing and evolving and going away (not around me) I thought the position was I had the ball here and I was around it and then I realised actually no it's like CTF is constantly changing and there is a connection but it's like further and further away.

Or as another respondent put it, 'reflecting things through movement gives some kind of honesty, you are kind of forced to be honest to yourself and it's hard to hide'.

Kinesthetics thus provided a framework for organising aspects of physical experience which provided participants with key insights into the impact of CTF on their own lives, but also watching each other also helped them reflect on its physical, emotional, and social impact too. Meanwhile, using a common (circus) language put researchers and respondents on a more equal footing, allowing them to speak in a shared language, making the research more fun, generating deeper reflections, and allowing those taking part to grasp what could have got lost if translated into verbal language.

4. Data Analysis

Data was analysed using an abductive research strategy that was simultaneously bottom-up and theory-driven, so that the concepts and processes used to generate and analyse data were constantly being scrutinised by researchers and participants (Blaikie 2010; Mason 2002). Meanwhile, thematic analysis (Coffey & Atkinson 1996; Davies 1998/2008) was used to reveal specificities and common patterns in the data from different countries and qualitative coding enabled the researchers to narrow the focus of the study further, with the research outcomes in mind. Qualitative coding means examining the material – in this case, the open-ended answers from the questionnaire as well as the focus group and workshop transcripts - and 'labeling it with a word or short phrase that summarizes its content' (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019, p.259; see also Saldana 2009).

A preliminary analysis of the returned questionnaires and transcripts of focus-group discussions highlighted the following thematic areas and subthemes:

Survey Questionnaires

Schedule, content and structure of the training
- strengths: contents, trainers, diversity of contexts, social aspect
- weaknesses: lack of continuity, lack of link with guidebook, time pressure, online module

Trainers: strengths and weaknesses
- different styles and approaches
- language barrier

Participants
- diversity
- group dynamics
- motivation
- language barriers

Suggested changes
- safety
- resources
- sharing
- movement
- continuity
- specific target groups

- financial help
- revising guidebook
- translation

Safety and safe space: material, social, mental, trainer's role

Impact on career
- skills
- confidence
- network
- opportunities

Impact on sector
- inspiration
- national and international

Focus Groups

Goals and role of CTF
- mobility
- non-formal education
- learning/knowledge
- community
- social
- ritual
- multi-level

What is a CTF stakeholder?

What is social circus?

Potential and actual impact of CTF
- pedagogy
- motivation
- standardisation
- multi-level

These words and phrases – the codes – were then grouped together under key themes and patterns with Google's online visual platform *Jamboard*, which enabled the codes to be visually organised through thematic grouping. Coding and grouping was a collaborative effort by the researchers, and the initial findings were presented to the CTF steering group and a group of CTF trainers and participants for discussion during the CTF Advanced meetings in Stockholm and Galway (see appendix below).

5. Research Ethics

The researchers paid close attention to research ethics at all stages of the research project: in planning the methodology; collecting and analysing different data sets; and in reporting the results. The first page of the questionnaire began by introducing the research team and stating the background and emphases of the CTF Advanced project. Informed consent was then obtained from all respondents. In the informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and data protection was emphasised – no personal information would be released outside the research team (Oldendick 2012). Informed consent took the following form:

I agree:

- that I have received adequate information about the research and the CTF advanced project.

- that I have freely chosen to answer the following survey.

- that I feel free to refuse to answer the survey.

- that I am aware that the data will be analysed by the three researchers and no personal information or other piece of information that can identify me personally will be shared with other people or published.

At the beginning of each focus group and workshop, the researchers also introduced themselves to those they had not previously met, explained the purpose of each focus group in the overall context of the research, and asked for group members' consent to make audio, video, and photographic recordings of the group's activities. In the report, the researchers also anonymised the names of all survey, focus group, and workshop participants.

While the researchers closely followed the ethical guidelines summarised above, due to the qualitative nature of this particular research topic, there was further ethical reflection as each encounter with a participant unfolded (Davies 1998; Gray 2010). Indeed, researchers can never be objective observers or mediators of knowledge; their backgrounds,

CTF Advanced meeting in Galway. Photo: GCC.

personalities, and changing position in the field of research all affect the multidimensional power dynamics between researcher and participant (Coffey 1999).

In this particular case, the researchers' close relationship with three of the partners started years before the project began. Ian R. Walsh was a member of the board for Galway Community Circus; Ilaria Bessone was, a circus trainer, research and international relations coordinator at AltroCirco; and Heta Mulari had been a researcher at Sorin Sirkus. These overlapping roles facilitated collaboration and continuous dialogue between the researchers and other teams involved in the project by bridging its different goals; creating a shared approach and ethics; and promoting mutual listening. While they certainly needed clarification and discussion at the beginning, this combination of goals and roles proved to be one of the strengths of the project. At the same time, the researchers recognised that their close relationships with the partner organisations may add a positive bias. Furthermore the researchers acknowledge their own positionality as able-bodied white Europeans.

Analysis and Research Outcomes

In the first place, CTF directly affects trainers, trainer instructing, stakeholders, and YSC participants; secondly, this impact is felt locally, nationally, and internationally. Finally, the impact affects people on both the micro-level (e.g., personal growth and career opportunities) and macro- (e.g., organisations, networks, sector, and the broader context of social work).

Analysis of the data highlighted five main areas where CTF had made an impact:

- **Modes of implementation:** how the training is executed, in terms of learning environment, group dynamics, and pedagogical approaches.

- **Diversity**: considered both in terms of the range of stakeholders, beneficiaries, trainers affected by CTF, and as a challenge to improving accessibility, reporting, and evaluation.

- **Clarity:** how CTF fosters continuous reflection about the goals and targets in instructing trainers and of YSC in general.

- **Recognition**: the ways in which CTF supports professionalism in the YSC sector and the recognition of YSC as an effective methodology within youth, education and social work.

- **Deeper impact**: how CTF affects people on the micro-level – fostering awareness, emotional intelligence, and the acknowledgement of vulnerability as a key resource in learning and teaching.

1. Modes of Implementation

What is meant here is how the courses were taught and how they were experienced by learners in terms of environment, group dynamics, organisation and pedagogical approaches.

In order to organise the reflections and insights on the modes of implementation, they have been grouped under the following headings:
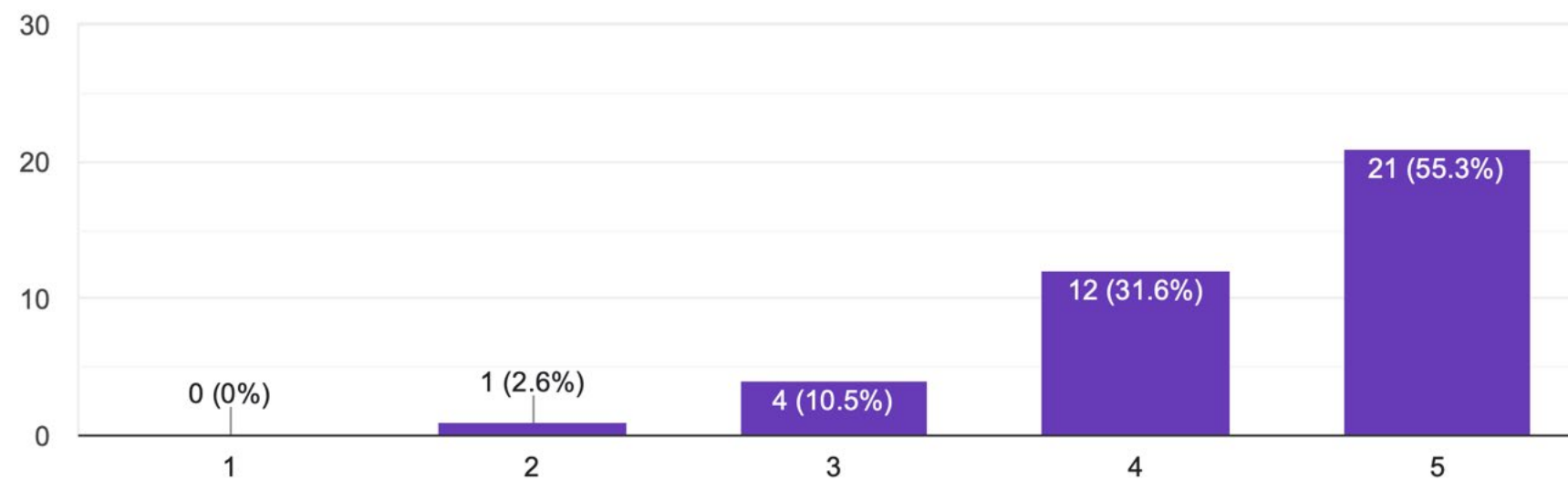
- Environment: safe space

- Group Dynamics: exchange of ideas, experiences, pedagogy

- Pedagogical Approaches: embodied learning

1.1 Safe Space

The participants and trainers who were surveyed were asked directly about safe learning environments, as many of the original surveys had highlighted the importance of a safe learning environment in their open responses. Participants were thus asked in greater depth about what constitutes safe learning; on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 they were asked to quantitatively rate how safe they felt when learning, asking questions, being vulnerable, sharing knowledge, or showing a lack of knowledge or experience in training sessions, ranging from 1 = very unsafe to 5 = very safe. Their answers are shown on the graph below.

Two qualitative questions on this topic followed:

- What made sessions feel safe?

- What made sessions feel unsafe?

Graph 1. Safe space: participants.

Then participants were asked to provide their definition of a safe learning environment.

Further quantitative engagement with safe spaces occurred in the trainer surveys where trainers were asked to rate how safe they felt their training sessions were. Again they were offered the same Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = very unsafe, and 5 = very safe. They were then also asked to provide a definition of a safe learning environment. Their answers are shown on the graph below.

Trainers were also asked further qualitative questions on what made sessions feel unsafe and about the aspects (strategies, spaces, people, other) that helped create a safe learning environment.

In the participant surveys, a safe learning environment was described as a place where 'you are listened to and seen', can 'express yourself' without fear; a place where you are able 'to make mistakes and fail', and can be 'respected, accepted, and valued'. Many answers repeated these core characteristics for a safe learning space, and some also stressed that you must be physically safe too. Participants also mentioned
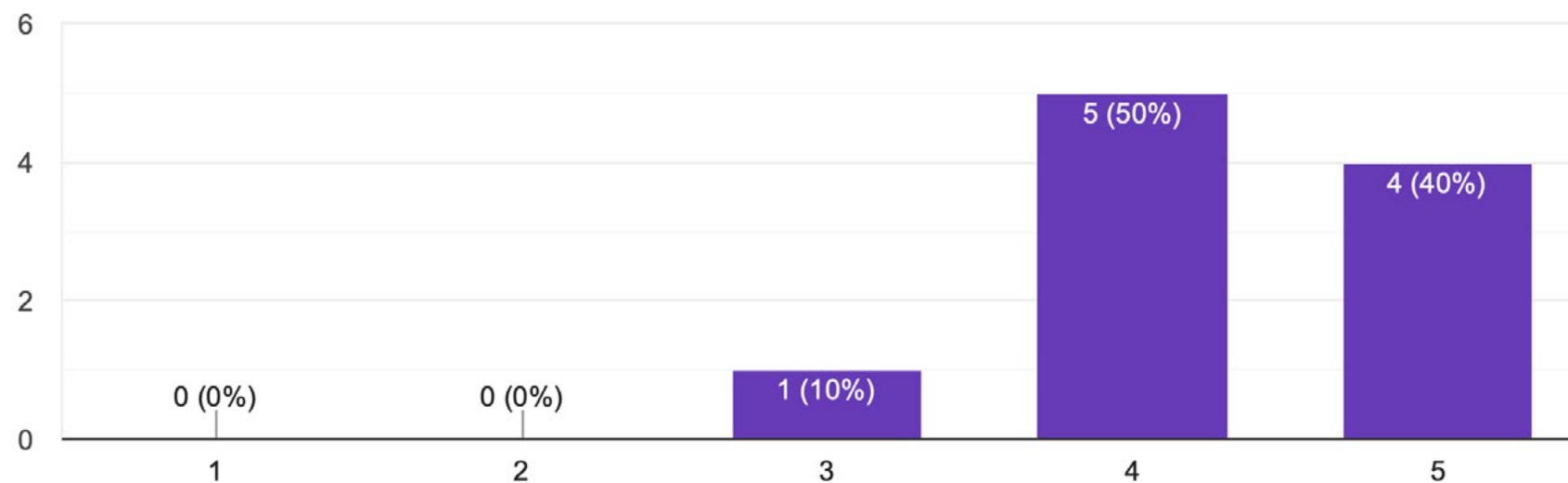
Graph 2. Safe space: trainers.

how the tone set by the trainers was important: 'warm, open and friendly', or inclusive, with trainers variously described as 'trust-worthy', open-minded, kind, and patient. Some felt that circus games in some training sessions helped create a sense of safety, while others mentioned the other participants making a safe space through their 'openness' and how as 'empathetic people' they made it a 'nice environment' for learning. When asked what made a session feel unsafe, some participants mentioned 'a lack of preparation', others the 'uncertainty' of some trainers. Others mentioned feeling a 'time pressure to get everything done' or when there had been 'changing facilitators with different pedagogical approaches' (for more on a variety of pedagogical approaches, see the section on diversity). Other problems of safety were feeling 'intimidated because everyone knew so much or were super creative' and a lack of fluency in English.

The trainers' definitions of a safe space were lengthy and considered. Common to most was that a safe space was one in which learners felt free to express themselves and were listened to, felt seen and accepted with their access needs met. Some also thought of a safe space in terms of aspiring to remove any impediments to learning be they 'physical or mental' while another thought of it as a place where learners might experience change. Ways of achieving this could be broken down into material, psychological, social, and behavioural aspects. In terms of material aspects, the space had to

be 'pleasant and inviting' and 'calm […] not noisy'. Regarding psychological aspects, the trainers mentioned free expression, lack of judgement, and providing participants with the chance to be themselves and feel ' listened to'. Social aspects included a 'shared understanding of values, approaches and concepts' and 'setting rules together', with 'everyone being responsible' for each other, where 'dialogue' could take place. Lastly, behavioural aspects were respecting diversity, planning carefully, listening to the group, being ready to adapt as necessary, and dedicating time to team building. The trainers did not identify what made sessions feel unsafe but instead reiterated the above.

The safe space was thus defined as a space where learners feel free to express themselves, feel seen and accepted, with their access needs met. A safe space is also a space where diverse ways of participating and learning are welcome and valued. However, sometimes learning implies discomfort, risk, and willingness to be challenged. In this sense, safety

GCC Christmas Cabaret.
Photo: Anita Murphy.

in learning spaces cannot be confused with comfort (Arao and Clemens, 2013), because as it implies the possibility to change, to express disagreement, to experience being out of the comfort zone. Learning to be a circus teacher and work with diverse groups implies being able to accept discomfort, uncertainty, suffering, conflict, and constant reflection. Thus, the notion of a 'brave space' (ibid) may be more apt for a programme aiming to instruct trainers.

1.2 Group Dynamics: exchange of ideas, experiences, pedagogy

Aspects of group dynamics played a part in the responses to questions on safe spaces but the participants and trainers were also asked more direct questions in relation to this area. On a Likert scale of 1 = poor, 2 = unsatisfactory, 3 = good, 4 = very good, and 5 = excellent, participants were asked two questions: to rate the level of group cohesion (how well participants worked and learned together); and to rate the level of peer-to-peer learning/sharing/discussions. Answers are shown in the graphs on the next page.

Please rate the level of group cohesion (how well participants worked and learned together).
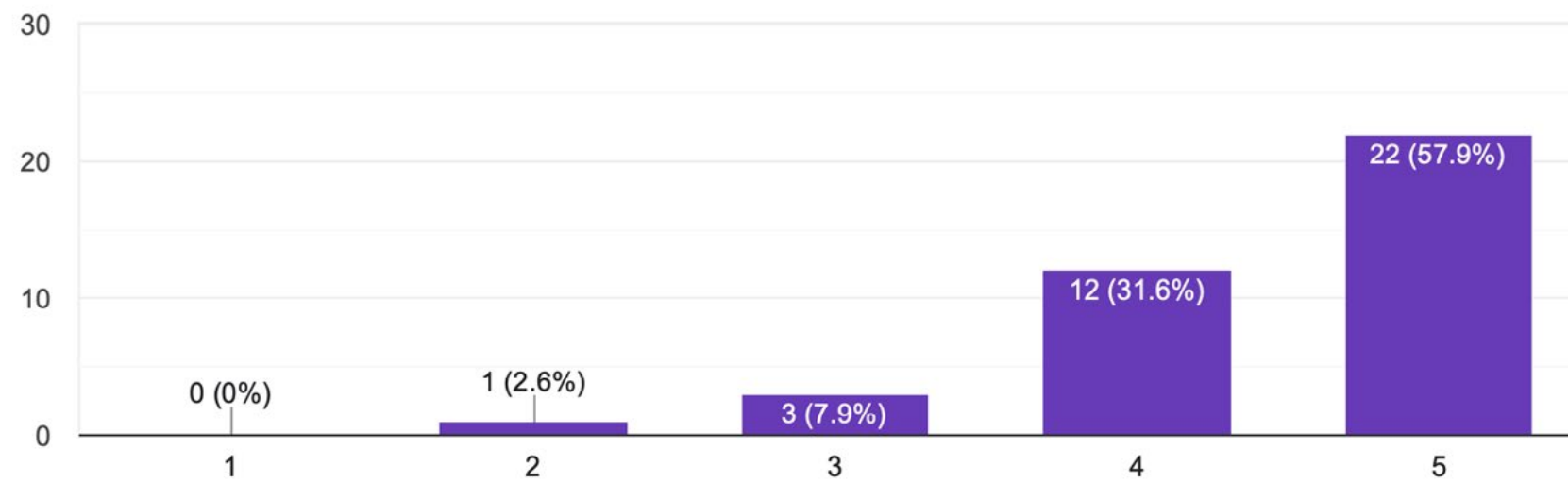
1. poor   2. unsatisfactory   3. good   4. very good   5. excellent
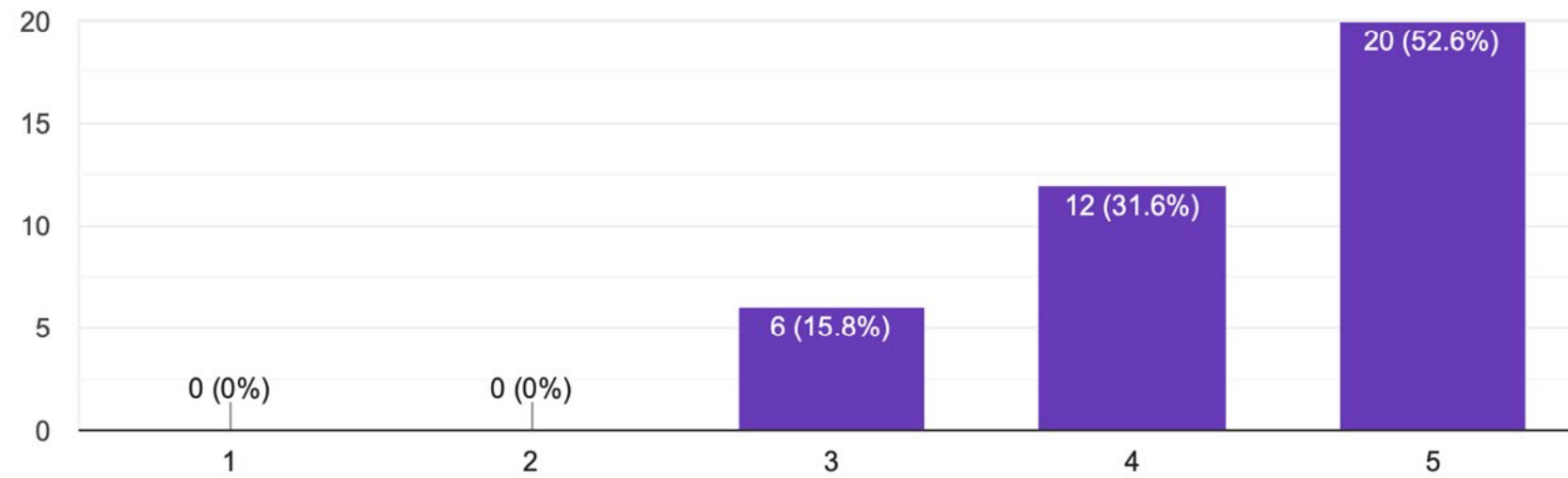
Graph 3. Group cohesion: participants.

Please rate the level of peer learning/sharing/discussions.

1. poor   2. unsatisfactory   3. good   4. very good   5. excellent

Graph 4. Level of peer to peer learning/sharing/discussions: participants.

Trainers were also asked the same two quantitative questions.

Please rate the level of group cohesion (how well participants worked and learned together).

1. poor   2. unsatisfactory   3. good   4. very good   5. excellent

Graph 5. Level of group cohesion: trainers.

Please rate the level of peer learning/sharing/discussions.

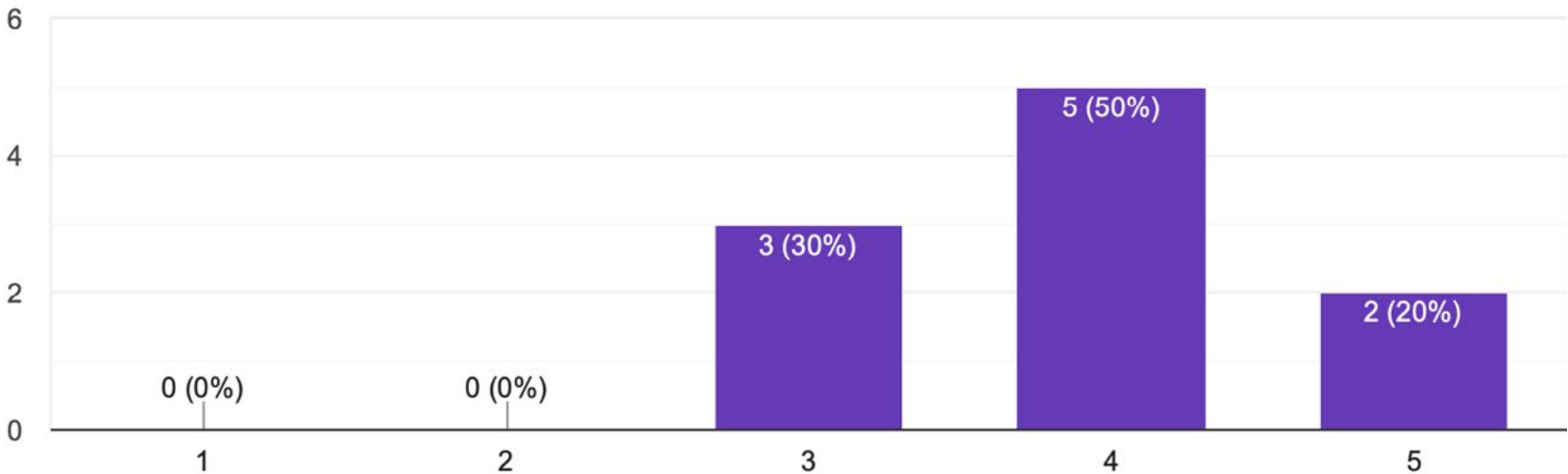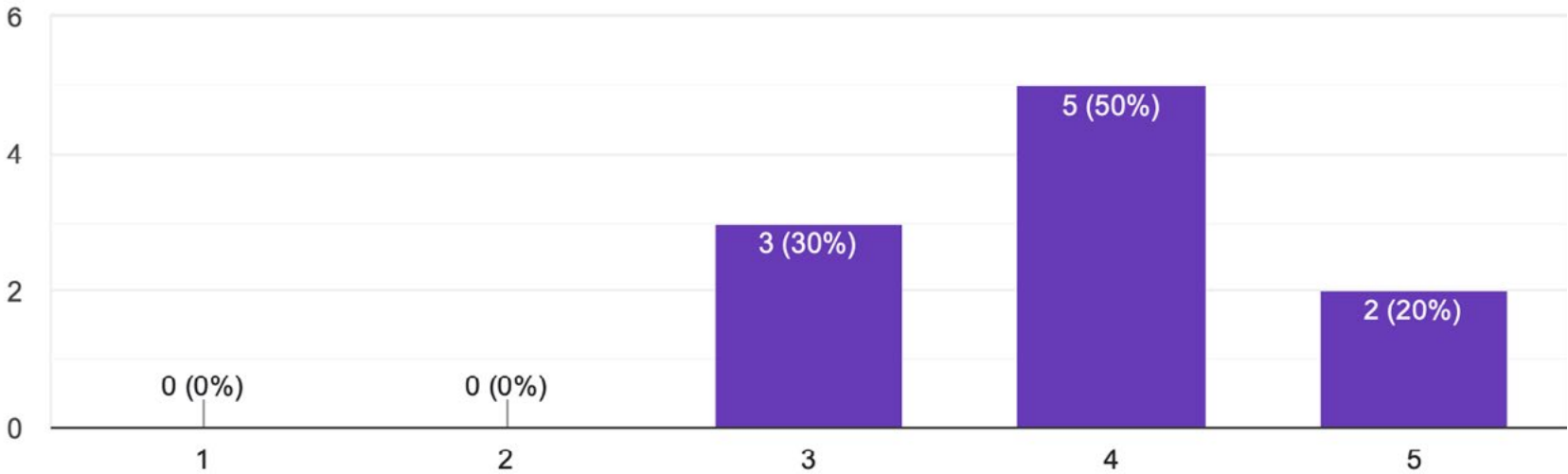1. poor   2. unsatisfactory   3. good   4. very good   5. excellent

Graph 6. Level of peer-to-peer learning/sharing/discussions: trainers.

Both participants and trainers were then asked for further comments about the level of group cohesion and peer-to-peer learning (in the form of a qualitative open response). The majority of participant answers commented on how well the group connected, shared and worked together with one writing that 'it was the most powerful part of the training'. Some registered a lack of group cohesion caused by some individuals who shared too much personal information which unsettled the group and another suggested having a class that focused on a target group e.g., the elderly, as a way to get the group to deepen their connection as they shared pedagogy in relation to a specific group. The trainers in the survey wrote how they aimed to promote cohesion and group learning, with one adding that 'working in groups and sharing ideas is the best part of CTF' and another offering a longer comment:

> The setting of the whole programme encourages team work and the group cohesion. So I always saw a good balance within the group participants, enough listen and care. Honestly I think that the group cohesion depends much more by the setting and the learning environment we build than by the characteristics of the participants.

When citing what they saw as the strengths of CTF, many participants and trainers stressed that the most useful aspect was the exchange of ideas, experiences, and pedagogical approaches within the whole group. 'I appreciated that we were learning from each other and it wasn't just the mentors who were conveying all the knowledge', was one such quote. Another was 'I learned mainly from the rich exchanges: advice from trainers who have a longer / different experience.'

Some participants were very negative about the online sessions that the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated at one point. One key aspect lost in these sessions was the impromptu exchange of ideas and experiences between sessions and in the breaks. A typical comment along these lines by one participant was that 'the online module had a lot weaker aspects because it was not possible to create the atmosphere as in the last modules. It was a lot harder to connect to the others and to feel the energy.'

1.3 Pedagogical Approaches: embodied learning

A recurring barrier to learning in the surveys and the focus groups was the issue of the training's delivery in English with many participants lacking fluency in this language. 'My poor knowledge of the English language made me feel insecure',

admitted one participant. 'It felt insecure that I didn't know the circus practices as well as the other participants.' One of the trainers also highlighted this problem when writing the training programme:

I believe that we always learn from the others but mixing languages and working experience is sometimes hard to combine. Peer-to-peer situations help more the 'weak' ones to find a space to express. But the 'experienced' ones also need to learn and that isn't the case when they have to translate or explain during the whole program to a fellow.

In the questionnaire, however, one participant noted that they learnt to work 'in a language mixed group, that it is possible to teach without words.' In the circus workshop conducted by the research team with participants of CTF training there was a further call for more learning through circus practice which could help with the language barrier as all participants shared the embodied experience of circus and it was perhaps the best way to speak circus with fluency. This concept of embodied learning follows Steven A. Stolz's understanding of the term wherein 'the whole person is treated as a whole being, permitting the person to experience him or herself as a holistic and synthesised acting, feeling, thinking being-in-the-world, rather than as separate physical and mental qualities that bear no relation to each other' (p.485).
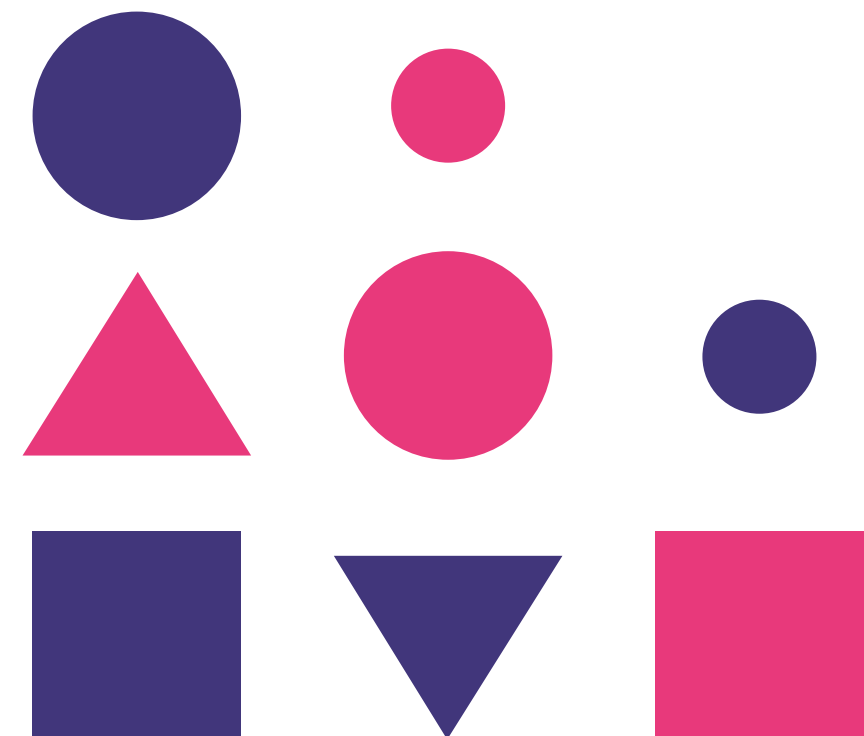
2. Diversity

In this report diversity is understood from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989), to cover a vast variety of social attributes, such as class, cultural and ethnic background, gender, sexuality, ability, and age – in terms of a person's social and political position (see Hascheme-Yekani & Nowicka 2022, p.3; Phoenix & Pattynama 2006). In social circus, diversity is inextricably linked with social inclusion and the need to create spaces where everyone has equal opportunities to participate and feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and respect. While the researchers didn't explicitly ask about diversity as a key theme in surveys or focus groups, it was discussed from several different perspectives in the research data, including participant and trainer surveys, focus groups and workshops. This is why diversity was chosen as a key theme to be included in this report as well.

The perspectives of diversity and inclusion are at the core of social circus, so it can reach as many different target groups as possible via different circus disciplines and approaches. 'Social circus targets a large range of groups with different needs', the CTF Guidebook states. 'It is essential to recognise and understand the target groups in order to set objectives and to adapt the content of a program to each group's specific needs' (Caravan Circus Network 2014, p.45).

In the research data, diversity in CTF (and social circus in general) was discussed from the twin perspectives of being (a) something that already is (and should continue to be) at the core of social circus, and (b) something to constantly work towards, as it is never fully reached. As such, several obstacles to diversity were flagged up in the data. The researchers have grouped these obstacles into three groups to achieve greater diversity in:

(1) CTF target groups (to increase its societal impact)

(2) CTF trainers and participants

(3) CTF methods of learning and evaluation

2.1 Societal Impact: Diversity of target groups in CTF training programme

In Prague, the stakeholders were asked to choose an image that would reflect and represent their view on the impact of CTF.

> I believe that […] social circus gives us the means to connect with another culture's diversity and somehow create an inclusive environment, and that we have the tools to make it happen. So that's like the two [things] I see in that image.

The stakeholder quoted above was linking the image they had chosen (pictured directly below) to cultural diversity and inclusion.
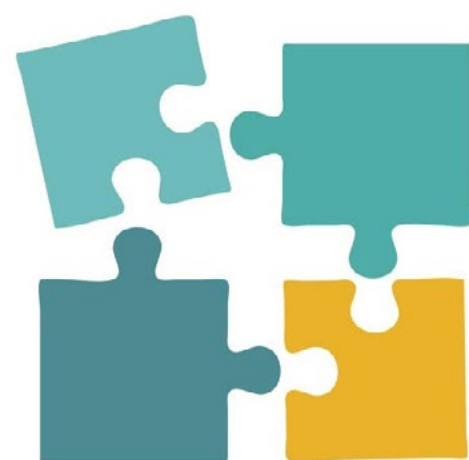
One of the most useful things gained from the CTF course for trainers who had completed it, was a greater experience and knowledge of cultural and age-related diversity. One stakeholder in the Prague focus group, for instance, described it as having 'the tools to connect with different communities, different ages, different diverse cultures and somehow connect now and build something together'. Meanwhile, in the Stockholm focus group, a stakeholder believed this could be expanded, wanting trainers to be 'more aware of the different kinds of groups that are in the classes', in terms of 'the variety of participants, of the pupils, students'.

While stakeholders agreed on the importance of increasing knowledge and skills related to diversity and inclusion in CTF, they were less sure about whether this was actually achieved in the course. Occasionally they highlighted the discrepancy between there being a need for increased diversity and yet there being a lack of material about this in the CTF training. For instance, in Prague one stakeholder pointed out, 'we don't have the refugee or the forced migration module, we don't have the disability module, we don't have that'. In the same focus group, another voiced a similar opinion. 'I see [diversity] as being strongly related to the impact of social circus practices, but whether it's as strongly related to CTF is hard to say'.

In the participant surveys, several respondents wrote about their wishes for more explicit discussions about 'the concept

Christmas Show Kaila at Sorin Sirkus. Photo: Kristian Wanvik.

of inclusion and disability in the program, in all modules and from the start', and that 'it shouldn't be a module apart'. Others wanted more concrete steps taken to target certain groups, such as 'working for a few days with elderly, disabled people' and 'when talking about learning processes', that the course 'should include sign language', for instance, and 'theory on autism'. In terms of learning about different target groups, one participant mentioned a lack of diversity in their current practice, 'in partner acrobatics, I work only with able-bodied adults, mostly white and affluent'. So it was important that CTF had a diversity module 'looking at teaching from the perspective of the wider community, which encompasses all of its members'.

As for the wider, potential societal impact of the CTF programme, stakeholders discussed 'increasing accessibility and diversity within circus education' as being essential, but one stakeholder in Prague put this in far more concrete terms:

> *I would be so happy to have a juggling teacher in a wheelchair […] it's not like it's something we should force upon ourselves that we cannot employ people who are not sort of representing some sort of target audience […] but we should always keep our eyes open for and try to be inclusive and create opportunities for people who don't really - who wouldn't choose to become a circus performer, a circus artist.*

From the surveys and focus group discussions it thus seems that, while perspectives on diversity and diverse target groups already exist to some extent in CTF, there still needs to be a more coherent, updated and overarching understanding of diversity and inclusion, so that it is constantly being developed further as social, cultural and political contexts change. One way is '[...] to think of CTF training as a way to respond quickly to whatever is happening [in society]', as one stakeholder in Prague put it, so that 'circus knowledge and training' can have more of 'an impact on society'.

2.2 Diversity in CTF Training: trainers and participants

CTF training brings together people from different cultural, social, and indeed circus backgrounds. This would explain why one of the recurring themes in the surveys was the diversity of both participants and trainers. Interestingly, the researchers did not specifically ask respondents about diversity, but it cropped up time and again. Some viewed diversity as a key strength in the training, while others admitted it was a challenge. Diversity was most often discussed in the open responses to questions asking about the strengths and weaknesses of the CTF programme, about their experience as participants or trainers on it, and about the selection of participants for the programme.

Trainers wrote about the diversity of participants in terms of their age, language, and level of circus skills and training. One trainer found this a challenge: 'Some are artists, others animators, others educators, others teachers.' They asked. 'Which programme suits this diversity?' Other trainers also brought up the challenge of different skill levels: 'some had a lot of experience and others were total beginners, and trying to find a way to answer the different needs [and] different levels of experience is challenging'. They too mentioned that 'the group had very diverse backgrounds, teaching experience, level of education [and] age', and that this required more work. 'This was not a strength or weakness per se, but it implied different levels of engagement and preparation'.
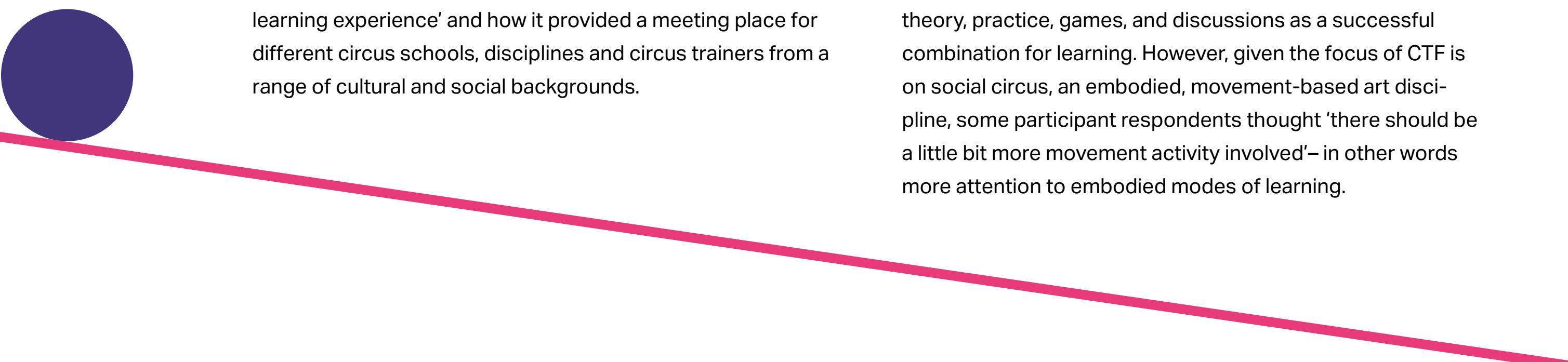
Many trainer respondents also mentioned language barriers as a challenge (see also *embodied learning* section above). 'The only possible weakness for a participant might be the language barrier', wrote one trainer. 'If the participant has little or no understanding of the language used in teaching, it can be very frustrating for them'. However, some trainers also viewed different languages as a strength that could potentially create stronger group cohesion. 'With each group there has been some challenges with language which, however, can also be a kind of strength for the training itself'. The argument seemed to be that participants were consequently more motivated to make an effort – 'participants usually always helped each other with language and understanding'.

Youth Volunteer training. Photo: GCC.

Participant respondents also brought up the topic of language barriers as an issue for some trainers: 'you have to teach in English and for most of them [trainers] it's not their native language'. Others noted that some 'facilitators were very good and experienced. They knew how to value the diversity of the group and make the moments of discussion interesting', but then went on to point out the different levels of teaching experience and preparation among trainers. 'Others were not prepared [...] neither with the material nor the capacity'. Other participant respondents appreciated the diversity of trainers and mentioned that having different trainers ideally leads to a deeper learning experience. 'I thought that having such a diversity of teachers was a great experience in itself [...]. I am very grateful with all I learnt, to be honest'.

There were some concrete suggestions from participant respondents as to how the CTF programme could address the challenges of diversity. Some acknowledged that participants also needed to change their mindsets. 'Sometimes it's difficult to work with new trainers once you've got used to [the ones] in the first module(s)'. Others thought this could be solved by ensuring better continuity in the CTF programme, e.g., allocating more time and resources to allow teachers to coordinate and plan together: 'there is no pedagogical team of trainers who are able to continuously lead the group in such a way that they get to know the diversity of the participants'.

The trainers approached the diversity of participants in CTF training in different ways. Some wished for more concrete requirements for CTF participants in terms of their level of experience. 'In future, the profile of participants should be clearer so it's easier to match them with beginner-level or more experienced trainers'. Other trainers saw diversity as a strength and as something they could build upon. 'I believe that different levels of experience could be really interesting and stimulating, if well managed. So for me, this mix of experience is to be treasured'. This also comes across from another trainer, who to 'fully appreciate the diversity of the group', stressed the importance of being oneself: 'in my introductions I put a lot of emphasis on being yourself, appreciating the diversity in the group'.

The trainers also commented on CTF being a unique and valuable opportunity to 'gather together [people] from diverse countries and cultures […] to co-create and share a collective learning experience' and how it provided a meeting place for different circus schools, disciplines and circus trainers from a range of cultural and social backgrounds.

2.3 Diversity of Methods in Learning and Evaluation

By its very nature, social circus uses and combines many different circus methods and disciplines. CTF training also makes use of a diverse selection of teaching and learning methods. The researchers asked the participants and trainers in the surveys to rate their levels of experience in learning/teaching CTF and to evaluate this experience in their open answers. These answers emphasised the importance of sharing with others and hearing examples of circus in different contexts and disciplines. 'The possibility to know other people from different countries and a different circus reality', as one respondent put it, 'how they work and are organised'. For many of them, the diversity of participants was seen as one of the most valuable assets of the training.

Participants also mentioned the diverse and fluid mix of theory, practice, games, and discussions as a successful combination for learning. However, given the focus of CTF is on social circus, an embodied, movement-based art discipline, some participant respondents thought 'there should be a little bit more movement activity involved'– in other words more attention to embodied modes of learning.

During the CTF modules, feedback and evaluation are collected from participants on a daily and weekly basis and there is also the possibility to give spoken feedback in pair and group discussions during the modules themselves. But this in itself is not enough; it is equally important to show that action is being taken to address the issues raised in the feedback. Some participants commented on this, and wanted more concrete and open responses on their feedback.

'[using circus language for evaluation] would also be more in line with what we do in our daily work and not detached from it.'

Methods for evaluation and self-evaluation in CTF were also discussed in the Stockholm focus group. As one stakeholder pointed out, not everyone is capable of analysing their teaching skills in a written form, 'because [writing] was not their skill. But they can work with juggling for 16 hours a day'. They suggested instead that someone else could perhaps 'translate it' into writing: 'if they could speak of what they see that they have reflected, then someone else can write it'. In the Galway circus workshop, the researchers approached evaluating CTF from an embodied, movement-based perspective, and one of the participants had this to say about it:

I feel it would be a good way to tie everything together through movement. It would bring more layers to it. […] There could be an initiative assignment where you would reflect your expectations and hopes [for CTF] through movement. You would film it for yourself and then the topics in the next module would be added to the movement material; to add more layers[…]. It would also be more in line with what we do in our daily work and not detached from it. It doesn't need to be academic in any way but practical instead (Interview with participant, 3 May 2023).
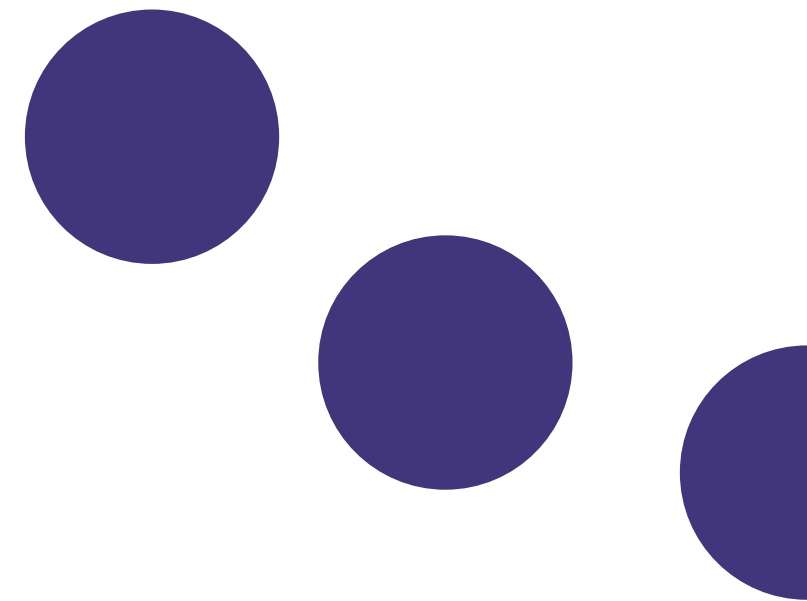
3. Clarification of Goals

Another important factor that affects the impact of CTF, is that it clarifies both its own goals and the value of being a social circus trainer. At all stages of this research project, participants, trainers and stakeholders discussed their different understandings of what these were: who is benefitting from the training and in what way. The changing cultural and funding contexts within different countries evidently play a key role here, and researchers wanted to see how CTF offers a space for this as an ongoing process in the different national contexts of each participant. To better organise these insights, we grouped them under two headings:

- The value of social circus

- The goals of CTF training

3.1 The Value of Social Circus

For some of the stakeholders in the Prague focus group, social circus was a tool for education while others saw its primary aim as addressing social questions. Many stressed the communal aspects of social circus and its ability to act as a tool for inclusion through cultivating a sense of connection, care, and belonging that would eventually lead to a 'better world', and 'better opportunities'.

The group also registered the difficulties of social circus in its ambition to satisfy two different constituents: circus and social enterprise, which at times could be in contradiction or conflict, for example when attempting mastery of a circus trick might cause stress to a performer or group. Stakeholders thus highlighted the 'need for a common understanding [of social circus] which allows for differences based on contexts'.

3.2 The Goals of CTF Training

This topic was discussed by stakeholders in the Prague focus group. For some, the goal of CTF was to build up the confidence of teachers, furthering knowledge in pedagogy, social circus, and various circus techniques through acquiring new tools and learning theories. For others, it was to give a 'mark of quality' that recognised the value of their pedagogical practice; while for another group, it was more a 'ritual of becoming'.

Some stakeholders suggested that CTF should benefit not only the participant but their organisations too, using the metaphor of scattering seeds to convey this idea. The goal here is to build a community of trainers, who can then spread this knowledge to a wider community of other actors who benefit from their teaching (youth and social groups, parents ,and friends) and they, in turn, will become advocates for social circus.

4. Recognition

CTF is an indication of the growth and importance of YSC in the youth and social work sectors – this was mentioned in both the surveys and first round of focus groups.

The growth of YSC is also indicative of the growth in importance of contemporary circus in legitimate art sectors (e.g., theatre and dance). It contributes to the growth of an international network of teachers that use CTF as a competence benchmark.

CTF thus provides recognition of:

1. Social capital and networking

2. Knowledge building

3. Credentials and funding

4.1 Social Capital and Networking

The focus groups in Prague and the circus workshops in Galway highlighted how CTF could strengthen networks, by reducing isolation and encouraging connectedness. This springs from knowing there are other people and organisations doing similar work, and thus possible work and training opportunities elsewhere too. Thanks to CTF, a number of participants and trainers had started teaching in other schools or countries, via EU mobility programmes, such as EVS (Euro-

CTF 7 Module A at Sorin Sirkus. Photo: Aleksanteri Mikkola.

pean Voluntary Service) and ESC (European Solidarity Corps). Networking was also highlighted at the national level too, as CTF supported the creation of national training programmes and networks (e.g., it inspired *CTF Ireland* in 2022).

Out of the 36 participants who responded to the survey, 28 stated that CTF had a good (11), very significant (12), or huge (5) impact on their careers. As well as improving their professional skills, many said they were encouraged and inspired by CTF, and that it provided opportunities for mobility and networking. On average, CTF had introduced each participant to 35 other professionals in their field, and 9 other circus schools. Networks grew thanks to work and mobility opportunities, but also through informal contacts (e.g., friends or other circus communities).

Out of the 10 trainers who responded to the survey, 8 stated that CTF had a good (2), very significant (4) or huge (2) impact on their careers. CTF had given them international experience, the possibility of being involved in other programmes, and new training skills and experiences.

On average, CTF had introduced each trainer to 70 other professionals in their field, and 12 other circus schools. Moreover, 42 per cent of participants and 60 per cent of trainers were involved in other international programmes thanks to CTF, and 28 per cent of participants and 50 per cent of trainers in national programmes or events.

Since 'connections and networks to other individuals, communities and society are understood as crucial aspects of social well-being' (Bessone, Mulari & Walsh 2023), it seems that CTF has clearly had an impact on the social well-being of all who participated.

4.2 Knowledge Building

Many participants highlighted how CTF had rejuvenated their knowledge of YSC, not just through the sessions facilitated by trainers, but also through a direct peer-to-peer exchange of techniques, tips, games, tricks, methods between participants. In doing so they also highlighted a weakness – the CTF Guidebook was somewhat out of date, especially with regard to the most contemporary social issues.

YSC can be seen as a 'community of practice' in which:

- Meaning is negotiated to create a body of more or less explicit knowledge and to reify certain concepts as 'symbolic artefacts and practices […] as markers of recognition of membership or otherwise of a particular community' (Paetcher 2003, p.76).

- Practice acquires a central role as a source of coherence: communities are underpinned by 'the mutual engagement in a joint enterprise which results in a shared repertoire of performances' (ibid: p.72).

- The learning process represents a bonding factor: participants 'become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together' (Wenger et al. 2002, p.5).

- Boundaries are built and rebuilt in relation to other forms of youth and social work, art, and circus practice, and this establishes and differentiates between significant markers of membership.

Within communities of practice, knowledge is constantly built, contested, and rebuilt, rather than being something immutable. Both surveys and focus groups pointed to the value of exchange, peer learning, and reflexivity in maintaining the body of knowledge that underpins YSC. Knowledge is made up of teaching and training skills that include ways of transferring of knowledge, maieutics (or eliciting knowledge via 'the Socratic method' of questioning), and being able to encourage creativity, confidence, and a sense of belonging in spite (or even because) of diversity.

4.3 Credentials and Funding

Another key point highlighted in the trainer survey was that CTF contributes to creating a professional sector and a label of quality for circus teachers and trainers, in that it can 'enhance the professional capacity of […] professionals', and of 'a network of schools and organisations which work for the circus sectors'. Another trainer wrote that 'this constitutes a real community of people aware of the education of young people through quality supervision in the world of the circus arts'.

Various participants also wrote that CTF 'trains trainers and gives international recognition to the work and method'. This not only means 'that there is a field to get educated in', but also raises 'the quality of an informal education', making it known ' how important it is that there is access to quality programmes', and this in turn 'helps the circus sector' by making it more credible to society as a whole.

Because it is now included within formal educational systems, CTF also indirectly provides more public and private funding.

CTF 7 Module A at Sorin Sirkus.
Photo: Aleksanteri Mikkola.

This could potentially support the growth of the YSC labour market, as it provides a system of credentials which can be used by Caravan Circus Network members, so for more than just selecting and hiring teachers.

However, accreditation may also represent a limit and a barrier, excluding those who for different reasons do not have access to the CTF programme. Collins (1971) argues that 'the increased schooling required for employment in advanced industrial society' reflects the demands for greater skills, but

more importantly responds to 'the efforts of competing status groups to monopolize or dominate jobs by imposing their cultural standards on the selection process' (: p.1002).

Brown (2001) adds: 'the content and occupational significance of [the few existing or emerging] credentials are [...] cultural and exclusionary' at least as much as 'technical and efficacious' (: 20). Indeed, if the most powerful organisations in the field offer new possibilities of accreditation, they are then fostering an increased demand for officially recognised education.

This 'educational inflation' may also 'mask cultural domination under ideologies of individual merit and technical competence' (ibid). However, in the case of YSC, at least among the members of *Caravan*, there is no single system of credentials. As a stakeholder in the second focus group in Prague pointed out: ' there is no official social circus teacher training course in the world. The people who come there, come there to learn'.

Thus, in the YSC sector, informal training, professional experiences, and subcultural and social capital still count for at least as much as credentials. Formalisation and specialisation of training is still not strong enough to turn credentials into the sole 'cultural entry barriers to position', nor into a fully effective 'formal claim to competence or trustworthiness' (Brown 2001, p.26).

In order for credentials to work technically (as a certification of skills), there needs to be 'a powerful alliance of disciplinary and professional organisations, employers, and governmental regulatory authorities' (ibid: 29). Given the diversity of the YSC field, and the absence of any unique regulatory authority, this looks unlikely to happen any time soon. It is not by chance that Gilchrist & Wheaton (2011) define this situation as the 'accreditation bandwagon' (: p.119), to indicate a particularly significant 'battlefield' that is presently being drawn up. In the case of YSC, this concerns more the existence of national programmes as well as CTF, and a number of other formal and non-formal education careers which are required or acknowledged to teach circus in different countries (physical education degrees, education degrees, art degrees, specific programmes such as Circus ++ and so on).

A diversity of views concerning accreditation and evaluation in CTF emerged from the research. On the one hand, CTF represents a 'model that unifies' the diversity of YSC, as this conversation from focus group 2 in Prague seems to indicate:

> **Respondent 1:** *Maybe another goal would be to, like unify and somehow propose a model that everyone, or not everyone, but as many people as possible can use and have [as] a reference. So imagine there's like 15 countries […] doing social circus in a different way. So maybe CTF proposes a model that unifies it.*

> **Respondent 2:** *A kind of quality label?*

> **Respondent 1:** *Yeah that everyone accepts and says OK, but this is something we agree on and this is what we're going to call social circus; so proposing a model.*

> **Respondent 3:** *There is a desperate need for teachers and at [school] we need teachers to be well-educated and to want to develop the circus field [around] the world, […] CTF is a really good opportunity to get to do this in a more professional way.*

On the other hand, as it emerged from the Stockholm tableaux workshop, stakeholders are very much concerned about the possibility of being too focused on unrealistic goals that leave people and organisations behind, or not being able to guarantee conditions which make CTF accessible to a sufficiently diverse range of backgrounds and countries. The pictures below represent first this concern (lefthand picture) and then the need and will to create bridges (righthand picture), by possibly slowing down and turning back to throw someone a line, to ensure that everybody is on board.
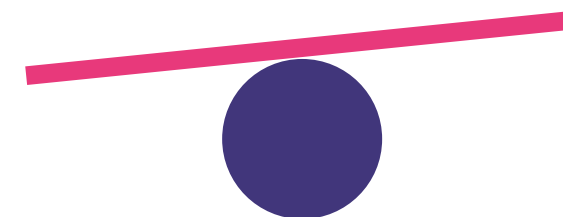
*CTF Advanced tableaux workshop
in Stockholm with stakeholders.
Photo: Heta Mulari.*

5. The Deeper Impact of CTF: awareness, emotions, vulnerability

After observing the performances created during the circus workshop in Galway, and listening to the group discussion, one of the researchers commented:

It seems that [...] in all the performances there's this kind of balance of vulnerability, where everyone seems to be [thinking] 'where can I be strong, where can I be vulnerable', [so] vulnerability in a way can be a strength it seems.

When we join a group we can be kind of vulnerable, and you have to learn to work with that, [...] also your idea about growth, about how you grow and so on. To me, a very good teacher is somebody that can be vulnerable in a way, and any class that has gone well for me has always been a class where you are listening and not necessarily doing, and where you are as vulnerable as they are and there's kind of a deep connection, [which] doesn't come through in our surveys, but it was really clear today. It is maybe that sense of that CTF might be able to create that sort of space of vulnerability or that space where these kinds of things can happen [...].

If you can access that kind of [...] growth mindset, of being vulnerable with people, or [you can] navigate those things which are really difficult, that can be a huge thing to learn beyond [any other] skills and gains. Because to me [...] how you approach things, that moment of stillness, [when] you were sitting there with all the things spinning around was really powerful actually.

It was how you approached, [and] how you didn't, how you moved away from things was much more interesting than the actual skill on display, if you know what I mean.

CTF Advanced circus workshop in Galway with trainers and participants. Photos: Heta Mulari.

Taking part in an internationally recognised programme provides participants with a sense of confidence, support and validation which enables them to go out of their comfort zones, trust their abilities and specificities, use emotions and uncertainty as resources, and express disagreement. As one participant from the circus workshop in Galway explained,

> […] from CTF I was a lot more confident in my classroom when I disagreed with other people, because it helped me understand why I disagreed and like, for example, we talk about social and development target groups and a lot about why we do certain things so, as a teacher […] I felt a lot more confident being able to say 'no, actually I don't think so' because […] it helped me explain why […] and understand myself.

CTF also seemed to teach the participants not to be afraid of mistakes, as mistakes are key resources for good teachers who are then able to turn them into resources for learning and guiding others. This underlines the importance of recognising the emotions of vulnerability to become a better circus teacher. For the participant, however, this can be uncomfortable, as one from the Galway circus workshop pointed out:

> I think the CTF experience helped me in a way to find the courage to go out of my comfort zone and [there were] a lot of similarities with my process of learning juggling. So I was first doing the movement mechanically, not so fluid and [I felt] insecure, but then [even though I kept] making the same mistakes, [it became somehow] more fluid and more creative.

Confidence and awareness also emerge through the difficult experience of being part of a group and learning collectively, with the complex feelings that this entails, and the challenges and questions this poses to one's sense of identity. Feelings of inclusion and exclusion, trust and inadequacy, joy and enthusiasm, as well as frustration and loneliness emerge through experiences of collective learning; awareness about these emotions is key to becoming a good teacher. Learning to become attentive and responsible to one's own inner movements improves pivotal skills for an educator, such as being able to pick up on group dynamics. This can sometimes, however, become a 'painful' process, as one participant in the Galway circus workshop admitted:

> […] because you are with your own insecurities and I kind of noticed during this week that I have the same things I had as a kid going to school, I have the same insecurities still going on, […] it can be painful to realise that I'm still doing the same things as a four-year-old so that like the beginning of CTF can be super painful about what is the rule/role and can you break the rule/role.

In this sense, awareness is painful as it reminds us how difficult it is to learn and to change, how much inner work it

CTF Advanced circus workshop in Galway with trainers and participants. Photo: Heta Mulari.

I really enjoyed seeing the different range of emotions coming from different acts because that for me underlined the importance of CTF, that it really makes an impact and it's important but for me. It's really […] in my head I feel the expectations from, I don't know who, but […] it's that I should be the super expert of CTF because I was for 10 years creating this and then I delivered 2 programmes of CTF in Finland and Ireland […] and now I'm here feeling I should be the super expert. And I'm like no, I don't know anything. It felt good to work on this topic with my wire and realise that in the end, in the scale [of things], all the good stuff is way, way bigger than the hard stuff. OK, so after CTF I have to stand back a bit. I was like, there it is, but to realise that in the end I want to be close and part [of something] and to continue – that was the biggest thing for me.

Learning to become a circus teacher does not mean controlling one's emotions then, but rather becoming aware of the inner battle that might happen. In the words of another participant talking to the trainer in the previous quote, 'when you were preparing to go on the wire, I connected it to what you said about inner battles […] to take extra care when you are nervous, that "you have to get ready", I saw that'.

This emotional engagement puts participants in a vulnerable place, which during the circus workshop in Galway was rec-

requires. However, it is essential to be able to construct the 'rule/role' and be ready to deconstruct or transform it as and when circumstances require it.

That CTF encourages this level of emotional intelligence is also clear from the following quote, taken from one of the trainers (of CTFs 5 and 6) at the circus workshop in Galway:

CTF Advanced meeting in Galway. Photo: GCC.

ognised by the respondents as a key part of the learning process and one of the most important resources to nurture as a teacher. 'I think that you have insecurities but I don't think you need to get past them. Sometime[s] you can say yeah, I know this, and [it] can be a struggle [...] I know my weaknesses. I'm trying not to avoid them, but to use them with my teaching, like, not make them a disadvantage'.

In the words of another trainer at the same workshop, 'one of the things we talked about during our module was [being able to say] "I don't know" and [it] has given me quite a lot of confidence. Now I tell the kids quite a lot when I don't have the answer [or] I have no idea'.

Learning to trust one's feelings; to be able to express vulnerability, uncertainty, or disagreement; and to be able to see one's mistakes and change one's ideas is at the core of both circus and human experience. The notion of safe/brave spaces discussed above (see above) allows for the expression of vulnerability and uncertainty throughout the training process. Moreover, the CTF Advanced project demonstrated how safe/brave spaces are pivotal not only in processes of teaching and learning, but in every project that requires the collaboration of a group of people. In this space, goals, terms, mandates, and deadlines need to be co-defined. Caring for individual needs and health represents a shared concern and responsibility, and social and cultural change is at stake.

Conclusions

All of our recommendations for the future are drawn from analysing the research data created in collaboration with research participants and partners in a dialogical manner. Our analysis and recommendations thus reflect the specific context of this project and the multifaceted experiences of all involved in the research project, which besides circus touch on many other aspects of life and subjectivity.

One of the key underpinnings of the project is the diversity of skills, backgrounds, and views it relies on; these include the fields of youth and social circus, social research, cultural studies, and the arts. This cross-disciplinary combination has provided a fertile terrain for exchanging insightful ideas and creative methods.

These recommendations are not in any order of importance:

- Consider using the term 'brave space' rather than 'safe space', as it this is more likely to encourage stepping outside one's comfort zone, taking calculated risks, and embracing each other's vulnerabilities.

- Rethink the accessibility and diversity of circus spaces in terms of neurodiversity. Promote the understanding of a relaxed space, meaning a material-social-embodied space which takes neurodiversity into account.

- Continually clarify the values and goals of CTF with each new iteration of the training programme; referring to it as a 'living document' (or 'evergreen/dynamic' document) insofar as it not only states CTF values and goals but these are continually edited and updated.

- Use Community Agreements to enhance communication, and make participants and trainers build an atmosphere of trust in each iteration of CTF training, where all feel heard and valued.

- Make time and space for an informal exchange of ideas, experiences and pedagogy during CTF (e.g., informal group activities outside teaching sessions, coffee breaks, and shared meals).
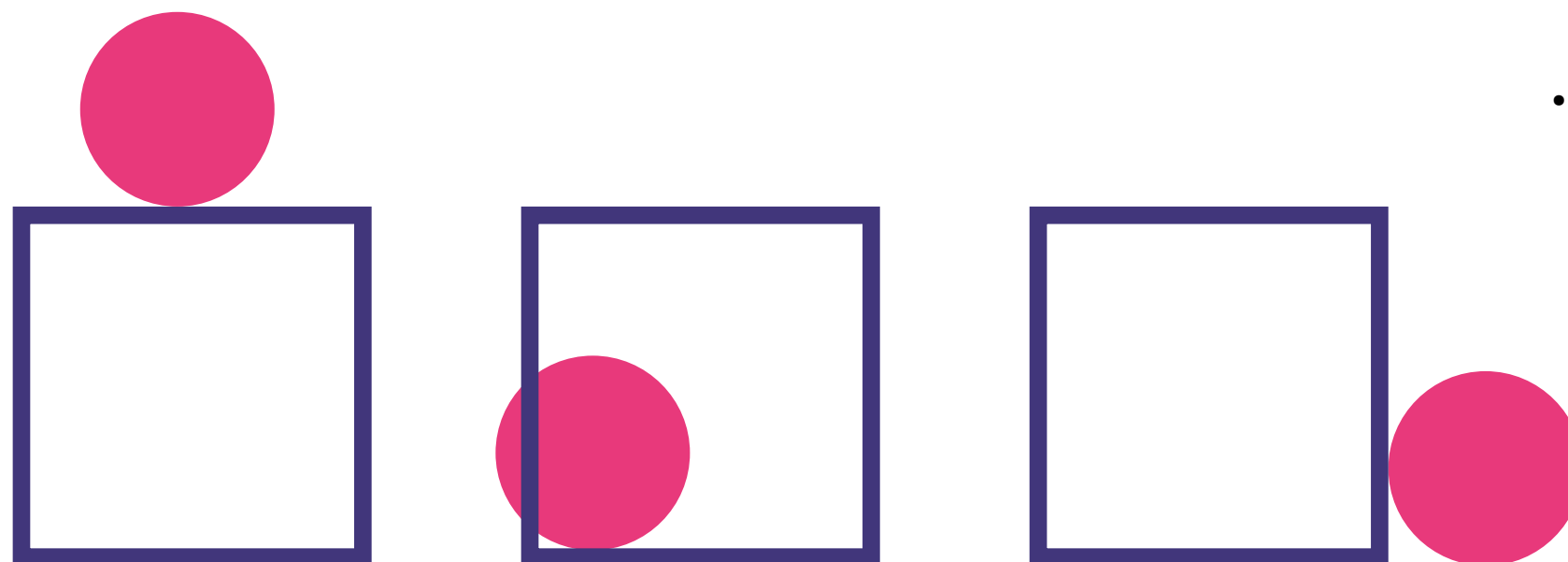
Mapping the impact of CTF. CTF Advanced focus group in Stockholm with stakeholders. Photo: Heta Mulari.

- Avoid online sessions as they afford little opportunity for the kind of informal exchanges outlined in the previous recommendation.

- Ensure that trainers have strong theoretical and methodological knowledge in at least one of the following fields: creativity and the arts, YSC, education, or social research; and are strong group facilitators with conflict resolution skills.

- Allow more time and resources for trainers to be able to coordinate and plan together more easily, ensuring consistency throughout the CTF training programme, while still letting each express their own personality and strengths in teaching.

- Make sure that regular moments are set aside for both internal and external dialogue between participants, trainers, stakeholders, and affiliates so that a diversity of needs are met and voices listened to, so that CTF remains fluid and can be constantly improved upon.

- Ensure there are more opportunities for embodied learning by using pedagogical approaches that involve circus and performance practices to aid teaching.

- Design a system of evaluation and certification which leaves space for a diversity of contexts and abilities, e.g., for the possibility of doing YSC with the Caravan Circus Network, paying particular attention to accessibility.

CTF Advanced kick-off meeting in Tampere.
Photo: Sorin Sirkus.

Develop diverse methods of learning, evaluation, and self-evaluation (e.g., embodied and artistic methods). Circus methods are particularly recommended as they provide a familiar language to most participants in CTF. The method must best reflect the skills, needs, and preferences of the participants, allowing them to go 'deep' in an 'easier' way (as one circus workshop participant put it in Galway), 'because we are not mostly like thinkers in that way, like we are either circus teachers or practitioners, so we work a lot with our bodies anyways and […] it gives solutions for people using language that is not their first language'.

- Check on the careers of CTF participants a few years after the programme (e.g., in terms of international mobility and work opportunities), as this would give some indication as to its lasting impact.

- Make sure that before, during, and after each iteration of CTF, meetings are organised to reflect on current affairs and phenomena regarding diversity, equality, inclusion; so that CTF can respond effectively to the present day, not only through social circus methods but also in the way it is structured and communicated.

- Adopt a critical, intersectional approach to increase awareness and responsibility in every part of the programme – especially among those with more power (e.g., trainers, directors). Intersectionality requires a vast

Photo: Anita Murphy.

variety of social attributes to be considered, so that practitioners are fully aware of any terms which might constrain learning, teaching, or participation in today's complex society.

- Make sure that diverse voices contribute to planning the CTF training cycles, enabling opportunities for encounters with the end-beneficiaries (participants in the YSC groups) as well. Strive to follow the slogan 'Nothing about us without us', coined by the disability rights movement (Harpur & Stein 2017), meaning consulting with and involving members of the groups affected by the activities at all project stages.

- Rethink the target group for CTF training in terms of its diversity and give trainers more support in planning and facilitating training for a diverse group of participants.

- Understand diversity as a key strength that will make CTF accessible to those who have thus far been absent by establishing more inclusive conditions.

- Facilitate national and international mobility for all members (e.g., visas, funding, and overcoming other possible obstacles).

- Understand that vulnerability is a resource for both trainers and participants, and that learning to be able to express vulnerability, uncertainty, or disagreement are key underpinnings and outcomes of the CTF training experience.

- Exercise critical reflection and decolonise social circus terms and concepts by facilitating dialogue about the different meanings in diverse linguistic, cultural, and social contexts.

- Be aware of the impact of using English as the dominant language in the training programme and reconsider how 'language barriers' can affect not only dialogue, but how people connect and share.

GCC Youth Volunteer Training. Photo: GCC.

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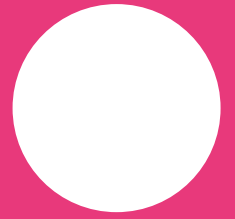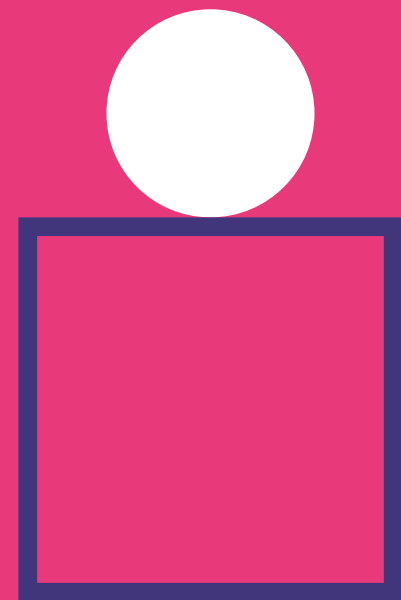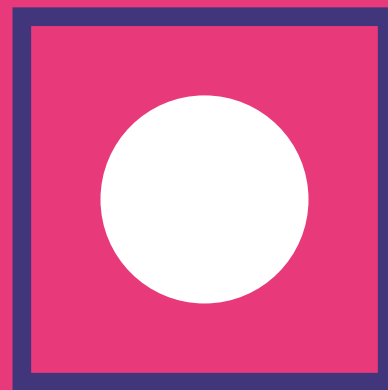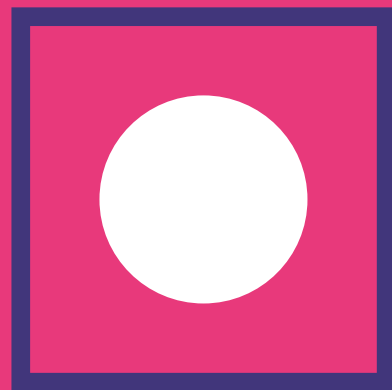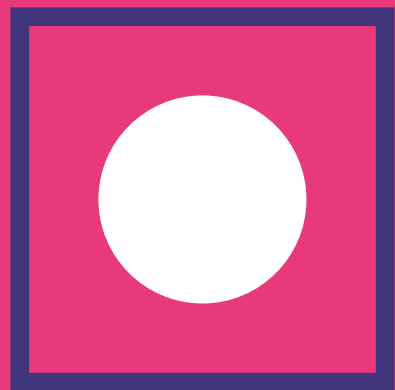
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CTF Advanced conclusion seminar team at Sorin Sirkus. Photo: Sorin Sirkus.

Circus Transformation Advanced

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