



CIRCUS DECREE IN FIGURES

Explanation of infographic Circus in Flanders



1	Introduction.....	3
2	Interpretation of the figures	3
2.1	In general	3
2.2	Youth Circus	4
2.3	Higher education	4
2.4	Teacher training	5
2.5	Creation	5
2.6	Organisation circus festival	6
2.7	International distribution of circus production	7
2.8	Nomadic tour	7
2.9	Promotion projects	8
2.10	Circus Centre	8
3	Inter-connection between sections of grant	9
3.1	Training versus Youth circus	9
3.2	Training versus Creation	9
3.3	Creation versus Festivals	9
3.4	Creation versus International distribution	10
3.5	Creation versus Nomadic tour	10
3.6	Circus Centre versus the rest	10



1 INTRODUCTION

Before 2009, the circus in Flanders enjoyed limited support for seven nomadic circuses. The Circus Decree introduced a stronger legal framework and extended the circus to newer forms of circus. So, with a baseline measurement from 2009 we would like to map the results of nine years of the Circus Decree. The decree dates from November 2008, but the tenth year of implementation, which is still ongoing, cannot be included in the measurement yet. We nevertheless believe that it is now an appropriate time to present data to the public.

The infographic is not intended to be a work of scientific value, but rather to offer a simple retrospective.

Flemish Minister of Culture, Sven Gatz, has chosen to keep the Circus Decree as a separate subsidy line for at least a few more years and wants to adapt it to the current context in which the Flemish circus operates today. In doing so, he shows that he considers this form of art and culture as an artistic product and also as a valuable (living) heritage and as a means of social development and empowerment in our very diverse society.

His decision not to include the Circus Decree in, for example, the Arts Decree is based on his conviction that a young, strongly-growing sector can also be vulnerable at the same time. A decree specifically for it can offer the necessary protective environment.

2 INTERPRETATION OF THE FIGURES

2.1 IN GENERAL

The starting point for the infographic is the Circus Decree. Only the resources earmarked for this line of funding were included in the infographic. All the figures are the averages of the annual totals in the 2009-2017 period. All subsidy channels that supported circus, such as the Decree on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy, the Participation Decree, the Arts Decree, provincial and municipal support, were not included. We want to sketch a picture of the Circus Decree itself, now that we are moving towards the tenth anniversary and an amendment to the Decree is on the agenda. Circus is gradually freeing itself from seeming oblivion and that is certainly due to a circus policy that has enjoyed a legislative framework since 2009. Between 2009 and 2018, opportunities were offered and seized with an excellent result: today the Flemish circus is being talked about far beyond our geographical boundaries.

The entire circus sector, and not just the subsidised areas, deserve a big compliment: thanks to their blood, sweat and tears, the Flemish circus has enjoyed a revival and today it is brimming with energy.



Each year, the circus budget was allocated in full. The median, the year 2013, had a budget of 2,279,000 Euros. In 2017, the budget available was 1,640,000 Euros for project-based support and 697,000 Euros for the Circus Centre.

2.2 YOUTH CIRCUS

Around 10% of the annual operating subsidy of the Circus Centre goes directly to youth circuses. This is for the basic support of affiliated youth circuses with a fixed annual activity that are involved in the Circus Centre's network of youth circuses. The budget is divided on the basis of the number of training hours that the youth circuses offer per week.

In addition to this 10% basic support for pedagogical activities, the Circus Centre naturally deploys many more resources that benefit youth circuses, such as a range of training courses for teachers, support for production groups that arise within the youth circuses, making materials available, networking at both national and international levels or developing contacts with higher education institutions. The deployment of resources and people for this is not included in the aforementioned 10%.

Youth circuses are not included in the current Circus Decree, yet their qualitative and quantitative growth is striking. That growth is first and foremost thanks to their own efforts and although they could not count on direct financial support from the Circus Decree, they were able to benefit from the attention and promotion that has been given to circus since the existence of the Circus Decree. It is striking how youth circuses managed to hold their own with limited financial resources. Unfortunately, they are sometimes obliged to introduce waiting lists, which makes it impossible for some young people to register. A pricing policy that focuses on 'circus for everyone', attention to social circus and artistic quality, professionalisation and so on, is putting youth circuses under pressure. The minister is well aware of this and wants to investigate whether an amended Circus Decree can also make some financial room for youth circuses.

2.3 HIGHER EDUCATION

The success of youth circuses also translates into good throughput to circus academies. The majority of grants for higher education go to young people who find their way to a circus academy after secondary education and who are on average 20 years old. But professional artists can also retrain or specialise and apply for a financial contribution. Over the past two years we have noticed a slight shift from mainly bachelor's degree courses to a combination of bachelor's courses and more specific course: a consequence of the evolution of the circus field. This is evidenced by the support in 2016 of two Flemish people for training in circus dramaturgy, a collaboration between the Centre national des arts du cirque (France) and the Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque (Brussels), and a technical training course for 'rigging'. These courses show that the field is developing and becoming more professional, whereby attention is being paid to the study and application of processes and to safety.



Nearly 35% of the subsidised students also turn up later in a creation file: they thus become circus makers themselves and remain active in the circus. The desire and drive of circus artists is often stronger than the financial reality that there is little money to be made from circus. What is also noteworthy is that it is mainly men who opt for a circus academy.

The subsidy is a contribution of up to a maximum of 80% of travel, subsistence and study costs. Travel expenses are generally not very high because most students with a grant travel to the neighbouring countries of The Netherlands and France. The Netherlands and France, with respectively 27 and 10 unique funded students in the course of the years, are followed by Canada (2), Sweden (2), Spain (2), Italy (1), Denmark (1), Russia (1), Ukraine (1), and Slovakia (1). In the latter cases, the students often attend highly specialised, thorough training courses for professional artists who have already come a long way. The courses pursued in The Netherlands and France are often, but not exclusively, bachelor degree courses. Most students go to The Netherlands, primarily to the Codarts training schools in Rotterdam or ACaPA in Tilburg.

In recent years, the circus budget has not been sufficient to grant the maximum subsidy for further education stipulated in the decree, with 2017 as the lowest point.

2.4 TEACHER TRAINING

The average age is clearly higher than for further education. These are students or artists who have already pursued another (circus) course and now additionally opt for a teacher-training course. The course with the most frequent number of funded students is that of the Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles.

The grant provides for a maximum 50% of the registration fees. this course has several drawbacks:

- high registration fees
- the course is not officially recognized and thus there is no officially recognized qualification
- full-time training for a full school year.

In addition, we subsidised (for the time being only once in 2016) a short-term teacher training course in social circus (8 Flemish participants), a collaboration between the Flemish (Circus Centre) and Dutch (Circomundo) network of youth circuses, which arose because of a considerable need for it.

In total, we subsidised the training of 26 students in the 2009-2017 period.

2.5 CREATION

Circus-makers feed the sector and define it with artistic vision and artistic research. Their productions fill festivals and cultural centres: without creation there would be no bookings, no performances and no audience.

Today, the Circus Decree provides subsidies for both organisations and individual creators. For the latter group, a maximum of 5,000 Euros per project applies. These are often starting artists who have



just graduated, who have embarked on their first modest project as a professional artist, but who have not yet established a structure. Of the 78 funded creations during the 2009-2017 period, 7 were by natural persons.

In recent years, significantly more subsidies have been allocated to creation than in the first years of the Circus Decree. That trend has a dual explanation:

- the vision of the Committee, which is followed by the policy: it considers creation very important and has carefully examined the relationship with other chapters of the decree (especially festivals) and has allocated relatively more subsidies to creation;
- the attention to circus in Flanders, and the growth related to that, which has had a stimulating and facilitating effect.

The average amount that goes to creation is low in relation to the total circus budget. A combination of factors may explain this:

- the financial uncertainty in creating a (large) performance;
- the artistic and administrative uncertainty of submitting a file;
- the reality of a small and young field of creators;
- a circus performance has a longer creative process;
- and tours with the same performance are longer than those in other art forms.

Large projects that have received at least 50,000 Euros in creation subsidies over the past nine years are:

- Collectif Malunés vzw [non-profit organisation]
- Nationaal Circus van Vlaanderen vzw [non-profit organisation] (Circus Ronaldo)
- Side-Show vzw [non-profit organisation]
- Circus Marcel vzw [non-profit organisation]

2.6 ORGANISATION CIRCUS FESTIVAL

Festivals that offer circus have been enjoying growing success in Flanders. Because of the audience they attract and the opportunities they offer to artists, they are a valuable chapter in the Circus Decree. In a difficult budgetary context, it is not always easy for the Minister and the Advisory Committee to make choices about the distribution of the subsidy amounts between the various chapters. Not awarding sufficient financial support to creations can have a blocking effect, but the allocation needs sufficient financial support to offer a place for creations.

The festivals that were subsidised between 2009 and 2017 are fairly well distributed throughout Flanders: Menen, Bruges, Roeselare, Kortrijk, Ghent, Aalst, Leuven, Antwerp, Borgerhout, Wilrijk, Mol, Hasselt, Neerpelt.

Festivals often take on a role as co-producer and in this way contribute, financially or otherwise, to the creation of performances. Contributing 'financially or otherwise' to creations depends on the interpretation that a festival organiser gives to the term 'co-production'. The term 'co-production' not only covers the support in cash money, but also frequently refers to offering a residence, a 'pré-achat' ['advance purchase'] of a performance, making equipment or space available, giving advice, and so on. That difference in interpretation makes it difficult to provide clear figures. In the broad sense of the word, we can assume that there will be approximately 75,000 to 100,000 Euros available per year for creation support from subsidised festival organisers.

2.7 INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF CIRCUS PRODUCTION

Flemish productions are finding their way abroad. By offering support for this, travel, remuneration for rehearsal and travel days or taking along a technician become financially feasible. Also performance slots where companies are expected to perform (virtually) free of charge to a public of professionals (the so-called OFF-festivals) lead to applications for subsidies. In this type of unpaid distribution, where the cost is recovered from the subsidising agency or from the resources of the company itself, one can legitimately ask questions about the ethics of the (foreign) organisers involved. Companies, however, like to go there to be picked out and to promote themselves. Flemish performances that went abroad with subsidies largely remained in Europe, with France as the winner. That is hardly surprising, because France organises a number of important and well-known festivals for the circus and introduced a new circus policy a lot earlier than Flanders. After France, performances with distribution subsidies mainly visited the United Kingdom, Spain, The Netherlands and Germany. They also went to Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland, and paid one visit to Latvia, Italy and Slovakia. Outside Europe, grants have been given for performances by companies in Mexico (2) and Brazil (1).

2.8 NOMADIC TOUR

Under this heading we find

- circuses that perform under their own management all year round, with the exception of a short winter break, in various cities and towns in Flanders
- circuses which, with their own infrastructure, offer performances to programmers of cultural centres or festival organisers and agree on a buy-out sum.

Both groups are small in number and that has everything to do with the high fixed costs and heavy investments that are part and parcel of the way in which these circuses organise themselves, such as tents, a fleet of vehicles or manpower.

The Circus Decree will continue, after the amendment, to provide support for circuses that cherish the nomadic aspect and give it a high priority.

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The more traditional circuses still pass on the 'craft' from parent to child. In addition, we also see that a new generation of children born in the circus qualify themselves further in youth circuses and further education institutions.

It is also striking that some young people who have been educated in further education institutions and have not grown up in a circus family, feel the urge to buy a tent and to live and work as a collective, regardless of the financial risk.

2.9 PROMOTION PROJECTS

This project support is intended to promote and draw attention to the Flemish circus and the Flemish policy. There are a number of explanations of why only a limited amount has been spent on promotion in recent years.

- The decree imposes a maximum of two projects per year.
- These projects were often the first to be excluded when the circus budget proved insufficient.
- The major role for the promotion of the Flemish circus is reserved for the Circus Centre.

The most important promotion projects were the Extreme Convention (an international training event for young and not-so-young, for experienced and not-so-experienced artists) of the Antwerp youth circus Ell Circo D'ell Fuego vzw [non-profit organisation] and two publications, namely a book on the history of Belgian conjuring art from Duif is Dood [Dove is Dead] bvba and a study by Not Standing vzw on the creation processes of circus productions.

2.10 CIRCUS CENTRE

The Circus Centre's mission is to support and promote Flemish circus and the Flemish policy and receives an annual operating subsidy for this purpose.

The Circus Centre is the only organisation that receives an operating subsidy under the Circus Decree on the basis of a five-year policy plan. The Circus Centre's mission is defined in the Circus Decree and specified each year in the progress report. The subsidy was not increased during the 2009-2018 period; years of savings even resulted in the subsidy for 2018 remaining below the level of the starting subsidy in 2009. Only indexations led to a slight recovery after the savings of 2010 and 2011.

The Circus Centre passes about 10% of its annual subsidy on to youth circuses, as we indicated in our explanation of youth circuses.

The Circus Centre takes on very diverse roles and also invests in Flemish creations. The percentage of 2.6% (an average over the period 2009-2016) mentioned in the infographic, only covers the creation support to production groups that belong to youth circuses. In addition, the Circus Centre indirectly focuses much more on supporting new creations through initiatives such as coaching weekends, partnership in CircusNext, Smells Like Circus, the yearbook for programmers or master classes for artists. The Circus Centre also facilitates about fifteen creations in *De Expeditie* in Ghent.



3 INTER-CONNECTION BETWEEN SECTIONS OF GRANT

3.1 TRAINING VERSUS YOUTH CIRCUS

Young people who are in further education almost always take their first steps in youth circuses. After finishing their further education, they often set to work as professional artists and frequently combine their work (performing and/or creating) with teaching. The infographic does not, however, make any connection between further education and youth circus because the latter has not had any funding until now under the Circus Decree.

A teacher training course ensures a flow-back to the youth circuses, which have a considerable need for well-trained pedagogical profiles in order to accommodate their growing number of members and to assist inexperienced teachers. Once again, we do not see any arrow between teacher training and youth circus, since this link also falls outside our funded scope.

Artists who no longer perform due to age or injuries can still develop a fine future as a circus teacher, director or coach.

3.2 TRAINING VERSUS CREATION

Artists who have enjoyed a grant for further education can often be found in creation files. This is seldom the case for someone who has followed a subsidised teacher training course and logically opts for a future in teaching rather than a future as creator or performer.

Very exceptionally, artists who are only trained in a youth circus (and who have further developed their skills on their own, the so-called self-made artists) turn up in a subsidised creation. Generally, these artists act within a non-professional context.

Nearly 35% of the students who have enjoyed a grant for further education are later encountered in funded creations as creators. That percentage is remarkable, especially since artists can also choose a career as a performer and not feel the need to create their own artistic product. The investment in training produces an output, a large part of which is reinvested and used within the circus.

3.3 CREATION VERSUS FESTIVALS

Creations find their way to festivals, which is a good thing, for the performance slots at festivals are very important for the circus artists in order to be able to recover the investments they make in their creations. Performances are increasingly being given in cultural and arts centres, which are also interesting partners for circus. The programming in these institutions, however, falls outside our scope (limited to the Circus Decree) and is not dealt with here.



3.4 CREATION VERSUS INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Circus companies that have received a grant for a new creation often subsequently submit a file for support for distribution abroad. Nearly all the organisations that received a subsidy for international distribution between 2009 and 2017 also received a subsidy for a new creation. But it is not always the case that people who received a grant to go abroad went there with the new creation. They often went abroad with an existing performance for which they had not necessarily received subsidies. This was rather logical in the early years of the Circus Decree, because the productions pre-dated the Circus Decree.

Circus artists also tour with a performance longer than, say, theatre, and similarly, the creation processes for circus usually take more time than those for the theatre. Recovering the costs of a performance, even if it is a success, is by no means certain. Being able to distribute a performance for a long time both at home and abroad is a good thing. In the best case, circus artists can tour with an existing performance and use it to accumulate resources for a new creation. A good circus performance usually gets better with time; so it would be a pity not to take or allow that time.

3.5 CREATION VERSUS NOMADIC TOUR

Of course, creation also has a role in nomadic circuses: without a performance there can be no tour. Traditional circuses that travel from one town to the next under their own management have only been subsidised in recent years for a nomadic tour. Other tent circuses that tour in Flanders were funded for both creation and distribution.

3.6 CIRCUS CENTRE VERSUS THE REST

The bond between the Circus Centre and the other subsidy areas has already been explained under the heading 'Circus Centre'. It goes without saying that the Circus Centre, as the umbrella organisation, has a relationship with the entire field and therefore also with all subsidy areas.

Do you need more information or do you have questions about the infographic?

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