

A support scheme
for emerging creators of contemporary circus in Europe



Think Circus!

ROUND-TABLE

**To accompany and support an artistic project
From the professional integration to the realization of a project**

European Conference Think Circus!#2
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TRAJECTORIES

Relying on the diversity of the paths of the authors supported by CircusNext in their artistic project, this first theme will be the opportunity to question the professionalization of the artists and the artistic work modalities: how, as an author, to be both committed into an aesthetic purpose and stand as a project leader? Which dialogue can be invented between artists, technical directors, production or diffusion managers, institutions, cultural operators, and how can we have a different look on our work processes?

Presentation of the speakers

Danijela Jovic

Danijela Jovic is the general coordinator of the European federation of professional circus schools (FEDEC) since 2009. She is specialized in the question of urban regeneration through civil society and arts. She worked on participative projects and in situ installations and led several interdisciplinary residency programmes. At the FEDEC, she works on the quality improvement of the education for professional circus artists.

Pierre Staigre

Pierre Staigre is the technical director of Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe and accompanies laureates and shortlisted artists in all the different steps of the scheme. He is also the technical director of the circus festival "Pisteurs d'étoiles" in Obernai since 2014 and works in parallel with different circus organizations and companies.

Charles Vairet

Charles Vairet is the artistic director of ATLAST, living creation label that he created in 2015. After carrying out the cinematographic programming of a Palestinian contemporary creation festival in Dijon (2003), he created in 2004 a festival of pluridisciplinary encounters between comic books, music, theatre or contemporary arts. He has been working in the contemporary circus field for nearly 12 years, in production, diffusion, development of companies and projects, which allowed him to travel all around the world. He collaborates with CircusNext as mentor for some of the laureates and has developed his own activity of support to project structuration. Since 2015, he has worked as temporary lecturer at Denis Diderot University professional institute (IUP) at the University of Bourgogne where he runs the module "Accompaniment of artists and companies, production, diffusion and artistic projects management" for Master's degree students in "Management for cultural operators & Intercultural and international projects engineering".

Géraldine Werner

Géraldine Werner is the co-founder and co-director of AY-ROOP, an organization dedicated to circus arts with two directions: artists support and a territory cultural project. AY-ROOP benefits from a venue in Rennes, Théâtre du Vieux Saint-Etienne, where they implemented a permanent lab for circus arts. In 2016, the Regional Direction of Cultural Affairs of Brittany (DRAC Bretagne) designated AY-ROOP as Scène de territoire pour les arts de la piste. Géraldine Werner was the coordinator of Jeunes Talents Cirque from 2002 to 2006 and worked with several CircusNext laureates. She is now a member of JTCE's board.

A. Dumont: I will tell you now why we decided to organize this round table. There are several reasons.

First, because accompaniment is an exciting question and it is never discussed enough. Second, because we had some time at the Spring festival, where we tried to ask this question in relation to other approaches of accompaniment, in particular in the sector of the creative industries and innovation incubators. Much has been said about the relationship between artists, institutions, especially through the eyes of Bauke Lievens who came to talk to us about this. What we had imagined with Cécile was to give the floor to those who are in the field very concretely, who are not on the side of an institution or a structure, nor artists, but those who are "in between".

These people who are hard to identify. They are in front of you, you can now put faces on these people there and on the different skills that it implies. We will clearly distinguish, so that it is clear, the so-called "artistic" accompaniment (external eyes, support to the dramaturgy) of an accompaniment that would attach more to the structuring and to the development of the professional project. We will be focusing more on this aspect of the accompaniment even if obviously to think an artistic project and to think a professional project is intimately bound.

These are the themes that we will discuss.

CircusNext is a device that accompanies emerging authors, artists during their first or second show and of course we will not be limited to this topic of emergence because the question of accompaniment arises all throughout life - as we have seen, from professional integration (with Zita) to reconversion (with Marine and Emilie). We will really think things on a long-term basis.

The first question we will raise is the question of training and this transition period.

I think that we can reason a lot in terms of transition in professional trajectories and ask ourselves if this question of becoming a project leader is asked as soon from the training period or not, and if so, how it is asked and how the approach of this question has evolved over time, because obviously the sector is evolving, so training and transition to professional integration are also evolving.

Danijela maybe you would like to start on this because you are really at the crossroads of the two and of course the others can enter the discussion on this because they share their daily life with artists in these moments of transition.

D. Jovic: To accompany artistic emergence I think it's the role of a school, a federation of schools. The emergence from the school of an artistic identity, the support towards the artistic autonomy of a student is the heart of all the debates of the FEDEC. Of course, there has been a whole evolution in pedagogical projects that have also accompanied the evolutions of pedagogical programs in which a lot of things have recently been introduced about integration into the professional world: skills related to professional integration, but not only, because the artistic quality remains a priority and from this results a better situation of each one on the different markets, in his own country but also in Europe. Each school has its own policy, its own tools and its local, regional, national and European partners, and in some schools there are also production units, with years dedicated to professional integration, or an educational program that offers apprenticeship status or internship periods.

A Dumont: Géraldine, Pierre and Charles often rub shoulders with artists who come out of school and have had a little transition period sometimes, can you tell us what you think are the issues raised by these artists when they are in this time of transition and / or at the start of a professional career and what are the questions that should be asked.

G. Werner: I've been working for more than twenty years with artists who are many at the beginning of a career, out of school or not necessarily went to a school. How do you do when you want to launch a first project, to make a first show, to concretize this desire to express yourself artistically? How do you go about it once you said that? I think it's really there, the difficulty and the first question that artists ask themselves: how does it work? Obviously the answer to that is very global and it covers all the trades so we often say, how come that those who have gone through a school do not have any knowledge about how this works.

In the end, I tell myself when I look in our sector at all the core work and what they cover, we have all, as much as we are where we are, a rather partial vision, very small of what the other core work cover. We can already unpack them by saying, "do not worry you may be ignorant about these questions, but we all are at some point and it is rather how we will do together that is important". Our sector is relatively well structured, with support jobs for which there has been training. I really consider this "thing", the accompaniment, the support, and I re-question it regularly, primarily as the desire to engage in a common adventure and to follow this desire, this project, this passion, this artist who has a proposal to make. Do we want to go there or not?

In this case, what is implemented, that is where it is built and it takes a crew. There is an image that best reflects my perception: we embark on a ship and there is a crew that must be effective and efficient so that we can trace the road together, a road that is a bit sinuous at times, but that we will do together. There is for this a prior need for mutual knowledge. The second essential step is to ask who occupies which position and to determine the roles. Is the artist, the bearer of the project, the one who must take the helm of the ship? As far as I am concerned, I am not convinced. I think that depending on the projects, desires, skills, this role can be provided by another person, so actually there is not one form of support, there is as many as there are projects, as there are personalities.

C. Vaire: I quite agree with Geraldine. I notice, that compared to the different artists that I accompanied during the mentoring sessions during the last edition of CircusNext, there is in my opinion a real gap between being in a training process and the reality of career. There is a gap between the quality of artist and the status of professional artist. By professional, I mean the fact of making a living with what we do. The stake is not necessarily obvious for everyone each time. I completely understand what Géraldine says and I agree that we sometimes have too much tendency to put the artist in the place of the "captaincy" and that it is not necessarily for him to hold the bar, because it does not necessarily have the means nor the possibility of having an overall mastery of the project. But it's also up to us to build the team aside to take power in a certain way. Beyond that, it's the very French-French question of art schools, where artists are trained in a form of excellence, a culmination, a search for creation but we do not necessarily train professionals and it can sometimes be contradictory.

By experience, on the last edition of CircusNext, I thought that there was a real difference among these people - who are in a situation of emergence and starting their career, between artists who for the most part were trained but who live in France, who live the French structuring model, themselves not necessarily French, but functioning as French with the French institution, and artists, who, at the same age, are not French and above all, live elsewhere than in France. The relationship to the structuring of thought, the relation to the profession, the question of professionalization and the means implemented is not done in the same way at all. Flamands living in Flanders, barely 22 years old, gave me a speech and had a structure of thought in relation to their professional project which was light years away from that of artists integrated in the French system, which has no at the moment, neither out of necessity nor out of interest, have been led to ask the question. I'm not saying it's better or worse but there is a real gap and I think it's disabling in the long run.

A. Dumont: It is the interest of the European perspective in this project too, to confront models. It seems to me that there are two different things, there is the question of being the captain at the helm, as Géraldine said, and whether or not we identify with that, whether or not we have envy and the means, then there is the question of the professional project, to live of his profession, with all the dimension of poly activity which is present, because there are little linear careers amongst circus artists. There is also the question of autonomy. Successful, in its career path, to be autonomous on the knowledge of the network and its way of working, and I think you all identified a little to a role of passer of this information there. Pierre, you are a technical director, you told me finally that beyond their conception of the technique, and the reality that catches up with them, the artists also ask themselves questions of another order: "where do I tour, how do I tour and how do I tour? » .

P. Staigre: I will no longer approach the issue via the prism of CircusNext. The look I have as a technical director is often the people who come with their first project, people who are graduating from a higher school, who are suddenly confronted with a reality on the ground that has been very little discussed in their training. In CircusNext, I intervene quickly enough to prepare the passages in Belgium or Paris and there are a lot of discussions and that are not purely technical discussions. Artists often ask me how they can organize themselves, how they can set up their companies, how they can do better. I bring a technical support to those who ask for it and who are looking for directors for example, I also help them to deepen their ideas of technical construction but I think that the essential it is not even there. The essential is in the link that I have with them and the rest of the partners. I feel like an interface between the artist, the production of CircusNext, the theatre too, because they are not accustomed to not receiving technical sheets. The artists need to acquire knowledge on the ground, but that, it is acquired in the time and that time they do not always have it.

My role is also to make them less stressed with the technique so that the artistic side can stand out. Even if they had x hours of course on administration, or on how to hang a trapeze, at one point it's not their job, they have to devote themselves to what they came for, it is to present a draft of a show. It is a topic that is particular and very interesting, and they are not supported enough. Once the creation process is finished, it is the same, there are a lot of issues that arise and have not been anticipated, in terms of assembly time, staff needed. Unfortunately, we are entering an economy where it is something that is very important. Either they release a show that is beautiful, and even if it takes 18 hours of editing it is ok, or it is a show moderately perceived and this question is going to arise. And suddenly, there are more and more companies that are starting to think like that too, which, I think, is quite sad at the artistic level, because it can restrain creativity.

A. Dumont: This terrible reality principle, which is not very funny but which exists ...

D. Jovic: I would insist on the transition, between a school training and CircusNext there is also a time of transition and maturation whether it is personal, artistic or professional, in particular as regards their role in the project (author, team leader, etc.). I also defend the fact of stopping to want to be the wonder woman or superman, the artist can not do everything in a limited time of training! We focus on learning a profession that is multifaceted and constantly evolving. I agree for example with the reflections of Pascal Guilaine on the "catering system". That is to say, we are not in a system of supply and demand that arrives at the desired time, at the desired temperature to the number of people who are seated to eat.

It is also difficult to position the training as a perfect product supplier, and that's true that we at FEDEC are working on an artistic quality. We also have different initiation systems in very professional contexts - bring students to CIRCa for example. I also defend the praxis, but as long as we are not in the professional world there are things that we will not experience. The school must also keep this place of search for freedom, to remain this place of possible errors and mistakes, of artistic and personal experimentation, since we also have post-teens who evolve towards the adulthood during the training time, but that is another subject.

A. Dumont: Danijela emphasized this period of integration, and indeed, there are plenty of transition periods during a professional career and the question of time is constantly raised, especially in the work of accompaniment, it is crucial. I like talking about companionship. Are we today on a European scale in a market that builds these necessary relationships? I heard it from the artists, there is this need for a companionship relationship and in this case, how do we build this relationship in the long run?

C. Vairet: I did 12 years as a production manager in several circus companies and I told myself that I was doing accompaniment. I still do it from time to time, but at the time, in front of people, I did not say that I was doing accompaniment, I was saying that I was responsible for broadcasting or production. The question of accompaniment raises an underlying question, it is how we, in our places, in the place that we even want to take, we can get to live from what we do. Putting its structure of thought at the disposal of another thought to accompany it, in all benevolence and lucidity is exciting, but it is not likely to make us live. So, it's part of a whole that also covers the production, the diffusion, the development, the artistic and cultural action, the technical direction when there is the possibility to have one sufficiently upstream.

You Pierre, you are present very early in the process CircusNext, but it is a special case. Companies that do not go through this circuit will meet you much later. It's a shame but it's like that. We must not distinguish the functions, the skills, or the places but on the contrary gather all these very precise places to give the means to the artists. What I notice today is that I do not think myself more relevant than others, but I feel stronger from my experience. No one has passed on to me, I just have experience and interest in it. The good accompanists are, I think, those who have the most empathy but also the most experience. At the same time, when you look at the sociology of the jobs of those who provide support, these are jobs whose economy is particularly precarious and which are still relatively undervalued and concern people who are rather very young and who do not stay in these positions. People who have been broadcasting, producing and coaching companies since 15-20 years, there are not many. It's a shame because there is no transmission of skills, no transmission of experiences, or too little.

G. Werner: In my own journey, I needed to give meaning to the term "accompaniment". One of the difficulties I see today, in terms of the professions that we do, particularly production, distribution, administration, is that we are in the field, we are in the action, we are extremely versatile on these professions, and at a given moment, I have the feeling that the artists with whom I work for 10 years also have the need to move forward in their career. So, how do we accompany these transitions? How do we accompany these artists when we are overbooked all day to build files and make phone calls? How does one manage to reconcile this rhythm of work with the time of the reflection which seems to me crucial and fundamental when one wants to be relevant in our accompaniment? I have no response. I think that CircusNext does not answer this question, but goes to another very important place, less in the daily project editing of the artists. It is important for me to have people who are exterior at this time, and who are not institutions.

Of course, the institutions are our partners, and they are with us in the same boat but they do not have this distance compared to the projects that they accompany themselves.

A. Dumont: What I hear in what you say is that when we speak of accompaniment we speak mostly of accompanying people. These are people with very different skills who are here. We can put them behind this question of the role of the caregiver, but they are rather skills that we can name. Should not we at a certain moment legitimize this posture? To say clearly that we accompany people? Is there not a job to be invented perhaps, a place to rethink especially in the link between artists, companies, and institutions in the broadest sense?

C. Vairet: When I started, I was part of the company I worked with. I have long demanded that I do not work for someone but with someone. Our position as a accompanying person is not sufficiently explicit in my opinion, because today we are not necessarily the companies with which we work or at least we are not obliged to be. We work with, we have a distance, and a possibility of distance with the creation that allows us to understand both the issues of those who welcome and those who are welcomed or wanting to be. In fact, relationships are formed, trustful, and it is something that is above all related to the human relationship. It would be interesting to think to give space to this relationship of trust, give it a legitimacy in this place. When I started, it was obvious to me that to accompany a show, you had to be the first fan of the artist or the artistic project. Today I do not think it's necessary. Accompanying an artistic project does not necessarily mean joining this project. However, we must understand the project, the people who carry it out, their intentions, their desires, understand how they position themselves in relation to the dominant aesthetics in a field, understand who is their network is and how it is composed, with whom they work and how they work ... All this seems to me more effective and more relevant than mere membership.

A. Dumont: What is certain is that there is the question of teaching people to ask questions and to ask them at the right time. We see it during the CircusNext process, the difficulty sometimes to formalize his project, to talk about it, to write a file and to present it to people, to transmit it is a real difficulty. All these questions are questions of professional practices that are not very formalized, also because they spend a lot of informal moments. We discuss between two informal moments of these questions, we drink a beer at the bar and we talk about that. At some point, should not formalize this informal? The CircusNext mentoring program is a form of formalization, the work you do Pierre is less formalized even if it is real. You, Géraldine, you evolve in a structure where this question is formalized, and perhaps you could tell us how concretely it is formalized. And then at the level of the school and the professional integration of young artists, do we give them the tools to think concretely? This is a question that I ask myself and that I ask you.

D. Jovic: It is true that we start first with the teaching team, we have a will to continue to bring together practitioners, to organize exchanges between peers and to have an evolving pedagogy. It is a challenge in a race for quality training at a very high artistic and technical level. It is very important to question these notions but we do not necessarily have all the tools I think and each school also makes sure to create its own tools. It's a lot by the teacher that passes. In recent years, the work has focused on the individualization of support and the qualitative aspect: focus more on the individual and gather a team even external around him. It's a real challenge for our sector. This debate is interesting at different levels of our responsibilities, as an organization or as an actor because it is through the networking and the dialogue between us, a dialogue that must include the artists often a little minority, that things can be built.

A. Dumont: This notion of dialogue Pierre, you told me a lot about it. To make dialogue between these different worlds, between a welcoming theatre and a company that is welcomed, there is not necessarily the same dialogue and finally your role is also to find the place of the common language or to translate the thought of the other to address it to the other.

P. Staigre: In a company, obviously, there must be a dialogue, there must be something beyond the show, it is necessary to create a technical team, the administration etc.. But there is also the link with the institutions and places that will receive it. We all work in culture but we are not in the same places. Someone was talking about the collective agreement earlier, but in the companies, the big companies excepted, we go over because we can not do otherwise. However, when you come to a theatre you have to respect all that, which is normal. All of this is a dialogue, sometimes even a deaf dialogue, because everyone has their own problems. Some companies, which go in this or that festival, I always tell them, be careful, it is necessary to know how to adapt also to the welcoming conditions. Being welcomed at the Théâtre de la Colline in residence for 3 months is not the same as doing the Avignon Festival. We do not receive the same thing, they are not the same issues or the same expectations. So, within the company, there is a whole path of speech that is very important, but it is also necessary to set up this dialogue with the programmatic structures. We have to agree on what we can let go and what we absolutely can not compromise on. It's also dialogue. If everyone listened to each other it would be fine, and without necessarily an over price. It's just listening and knowing what the other person is saying, understanding that you do not expect the same things in the same places, but

A. Dumont: It's really understanding the expectations. Perhaps Géraldine can tell us a bit about what you perceive from the artists that you accompany, that you receive in residence and that you receive for the festival - these three configurations being very different - what it is precisely with both of this need for common language.

G. Werner: To take the specific example that Pierre has just mentioned, the collective agreement indeed, not everyone can apply it but not everyone is aware of it either. The question of knowledge, it is really crucial. It creates discomfort when we have the feeling that we lack information, when there are things we do not control, it creates divisions and we arrive in situations where we miss cruelly of dialogue although it could be quite simple. How can we all, in our places, ensure that there is a better knowledge of these trades, the sector? We, very concretely, in a new collaboration with a new company, we ask the team, the hard core, to spend a minimum of 4 days with us in our office to really spend time where each person on the team devotes time to explain what his tasks are, what tasks he performs, such as a small immersion course in each position. We also take the time to find ourselves on specific questions that we have identified in advance, meetings, brainstorming. It seems really essential and we ask that the artist or the people on his team come regularly during the year to spend 2-3 days. It starts to work well because we are extremely mobile, we go to see the artists in residence, it allows to be with the team in situ and to participate in these times, and to see how it goes when we are in the places. It seemed important to us that we could reciprocation of the same. We started on this principle. We have a place dedicated to the reception of artists in residence, we want to be a little on the same diagram to really dedicate a time of immersion and meeting on our professions.

A. Dumont: It's all this question of maturation and taking the time to identify oneself with these professions that we named - author, project leader, entrepreneur - that exists but that artists use little, maybe because it is badly identified. Being an entrepreneur is also managing a budget, staff, and being able to consider a project in the long term.

I do not know if anyone wants to bounce on this because we will have to close this discussion soon.

C. Vaire: We talked about it a while ago, the word entrepreneur is not very usual in our field. Our daily reality is to meet artistic teams with whom we will begin to collaborate. This collaboration can begin at the very beginning, when the show does not exist yet and it is all about creating the project. Together we evaluate the need and the desire to do it together, but the challenge, the only reality we are working on, is that we have to create this show because it is necessary. All the legal structure that will be put in place is a structure that is made and thought just in the service of the realization of this show. It is also up to us to get people to take a little distance with the reasons why they come to see us and to bring them to see wider, in the longer term. What do we do after the show is out? I find that it is important for the accompaniment persons to anticipate the after and sometimes exceed the request of the one who asks us to go and find what goes a little further. Compared to this notion of entrepreneur, but that is very French-French, in France, the dominant legal structuring, is the association, and the legal responsibility in the immense majority of the cases is not assumed by the who has the real responsibility. I think that this notion of entrepreneurship, if the real responsibility was assumed by the one who does, would not arise at all in the same way.

A. Dumont: We'll have to stop there, thank you very much. This question of the time seems crucial to me to continue to think not to be in a short-term vision, not to forget that a long-term vision is structuring and then these roles there of transmitters of something still seem to me to need to be legitimized and discussed to give them a more present and stronger place in our sector.

Thank you to everyone !



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for emerging creators of contemporary circus in Europe*

CircusNext

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