



The Rising Wave

Contemporary circus in Norway
and around the world



About This Report

Funded by Kulturrådet, this report aims to give an overview of contemporary circus art at European and national levels, and to identify paths to further develop circus art in Norway.

The report is delivered by Cirkus Xanti, alongside two seminars, as part of the project Sirkus Anno 2018. It draws on a review of literature, around twenty in-depth interviews, and an open survey, and focuses on professional artists and artistic creation practices. Youth circus and commercial practice are touched upon, but were largely outside the scope of this study.

The open survey was designed and delivered in collaboration with Sirkunst and the Baltic Nordic Circus Network.

Cirkus Xanti

Cirkus Xanti is a Norwegian not-for-profit company focused on the creation, production and presentation of contemporary circus. Cirkus Xanti is the owner and producer of The Circus Village, a mobile circus centre and festival.

Sirkunst

Sirkunst is a national network for circus in Norway. In 2008 Sirkunst published a directory mapping of the Norwegian circus field. Later the same year Sirkunst was commissioned by Kulturrådet to produce a study on the feasibility of a new circus space in Oslo. Both previous publications provided important background research for this report.

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NORSK
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Preface

Trond Hannemyr - Festival Director, PIT

Porsgrunn Internasjonale Teaterfestival has been programming contemporary circus since 1997, when we first presented the French collective Les Arts Sauts and the Swedish company Cirkus Cirkör. In the years since we have presented circus from all over the world – from large-scale outdoor performances for thousands of people, to circus in the streets, to work shown indoors. In the process PIT has become an important arena for experiencing contemporary circus in Norway. The audiences at PIT have had rich opportunities to see a range of performances – all of them very different, and yet all falling under the genre of circus.

The performing arts field has today recognised the challenge of reaching new audiences. Through its fundamental capacity to fascinate and entertain, circus is a fantastic tool to reach young people and a large and varied audience. At its best circus is more than a showcase of the performers' technical skill; it also inhabits the storytelling of theatre and the physical poetry of dance. Today, circus is perhaps the only performing art that, in a natural and organic way, can fuse all genres of performance.

Looking back over the years, I can see an interesting development. The strength in the early new circus performances was the skills, the physical poetry, and, at least for a part of the field, a devilish and anarchic will to break all boundaries and taboos. In recent times the desire and ability to tell a clear story have been strengthened – and this development is especially strong in certain Nordic companies. I'm thinking of Cirkus Xanti's latest production *As a Tiger in the Jungle*, and, of course, Cirkus Cirkör's trilogy about borders directed by Tilde Björfors – *Borders*, *Movements* and *Limits*.



Where there is a conscious political commitment and strategy, contemporary circus has shown an exceptional ability to engage children and young people in a creative, life-changing process. One example is Cirkus Cirkör's work in the Botkyrka community outside Stockholm.

The contemporary circus' capacity to fascinate, to inspire, and to reach new audience groups, ones that do not normally visit theatres or performing arts events, is linked to the core of circus: the artist's struggle to achieve a high-level of physical skill and the spectator's fascination as they experience the result. This simple fact, this concreteness, is perhaps the strength of circus compared with all other genres of performing art.

Regardless of how the performing arts are blended, regardless of whether a performance chooses to address the audience through clear storytelling, pure entertainment, physical poetry, or something more conceptual, the performers' physical skills will always be there, as a constant fascination and reminder of how invincible we wish to be – and how vulnerable we are in the end.



Executive Summary

Contemporary circus is thriving around the world.

Following a period of intense experimentation that began in the 1960s and 70s, it has emerged as a vibrant art form supported by a global infrastructure of professional schools, residency centres, festivals and venues. In Europe alone there are more than 5000 companies working in circus and street arts, and more than a hundred dedicated festivals.

The Norwegian circus scene is small but deep. This study identified 42 Norwegian or Norway-based professional artists who are principally engaged in creating contemporary circus art. Alongside these are a larger number of pedagogues, casual practitioners, and artists from other fields who incorporate circus skills into their work.

Norwegian circus artists are characterised by a high level of technical skill and extensive training in higher education. 63% of respondents to our open survey had completed post-secondary training in circus. Within this group, the average was 5.1 years of studies in the higher education context. Norwegian artists have varied working experiences among some of the most respected circus, theatre and dance companies in Europe.

Overall, the Norwegian field is growing – driven by rising numbers of students passing from culture / folk high schools into professional education, by years of dedicated advocacy and awareness building, and by efforts to establish an infrastructure in Norway for the creation and presentation of circus art.

Kulturrådet has supported this activity, but **there is a need for long-term support to develop a better base of infrastructure.** During 2011-2017, Kulturrådet awarded 14 million NOK of grants to circus. During this period grants for circus through the Kulturfond accounted for just 0.3% of all Kulturfond spending.

Institutional recognition is increasing, but needs to accelerate. Without it, many Norwegian artists are choosing to live and work abroad. They leave for education, and stay in order to be part of an artistic community and have opportunities to create work. **A third of all respondents to our open survey, and half of all those to recently engage in long-form creation, had a base abroad.**

The most significant factor in where artists choose to base themselves is access to space for training and creation. A permanent space dedicated to training and creation is a key piece of infrastructure that Norway now lacks. Existing facilities either provide limited access or are under-resourced.

As a form, **circus has the potential to address a number of Kulturrådet's strategic objectives**, particularly by boosting international collaboration and bringing new artistic practices and ideas to the performing arts.

There is a growing market, both nationally and internationally, for contemporary circus. The field also has the opportunity to access an extensive Nordic infrastructure – one that Norwegian artists and professionals helped to build through a series of critical cooperation projects beginning in the mid 2000s.

This report concludes with three recommendations:

- 1 Increase Kulturrådet's support to circus arts and consider the creation of a dedicated fund
- 2 Support the development of a permanent space for circus training, presentation and creation in Norway
- 3 Build knowledge of circus art among institutions, programmers, and cultural agents

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Introduction

Circus today

Circus is an art form that is rapidly growing around the world. Following a period of intense experimentation that began in the 60s and 70s, circus emerged at the end of the last century as a complex medium spanning a range of ideas, techniques and aesthetic styles. Like dance, it is based in the body, but it stages the body in situations of risk, and at the limits of exceptional physical ability, in ways that audiences respond to at the level of gut instinct. In a sense, it is universal: you don't have to know the language for it to speak to you. This immediacy has always been circus' power, but artists in the contemporary scene have begun exploring the theatrical, ethical and social consequences of such a contract between artist and spectator. Questioning the fundamental nature of the medium, working to reshape it, they create performances that grapple with ideas of identity and the contemporary body, our relationship to technology, the evolving nature of civic society, or the primacy of the live event and our responsibility to it as spectators.

This vibrancy of ideas has increasingly been recognised by institutions, cultural funders, and the arts community at large. In 2001-2002 the French cultural ministry declared a Year of Circus with the aim of bringing about what Catherine Tasca, then Minister for Culture, described as “an epochal change – a true turning point in the relationship between the Ministry of Culture and the circus world”.¹ In Flanders, a circus decree was

¹ Tasca, Catherine, ‘Déclaration de Mme Catherine Tasca, ministre de la culture et de la communication, sur les mesures gouvernementales en faveur des arts du Cirque, Paris le 6 juin 2001’. <http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/013001658.html>

Alongside the organisation of performance events and festivals, the Year of Circus saw the Ministry introduce new regulations and



passed in 2008 to outline a special budget for circus, due to be renewed with expanded scope in 2018-19. In the last decade, heavyweight cultural venues from The Roundhouse in London, to La Villette in Paris, to La TOHU in Montreal have launched large-scale festivals dedicated to the contemporary circus form.

Audiences have grown accordingly. In Finland, the number of people visiting a contemporary circus event has risen almost 300% in the ten-year period 2007-2016, and in 2016 the combined traditional and contemporary circus audience took the second largest share in the performing arts, behind theatre and ahead of dance.² In France, circus is also extremely well-established, counted as the third most visited performing art behind street arts and theatre.³

How has this happened? Behind such progress lies a substantial infrastructure for training and creation, developed over the last 50 years on an international scale. It includes dedicated, fully accredited higher education institutions in nine countries, offering courses

measures to strengthen creation, touring and education. Following on from the Year itself, the Ministry committed to annually invest 65 million Francs (~10 million Euro) in the circus field – a 48% increase on the 44 million allocated in 1999.

² Figures taken from the Finnish Circus Information Centre. This organisation publishes an annual sheet of statistics which are incorporated into Theatre Info Finland (TINFO)'s book of Theatre Statistics. In 2016 the combined audience for traditional and contemporary circus reached 446,650. <http://sirkusinfo.fi/en/circus-in-finland/circus-statistics>

³ Babé, Laurent, ‘Les publics du cirque: exploitation de la base d'enquête du DEPS «Les pratiques culturelles des Français à l'ère du numérique - Année 2008»’ (Ministère de la culture et de la communication, 2010). <http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Documentation/Documentation-scientifique-et-technique/Les-publics-du-cirque>



ranging from bachelors qualifications to PhDs; a network of residency sites (many of them cross-disciplinary) that support research and experimentation in circus; a thriving ecosystem of specialist production and diffusion companies; and hundreds of youth schools working to train the next generation of practitioners. The international field has been further tied together by institutional collaborations, including a number of significant cooperation projects funded under Creative Europe and EU initiatives such as Erasmus+ and Interreg. A 2015 survey found fourteen such projects dedicated to circus, involving partners from 21 countries and receiving combined subvention of around 5.4 million Euro.⁴ Recognising this strong base of development, in 2018 the European Commission ordered a study of the current panorama of circus in Europe – to be published in 2019.

Looking across different countries and areas of activity, circus has in fact flourished in three directions: as an expressive art, as an amateur practice, and as a powerful tool for youth and social work that promotes creativity, cooperation and physical confidence. This report focuses on contemporary circus as an expressive art, but recognises that these three areas of practice are interlinked, that they serve one another, and that a strong foundation for any local sector requires the contribution of all three branches of work. In fact, it is exactly this holistic flexibility that makes circus effective in cutting across different national policy objectives – from sport and health, to participation, to sustainable communities, to accessibility.

⁴ Figures taken from Gaber, Floriane, 'European Cooperation Projects 2015' (Circostrada, 2015). http://www.circostrada.org/sites/default/files/ressources/files/cs-publication-5-en-2_final_proj_coop.pdf



A scattered field – circus in Norway

Norway has an increasingly large and active circus field, and has already been successful in producing a number of highly trained circus practitioners. Research conducted for this report – which took the form of a review of literature, an open survey, and around twenty interviews – identified 42 professional artists, joined by a larger number of pedagogues, casual practitioners, and artists from other fields who incorporate circus skills into their work. In an open survey for this report, 63% of respondents had completed post-secondary training in circus, averaging within this group 5.1 years of studies in the higher education context.

However, after taking their first steps in circus training in Norway – often at culture schools such as Trondheim Kommunale Kulturskole or at Fjordane Folkehøgskule – many of these artists have chosen to live and work abroad. In our open survey, a third of all respondents, and more than half of those with post-secondary education, had a base abroad. Without some adjustments this situation is likely to continue. The pathways that are available for further professional and career development currently lead out of the country. Crucially, aside from the Circus Village when rigged, there is no space dedicated to training and creation in Norway.

In spite of this, there is still activity in the country. Alongside a strong base of youth and secondary teaching, there are opportunities to see professional circus work at two dedicated festivals – Circus Village, which has pitched at several sites around the country, and then the newer Merge Norge, which takes place annually in Oslo. Other festivals and venues, including Bergen International Festival, PIT Festival in Porsgrunn, and Bærum Kulturhus in Sandvika, have a history of programming circus – and in the case of PIT, a track record that stretches back to the mid 90s with performances from some of the seminal companies of the new circus movement. Kulturrådet has also supported circus projects over the years – with major three-year grants to Cirkus Xanti for the Circus Village project in 2009-2011 and 2012-2014, and total combined



subvention of almost 14 million NOK over the period 2011-2017.

What's missing from this picture is a stable community of circus artists who live and create work in Norway. Developing such a community would allow the country to access the full benefits of the investment it is already making in the form of grants and education costs. It would develop new audiences and new opportunities for presentation, raise the level of circus training and the skill level of practitioners, and, over time, connect Norway more completely to a new and influential branch of the contemporary arts.

The challenge therefore is to create an attractive environment for circus artists – both Norwegian and international. Doing so is not a matter of starting from scratch, but of taking steps to tap into a pool of unrealised potential and to support the range of activities already taking place in the country.

This report as a whole makes the argument for why and how. Underlying it are four key benefits to supporting the circus field:

1 Drawing on untapped talent

There are growing numbers of Norwegian circus artists who have completed higher education training in Europe and now work there. Many are interested in returning and basing themselves in Norway, if they have opportunities to train and create work. There is also a global community of circus artists who work internationally. Bringing these individuals to Norway would improve the level of circus arts teaching in the country, accelerate the growth of the field, and plant the seeds of future activity.

2 Reaching a wider audience

As a physical – and often non-verbal – art form, circus has the potential to attract difficult to reach audiences – including demographics not normally



engaged by the arts and immigrant populations. The universality of the form opens new markets through international touring, and as a cultural export circus has begun to tap into emerging markets in South America and East Asia.

3 Boosting international collaboration

The international circus field is expanding quickly and is highly interconnected. The Nordic countries have been particularly active both in establishing national infrastructure and in founding cooperation projects such as the Baltic Nordic Circus Network.⁵ Sweden is home to one of the leading educational institutions, DOCH – Dans och Cirkushögskolan (since 2014, part of Stockholm University of the Arts), while in Finland the national centre Cirko - Center for New Circus was opened in 2014 as part of the City of Helsinki's plans to develop a new cultural quarter at Suvilahti.

4 Enriching other art forms

Contemporary performance is interdisciplinary. Circus brings something new to the table, and the impact of its physical vocabulary has already been seen in the work of leading choreographers such as Wim Vandekeybus, Alain Platel and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, as well as in collaborations with figures from visual arts, theatre, opera and music. Spaces that are suitable for circus training and performance also open new technical possibilities through their height and rigging facilities.

⁵ The Baltic Nordic Circus Network is the successor to the New Nordic Circus Network – which was founded in 2007 by Copenhagen International Theatre (KIT) in Denmark, the Finnish Circus Information Centre and the Cirko Center for New Circus (then Cirko) in Finland, Circus Xanti in Norway, and Cirkus Cirkör in Sweden with support from Kulturkontakt Nord. In 2011, NNCN organised a Year of Nordic Circus across participating countries.



To explore these points more fully, this report has been designed to give an overview of the current state of circus art in Norway and around the world – touching both on aesthetic developments in the form, and on the practical realities of how circus artists live and work. Our starting point in writing it has been the belief that circus is poised to make a significant contribution to the arts in Norway. Speaking to artists, policy-makers and leading organisations, both here and in other countries, we have been convinced in fact that Norway is at a tipping point – and that now is the time to invest in the field.





1. The contemporary circus form – development and the modern field

The contemporary circus form is **physical**, **real** and **diverse**. A commitment to experimentation and research is constantly shifting the boundaries of the art. But what, if anything, defines contemporary circus, and where has it come from?

Art forms are notoriously hard to define. As a relatively new one, contemporary circus is also still undergoing a good amount of experimentation and redefinition. The researcher Julien Rosemberg cautions against trying to define circus in terms of a specific body of techniques, proposing instead that ‘abnormality’ is the key concept that unites the genre.⁶ The artist Johann Le Guillerm, echoing the ancient history of the acrobatic arts as spectacles in public spaces, sees circus as the phenomenon by which people gather around “minority practices”.⁷ Daniel Gulko, of Cahin Caha, navigates the art form with a compass that reads *Weird, Wonderful, Risk and Ridicule* at its cardinal points.⁸

The popular image of circus, however, has some way to go if it is to reflect these varied interpretations. Audiences who are yet to see a contemporary performance often have expectations – in terms of visual style, physical disciplines, tone and structure – that are rooted in the classical circuses of the 18th and 19th Centuries. Levels of

⁶ From the interview with Julien Rosemberg, ‘Croisements et Singularité’, in the special publication *Le Cirque Contemporain en France* (La Terrasse 225, October 2014), p. 8. “Je ne fait pas partie de ceux qui définiraient le cirque au regard des spécificités d’un corpus de gestes techniques qui lui serait propres. Pour moi, la notion de cirque ne se situe pas à cet endroit, mais c’est très discuté et c’est légitimement discuté. Je pense que la clé de voûte de ce qui fait cirque ou pas cirque, c’est le rapport à la question de l’anormalité, que le cirque travaille avec un corpus de gestes et de mouvements.”

⁷ From the Fondation BNP Paribas insert in the special publication *Le Cirque Contemporain en France* (La Terrasse 225, October 2014), p. IV. “Le cirque reste avant tout un espace de points de vue avec des spectateurs qui encerclent l’histoire. [...] Je considère le cirque comme un phénomène d’attroupement qui se fait autour de pratiques minoritaires, c’est-à-dire peu pratiquées.”

⁸ From a presentation given by Daniel Gulko at a seminar in Ghent 16-18 January 2016 as part of Bauke Lievens’ research project *Between Being and Imagining*.



public awareness vary from one country to another, but all territories are engaged in renewing the archetypal image of circus, and in placing the contemporary art form in proper relation to its past.

Traditional to contemporary

Today the contemporary circus can look like anything – there is no single visual style or aesthetic that defines it. Yet our collective image of circus, the one that resides in most people’s imaginations, is still of the red and yellow tent – of performing animals, painted clowns, flying trapeze artists, and an itinerant lifestyle lived out in wagons or trailers.

In reality, none of these elements are fundamental to the circus form. Instead they correspond only to a specific period in circus’ development in the western hemisphere – the period from 1768-1968, which began with the ‘first’ circus, Astley’s Circus; encompassed the rise of the great circus families and proprietors; and ended with the start of the *nouveau cirque* movement, which had its major epicentre in France but was mirrored by other actions around the world.

Through the 19th Century and into the 20th, circus spread across the world, becoming its largest form of popular entertainment. In the US, at the height of the circus boom in 1904, over 100 circuses were touring the country, the largest of which had tents capable of holding over 10,000 people, with seven rings and stages. At this time, circus was also thriving across Europe. The first Norwegian-produced circus, Cirkus Halvorsen, arrived on the scene in 1860 – one of 28 Norwegian traditional circuses that would emerge over the next century and a half.

The persistence of this historic image of circus is credit to its commercial success, but it disguises a long history of circus arts before 1768. Itinerant performers, acrobats and saltimbanques are recurring figures in culture, history and visual art. Jesters entertained in medieval court. Tumbling and contortion are depicted in Ancient



Egyptian painting. In the Colosseum in ancient Rome a visitor might encounter jugglers at the entrances, rope-walkers above the seats, and animal-trainers in the rings. In the south-east of Norway, one can find a 2300 year-old carving of acrobats in a mountainside.⁹

The circus historian Pascal Jacob imagines this three-phase history as a tree. The ancient circus arts form the roots; the trunk is the middle period, from 1768-1968, when the circus arts became closed within a certain codified practice; and the branches represent the modern era, in which the circus arts have again separated and begun to grow outward in every direction.

This modern era began with the new circus, or *nouveau cirque*, movement. Like any artistic movement, new circus had its influential figures and outsize personalities but was also ‘of the moment’, emerging from a generational impulse to break through the boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, rediscover the political and popular content of art, and change the language of performance. In France, this had a significant link to the events of May 1968 and the desire to democratise culture by bringing it into public space.¹⁰ In the US, it was the spirit of protest exploding around the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war. Across Europe, it was connected to a spirit of free exchange and to a young generation who were discovering the opportunities of international travel.

An important catalyst of the new circus movement was

⁹ Waage, Sverre, ‘Circus in Norway 2009’ in *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus* (STUTS, 2012), p.196. Waage adds: “Also, there is evidence that merchants and warriors from Norway sailed all over Europe and North Africa 1000 years ago and met and experienced circus art.”

¹⁰ For more on this see Martine Maleval’s *L’émergence du nouveau cirque 1968-1998* (L’harmattan, 2010).



the opening of the first circus schools – two in Paris in 1974, l'Académie Fratellini and l'École au Carré. The classical circus had traditionally passed on techniques within families or in strict communities but these schools opened circus practice up to artists from all backgrounds. They allowed circus disciplines to circulate in an artistic milieu that drew on theatre, mime, jazz, puppetry, visual art, and other mediums.

In a sense, this was circus' modernist phase, during which the established conventions of the form were broken, recast, or called into question – and not always subtly. Pierrot Bidon, the founder of the brash, chaotic Cirque Archaos, would later remember: “About 200 years ago in England and in France everything was based on the horse as a means of communication. Why? Because horses were the means of communication of the era. All of the shows turned around horses. You had all sorts of different uses – acrobatics on horseback, alongside horses, in dressage, etcetera. Our idea was very simple: to take all those things except, instead of horses, to use cars, motorbikes and lorries, as well as blowtorches, angle grinders and chainsaws, to create something of our time.”¹¹

In a period of cultural redefinition what else linked the old and the new? Extraordinary skill has always been at the heart of the circus concept, but there are also three characteristics which, while not universal, tend to underlie the art. Circus is physical (the skills that are performed often draw attention to exceptional physical ability), real (the feats of strength and dexterity are really playing out, and sometimes in a circular space that reveals the audience wherever one looks), and diverse (in that it touches on many different disciplines and styles of performance). In the new circus era, these characteristics

¹¹ From a collection of interviews with Pierrot Bidon edited by Oliver Crova: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5R0WHfa_xU



drove the broad appeal of the form and helped it reach a wide array of audiences.

By the 1980s, the new circus was spreading through Europe, carried by pioneering companies such as Archaos, Cirque Plume, and Circus Oz. The provocative French ‘punk circus’ Cirque Aligre was one of the first to hit Norwegian shores. Already infamous after appearances at Avignon Off and the avant-garde SIGMA Festival in Bordeaux, where the artist Bartabas rode on horseback, like a “cavalier de l'Apocalypse”,¹² with his chest covered by a swarm of rats that gripped his black jacket, Aligre would kidnap unwitting members of the audience and tear off their clothing before swinging them up high on the trapeze. In 1980 they appeared in Studentersamfunnet in Trondheim, then at Grenland Friteater in Porsgrunn, before being escorted out of the country by local police.

Another important visitor to Norway around this time was the Festival of Fools, a hugely influential touring festival started by the Dutch group Friends Roadshow. Presenting a wild mix of new clowning, variety, street arts and circus, the festival was a hotbed for emerging forms of performance. After a first Nordic landing at Copenhagen, the Festival of Fools visited Oslo and Bergen, and during the mid 80s transformed into the short-lived Oslo International Theatre Festival.

Inspired by these events, as well as by other currents in world theatre, Norwegian companies including Grenland Friteater, Saltkompagniet, Teater Beljash, Stella Polaris, and Verdensteatret made circus an integrated element in their training and performance work. Each of these groups might have developed circus into the

¹² Costaz, Gilles, ‘Bartabas, l'homme qui fait danser les chevaux’ in Les Echos: https://www.lesechos.fr/06/10/2000/LesEchos/18252-506-ECH_bartabas--l-homme-qui-fait-danser-les-chevaux.htm



contemporary art form it became in France and countries around Europe, but instead they moved towards framing their practice as physical and visual theatre. In his essay 'Circus in Norway 2009', included in Tomi Purovaara's 2012 book *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus*, Sverre Waage posits a number of possible reasons for this – including a lack of advocacy and the “short cultural history” of Norway – but finally circus art would emerge in the country later and by another route.¹³

Development in Norway

With no grants and no dedicated spaces, initially the circus scene in Norway was based more around practice than artistic production. Activity was concentrated in small-scale performances and events, and juggling became popular as a discipline that could be practiced anywhere. In 1991 the juggling company Balls in the Air was established, and in 1996 it arranged the first juggling festival in Norway. While homegrown productions remained elusive, international performances continued to visit the country throughout the 1990s – notably via Bergen Festival, Porsgrunn International Theatre Festival, and the International Theater Festival in Kongsvinger – giving a window onto rapid developments that were taking place at the international level. In 1997, TIK brought Cirkus Cirkör, then a young company enjoying some sensational media coverage, to Norway for the first time, establishing links with Norwegian venues and audiences that persist to the present day.

Around this period, youth and foundation/preparatory training was also getting established in Norway. In 1997 a one-year training scheme was founded at Fjordane Folkehøgskule in collaboration with Circus Agora. Another major turning point in circus education came in 2001 when Norsk kulturskoleråd started a five-year new circus

¹³ Waage, Sverre, 'Circus in Norway 2009' in *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus* (STUTS, 2012), p.202.



project to offer training in nine local communities in Norway – Oslo, Trondheim, Karmøy, Bergen, Stavanger, Fredrikstad, Lillehammer, Tromsø, and Kristiansand. Both Fjordane and the culture school programmes established routes that artists would later pass through on their way to further training abroad.

In 2001, Cirkus Xanti's *Ringene*, co-produced with Haugesund Teater and Pain Solution, was the first Norwegian circus project to receive funding from Kulturrådet. A bloody and intense realisation of the Völund myth, the piece toured south Norway in a circus tent, giving 34 performances in 33 days. The conservative newspaper *Aftenposten* concluded its review of the production by exclaiming: “Finally, new circus has come to Norway.”

And indeed by the mid 2000s there were a modest number of Norwegian performances being shown around the country. Cirkus KhaOom's *Hedda-Go-Lucky*, a performance that picked up from the closing moments of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, was presented in the Jacob Church in Oslo in 2006. The same year Cirkus Xanti's *Trollprinsen* won the Norwegian Theatre Guild's Hedda Award for best performance for a young audience, while Cirkus Sibylla were touring the country giving performances for (and running projects with) children and young people. The juggling collective Flaks was also organising small performances and events, as well as the annual Bestcoast Festival, which they had founded in Stavanger in 2000. Other companies working with circus skills at the time included Stella Polaris, Pain Solution, and Teater Okolo.

From the mid-2000s on, the story of circus in Norway is one of increasing internationalism, reflecting the emergence of networks and cooperation projects across the European field. For Norway it was, particularly, a time of Nordic collaboration, as after years of grass roots activities the Nordic countries had begun to structure their circus sectors. In Sweden, the first students graduated from the circus programme of the University of Dance (later renamed the University of Dance and Circus)



in 2007, and Manegen was established the next year as the federation for circus variety and street performance. In Finland, the Finnish Circus Information Centre was founded in 2006 to promote cooperation and improve the standing of circus as an art form. In Denmark, the Danish Arts Council had made circus a priority in 2003, and in 2005, KIT - Copenhagen International Theatre was awarded a grant of 300,000 Euro to “implement an action plan for the development of contemporary circus as a stage art in Denmark”.¹⁴

These different paths converged in 2007 when KIT lead a successful application to the new KKNord grant scheme to launch the New Nordic Circus Network. The goal of NNCN was to improve information on contemporary circus and promote artistic collaboration between the Nordic countries. Its flagship project was Juggling the Arts – a series of artistic laboratories, organised throughout the Nordic countries during 2008-2013, which was pivotal in the formation of new projects such as the Finnish group Race Horse Company.

In Norway, JTA and the NNCN kick-started a number of new initiatives and gave weight to existing plans. In 2007, Sirkunst was founded as an independent organisation working for the development of circus art in Norway, and Cirkus Xanti was awarded funding to tour the Circus Village with its own productions. In 2009, Cirkus Xanti was then awarded a three-year funding package to develop the Circus Village as a mobile festival and creation space, and helped to open Norway further to international collaboration, participating in networks such as Circostrada and the new Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe, and introducing Norwegian audiences to artists such as Race Horse Company, Jeanne Mordoj / Cie Bal,

¹⁴ Degerbøl, Stine and Verwilt, Katrien, ‘A Chronological Panorama of Danish Contemporary Circus’ in *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus* (STUTS, 2012), p.189.



Ilona Jäntti, and O Ultimo Momento. In this way, Norway has become a participant in an international artistic community – as today contemporary circus is marked by an exceptional level of international collaboration and exchange. From this rich interchange, involving thousands of artists and companies, a whole universe of different styles and approaches has emerged.

A multitude of approaches

Like any healthy art form, contemporary circus presents a moving target for those who try to pin it down. Here we present just a few styles and lines of work that can be found in the field today.

New objects and equipment: Many artists now bring their skills to new contexts or types of equipment. For their performance *LANDSCAPE(s)* the French group La Migration designed and built a new double-tightwire structure that evokes the cyclical patterns of nature, seasonality, day and night.



Personal stories: Many artists now draw on their personal histories to make work, and particularly examine the body as a site of identity. Works in this vein include Croatian company Room 100's *C8H11NO2*, which attempts to capture the experience of living with schizophrenic disorder and uses extreme skills in contortion and dislocation to transform the human body.

Circus in the natural world: Historically, circus has had a strong relationship to rural areas and outdoor lives, and this remains the case in the contemporary scene. This is a notable line of work in Norway, with examples including Cirkus Xanti's *Bastard*, Acting for Climate's upcoming performance *Into the Water*, and Det lille mekaniske loppesirkuset's *Elven og Havet*.

Digital work: Projects and initiatives involving digital technology now include forays into virtual reality and wearable devices. An early performance in the genre was Skye Gellmann's *Blindscape*, a combination circus performance and game where the audience members navigated soundscapes using an iPhone.

Women-led performances: In recent years there have been a number of companies and collectives that reflect on the position and agency of women in circus art. Two large-scale examples are the Swedish Gynoïdes Project, and the French group Projet.PDF (Portés De Femmes), a collective of sixteen female acrobats.

Magie Nouvelle: The magie nouvelle movement encompasses a small group of artists rethinking the codes and context of magic. One leading figure is Étienne Saglio. In his performance *Les Limbes*, scraps and expanses of plastic animate images of ghosts, the afterlife and the soul's onward journey from this world to the next.



Specialisation: While traditional circus usually presented a medley of skills, in the contemporary scene many practitioners develop single-discipline performances. The Norwegian artist Eivind Øverland has worked with Lalla la Cour to create *The High Life*, a 45 minute piece playing out entirely on double trapeze, while Lisa Marie Ødegaard is a co-founder of Collectif Sous le Manteau, which brings together specialists in Chinese pole.



Research and the international field

Amid this broad spectrum of work, one idea has become notably influential – that of artistic research.¹⁵ As in other art fields, this phrase has some conceptual blurriness but broadly denotes an interest in interrogating the circus form and techniques – including their relation to social structures, gender identity, and so on – and making this the basis of a creative approach. This commitment to experimentation with core principles is not new, but has been promoted by the rise of a particular style of stripped down work. An influential example has been Un Loup pour l’Homme’s *Appris par Corps* (‘Learned by Body’), a piece which communicates through an intricate, low-key acrobatic language, and which has no props or text and minimal lighting and music. When working on the performance, the artist Alexandre Fray wrote: “I do not know – do not want to know – on what day this creation will ‘speak’, as the material that will be the heart of it has not yet taken form. I do not want to force the [skill] to say something; I want to know what it has to say, inherently. I want to give it that chance.”¹⁶

Schools such as Le Lido in France and DOCH in Sweden are explicitly oriented around research language and practice, while specific funding schemes and initiatives such as Lab:time in the UK, Cirkör LAB in Sweden, and the Juggling the Arts project in the Nordic region have provided support to research as a way of deepening circus practice. Another major project in this line has

¹⁵ Academic research is also growing, and can approach circus from any number of angles. In Quebec, the Montreal Working Group on Cirque/Circus informally gathers academics whose interests span sociology, gender studies, business, history and other spheres. The Circus Research Network, started in the UK and associated with the University of Sheffield, circulates information to over 150 members from more than a dozen countries.

¹⁶ Quotation taken from the company website: <http://unloupourl-homme.com>



been Bauke Lieven’s four-year research project *Between Being and Imagining*, funded by KASK School of Arts in Ghent, which promoted dialogue through a series of open letters and encounters (multi-day seminars that organised structured conversations), as well as leading to the creation of two performances with Alexander Vantournhout – *ANECKXANDER* and *Raphäel*.

This emphasis on research has shaped the logistics and aesthetics of the contemporary field and is supported on a transnational scale by projects like the European initiative CircusNext. Co-financed by the European Commission, CircusNext is a platform network with seventeen member organisations in twelve countries that supports new creators in the circus field through an extensive programme of residencies, mentoring and financial support – typically picking six ‘laureates’ every two years from around 150 applications across Europe.¹⁷ Within the programme the emphasis is not necessarily on uncovering projects that are production-ready but on reinvigorating the circus field by introducing new ideas and perspectives.

Such opportunities for creation and exchange are open to Norwegian artists, and indeed many are already participants in the international field, with a majority working internationally and many choosing to base themselves abroad.

¹⁷ The roots of CircusNext go back to 2001-2002, when the French Ministry of Culture initiated the project *Jeunes Talents Cirque* to accompany new creators (or ‘auteurs’) in the circus arts. In 2009-2010 it became *Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe*, during which period the Nordic region played a notable role in the expansion of the project by integrating the Juggling the Arts laboratories organised by the New Nordic Circus Network.



2. An overview of the Norwegian field – artists, funding and artistic projects

The Norwegian circus field is **skilled**, **productive** and **spread out**. Artists base themselves across Norway and throughout Europe, working on a broad range of artistic projects. Here we look at the distribution of the circus field and Kulturrådet's support for the sector in Norway.

Number of professional artists	42
Avg annual funding to circus - Kulturrådet	2 million NOK

The Norwegian circus field is small but deep: while there are relatively few artists compared to other performing arts fields, these individuals are characterised by high levels of professional education, high levels of technical skill, and varied working experiences and artistic accomplishments.

In research for this report we identified 42 Norwegian or Norway-based professional artists who are largely engaged in creating contemporary circus art. This is a conservative reading, and the number of 'practitioners' in a broader sense is larger. Alongside those who work on artistic projects, there exists a small cohort of people working principally as pedagogues, and then a number of artists who do not place themselves in the circus sector – coming instead from theatre, dance or other backgrounds – but who incorporate circus skills such as aerial or acrobatics in their work.

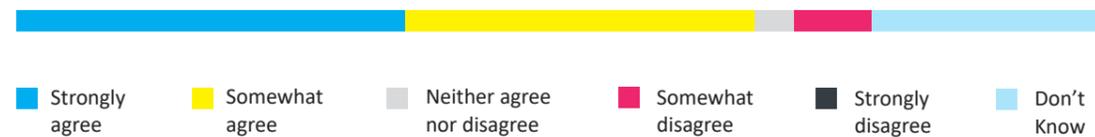
Our research for this report also suggests that the number of artists, and the field at large, is growing. Artists interviewed for the report repeatedly expressed such a sentiment, citing particularly rising student bodies at culture schools and in the one-year programme at Fjordane Folkehøgskule, as well as with private institutions that offer circus training. Trondheim Kommunale Kulturskole, for example, has more than doubled its student numbers over the last decade; of the 200 circus students currently enrolled, 30 receive extra tuition as part of a talent group.

As the total number of students at such institutions increases so too does the number of artists moving forward to continued training: four artists are currently enrolled in full-time higher education courses at circus schools in Europe and Canada, and in 2017 a further



five started the three-year Upper Secondary School Programme offered by S:t Botvids Gymnasium and Cirkus Cirkör in Stockholm. 68% of respondents to our open survey either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the number of people working in the circus field in Norway is rising (with 21% indicating that they didn't know).

'The number of people working in the circus field in Norway is rising.'



Speaking of the growing pool of established professional artists, the director Rudi Skotheim Jensen gave the example of casting for his recent production *Elven og Havet*: “The artistic and technical level of Norwegian performers has grown substantially since I finished ESAC [the Ecole supérieure des arts du Cirque in Belgium] in 2005. Which is why I was able to make an all-Norwegian production of *Elven og Havet* – and was able to actually choose the artists, not just grab whoever was available.”

“ Youth circus in Norway started around when I got into circus, and now there's this wave coming of people who have trained at a youth circus, or with a circus theatre group. All these people are starting to enter or finish their education abroad and they will have the possibility to come back to Norway. I feel there's so much circus starting up in the country.

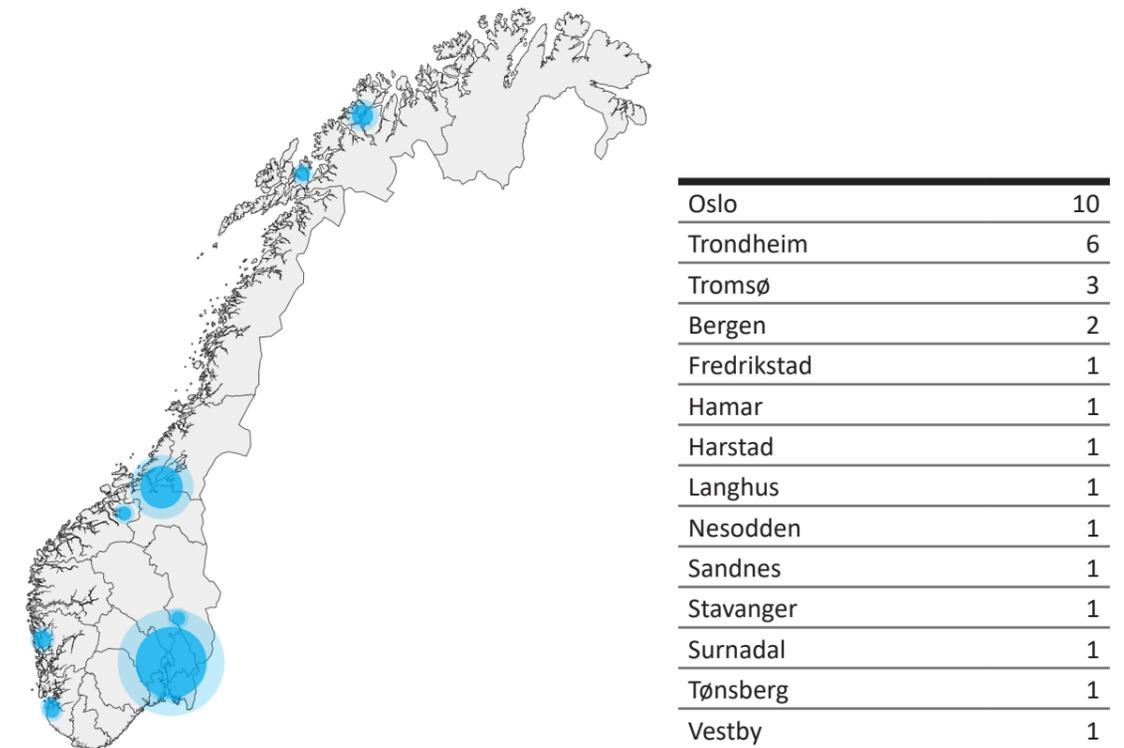
Emma Langmoen, Oslo Nysirkus



Norwegians at home

In the open survey conducted for this report, 68% of respondents based themselves in Norway, and a further 5% had a base both in Norway and abroad. While Oslo, Trondheim and Tromsø were the cities with the greatest numbers of respondents, the remainder were widely distributed across eleven different localities.

Survey respondents based in Norway



Trondheim's community has grown up around the culture school there, while in Tromsø the performing arts house Kulta has been the central institution. The Oslo community is a looser network with more international connections.



Of the 29 respondents based in Norway, 31% had engaged in a long-form creation project in the last 24 months, with greater numbers engaging in teaching and act creation/performance.

This underlines a reality of the Norwegian field today: that, for all that the sector as a whole is growing, artistic work is still nascent inside the country. The interviews conducted for this report reflected this, with interviewees describing a lack of venues to programme work, a general absence of public or institutional recognition, and, critically, an absence of dedicated spaces for training and creation. We will return to each of these points in more depth in later chapters.

However, we do believe that artistic work in Norway is building momentum and that there are now a modest number of projects, focused on artistic creation and performance, that are initiated by artists who base themselves in Norway or that draw significantly on national resources. In the last few years such projects include KompaniTO's *Ever After*, a dance and circus performance examining the darker side of individualism and self-actualisation (co-produced by Arkitektenes hus, Dans/5, Cirkus Xanti, and Riksteatern in Sweden); Cirkus Xanti's *As a Tiger in the Jungle*, a collaboration with Ali Williams Productions that features three performers from Nepal and Vietnam and that tells the story of children trafficked into Indian circuses as children (the show is still active, but has toured to England, Wales and Norway, playing at PIT Festival and Bristol Circus City festival, among others); and Østfold kulturutvikling's *Night Sea Journey*, a one-off project to celebrate Fredrikstad's 450th anniversary that took audiences on a 'poetic circus walk' through the industrial landscape of Fredrikstad Mekaniske Verksted, featuring artists from Abaris Aerial Theater and Det lille mekaniske loppesirkuset alongside those from Sweden's Cirkus Cirkör.

The Circus Village, founded in 2007 by Cirkus Xanti, has been a critical amplifier for artistic work – acting as a platform and sometimes co-producer for performances;



providing training and professional development opportunities in the form of seminars and workshops; creating a flow of exchange and information between Norwegian and international artists; and providing space for creation – a subject that we will return to in more detail later. The more recent Merge Norge, founded in 2016 by KompaniTO, has likewise become a showcase for Norwegian – and more widely Nordic – work, as well as a rallying point for a scattered community of artists.

There have also been signs of interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly with dance. The residency centre R.E.D., a converted farm outside of Oslo run by the director and choreographer Ella Fiskum, has been a significant supporter of circus creation, hosting residencies for Foot in Face, KompaniTO, Eivind Øverland and Lalla la Cour, Hege Eriksdatter Østefjells, and Cirkus Xanti. Marta Alstadsæter, a graduate of Codarts in Rotterdam, has also explored the crossover of circus and dance in her new project *Engel*, a duet with contemporary dancer Kim-Jomi Fischer. In another line, Oslo Nysirkus has investigated collaborations with music in two productions – *Symfoni & Sirkus* in 2016 with Oslo Philharmonic, and *Tidstyven* in 2017 with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. In her production *1½*, the artist Frida Odden Brinkmann, educated at circus schools in

“ *The dance field has been working with urban dancers for awhile now, and I think it's just a matter of time before these choreographers realise they have another group of highly trained people in the circus. I think also the circus artists themselves have understood that they can enter the spaces that would normally belong to dance – they can work with their concept and get onto these other platforms.* ”

Ella Fiskum, R.E.D. / Ella Fiskum Danz



Tractor Circus

Tractor Circus brings contemporary circus to the villages of Scandinavia. Farmers and locals lend their tractors and farmyards, and in return the four artists offer a performance or full weekend of concerts and workshops. By taking its performances outside of theatres, the project aims to “meet people where they live, in their everyday lives”.

Denmark, Sweden and France, worked with puppetry to bring to life the figure of Antero, a juggler “short in size and full of temperament”.

In general we believe there is considerable scope for collaboration with other forms and for presentation in new arenas. One artist interviewed for this report, Hege Eriksdatter Østefjells, had recently recast her work as ‘immersive performance design’ and had developed a short piece, *I don’t know if I’m strong enough but I’m not letting go of you*, with the artist Karoline Aamås for presentation in the artistic programme of the sixth World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Oslo. The project Acting for Climate, initiated in 2015 by Abigael Winsvold and Victoria Gulliksen, sits at the intersection of arts, environmentalism and activism, and has been building a network of researchers and scientists interested in



communicating through the performing arts.

The director Rudi Skotheim Jensen stressed that there were also opportunities for sponsorship and commercial collaboration. For the project *Elven og Havet*, which worked with maritime themes, his group Det lille mekaniske loppesirkuset approached the company Varri, a niche supplier of climbing equipment that works in the sports industry, fall protection, emerging technology, and rescue markets. Varri sold Loppesirkuset equipment at cost, while in return the creative team gave feedback on how Varri products could be applied in new contexts and markets.

Such partnerships and collaborations are both an indicator of circus’ flexibility and a reflection of the fact that, as the circus scene in Norway is mostly composed of independent operators and has few structural organisations that fulfil a supporting role, it is necessary to cast a wide net in the search for resources.

In the open survey for this report, asked to name sources of funding and sponsorship accessed in the last two years, respondents named 24 funding bodies and foundations – thirteen in Norway and eleven outside of the country.

Funding sources accessed in the last 24 months

NORWAY

AP Møller Fonden
 DKS Kongsvinger
 DKS Nordland
 FFUK
 Fredrikstad Kommune
 Kulturrådet
 Innovasjon Norge
 Oslo Kommune
 Sandnes Kommune
 Sparebankstiftelsen DnB
 SPENN
 STIKK
 TurneOrganisasjonen i Hedmark

INTERNATIONAL

Colstrups Fond 🇩🇰
 Dansk Artist Forbund 🇩🇰
 Færchfonden 🇩🇰
 Holstebro kommune 🇩🇰
 Institut Français 🇫🇷
 Konstnärnsnämnden 🇸🇪
 Kulturkontakt Nord 🇩🇰
 Nordisk Kulturfond 🇸🇪
 Odense Kommune 🇩🇰
 Region Skåne 🇸🇪
 Statens Kunstfond Danmark 🇩🇰



Kulturrådet remains the most important source of project-based funding for artists in Norway, though the volume of grants and applications remains low. Some interviewees doubted their eligibility or realistic chances of winning support, while a few felt that the funding situation was good so long as applications were written strategically – for instance by emphasising multidisciplinary collaboration, or by focusing on narrative elements / storytelling when applying through the Fri scenekunst - teater strand. “I think if I was in another country where circus was more established I would write the applications completely differently,” said one (successful) applicant.





Kulturrådet's funding to circus

Circus accounts for a very small proportion of the cultural budget. During the seven-year period 2011-2017, subvention to circus through the Kulturfond programmes accounted for an average of 0.3% of total Kulturfond spending.¹⁸ Looking at the period 2011-2013, when figures are available for the dance field, dance accounted for an average of 10.7%. In the same three-year stretch circus rests at an average of 0.3%.¹⁹

No circus group or structure has yet received a grant under Basisfinansiering av frie scenekunstgrupper, which has been a key contributor to the maturation of the dance field in Norway, nor under the more recent Driftsstøtte.

¹⁸ Figures taken from Kulturrådet's decision lists, 2011-2017. Grants to circus were identified first by searching against a database of names and companies, then by a manual reading of the full decision lists of the sixteen funds named here. For a full breakdown of grants see: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/15s0kdquED3lOn679DFezkt7PGuRF9ff00DEq_VNpQGA/edit?usp=sharing (Sheet 'Kulturrådet funding: 2011 - June 2018')

¹⁹ In the years, 2011, 2012 and 2013, the totals awarded to dance within the Norsk Kulturfond were 53,133,000 NOK, 60,573,000 NOK, and 65,958,000 NOK. Figures taken from the Kulturdepartementet's *Dans i hele landet: Status, utfordringer og strategier for videre utvikling av profesjonell dans i Norge* (Kulturdepartementet, 2013), p. 10.



Kulturrådet funding in the period 2011-2017

13,997,800
NOK

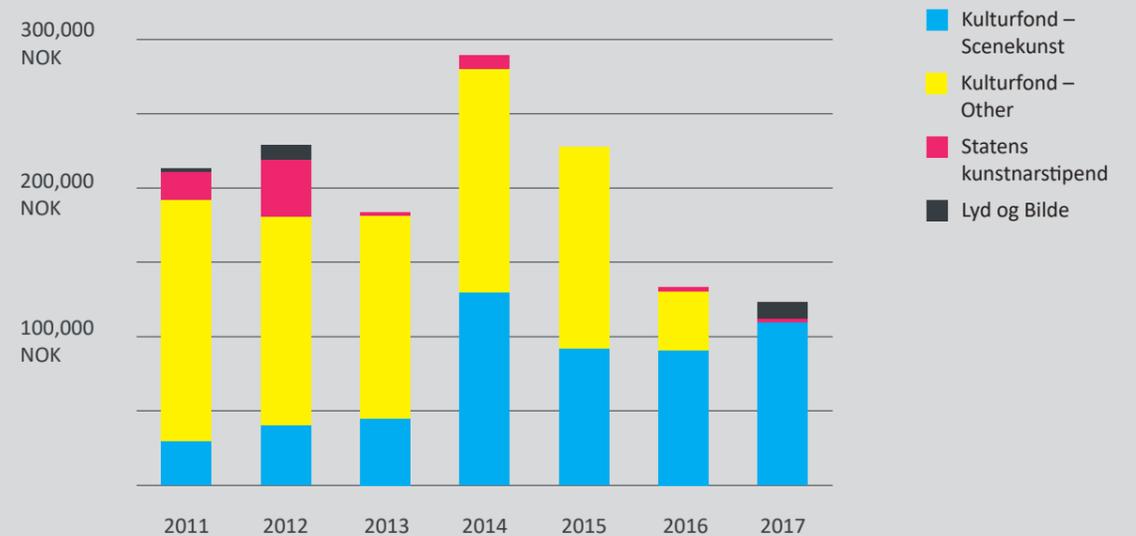
74
Grants

23
Unique recipients



- 38% ■ Kulturfond - Scenekunst
5,370,600 NOK
- 55% ■ Kulturfond - Other
7,650,000 NOK
- 5% ■ Statens kunstnarstipend
752,200 NOK
- 2% ■ Lyd og Bilde
225,000 NOK

Amounts granted by year and fund





	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Kulturfond – Scenekunst							
Arrangørstøtte scenekunst	x	-	-	-	-	-	250,000
Koreografiutvikling (Avsluttet)	25,000	-	-	x	x	x	x
Kompetansehevende tiltak - scenekunst	150,000	270,000	155,000	150,000	390,000	23,500	243,000
Formidling / gjestespill	125,000	137,100	290,000	-	230,000	82,000	220,000
Forprosjekt scenekunst	x	x	x	100,000	-	-	-
Fri scenekunst - dans	-	-	-	450,000	-	-	380,000
Fri scenekunst - teater	-	-	-	600,000	300,000	800,000	-
Kulturfond – Other							
Prosjektstøtte barne og ungdomskultur (Avsluttet)	420,000	600,000	570,000	700,000	750,000	x	x
Kunstløftet (Avsluttet)	-	-	-	-	110,000	x	x
Rom for kunst - kunstarenaer og kulturbygg	1,200,000	800,000	800,000	800,000	500,000	400,000	-
Statens Kunstnarstipend							
Arbeidsstipend	190,000	190,000	-	-	-	-	-
Arbeidsstipend for yngre / ny-etablerte kunstnarar	-	196,000	-	-	-	-	-
Diversestipend	-	-	25,000	-	-	-	30,000
Diversestipend for nyutdannede kunstnere	x	x	-	90,000	-	31,200	-
Lyd og Bilde							
Gjenopptakelse av scene-forestillinger	20,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fond for Lyd og Bilde	-	95,000	-	-	-	-	110,000
TOTALS	2,130,000	2,288,100	1,840,000	2,890,000	2,280,000	1,336,700	1,233,000

All figures full amounts, NOK. 'x' = fund closed. '-' = no grants awarded.

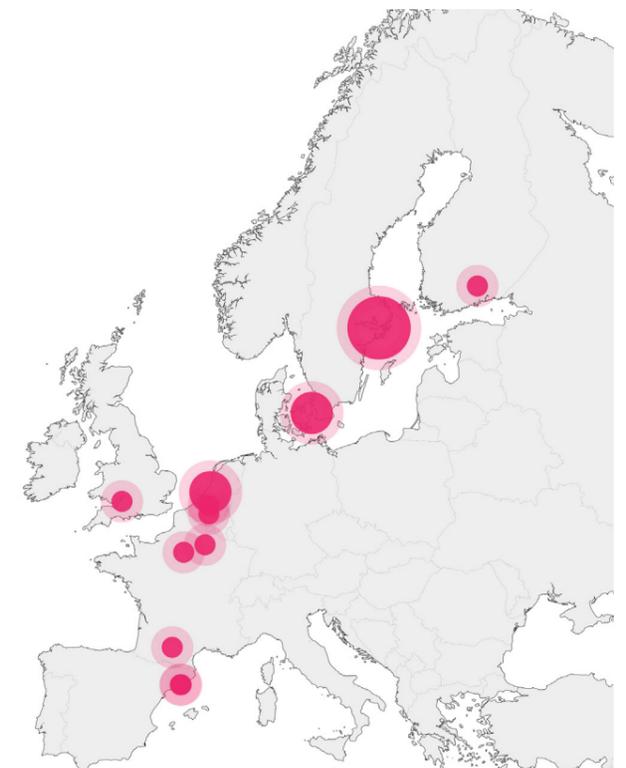


Norwegians abroad

A significant cadre of Norwegian artists train abroad, work abroad, live abroad. In the open survey for this report, 28% of respondents based themselves abroad, and a further 5% split their base between Norway and another territory. In total there were twelve locations across eight countries.

Survey respondents based abroad

Stockholm	3
Copenhagen	2
Rotterdam	2
Antwerp	1
Barcelona	1
Bristol	1
Brussels	1
Lahti	1
Malmö	1
Paris	1
Reims	1
Toulouse	1



Among these respondents, 62% had engaged in long-form creative work in the last 24 months – double the percentage for those based in Norway.

This reflects the reality that, for artists interested in initiating or working on creative projects, there are currently more opportunities, and better working conditions, available overseas. Even for those nominally



‘based’ in Norway, they often carry out a substantial amount of their work in other countries. Asked what it meant to be ‘based in Oslo’, one interviewee replied, “I guess what it means is that when I don’t have work I usually go there. It’s changing a lot [with more projects starting up in Norway], but I think at the moment I spend between one and three months in Norway each year.”

Recent artistic projects led by or involving Norwegian artists abroad include the performance *Vixen* by the company Tanter (based in Denmark but with two Norwegian artists), a tear-down of female stereotypes that was created with support from Nordisk Kulturfond and Nordisk kulturkontakt, and that has been performed in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Norway, and the UK; Eivind Øverland and Lalla la Cour’s *High Life*, a 45 minute piece which, reflecting the specialisation of circus disciplines, takes place entirely on trapeze; and *The Handstand Forest*, Mikael Kristiansen’s ongoing research project exploring the group dynamics of handbalancing, which in its early stages was supported by Sweden’s Konstnärnsämnden and Cirkör LAB in Stockholm. Norwegian artists have also done performance and devising work with companies including Les Colporteurs (France), Odin Teatret (Denmark), Le Guetteur (France), Circo Aereo (Finland), and Scapino Ballet Rotterdam (Netherlands).

In our open survey, 100% of respondents basing themselves abroad had higher education training in circus. For most individuals, moving abroad in search of education is their first step into the international field, but, speaking with artists based in countries such as Sweden, France, Denmark and Spain, we heard diverse and multifaceted reasons for their decisions to remain there.

For a small number, the reasons were to do with accessing national funding for creative projects, or living in France or Belgium to access intermittence (a state welfare system that supports artists between work contracts). However, the most consistent response was

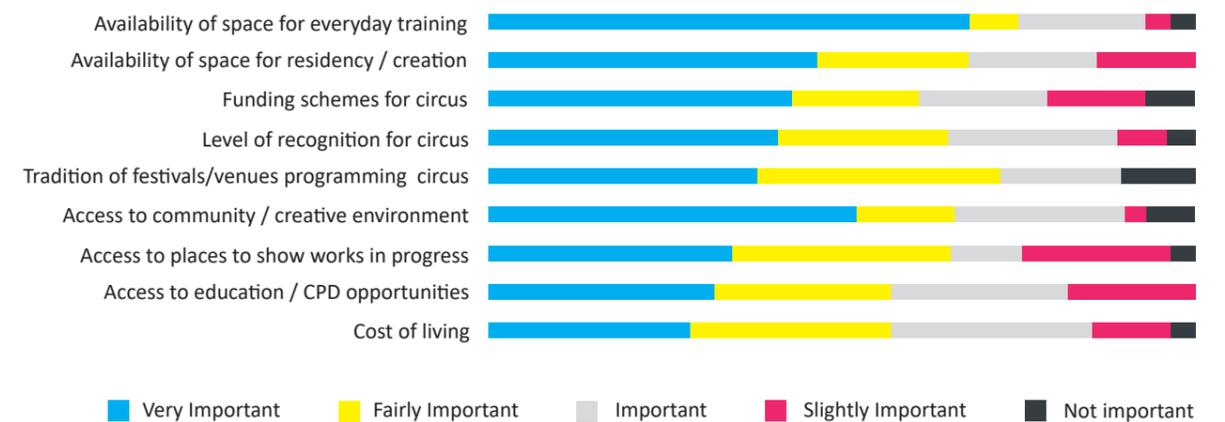


“ I think it would feel very lonely if I went back to Norway. There isn’t really a community of professional artists living there training and creating. That scene exists but it’s not like a community – it’s more spread out here and there.

Karoline Aamås

that artists chose to live in other countries in order to feel part of a larger community of circus training and creation – a desire which is inseparably linked to the need for dedicated training/creation space around which such a community may gather. This is further borne out by our open survey, which ranked ‘availability of space for everyday training’ as the most important factor in an artist’s decision of where to base themselves, followed by ‘access to community / collaborators / a creative environment’ and ‘availability of space for residency / creation’.

Factors for choosing a base





A significant number of artists interviewed said they would like to move back to Norway, or at least develop a greater working presence in the country, if there were opportunities to train, create and work.

For the remainder of this report we look at what this means – to train, create and work – by touching on education, the working lives of circus artists, and the importance of space, before detailing the market, national and international, for a renewed circus field in Norway, and formulating a set of recommendations to capitalise on existing activity.

But we begin where artists themselves begin – with their first steps in circus training, and with the education paths that lead them in time to the international field.

Hege Eriksdatter ▶
*Østefjells' Potatoes
& Sauce.*
Photo: Andreas
Bergmann





3. Becoming a professional – education paths and training

Norwegian circus artists have high levels of **education** and **professional training**. Norway itself is rich in entry point for circus training, but to become professionals most artists must move abroad.

In all areas of life, careers often start from chance encounters. In circus, given the specialist nature of the training, this is especially true: a little bit of luck is needed to meet the right person, to grow up in the right area, or to see the right show that inspires interest at the right time. As such, each artist has their own origin story and a unique set of formative experiences.

There are, however, broad commonalities, and in our survey and interviews we found three general categories of entry in Norway for those who go on to work as professional artists:

#1 Culture schools / folk high school

Circus training was firmly established in culture schools in 2001 when Norsk kulturskoleråd launched a five-year new circus project to offer training in nine local communities in Norway.

In some regions the training schemes eventually closed down – partly because, at the time, there were problems sourcing qualified teachers. However, from the nine pilot regions, there are still education programmes in Trondheim, Tromsø, Fredrikstad and Karmøy, and these have been joined by others.

In a 2014-2015 survey, published as part of the Masters thesis *Circus art – circus teaching in the field of performing music and art education*, circus researcher and pedagogue Lea Moxness identified eleven culture schools and nine private associations offering circus education in Norway. Taken together, these twenty institutions accounted for a total of 1062 students and 42 teaching positions.²⁰ Among the culture schools, there

²⁰ Moxness, Lea, *Sirkunstneren - Sirkusundervisning i det kulturskolerelaterte feltet* (Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 2005), p. 16. As noted by Moxness, teachers often work at multiple schools/institutions, so while there are 42 positions the number of individual teachers will be somewhat lower.



were 585 students enrolled, with 338 more on waiting lists.

Of course, the majority of these students do not go on to train at a professional level, but some do – and there are established pathways for them to follow as they seek to build their skills and career. In 2017, five of the graduating students from Trondheim Kommunale Kulturskole were accepted into S:t Botvids Gymnasium and Cirkus Cirkör's Upper Secondary School Programme in Sweden – a three-year foundation programme after which students may continue on with university level circus education. Fjordane Folkehøgskule has similarly acted as a stepping stone by providing foundation training that prepares students for further education, with Fjordane students moving on to schools in France, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, and the UK.

#2 Creative groups / private initiatives

For some artists, formal education is sought later, if at all, and an introduction to circus comes instead from joining a private school – such as SirkusSmulene in Oslo and Cirka Cirkus in Bærum – or from working with theatre groups and artistic collectives that incorporate circus skills / circus artists.

An important example of the latter has been the independent company Stella Polaris. Founded in 1985 as a collective inspired by the traditions of medieval theatre, Stella Polaris has drawn often on acrobatics and the circus arts – both in its professional productions and in its youth work and teaching. Members of Stella Polaris have gone on to complete training programmes at AFUK in Denmark and CNAC in France.

#3 Garage Warriors

A final path into circus work is the DIY approach. Some circus disciplines require specific facilities/equipment and precise technical instruction, but practices such as handbalancing and juggling are more immediately accessible – at least in their early stages. A young person with an interest can pick up some basic technique or



tricks from the Internet, and then practice in their garage or back garden – even to the point of attaining a high standard through autodidactic training. Some of these garage warriors then move on to further training as they look to develop their skills or to discover a career path and professional identity.

Entry points for survey respondents

Culture school / folk high school	13
Creative group / private initiative	23
Garage warrior	3

Although grouped together here, the culture / folk high school and especially the creative group / private initiative categories are actually comprised of a broad landscape of small and larger players. The 39 respondents to this question between them named 25 organisations: Aerial Arts NYC (US); Baller i lufta; BraSirkus; Circo Teatro Udi Grudi (Brazil); Cirka Cirkus; Cirkus Arnardo; Cirkus Bambino; Cirkus Merano; Cirkus Sibylla; Cirkus Xanti; Drømmefabrikken; Flaks Sjongleringsgruppe; Fjordane Folkehøgskule; Karmøy Kulturskole; Kölner Spielesirkus; Kulta; Nysirkus Bjerke; Sirkus Agio; Sirkus Pilar; SirkusSmulene; Stella Polaris; Tønsberg Ungdomssklubb; Trondheim Kulturskole; Trupp Mimus; and Unga Örnar Borlänge.

While these categories can give a rough division of the ways people enter the circus field, it is also important to note that the point of entry is usually preceded by the point of inspiration – and in many cases the impulse to try circus training emerges after seeing an artistic production. It is experiencing vibrant performances that plants the seed. An exceptional production can be a turning point in a person's life, driving them to take up a hobby, then turn it into a commitment, and perhaps finally into a full-time career.

Training to a professional level

As we pointed out in the previous section on the development of contemporary circus, one important



turning point in the rise of new circus was the establishment of two schools in Paris. These were followed by many others, including France's national school, CNAC, in 1985; the École nationale de cirque in Montreal in 1981; and Circus Space (now the National Centre for Circus Arts) in the UK in 1989. These institutions did not only help to broaden access to circus techniques; they also shaped the evolution of the field by creating programmes that mixed rigorous physical training with artistic exploration. Bernard Turin, the director of CNAC from 1990-2003, was an especially influential figure. An established sculptor and visual artist who led a double life as a passionate amateur trapeze artist, he was given a free hand by the French government to overhaul the education programme at the school. Taking the emphasis off technical training, he instead laid out an interdisciplinary programme of workshops with directors, choreographers, visual artists, writers and film-makers. The goal was to graduate 'total artists' – an ideal that many institutions still pursue.

Today, FEDEC - the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools, lists 57 professional training bodies as registered members, ranging from upper secondary education bodies to institutions supporting accredited degrees, masters, and doctoral studies.²¹ Even this is only part of the picture, as worldwide there are thousands of youth schools, clubs, and recreational associations. In Finland, which has a notably strong youth circus field, there are 45 schools registered with the Finnish Youth Circus Association, who between them have around 250 teachers and trainers working with more than 8500 students.²²

²¹ Statistics from the FEDEC website: <http://www.fedec.eu/en>

²² Statistics from the Finnish Youth Circus Association website: <http://snsi.fi/in-english/#.WpAnw9aqPIU>



In simplified terms, there are three levels of circus education that form a pyramid:

Recreational / youth training: This can range anywhere from a single class a week to an intensive, structured course culminating in a public performance.

Foundation / preparatory training: Foundation or preparatory training usually lasts between one and three years and is designed to prepare students for application to a higher education institution by providing them with a strong base of technical skill. In some cases, circus artists do their foundation training as part of their upper secondary education – as is the case with the BTEC courses at Circomedia and the National Centre for Circus Arts in the UK, or the Upper Secondary School Programme offered by S:t Botvids Gymnasium and Cirkus Cirkör in Sweden.

Professional training: Professional training encompasses full-time, long-term courses that prepare an artist for professional work, and in some cases return an accredited degree or postgraduate qualification. There are a number of institutions offering such training in Europe and North America, including Codarts in the Netherlands, DOCH in Stockholm (part of Stockholm University of the Arts), and Circomedia in the UK. Most professional schools now operate either out of buildings that have been entirely purpose built, or structures that have been heavily renovated/repurposed.

While not every individual will pass through each stage of this pyramid, many do begin with youth circus and continue to higher education. As circus education has become more structured the technical level of artists in the field has risen accordingly, and it is now possible for artists to enter the workplace already having a decade of serious training under their belts.



As with a form like dance, technical virtuosity is not necessarily the goal or the prize, and yet a certain baseline of ability is needed to fully explore the possibilities for original movement, and for the artist to be capable of working in a wide range of professional scenarios over the course of their career. As this 'basic' level of ability rises, the time spent in education has tended to rise as well. It is now not unusual for an artist to complete two consecutive degree programmes, perhaps focusing on technique in the first school and creation in the second.

It is possible to be a professional circus artist and to create full-length theatrical performances without a formal education, and there are individuals who do achieve this, but within Europe they are a minority. In the survey conducted for this report only one of the sixteen artists who marked that they had engaged in long-form creation in the last 24 months had not completed higher education studies. Schools provide equipment and space, as well as high level teaching, that is otherwise hard to come by. They also help to ease artists into the workplace through formal initiatives that bridge the gap from student to worker,²³ or by introducing them to informal networks. Norwegian artists who want to benefit from these networks, as well as attain a technical level that makes them competitive with their peers, must train abroad.

²³ In their third year at the Centre national des arts du cirque in France, students work with a director (often a figure from outside the circus field) to create a graduation performance which then tours as a professional production, sometimes for upwards of a year.

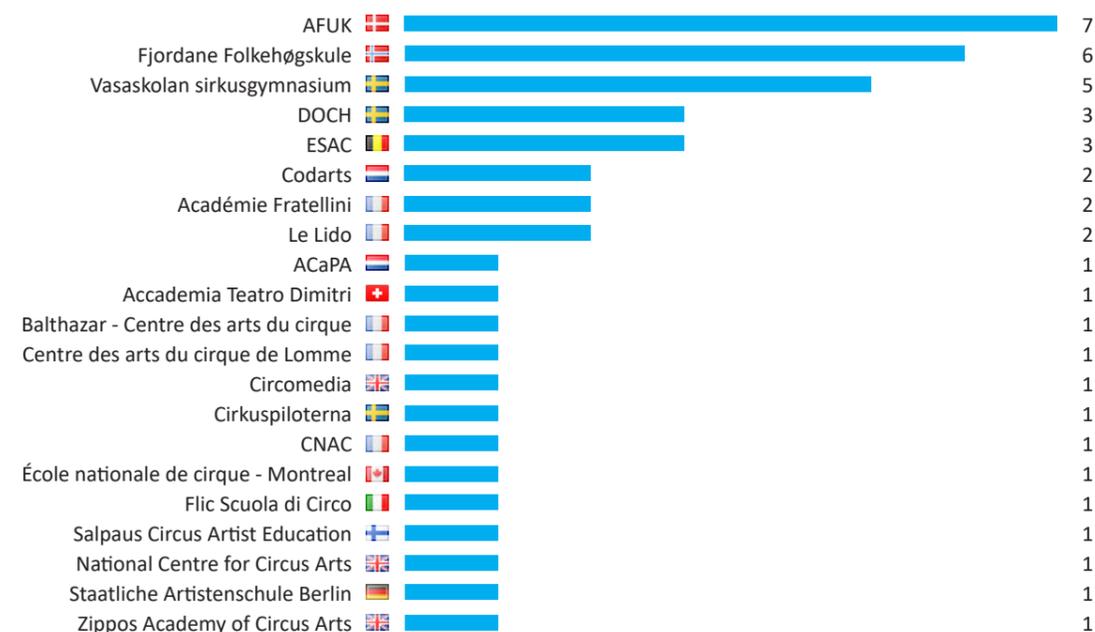


Educations abroad

In conversations with artists held for this report, a recurring point was the lack of higher education training in Norway. There are no institutions offering degree-level courses in circus arts in the country, and as such artists must undertake a wider search if they wish to complete intensive or certified training of this kind.

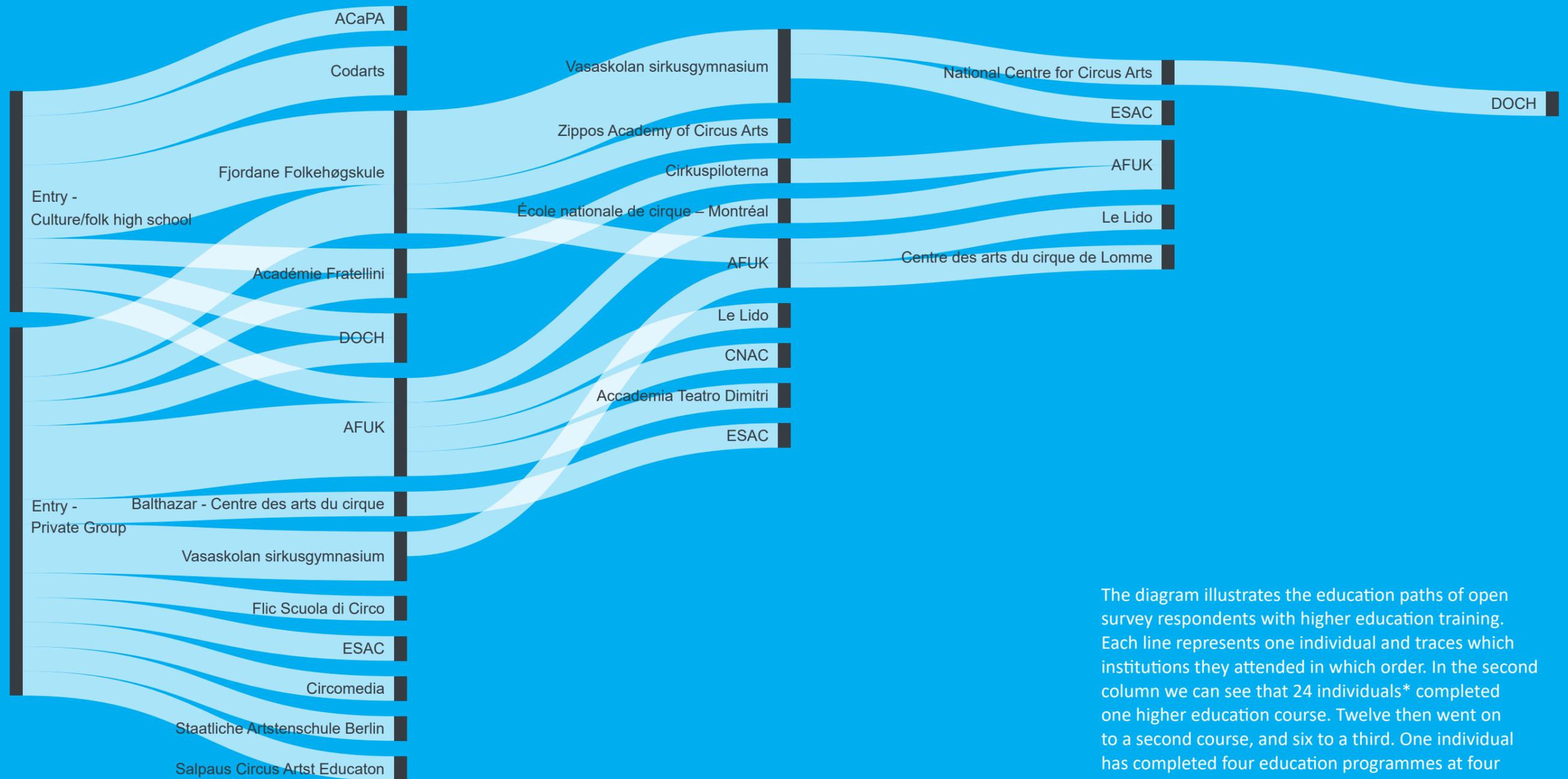
Among the 40 respondents to our open survey, more than half had at least three years of full-time post-secondary study, and five had more than a decade. Among the 25 respondents with post-secondary training, the average was 5.1 years spent in full-time higher education.

Post-secondary education among survey respondents



AFUK has been popular both because of proximity and because in its admissions procedure the school de-emphasises technical level and focuses on creative potential. While some artists complete only AFUK, others use it as a springboard to schools which require a higher technical level at entry.

Education paths



The diagram illustrates the education paths of open survey respondents with higher education training. Each line represents one individual and traces which institutions they attended in which order. In the second column we can see that 24 individuals* completed one higher education course. Twelve then went on to a second course, and six to a third. One individual has completed four education programmes at four institutions – their line stretches the furthest to the right.

* One individual with higher education training is not shown on the diagram, as they indicated on the survey that they had completed a BA in circus arts but did not name the awarding institution.



Though training abroad is a necessary step in the careers of many artists, those we interviewed had consistently encountered difficulties in obtaining support from the student loan body Lånekassen. The organisation does not recognise circus as an art form, and yet some of the educational institutions in the circus field (including Codarts in Rotterdam and ACaPA in Tilburg) are recognised by Lånekassen as ‘exceptional’ schools. This situation is confusing to applicants and can lead to inconsistent outcomes, with some applicants receiving funding and others being told they are ineligible. We found one case in which an artist had received support from Lånekassen to study at Codarts, while another individual, some years later, had been refused support for the same course at the same institution. As one interviewee put it: “You cannot accept the first ‘No’. You really have to fight for it.”

Several applicants to schools abroad who were refused funding by Lånekassen were told that they could attend Fjordane Folkehøgskule instead, reflecting a wider lack of institutional understanding concerning the level of professional training most individuals will need in order to build careers as artists. Of the six open survey respondents who had attended Fjordane, all six had moved on to further training abroad.

Norwegian artists are also hardly alone in having to move for their education. There are in fact a number of other European countries that have strong or emerging circus sectors but no professional training, as well as countries, such as Spain and Italy, that as yet lack courses awarding accredited degrees.

And this international circulation is not necessarily a bad thing. As we’ve already indicated, training in another country provides artists with opportunities to expand their professional networks, as well as to access a specific curriculum that is tailored to their technical preference and style of working. It also in large part prepares them for the realities of working life.





4. The working life of a circus artist – work, training and creation

Circus artists work **flexibly, internationally**, and as **creators** of their own work. They are adept at changing roles and are quick to move in pursuit of opportunities. Here we look at some individual examples and the logistics of creation.

The working life of a circus artist is variable, self-directed, and highly mobile. Long-term contracts are rare, and most artists live on a mix of creative work, teaching (in the professional, amateur and youth fields), and entertainment services, juggling multiple projects with multiple companies and collaborators. New companies are frequently created, sometimes for the sake of a single project, and just as frequently are dissolved or remade with different artists. In their working habits, you could say circus artists are a little like jazz musicians – always playing in each other's bands.

One of the artists interviewed, the Toulouse-based Lisa Marie Ødegaard, typified this fluidity. In addition to taking jobs as a technician and teacher, she had three performance projects: working with the French company Les Colporteurs on a piece commissioned to celebrate the 500 year anniversary of the death of Hieronymus Bosch; joining with seven other artists to create a new company, Collectif Sous le Manteau, as a long-term creative project; and teaming up with a second Norwegian artist, Elise Bjerkelund Reine, to work informally as the duo Norwegian Ninjas. Each project represents a different professional role: interpreter of a director's vision; co-creator within a long-term, professional collective; and accomplice in a more playful and improvised partnership. Each is also underpinned by a different financial model: the job with Les Colporteurs is under contract; the long-term project is being incorporated in France to be eligible for funding there; and the work done by the duo, with no incorporated entity behind it, raises money on an ad hoc basis if at all (money for a residency in Cape Town was collected through crowdfunding platform Kiss Kiss Bank Bank, for instance).

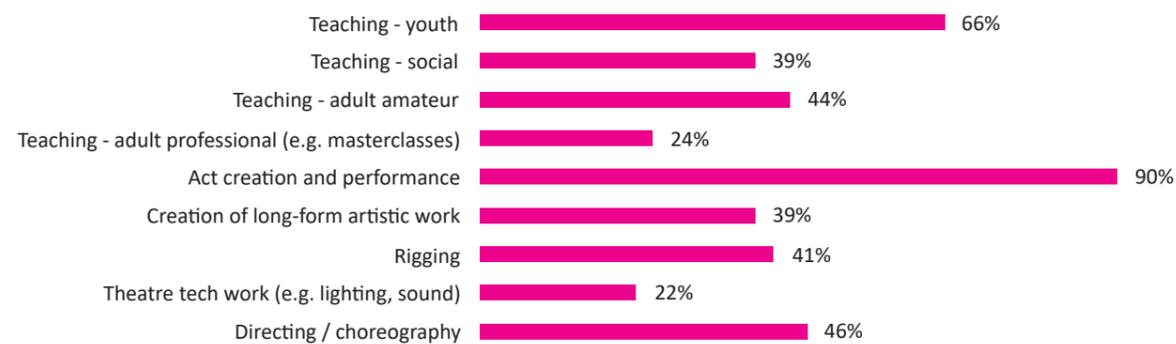
This flexible, multifaceted way of working is typical, and, for some, preferable. Even if artists have concerns about the financial precariousness of short-term contracts, they enjoy the variety of taking on multiple projects and adopting different positions as interpreters, co-creators or outside eyes, sometimes viewing this as a means of testing out different roles they might return to, and



concentrate on more fully, when their careers as active performers end or are reduced.²⁴

Within a range of working commitments, artists are also often in the position of self-financing creative projects – and especially creative projects in their earliest stages. Teaching and performance work can create space for experimentation and research, and in some cases allow artists to develop projects that generate ideas and contribute to personal artistic development without necessarily having a final ‘product’.

Types of work undertaken in the last 24 months by survey respondents



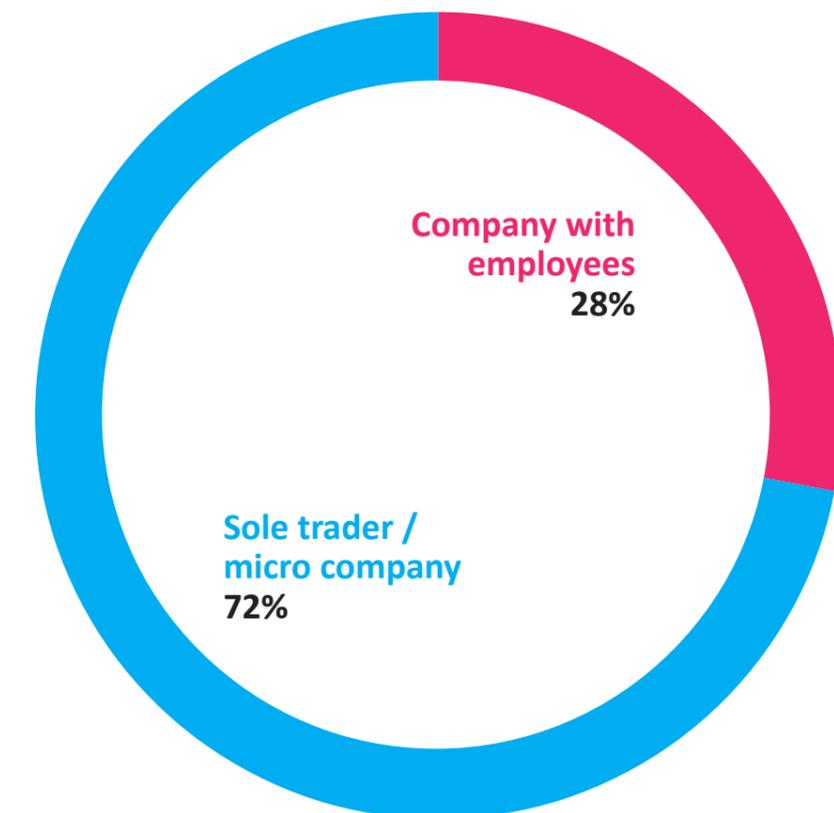
²⁴ As with dance, questions of longevity are very present in the circus field. Also as with dance, there are artists in circus who succeed in sustaining lifelong careers as full-time performers, whether by switching to lower impact disciplines or simply by toughing it out. Such figures are relatively rare, however, and it is more common for creative careers to have phases of specialisation.



Flexibility vs stability

Within this flexible paradigm artists usually carry the status of sole trader or run their work through a not-for-profit entity / micro company with no employees. In our survey, 72% of respondents were working in this mode.

Under what status do you conduct most of your work?



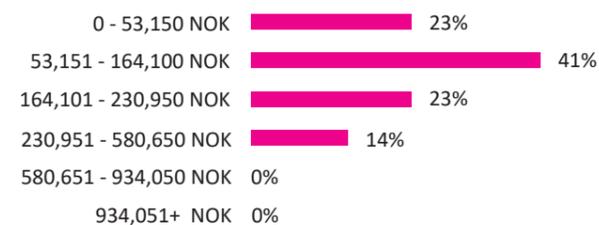
At the same time, artists are quick to form companies – or working coalitions – that serve as a front or identity for an artistic project without necessarily being incorporated. Combined with the high mobility of artists, the ephemerality of projects, and the tendency of artistic groups to contain individuals of different nationalities, this blurs the lines of what is and isn't a ‘company’, what is and is not ‘Norwegian’, and which groups can



and cannot be considered 'active' in the circus field. Nonetheless we counted upwards of twenty artistic groups that have been at least somewhat active in the last 24 months and that have a strong connection to Norway or Norwegian artists.

The final part of this picture is that flexibility is traded against stability. The freedom to take on disparate roles, to initiate personal projects, and to work independently generally comes at the cost of a lower income.

Income (NOK / converted to NOK) of survey respondents working as sole traders / micro companies in the previous financial year



While in our interviews we generally found that artists were comfortable with their lives, and had chosen to make this trade off, we would like to note that it is a situation that makes it more likely individuals will cycle out of the field as they age and develop greater financial commitments, and that this issue, which is widespread across the arts, is more acute in the circus field given low levels of institutional support. Improving income for artists in the field would help to build a stronger foundation for the future and raise the amount of time that could be spent on artistic work.



Making work

Circus artists are usually trained as the creators of their own work – or at least this orientation is more common than in dance and other contemporary performance forms.²⁵ There are some opportunities to work as an 'interpreter' – mostly by joining projects headed by larger companies or by crossing over into the dance field – but in the majority of cases artistic companies are seeking collaborators who can participate in a shared devising process. In the second report published as part of Project Miroir, an ongoing investigation into professional training in the circus arts, FEDEC - the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools surveyed employers in the circus field and found that 'creativity' and 'adaptability' were considered the two most prized attributes – more important than an exceptional level of technical ability.²⁶

While models of collective creation remain the norm, there is also now a growing emphasis on training dramaturgs and directors who specialise in working with circus. In 2016, the school Circomedia in Bristol launched the first MA in Directing for Circus, and there have been a number of masterclasses, courses and other initiatives with a similar focus. One project in the Nordic region has been CARE - Circus Arts Research Exchange, which ran 2013-2015 with support from the Creative Europe programme, and involved circus directors from Sweden, Norway, Finland, France, and the Czech Republic.

Whatever the composition of the creative team, creation periods in circus are often very long – because the intensity of the practice places hard limits on

²⁵ For more on this topic see Tomi Purovaara's book *Conversations on Circus Teaching*, which collects fourteen interviews with circus pedagogues from six countries.

²⁶ Herman, Zita, *Analyse des Compétences Clés des Jeunes Artistes de Cirque Professionnels* (FEDEC, 2009), p.28.



how much physical work an artist can perform in one session, because the acquisition of new technical skills (for instance, working with a new piece of equipment) is time-consuming, and because artists have to piece together their schedules as they juggle multiple projects. It is further slowed down by the logistical work of raising money, finding residency space, managing the creative team, and so on, which many groups do without the aid of a producer.

But while they are long these creation periods are usually not continuous – rather they are broken up into blocks of a few weeks at a time, with residencies in multiple spaces in multiple countries. A company might do ten days in Belgium, two weeks in Denmark, a month in France, a week again in Finland, and so on, all spread out over the course of a year.

This international way of working is facilitated by the make-up of companies – which, reflecting the international student bodies at circus schools, frequently bring together artists of different nationalities – and is underwritten by the infrastructure of the field itself, which has evolved to be highly interconnected. At an informal level, virtually every circus creation is an international cooperation project.

Working internationally

Respondents to our open survey had undertaken **90 artistic residencies** in the last 24 months. These residencies took place in **14 countries**, and at **71 sites**, including Cirkör LAB in Stockholm, Cirko Center in Helsinki, Archaos - Pôle National des Arts du Cirque Méditerranée in Marseille, Latitude 50 in Marchin, the Théâtre National in Brussels, Le Volcan - Scène nationale du Havre in Le Havre, and Trafó in Budapest.

Sites in Norway included Blå Grotte in Fredrikstad, Bærum Kulturhus, the Circus Village in Oslo / Sandvika, R.E.D. in Eina, and Nordic Black Theatre, Arkitektenes hus, and Rom for Dans in Oslo.

- In addition to creative residencies, survey respondents had used **61 spaces** in **14 countries** for regular training.
- **62%** of survey respondents had worked outside of Norway in the previous 24 months



Taking residencies around Europe allows artists to build personal relationships with key institutions and pull together a wide professional network. If they eventually return to a residency partner to give finished performances, or win support in the form of co-production, so much the better – and this is in fact an established pattern among residency sites that double as presenting venues such as La Brèche in Normandy, which produces the festival Spring, and the Provincial Domain Dommelhof in Belgium, which hosts the festival Theater op de Markt.

There are things to criticise in this system of international residencies – including the difficulty of travelling for artists with children or other care commitments – and indeed it is not the only approach. A small number of artists rent spaces – though this necessitates a sizeable production budget and is more feasible for disciplines like juggling that have lower technical demands. There are also some younger companies who have chosen to create and control their own space by returning to tented work. One such project with a Nordic connection is Circus I Love You, which features eight performers from five countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Norway and Sweden), although others in Europe include the celebrated French outfit Un Loup pour l’Homme and the Belgian ensemble Collectif Malunés.

Creation in Norway

The present international network has not sprung up by chance, but is the result of a concerted push for creation spaces that recognise the technical requirements of circus practice. France has long been a forerunner in providing such infrastructure,²⁷ but it has also been developed increasingly in countries including Belgium,

²⁷ In 2010 the Ministry of Culture nominated fourteen organisations as ‘pôles nationaux du cirque’ – regional bodies supporting the structuring of the circus field at the level of creation and diffusion.



Spain, Denmark and Portugal.

In Norway the main space for circus creation has been the Circus Village, which in the period 2007-2017 hosted residencies for 44 companies from fifteen countries, and organised a number of continuing professional development opportunities in the form of laboratories and seminars.

Creation at the Circus Village 2007-2017

Number of resident companies/artists	44
Notable international examples	Sirkus Aikamoinen (FI), Cahin Caha (FR), Magmanus (SE), Ilona Jänti (FI), Circus Kathmandu (NP).
Number of laboratories focused on creation	11
Notable examples	Juggling the Arts (2011), Directing Contemporary Circus (2013), Pair Acrobatics (2013), Experimental Rigging and Contemporary Circus (2014)

The impact of these opportunities for creative research has been wide-ranging. At the Experimental Rigging laboratory, Rudi Skotheim Jensen developed some of the ideas that would later inform the production *Elven og Havet*. The Finnish artist Aino Ihanainen, who was in residence at the Village in 2012, and participated in a Directing Contemporary Circus lab organised by the Village in Reykjavík in 2013, developed a line of work that would later inspire and evolve into the Cirkus Cirkör production *Knitting Peace*.

A newer player in the landscape of creation spaces is R.E.D. - Residency Eina Danz, which opened in 2012 in a converted farmstead in Eina. The centre's main barn space was equipped with rigging points during a renovation in 2015, and residents to-date have included



the circus artists/companies Foot in Face, KompaniTO, Eivind Øverland and Lalla la Cour, Hege Eriksdatter Østefjells, and Cirkus Xanti. In 2018, R.E.D. was acknowledged as a competence centre for dance with a speciality in interdisciplinary work – and particularly combinations of dance with circus and film.

A number of respondents to our open survey had done creation work in theatres and other spaces in Norway, including Blå Grotte, Nordic Black Theatre, and Rom for Dans. Overall we feel that the possibilities for creation in Norway are improving and diversifying, and that this is slowly having an impact on opportunities for the presentation of work.

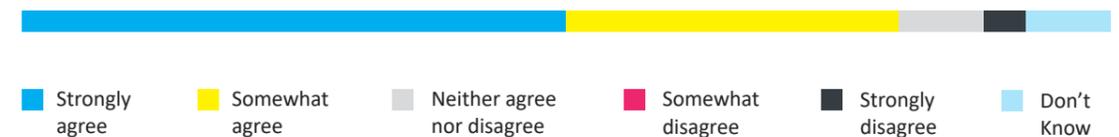
However, there is still work to be done in this area, and it is important to recognise that, internationally, many circus centres are multi-purpose facilities that also provide space for everyday training, run masterclasses and professional development opportunities, and participate in international exchange projects. In doing so, they draw communities of practitioners around them. It is a permanent space of this kind, and its attendant community, which Norway now lacks.



5. Spaces for training and creation – building exchange and community

Norway needs a **permanent space** for circus training, presentation and creation. The provision of such a facility would boost the number of artists basing themselves in Norway and increase the flow of international visitors.

‘I would be more likely to base myself in Norway if suitable spaces were available for training and creation.’



For a circus artist the ability to train is a basic need. As with dance, the practice is physically demanding to the extent that it requires constant maintenance of physical condition. Most artists have stories of training in unusual locations – hiring sports halls, or rigging their equipment in the woods – but these are stop-gap measures and can be expensive, technically restrictive, seasonally dependent, or difficult to coordinate on a consistent basis. The ad hoc solution that one artist brings into play will also not necessarily work for another: there is an extreme technical diversity in the circus field, and the different skills require different equipment, different rigging, and different dimensions when it comes to height and floorspace. This technical diversity also means that, compared to theatre groups, it is harder for circus companies to self-fund spaces or to form small collectives that jointly develop facilities, pay to insure them, heat them in the winter, and so on.

Yet if artists are the lifeblood, then a training space is the heart: wherever else they circulate, artists will always return there. As we have already pointed out, the availability of space for open training is the most important factor in the decision of where artists choose to base themselves, followed by ‘access to community / creative environment’ and ‘availability of space for residency / creation’. 81% of respondents to our survey either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that a training and creation space would make them more likely to base themselves in Norway.



The benefits of a training and creation space encompass more than the physical practices it enables. A space has a multiplier effect. One interviewee described it as a “work network”, explaining how a dedicated space facilitates both the creation of work (through collaboration, showing work informally, receiving feedback, etc) and the sharing of jobs and opportunities (“If I have a job I can’t take on myself I can pass it on there”).

At present, Norway is not without spaces that can be used for training and/or creation. In Oslo, Sirkuspunkt organise open training sessions at the gym of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, though this is available only in a pair of two-hour slots each weekend. In Trondheim, the juggling community has access to the sports complex Nidelvhallen when classes end or in spaces between, and during summer closing. Culture schools in Fredrikstad, Trondheim and other areas have teaching facilities that artists have made use of, but in these cases the primary function is teaching – any additional access has to happen around the edges of an existing schedule. In some cases, schools also conduct their circus classes in multi-purpose buildings – they share access and can’t leave equipment rigged between sessions, and often have lower ceilings which allow only limited aerial work and preclude some disciplines.

“ For me it’s very important to have other artists around me so we can motivate each other for training, for creating and doing small shows or participating in open stages, or for just being part of an arts community in general.

Naomi Bratthammer



As several interviewees pointed out, if training is only available on very restricted, or unpredictable hours, then it becomes hard to schedule training alongside other working commitments (which are themselves likely to be irregular).

Some other options exist. There are two converted barn spaces that have the facilities for circus creation – R.E.D., which we mentioned in the previous section, and Glasslåven, an arts space in Gran. The multidisciplinary nature of these projects makes an important contribution to the artistic development of the circus field, but, once again, these are spaces that must meet many demands and that are not accessible for general training. The Circus Village has operated as a full-purpose space for training and creation, but has lacked the support to remain open outside the summer months.

In many ways, this situation is familiar from other countries. As a circus scene grows, more and more existing infrastructure is pulled into partial service – theatres while dark, schools and gymnasiums outside of busy hours, private rentals, and so on – until a tipping point is reached and a permanent space for training, creation or both is founded. Such a process led to the foundation of sites including La Central del Circ in Barcelona, opened in the Parc del Fòrum in 2011; the arts complex Subtopia on the outskirts of Stockholm, inaugurated in 2002 and now host, in the halls of Cirkus Cirkör, to an open training programme operated by Manegen, Sweden’s national development body for circus, variety and street performance; and the Cirko – Centre for New Circus in Helsinki, which since 2011 has operated as a purpose-built circus space at the heart of the new cultural quarter in Suvilahti district.



La Central del Circ

Opening its doors in 2011, La Central del Circ is a 3000m² purpose-built circus facility located at the Parc del Fòrum in Barcelona. Alongside managing its training, rehearsal and presentation spaces, La Central has been active in a number of international cooperation projects and networks. Current initiatives include CIRCollaborative Tools, an Erasmus+ funded project exploring the use of digital tools in circus creation, and the international project Circus Incubator, which aims to investigate the commonalities between entrepreneurial thinking and experimental creation.

While we must look abroad for examples of permanent structures, the idea of founding a similar project in Norway is hardly new. In fact, more than a decade ago two separate studies envisioned such a space in the form of a new training hall in Oslo.

A circus hall for Oslo

In 2005, the Project Development Group for a New Circus Hall at Hausmania (PUG) was established. In 2006 it published a plan to build a new permanent circus building in Hausmania, but ultimately the project did not go forward. The plans for a circus building were shelved and the site became the film and theatre centre Vega Scene.



In 2008 a second study, launched by Sirkunst and managed by Håvve Fjell, assessed the potential of converting the Borggata 5 building into a circus centre, but found the space afforded limited options and would have required an expensive floor excavation to create the necessary height for aerial disciplines.

In the decade plus since these plans were published, the fundamental case for a training space has strengthened as the Norwegian scene has grown and as circus has flourished as a contemporary art form.

Beyond its importance to the working lives of circus practitioners, and its potential to increase the number of Norwegian artists basing themselves in the country, we believe a dedicated space for training, presentation and creation would have a number of other beneficial effects.

1 Attracting international visitors and residents

A training and creation space would not only make Norway more attractive as a base for Norwegian artists, but also draw an influx of international visitors, some of whom might choose to stay. Such a phenomenon can be seen in Stockholm, where the existence of a small number of key factors, including the ready availability of training space, has made the city attractive to artists from around the world.

2 Making circus facilities and artists available to other art forms

Having a circus community in Norway would also provide a pool of performers with exceptional physical abilities to inspire and refresh other forms. There have already been some small signs of this in the country. In 2003 the Oslo-based dance outfit Zero Visibility made the piece *It's only a rehearsal*



with the French acrobat Dimitri Jourde.²⁸ A breakthrough work for the company, the piece has had more than a hundred performances, playing in prestigious venues and festivals in London, New York, Edinburgh and Sydney. It is still in repertoire and was last performed in 2016.

3 Deepening research and providing space for masterclasses and professional development

To date, a number of masterclasses, laboratories and seminars have been offered in Norway – through independent organisers, and within the frames of Circus Village and Merge Norge. A permanent space would provide an opportunity to build on this work, as well as to join international cooperation projects focused on higher level training and research-based practice.

For these reasons, we think that the foundation of a permanent space for training and creation in Norway is the single most important step that can be taken to kick-start a higher level of artistic work in the country. It is the missing link in the infrastructure of the field and the main roadblock that stands between Norwegian circus and a growing market for artistic work at home and abroad.

²⁸ Typifying a hybridised approach, Jourde is a graduate of the national circus school in France, CNAC, who has worked equally with leading circus creators (Yoann Bourgeois, Zimmermann & de Perrot, Compagnie MPTA) and choreographers (Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, François Verret).





6. The market for circus – audiences and presenters in Norway and overseas

The **market** for circus is **growing** at home and abroad. A diverse array of Norwegian venues are programming circus, though opportunities to tour remain limited. As a cultural export, circus benefits from its universality and the proliferation of dedicated festivals in Europe.

Audiences for circus in Norway are as yet fairly modest, but have the potential for growth that builds on the foundation of the last ten years. Some culture houses in the country are already supporters, programming international work by companies such as Circo Aereo, WHS, Race Horse Company, and Gravity & Other Myths, as well as Norwegian companies like Det lille mekansike loppesirkuset and Cirkus Xanti. Festivals such as NonstopFestivalen in Moss, Bergen International Festival, PIT festival in Porsgrunn, Harstad's Arctic Arts Festival, and Høstscena in Ålesund have also programmed companies from France, Sweden, Canada and Germany alongside Norwegian work.

In interviews for this report, artists had varying opinions about the existing audience for circus in Norway – ranging from those who felt the traditional image of circus is still overpowering, to those who felt optimistic about growing levels of awareness. One factor that may account for these different viewpoints are regional inconsistencies – areas such as Oslo, Bærum, Tromsø, Fredrikstad and Trondheim, which have broader bases of circus activity, have built greater awareness among audiences.

Several interviewees also spoke about the impact of the Swedish company Cirkus Cirkör, who have toured quite extensively in Norway through the culture house network. Cirkör have played an important role in updating the image of circus, and have built up a significant following in the country. From another perspective, some artists interviewed felt this replaced one narrow definition with another – and that audiences expected all circus to be in the 'Cirkör style'.

The fact that contemporary circus is relatively little known in Norway, and has no 'blockbuster' companies, can be considered both a weakness and a strength. On the one hand it can mean artists are prejudged according to outdated misconceptions, and puts the artists in the position of being de facto 'ambassadors' for their art form (a responsibility that some find restrictive). On the other, it means there is space for a broad field composed



of a diverse array of small players, who have, in a way, the advantage of surprise and the possibility to shape perceptions. As one interviewee put it: “The power to define is absolutely there if people want it.”

An adaptable form

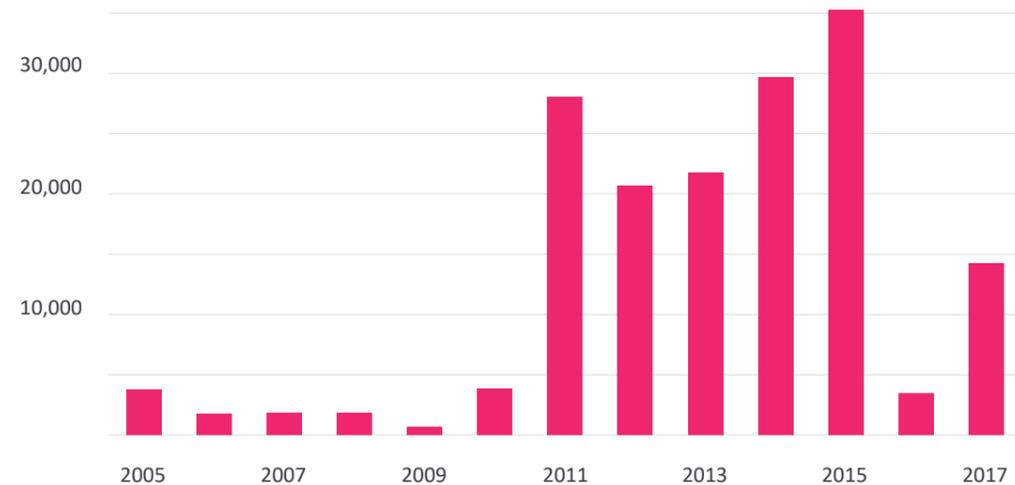
Looking at the market for circus in Norway, there is currently a disparity between work for children and work for adults / general audiences. Work for young audiences can have a surprisingly large reach. A recent example is Naomi Bratthammer’s performance *Med min egen skygge*, presented by Barnas Musikkteater, which in 2017 went on an eight-week tour that played to around 8000 children aged five and under. The piece appeared in schools, theatres, and multidisciplinary spaces such as Tou Scene in Stavanger. One memorable performance was given in a swimming hall in Kristiansand: “We rigged from the ten-metre diving board and then they lowered the water level in the pool. We had the kids run with us through the swimming hall and then I climbed the tissu and did my final piece to ‘In the Hall of the Mountain King’, dropping into the water at the end.”

The Cultural Rucksack programme has also created significant opportunities for circus artists to present their work in Norway. Taking only the figures from projects selected by Scenekunstbruket, there have been over 1200 circus performances playing to more than 165,000 people in the thirteen-year period 2005-2017, with the number of performances generally increasing over time.²⁹ As one interviewee put it, “If I didn’t do the Rucksack, I wouldn’t be able to live in Norway.”

²⁹ Figures taken from an analysis of Scenekunstbruket’s database: <https://www.scenekunstbruket.no/statistikk>
For our edited list see: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/15s0kdquED3l0n679DFezkt7PGuRF9ff00DEq_VNpQGA/edit?usp=sharing (sheet ‘Scenekunstbruket - Circus touring 2005-2017’)



Audience numbers for circus performances programmed through Scenekunstbruket



Clearly this is an important market for artists – one that sows the seeds of future interest among young audiences, and one that circus may be uniquely fit to address given the effectiveness of “concrete” performances, the desire to present a “wide range of cultural expressions”, and the need to reach children for whom Norwegian is not a first language.³⁰ But the relative size of this market also plays into the misconception that circus is ‘for children’ – an outdated and restrictive view that does not reflect the breadth of work now being made. In our open survey, more than half of the respondents were making work not restricted to a specific age group. The market for adult work in Norway is challenged by the rigidity of the system of state

³⁰ Christophersen, Catharina; Breivik, Jan-Kåre; Homme, Anne D.; and Rykkja, Lise H., *The Cultural Rucksack: A National Programme for Arts and Culture in Norwegian Schools* (Kulturrådet, 2015), p. 10, 27, 50.



theatres, but interest has been demonstrated by projects like the Circus Village, which, with a programme that includes performances for adults or all ages, has played to more than 40,000 people in Norway since 2009.

Internationally, we see that circus is reaching broad demographic audiences. In 2015, as part of the European project [Circus] Work Ahead! there was a study coordinated by the University of Poitiers' Emilie Salaméro that examined ticketing data and conducted interviews with audiences from festivals in Denmark, France, Belgium and the Czech Republic. It found that just 11.4% of those surveyed were families with children.³¹ In France, a 2008 report showed that 53% of the total audience for circus was represented by the age ranges 25-34 and 35-44.³²

While detailed audience data is not available in Norway for the circus field, we are able to look at the presentation of work by venues and festivals over a short period in order to get an idea of how and where work is being shown.

³¹ Salaméro, Emilie, 'La diversité des regards portés sur les formes contemporaines de cirque: les spectateurs de cirque à l'échelle de quatre territoires européens' ([Circus] Work Ahead!, 2015), p. 22.

³² Babé, Laurent, Les publics du cirque: Exploitation de la base d'enquête du DEPS « Les pratiques culturelles des Français à l'ère du numérique - Année 2008 » (REPERES DGCA, 2010), p. 3.

Skogen, *Knekke Greine* ▶
Photo: Love Kjellsson

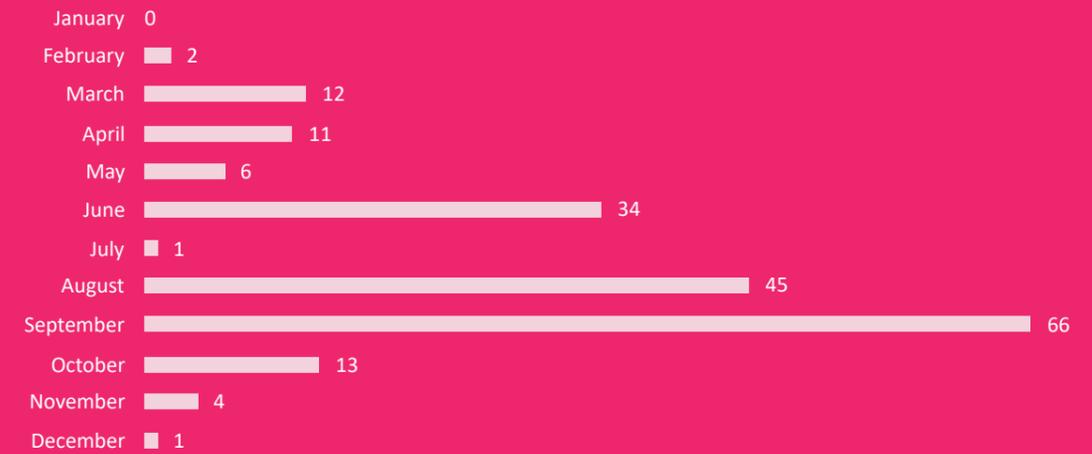


Presentation of circus productions in Norway, June 2016 - June 2018

- Over the two-year period 14 June 2016 - 13 June 2018 there were 195 public performances of 50 artistic productions. 35 artistic groups showed work at 34 presenting venues or festivals.³³
- The number of performances is significantly higher in the summer months, which is a reflection of the importance of festivals as presenters.
- Overall, 67% of performances were presented as part of a festival, and 33% outside of a festival context.
- While the total number of presenters is encouraging, more than half programmed only one circus production during the two-year period.
- The average number of performances per production is low – 3.9. 28% of productions had only one performance in the two-year period, and 80% had five or fewer performances. The only productions with more than ten performances were Cirkus Cirkör's *Limits* (25 performances), Cirkus Xanti's *Sirkus Nysgjerrig* (23), and Cirkus Xanti's *Bastard* (18).

³³ These figures include only public performances of professional productions; school shows and private performances are not included. The data itself is gathered from a combination of sources including this report's own survey, Sceneweb's database, and a review of the records of key venues and festivals. We feel it is useful to give a general overview, but caution that it is unlikely to be fully comprehensive. The data set is available here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/15s0kdquED3l0n679DFezkt7PGuRF9ff00DEq_VN-pQGA/edit?usp=sharing (Sheet 'Presentation of Circus Productions in Norway: June 2016 - June 2018')

Number of performances by month



Number of performances by region

Akershus	59	Østfold	9
Buskerud	4	Rogaland	5
Hedmark	2	Telemark	10
Hordaland	17	Troms	13
Møre og Romsdal	1	Trøndelag	1
Nordland	1	Vest-Agder	1
Oppland	1	Vestfold	7
Oslo	64		

* Regions not shown had no performances.



The universality of circus

It is often said that circus is a universal and accessible art form. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that circus has the capacity to be ‘accessible’ but also to be disruptive, incendiary or deeply challenging – a multitude of approaches are within its effective range. In this flexibility, it is the same as music, visual art, or any other mature art form: the character of the finished work, and the appropriate audience for that work, rests heavily on the choices the artist makes.

However, in saying that circus is accessible what is really being expressed is an instinct for how it communicates – through the body, through action – and for how powerful that kind of communication can be. Historically, circus played an outsized role in defining popular culture, while the new circus movement, particularly in France, was linked to the upheavals of 1968 and to the desire to democratise culture. As Marine Cordier, a lecturer at Université Paris Ouest Nanterre, writes in an essay that describes these early companies of the *nouveau cirque*: “In their eyes circus is by nature a popular art: because it privileges physical prowess rather than the [dramatic] text, it is in effect perceived as a language accessible to everyone. Above all, the use of the tent went hand in hand with the ambition to address a large public: as a transportable performance space, the tent can go to places that are geographically and socially diverse, and can reach isolated neighbourhoods or isolated rural areas, making it possible to bring culture to those places where cultural facilities are absent.”³⁴

Tented work, and this ideal of the mobile cultural space, is still an important component of circus performance, and arguably is undergoing a small resurgence. Norway

³⁴ Cordier, Marine, ‘Acteurs et enjeux de la démocratisation culturelle: le cas du cirque (1970-2010)’: <http://chmcc.hypotheses.org/530>



has two traditional circuses, Cirkus Agora and Cirkus Arnardo,³⁵ and in the contemporary domain Cirkus Xanti toured in a tent in 2001 and 2007 before founding the Circus Village in 2007 and touring it 2009-2018. The Nordic project Circus I Love You is touring France, Sweden and Lithuania through 2018. In France, a number of companies create and tour work in their own tents, and the field as a whole has taken steps to guard the ‘specificity’ of these arenas. The cultural venue La Villette in Paris has had an *espace chapiteaux* since 1990 – a 4200m² space it uses for residencies and performances – and in 2016 created a new three-month festival there, *Villette en Cirques*.

Without the limitations of having to compete for space in theatres, tents can facilitate longer runs for shows, and can appeal to audiences who wouldn’t normally approach a theatre or institutional building. For artists it is often also an aesthetic choice. As a space developed for circus, the tent gives technical freedom, and permits companies to play in the round. A number of artists have also developed projects that reflect on the history, mythos or technical structure of the *chapiteau* – ranging from Les Arts Sauts, who designed and fabricated a series of custom tents tailored to their large-scale aerial performances (with audiences seated in reclining chairs, easier to watch the action overheard), to Cie 111’s *Géométrie de Caoutchouc*, in which a tent is manipulated as a gigantic puppet, breathing, lifting and stretching before rising to hover over the heads of the audience like an inscrutable god.

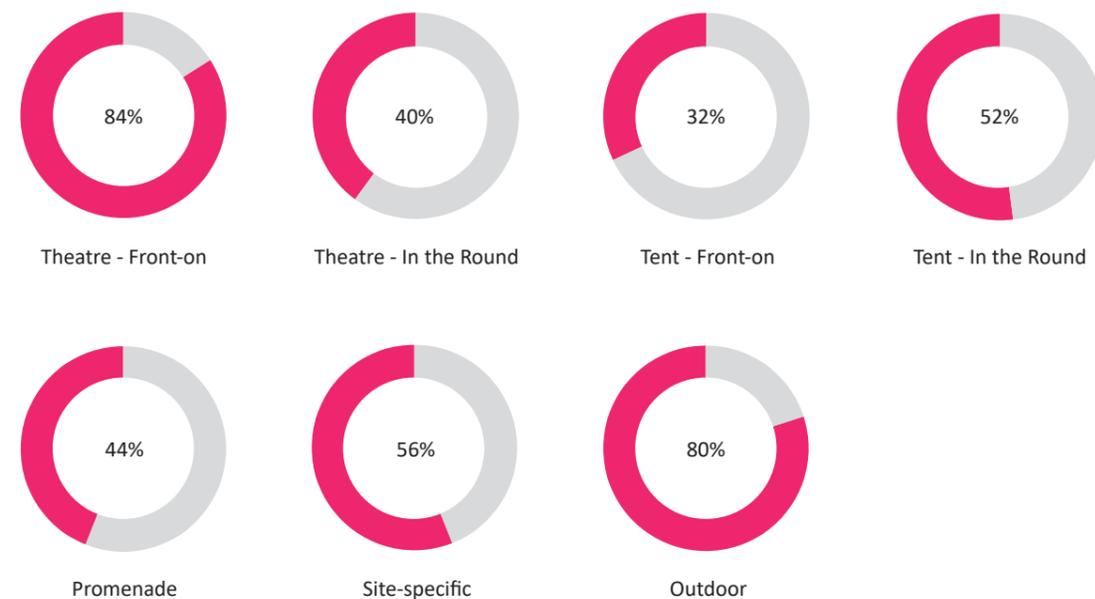
Tents, however, are expensive to maintain and tour, and a large amount of circus work now takes place in theatres – as well as outside and in a variety of site-specific modes. Respondents to our open survey had created work for a wide range of settings:

³⁵ A third traditional circus, Cirkus Zorba, ceased operating in 2017.



Spaces performed in during the last 24 months

In which settings have you performed your work in the last 24 months?



This variety of venues speaks to the flexibility of circus, as well as to the willingness of artists to develop bespoke performances – perhaps in search of a creative challenge or a unique market, but usually both. The world circus oeuvre now includes a performance developed for cemeteries (Circa's *Depart*); a piece sited, along with its audience, in the back of a truck (Circ'ombelico's *DA/FORT*); and a show for swimming pools (Salla Hakanpää & WHS' *Dive*). Three examples with a Norwegian connection are Tractor Circus, where the performance takes place around heavy machinery borrowed from local farms; Skogen's *Knekke Greine*, developed as an immersive performance for woodlands and forests; and Acting for Climate's *Into the Water*, a piece which draws inspiration from the water cycle and which will premiere



Skogen, *Knekke Greine*

Inspired by ecological science and Nordic myths, Skogen's *Knekke Greine* takes audiences on a forest walk, led by a "confused and superb" guide, to break down barriers between spectator and participant. The performance is tailored to each woodland and region it is performed in.

in 2019 on the stage of Hawila, a wooden tall ship.³⁶

General-purpose theatres are of course a major outlet for circus performance, but in some cases lack the technical specifications to host work. While there can be problems with the available height or general dimensions, installation of rigging and anchor points is a relatively inexpensive way to improve the readiness of venues for hosting circus performances – and many theatres have found it worth the effort. In its final analysis of

³⁶ And it's not the first Norwegian project connected to sailing. Zirk Mir's efforts to sail and perform around the world were documented by NRK in the 2014 documentary series *Sirkusseilerne*: <https://tv.nrk.no/serie/sirkusseilerne>



Circus Evolution, a project to build a touring network for circus in the UK, Crying Out Loud / The Audience Agency found that circus can contribute to a broader and more varied programme at venues and in doing so add more points of entry for audience members.³⁷ In Finland, the festival Circus Ruska has partnered with Tampere Theatre Festival, bringing a young adult audience that the traditional performing arts struggle to reach. Marta Almirall Elizalde, the director of Barcelona's La Mercè festival, programmes circus performances as a way of reaching the 14-18 year-old age bracket – one of the “most difficult” to programme for.³⁸

Dedicated circus festivals have also been able to build audiences specific to the circus form. The [Circus] Work Ahead! study found that 44.9% of those surveyed were motivated to attend festival performances by ‘the taste for circus’ – the strongest consideration ahead of other factors such as festival marketing (27.8%) or media coverage (7.7%).³⁹

There have also been a number of large-scale initiatives that have taken up circus as a tool to reach wide and diverse audiences, and in recent years circus has played an important role in the programmes of several designated European Capitals of Culture. Umeå's 2014 tenure led to the creation of a new ten-day festival of contemporary circus – one of the largest events of

³⁷ Mills, Penny, *Circus Evoluton One & Circus Evoluton: The Bridge, Audience Profles Final Reportng* (The Audience Agency, 2017)

³⁸ From an interview with Marta Almirall Elizalde for the European project CASA: <http://casa-circuits.eu/interview/marta-almirall-elizalde>

³⁹ Salaméro, Emilie, ‘La diversité des regards portés sur les formes contemporaines de cirque: les spectateurs de cirque à l'échelle de quatre territoires européens’ ([Circus] Work Ahead!, 2015), p. 11.



the entire cultural programme. The 2013 designation of Marseille likewise saw the creation of a lively circus strand which later consolidated as the Biennale Internationale des Arts du Cirque, a month-long event that in 2017 attracted an audience of 100,000. The cultural consultant Gérald Drubigny describes the value of circus in this context: “It is a training school for individuals, whether spectators or apprentices. Circus contributes to an individual's social education and integration by giving them a taste for effort, familiarising them with risk, promoting team work and cohesion, showcasing beautiful gestures and seeking harmony. It's an excellent apprenticeship in European citizenship.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Gérald Drubigny, ‘European Capitals of Culture and Circus Arts #2’, published by Circostrada. <http://www.circostrada.org/sites/default/files/ressources/files/cs-publication-3-en-5.pdf>



Circus as a cultural export

Number of festivals dedicated to circus and street arts in Europe	104
Notable examples	Circusstad (Rotterdam, NL), Theater op de Markt (Dommelhof, BE), Mirabilia Festival (Fossano, IT), CircusFest (London, UK)
Number of multidisciplinary festivals programming street arts and circus in Europe	266
Notable examples	Festival d'Avignon (FR), Edinburgh International Festival (UK), Helsinki Festival (FI), La Mercè Festival (Barcelona, ES), Stockholm Culture Festival (SE), Letní Letná (Prague, CZ)
Number of circus and street arts companies in Europe	5000+

The growth of activity in the European field has been accompanied by a growing market for the presentation of work. Alongside programming within regular venue seasons, there has been a proliferation of festivals featuring circus – either in the form of newly created events, or established arts presenters leaning into programming the form. Circostrada's Hubble project, directed over the three-year period 2014-2017 and collecting data from thirteen participating countries, found 104 festivals that were dedicated to circus art and a further 266 that included circus and street arts in their programmes. Such festivals exist at a range of scales but bring the participation of cross-disciplinary cultural venues including La Villette in Paris (producing the festival Hautes Tensions), the Roundhouse in London (CircusFest), Vooruit in Ghent (Smells Like Circus), and Les Halles de Schaerbeek in Brussels (Hors Piste).

Performing overseas is regular practice for circus artists, but in a large, low population country like Norway, where



the logistics of national touring are challenging, it can be a necessary step in building a sustainable career. In this respect, Norway is perhaps comparable to Finland. In 2016, 37% of Finnish contemporary circus performances took place outside of the country. Alongside a number of European territories such as France, Germany, Sweden and the Czech Republic, third countries such as China, Canada and the United States all featured prominently in the statistics.⁴¹ Such touring is being supported strategically at a number of levels – from the Finnish-Chinese cooperation project Circus Bridge, to the Finlandsinstitutet and Institut français de Suède's new pilot of a joint annual award to support French-Finnish circus companies to tour in Sweden.

At present, Norwegian artists are already active in other countries, but in many cases relocate themselves in the process. By renewing their connection to Norway but maintaining their international outlook, these artists have the potential to help Kulturrådet achieve its goals around strengthening international cooperation.⁴² There has already been some support in this line. In 2013 and 2015, the Circus Village ran major projects in Iceland and Portugal, playing to audiences of around 10,000 each time. In 2018 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Performing Arts HUB selected Cirkus Xanti as one of ten companies to exhibit at PAMS - Performing Arts Market Seoul, and the showcase CINARS in Montreal.

While North America and Asia are growing markets

⁴¹ Figures taken from CircusInfo Finland's annual statistics. Available over a ten-year period, these also show a growth in the export market over time – both in absolute and relative terms. <http://sirkusinfo.fi/en/circus-in-finland/circus-statistics/contemporary-circus-performances-in-finland-and-abroad>

⁴² Objective 3.5 in Kulturrådet's *Strategi 2018–2022 Norsk kulturråd (Kulturrådet, 2018)*, p. 4. <https://www.kulturradet.no/documents/10157/882de948-c476-463f-9dc5-ee7cb0aa25d9>



for circus work, more significant is the large and accessible market on Norway's doorstep. Northern Europe is becoming a centre of circus activity, and the other Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, are leaders in the international arena. Norway can gain considerable advantages by tapping fully into the Nordic infrastructure which it participated in building. Alongside a large network of residency sites, festivals and research projects, this includes Subcase, an annual event dedicated to promoting new Nordic projects that is one of the most influential and well-attended showcases of its kind, welcoming some 300 programmers and producers to Stockholm each year.



Cirkus Xanti's *Bastard* ▶
at the Circus Village in
Sarpsborg, 2011.
Photo: Stefania Rota.



7. Recommendations – challenges and opportunities

The circus field in Norway is at a **tipping point**. The circus form itself represents an opportunity for Kulturrådet to fulfil its strategic objectives. While the pieces are in place for continued growth, the field needs targeted support to create a stable future.

The Norwegian field has a growing number of highly trained artists who are involved in a wealth of creative projects in Norway and throughout Europe. It has a foundation of past activities to build on, a large market on its doorstep, and the interest of presenters and supporters from across the arts.

We believe that the field is building momentum, but that more can be done to ensure that Norway is an attractive environment in which circus artists can work and create. The sector itself has its own work to do in terms of advocacy and structuring, but we also believe that Kulturrådet has an important role to play in identifying development priorities, in providing leadership within the larger arts ecology, and in supporting the individuals and companies who are driving the development of the sector. Here we present three broad recommendations for consideration.

1. Increase Kulturrådet's support to circus arts and consider the creation of a dedicated fund

Kulturrådet has been an important funder and contributor to the success of the circus field, but circus currently receives a small amount of the total cultural budget. Over recent years this has not grown in relation to the number of artists, nor with respect to recent increases of the total amount available through the Kulturfond. At present there are also no companies in receipt of regular/structural funding. This overweights the field towards independent actors when a balanced sector needs a broader mix of institutions and free actors who can draw on each other for expertise and new ideas. The support structures that do exist – such as Cirkus Xanti / the Circus Village, Merge Norge, and Sirkunst – are vulnerable without a higher level of support or regular/structural funding.

We believe an increase of support to the circus field would help to secure the future of the sector, while also fulfilling Kulturrådet's own ambition to “stimulate professional artistic work” by creating a “good framework for artistic depth and further development” in the arts



field – an objective which recognises the importance of long-term, multi-annual support in building the stability and quality of artistic work.⁴³

Making a commitment to circus, perhaps in the form of a dedicated fund, would also bring Norway's institutions more closely into line with their equivalents around Europe. In France, circus affairs moved from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Culture and Communication in 1979, and in 2016 the art form received just under 12 million Euro of national funding.⁴⁴ Finland has had a circus category since 2009. In 2008, the Flemish government passed a Circus Decree, outlining a special budget for circus (2,328,000 Euro in 2017), which is expected to be renewed and reinforced later in 2018–19.⁴⁵ Arts Council Ireland first began to identify circus as an art form in 2005, and now has a special category for street arts, circus and spectacle. Other countries have begun to follow suit. Portugal announced a new funding division for circus and outdoor arts in May 2017, while special funds have recently been dedicated in Austria and Estonia.⁴⁶

⁴³ Kulturrådet, *Strategi 2018–2022 Norsk kulturråd* (Kulturrådet, 2018), p. 4. <https://www.kulturradet.no/documents/10157/882de948-c476-463f-9dc5-ee7cb0aa25d9>

⁴⁴ The Ministry for Culture dispensed 11,990,467 Euro in 2016. Regional funding accounted for an additional 5,943,700 Euro. Figures taken from the annual data published by Le Syndicat des Cirques et Compagnies de Création: <https://www.compagniesdecreation.fr/observatoire/donnees-chiffrees/donnees-annuelles/2016-aides-publiques-cirque.html>

⁴⁵ Figures taken from the special publication *Cirq'onstances: 10 Jaar Circusdecreet in Vlaanderen* (Circuscentrum, 2018), edited by Koen Allary, Julie Descamps, Mui-Ling Verbist, Maarten Verhelst, and Nele Vertriest, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Estonia opened a special cultural fund to support circus arts in 2016. Also in 2016, a new public funding scheme was opened in



The formalisation of circus as a category would send a clear message on the legitimacy of circus arts. It is also, we believe, a necessary step to support the structuring of an emerging field – one which faces the catch 22 of needing to establish itself to be eligible for long-term support while needing long-term support to properly establish itself. A relatively small strategic intervention has the potential to bring about a step-change in the maturation of the sector.

2. Support the development of a permanent space for circus training, presentation and creation in Norway

An earlier section of this report details two previous studies on the creation of a new circus space in Norway – the key piece of infrastructure which is currently missing from the field.

We believe that it is time to return to this question, and in doing so it would be wise to weigh a number of options. While there are several purpose-built circus spaces around the world, many more are converted at lower cost from factories, churches, warehouses, and other disused buildings. A recent possibility to emerge in this line is the former prison Botsfengselet in Oslo. While its future use is currently undecided, the state government and Oslo City are weighing the option of converting the structure into a multidisciplinary arts centre, and there are several spaces in the building, as well as in the wider compound, that might be suitable for development as a circus centre.

Opportunities of this kind actually emerge with some regularity but take significant planning and resources to capitalise on, and depend on the existence of institutional backers. We therefore recommend that Kulturrådet support the ambition to develop a permanent space in

Austria making 200,000 Euros available for circus creation.



Norway at the level of planning and feasibility, and that if necessary it play a role in brokering the connections and partnerships that would bring solidity to any plan.

In the meantime, the Circus Village can be seen both as a bridge to an eventual solution and as an integral part of any new space. An integrated system for creation/presentation could site the Village outside a permanent space during the off-season and use it to tour new productions in the summer.

The Village has tents, rigging, equipment, dance mats, and other assets to the value of around 2.5 million NOK which currently spend much of the year in storage, and which could form part of the foundation of a new permanent space. We recommend that Kulturrådet act to maintain the operation of the Village, while supporting the organisation itself to take on additional expertise and to establish itself more fully as an independent entity.

3. Build knowledge of circus art among institutions, programmers, and cultural agents

Kulturrådet has a strong and welcome commitment to building institutional knowledge concerning new artistic trends and movements. The commissioning of this report is an important step towards gathering information on contemporary circus, but it must filter down to decision making processes and instruments, including grant committees, before it can have an effect.

If knowledge of the circus field depends too much on institutional experience of processing applications, then this poses a number of problems in respect of small and emerging fields, including (i) artists not applying due to depressed expectations of success or eligibility, (ii) circus applications being assessed alongside proposals from fields which have benefited from significantly greater investment and infrastructure, and (iii) loss of the international dimension, which is uniquely critical in the circus field.

Ensuring that committee members and others



have adequate knowledge is not only a matter of strengthening decision making processes but also of preparing the Council for its ambition to be active in professional debates in the arts field.

The circus sector has its own advocacy work to do, but needs the support of Kulturrådet as a body that defends – and, inevitably, helps to define – artistic practice. We would like to see Kulturrådet champion the circus field in Norway and to take a leadership role in articulating a vision for its place in the arts ecology. Concretely, this might include:

- Reassessing the status of circus within the spending requirements placed on culture house budgets. At present, the ear-marking of funds gives culture houses limited flexibility to support circus work – and leads to a situation in which home-grown productions can lose out to large-scale international work.
- Reviewing and improving the capability of the culture house network to host circus performances, and ensuring that the technical requirements of circus are taken into account during the planning of new venues and centres.
- Ensuring the representation of the circus field at Kulturrådet's annual conference.

As a final point, we would like to see Kulturrådet staff join an international conversation with peers from equivalent bodies. The European network Circostrada hosts regular meetings between policy-makers within the frame of its Creative Europe project – to date there have been seven seminars involving participants from more than twenty countries. The next will be held in France in October 2019 as part of the international conference Fresh Circus. We encourage Kulturrådet to consider having a presence at this meeting.





Conclusion

We called this report The Rising Wave for a reason.

After more than two decades of concerted activity, the Norwegian field is now growing in size and diversity of professional experience. The artists we interviewed for this report were marked by a confidence and optimism for the future of circus art in Norway.

Like them, we believe that the Norwegian field has significant strengths – including its highly trained and internationally active artists, its extensive connections to networks and opportunities in Northern Europe, and the power of circus itself as a physical medium that can transcend cultural boundaries.

It has challenges as well. Among them are the need to build institutional knowledge, the absence of a permanent space for training, presentation and creation, and lower levels of funding compared to the other performing arts. For the most part these are challenges of structure and policy.

In spite of the resilience and versatility of the form, the thriving circus scenes in other countries did not happen by accident. Talented artists will always be at the centre of artistic work and creation, but they need institutional recognition and strategic support to grow in the long-term.

In the current environment, it is easy for artists to emerge and hard for them to stabilise. This is a common situation for newer art forms. Development is driven by determined actors until a tipping point is reached and they effect a major shift in attitudes throughout the art field. We see that in Norway this shift has begun, but we believe that it needs to accelerate in order to preserve the achievements of the past and secure the stage of the future.



Cultural budgets involve trade-offs between competing interests and diverse visions of how art can create cultural value. A balanced arts policy is one that recognises and supports different forms both for their aesthetic qualities and for the different nuanced contributions they make to the social good.

Part of circus' success story is that it attracts different individuals – artists who speak with a different voice, and the audiences who respond to it. In doing so, circus brings something new to the table. It expands the range of choice, and it inspires other art forms in ways that make the cultural field more diverse and heterogeneous. This can only be a good thing for audiences, artists and the world of ideas.



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