

# CIRCUS

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# SOCIAL

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# PROJECT

# IN PRISON

LEUVEN - BELGIUM





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*CIRKUS IN BEWEGING  
SET UP A 5 DAY FULLTIME CIRCUS  
WORKSHOP FOR 12 PRISONERS  
AND 12 CIRCUS TEACHERS/ARTISTS  
IN THE PRISON FOR MEN  
IN LEUVEN/ BELGIUM.*

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We do not have many visual images to illustrate our project as it was forbidden to take video or photo's. The only pictures we have were taken the day of the performance by a social worker and never show the faces or the prisoners.

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# ABOUT CIRKUS IN BEWEGING

## “Cirkus in Beweging”

(Circus in Movement) is an open house for circus education.

Artistic and social circus activities, developing the whole person, come together and lift each other to a new form of art education.”

In 1993 “Cirkus in Beweging” was founded as the first circus school in Flanders. Today we are with our 1050 students and a large artistic range, one of the biggest educational circus houses in Europe, offering a well-structured educational and artistic practice. Every week we have 54 groups training in our school .

Next to our weekly classes we organize circus workshops for people with fewer opportunities.

- Inclusion of 1 or 2 kids with social , physical or mental impairment in our 54 weekly groups.
- Weekly workshop in Fabota and other places, playschemes with many children from ethnic minorities.
- Social –artistic project with stilt group “geveugelde ruiters”
- Teaching weekly juggling and acrobatic classes in prison in Leuven.
- Intensive training of social workers to use circus arts in their play work.
- Specialized circus training during Easter holiday for teenagers with mental disability.

We educate:

*IN CIRCUS MOVEMENT*

*THROUGH CIRCUS MOVEMENT*

*ABOUT CIRCUS MOVEMENT*

*In doing circus* movement, the physical actions and experiences, we gain confidence in ourselves and learn all the motor skills we need in live.

*Through circus* movement we also learn about the others, we relate with them and form our personal social and emotional development.

*About circus* movements : we teach children and teachers why we do what we do and how to do it; we educate them about the benefits of movement and circus.



# INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS PROJECT IN PRISON

“We set up a 5 day fulltime circus workshop for 12 prisoners and 12 circus teachers/artists in June 2015.”

Cirkus in Beweging started teaching circus skills in the prison of Leuven in September 2013. Every week one teacher works with 6-8 prisoners. The main skills they do are juggling, rollabolla and stilt walking. The project is in collaboration with the VZW De Rode Antraciet” an organization that sets up projects and activities in prisons. The Rode Antraciet vzw is a non-profit organization (VZW) for socio-cultural and sportive participation in the penitentiary sector. Participation is a right for all. The Rode Antraciet vzw wants to increase the possibilities to participate in socio-cultural projects during detention and focusses here on the live after the detention. The Rode Antraciet vzw respects the dignity and the possibilities of each individual and takes the sense of responsibility of each person as a starting point. She organizes cultural, educational, sportive and community projects for and with prisoners, giving attention to their social environment, The Rode Antraciet vzw emphasizes in this work the importance of collaboration between individuals, organizations and government. Personal growth, networking, (re)activating in society and social integration are reference points for their own varied and specialized offer and for a constructive collaboration with the sportive and socio-cultural partners from outside the prison walls. We believe this work is very valuable and worthwhile; every week we create a small world apart for some prisoners. Prisoners in this prison of Leuven are allowed out of their cell only 2 x 30 minutes a day for a short walk and all the other time they spend in isolation. Meeting each other and learning a skill as juggling together brightens up their day and gives them a moment of “non-worry”. We have had a very successful year; some prisoners come every week to the workshop, proving they really like it and feel it helps them. We persuaded the prison direction to purchase some juggling balls and so some prisoners also practice in their room. The prisoners also made some rolla-bollas themselves which are stored inside the prison and can use be during the circus-courses. This success makes us want to do more: We convinced the Direction of the prison and got the permission to set up a 5 day fulltime circus workshop for prisoners in June 2015. This workshop is led by an external physical theatre director, Wim Oris, and the circus teacher with the 2 year experience inside the prison, Rika Taeymans. An international group of circus teachers from the project Social EDUCIRCATION (Erasmus for All-program) joins this team and works together for 5 days.



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## THE PURPOSE, GOAL OF THIS WORKSHOP IS MULTIPLE

- Offering the prisoners a whole range of circus-activities ( not just juggling and stilts)
- Making the prisoners work together on a communal project .
- Achieving self-confidence and trust in themselves and others.
- Working towards a circus-show that can be performed for an audience .
- Giving the prisoners an international experience working with teachers from 7 European countries.
- Giving the circus-teachers an experience of working in prison; getting to know this world apart . With this experience teachers can start to set up projects in their own country.
- Opening out the hidden life of prisoners through a public performance.

**Rode antraciet:** Elke Stallaert en Ine Melis en Fons

**Hulpgevangenis:** Nadine Vandormael en Jimmy

**Cirkus in Beweging:** Stef Langmans ,Rika Taeymans and Franco Rodriguez

**Compagnie Tartaren:** Wim Oris

International participants from Social Educircation (Erasmus +)

- Ilaria Cieri (Italy)
- Luis Reche Munoz (Spain)
- Gotz Martiny (Germany)
- Glynis Hull-Rochelle (USA / Czech Republic)
- Hana Cerna (Czech Republic)
- Palmai Balzas (Hungary)
- Jack Rees (UK)
- Lia Geropoulou (Greece)

We set up a program that is adapted to the population of prisoners at that moment. Starting by getting to know each other through circus games, we focus after that on the following skills:

- Tightrope walking
- Rolla bolla
- Stilt and globe walking
- Juggling
- Acrobatics
- Circus theatre

The first three days we do a lot of group work and we teach the circus skills in small groups with a lot of individual attention. The circus skills have the physicality of sports but exclude competition. Through working with circus we work on developing coordination and balance, increasing concentration and building on self-confidence.

The last days we focus on the performance. In this we focus on collaboration: the group is greater than the individual. Leadership and social skills are being developed through working in group towards this performance.

The director of the performance is someone who is experienced in working with special target groups , theater and storytelling. Encouraging stage presence through circus is going to be one of his tasks. The performance is not the goal of the week. If some nice show elements are coming out, then this is great but the process is far more important than the product.

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## PARTICIPANT

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## TARGET GROUP / SITUATION IN PRISON

This prison is called Hulp gevangenis and is an arrest house. This means that people are waiting for their trial and are waiting to be convicted. So there is a lot of anxiety about the future and a lot of long days of waiting and not really knowing what is going to happen.

A lot of new prisoners are coming and going, never knowing how long they are going to be there. The place has no calm atmosphere where activities and work can be set up on a regular basis. Things are continuously changing and teachers and staff are constantly adapting to this as well as the prisoners.

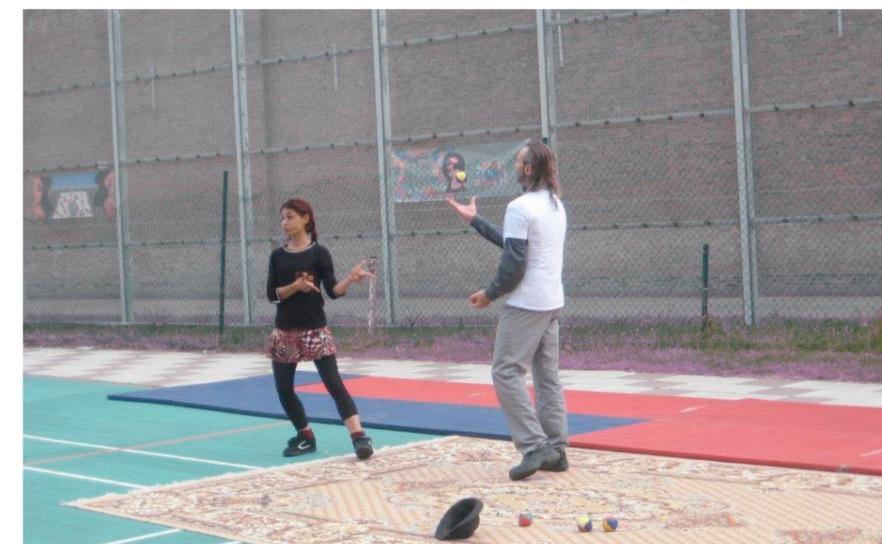
All prisoners have a very different background and history. Most of them have a low self-esteem . On the other hand they are survivors and know how to handle difficult situations.

On the 1st of June we perform in prison to attract attention to the project and to stimulate the prisoners to join the project. The performance is done on the courtyard during the evening-walk. Two circus-artists and a musician on stilts create a little show and perform in front of the prisoners: they have a close contact, talk and let them try things out if they wish. Through this show we had a lot of people interested to join.

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## HOW WILL WE TRY TO ARCHIVE OUR GOALS?

- We try to create situations where the prisoners feel they learn something.
- The main work will be to find connection and make links together; everybody will get to know the others.
- We will start from where they are and build up from there.
- Make them believe in themselves by encouraging them and by focusing on all the things they can do and learn .
- Be calm, honest and authentic .
- Give them "good" moments to remember and experiences of "success".



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## WHY WE BELIEVE SOCIAL CIRCUS PROJECTS LIKE THIS WORK ?

- It supports personal growth and social learning:
- It is open and accessible to all, regardless of age, ability and mobility.
  - It connects people from all backgrounds and abilities.
  - Circus is non-competitive and non-threatening.
  - Builds trust and empathy.
  - Can break down barriers and challenge prejudice.
  - It engages those on the margins and provides an alternative to traditional . sports and art forms.
  - Circus offers something different, unique, 'cool', interesting and outside of the . norm to be part of.
  - Offers a willingness to try new things and build up physical strength.
  - Stimulates teamwork and respect

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## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN WORKING IN PRISON

- Never work longer with the group then the time that was planned.
- Do not take cell phone in prison.
- Do not accept anything the prisoners give you.
- Do not wear metal , piercings or excessive jewelry.
- Do not make any promises.
- Come in together as a group .
- Prisoners will be called away for many reasons.
- They cannot go to toilet without being accompanied.
- They cannot leave the room on their own.

Two social workers, Fons and Elke from Rode Antraciet organization each accompany a group on the first day. Fons participates on three days during the project and Elke will be responsible every day for the communication with the prison staff. This is very important. Fons works for more than 20 years in prison and has accompanied quite a few projects; he helps the group to put things in the right perspective.

We have to plan each day the exact location and schedule of each prisoner for the next day .

Elke and Rika sit together every day to do this.

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## PLANNING

Monday 1 June

Promoting the project with a small circus performance during the evening-walk

Friday 12 June - 14u15-15u30

Getting to know the group prisoners and the teachers (WIM and RIKA)

Monday 15 June - Tuesday 16 June Wednesday 17 June - Thursday 18 June

9u30 - 11u15 = session 1

12u30 - 13u30 = session 2

14u15 - 15u30 = session 3

Friday 19 June

9u30-11u15: session 1

12u30-13u30: session 2

14u15-15u45: Preparing the performance at the courtyard

18u-19u: performance during the first walk

19u-20u: Performance during the second walk

**Max 10 visitors from outside will be invited and received by the director of the prison.**



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## DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOPS / DETAILED PROGRAM

### Friday 12th of June

Wim Oris, Rika Taeymans and a trainer from de Rode Antraciet meet the group of prisoners for the first time and introduce the project to them. A first encounter between the prisoners can happen. The prisoners do not know each other and only meet daily in the walk where more than 100 prisoners are out in the courtyard. We use some group dynamic games to loosen up the atmosphere and to get to know each other, to talk about the project, tell them that the aim is to have fun together through doing circus together; using this form of art to train themselves, work together and learn new things.

Games we use:

- Clap game: passing on the clap. Starting real simple and then more elaborated. (Reaction game)
- High five name game: First walk up to a person, shake hand and say your name and hear his name; then walk up and the person you go to has to say your name; then high five with names.
- Juggling with scarves in circle and move places to right or left; move two or three places.
- Then learn how to juggle 2 and 3 scarves. (very quickly)

### Sunday 14th of June

During Sunday most of the circus-teachers arrived in Leuven and got settled in at a hostel. In the evening we met with this group in the building of Cirkus In Beweging to get to know each other a little bit and prepare next coming days. This was very important because in prison there would be a very tight schedule to follow. Rika informed us of the security-measures and procedures they use inside the prison. (Very nice to see and feel how the prison staff became more relaxed and open to our presence as the week was progressing)

We also discussed our personal ideas and expectations about this project and learned that, although we were looking forward to it and all of us were very open-minded, we also had some insecurities, questions, presuppositions, about who it is inside prison and how prisoners will be like. So Rika could tell us about her experiences and we felt good as a group to go inside.

Further we listed up some nice ice-breaking games and name-games to start with on Monday morning and we thought about how to organize the other sessions during the first two days. We filled in the overall structure of those days and some of the techniques we wanted to start with. We didn't want to plan too much in advance because we were not sure how many participants we would have and how the timing and situation would be of influence.

### Monday 15th of June

We meet at 8.45 am in the prison (Maria Theresiastraat in Leuven): it takes time to get the passport-photo taken and check in. This first day we also bring in the material (a van with material goes at 8.30 am)

We have three sessions on Monday:

the 1st session we are all together (about 24 people) in the cinema-room for an acquaintance-session.

The focus is on the getting to know one another and the environment. We find

a good ice-breaking game to start and set an open atmosphere.

- We start with a slow high five game where we get to know the names of everyone.
- Circle name game: Standing in two circles, one person points at someone and say his name and then he does the same. The idea is that you cannot say the wrong name, not hesitate or slow down the rhythm. If you do you go to the other circle to join in there. Great fun, lots of laughter, nobody gets excluded of the game. And we all know all the names!!!
- String Game: A ball of wool gets tossed around in the circle, every time the person catching the ball holds the string so that it forms a 'network of strings'. When everybody is holding it, one person has to let go and move over/under/between the network of strings to get to the place of some else. (This game illustrates the connectedness of all participants and implies collaboration to succeed.)

Each circus teacher or artist or inmate introduces him/herself and tells the group where they come from, what they like in circus or general in life.

We divided the group in two groups. We had a mixture of young, very sportive guys and another group of older man. We decided to make two groups according to age for the first two days so that all feel at ease and work according to their tempo and abilities.

We ate inside the prison the first day and organized the material after this first session.

**The 2nd session and 3rd session we split up the group and work on 2 different circus skills, each circus teacher also chooses which technique they want to teach :**

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## JUGGLING

We chose to start with balls and ball games. Some could already juggle and others needed some more input from a juggling teacher.

- We start with a game called 'ball-sewing' where you fix a pattern with one ball going across between everyone in the circle. Once the pattern is fix you can elaborate on this by bringing in more balls, or changing the position of the persons. In this way the teachers can get a first view on the throwing- and catching-abilities and indirectly get the focus on reaction-abilities. This game offers an easy and fast group-supported experience of success with ball-juggling (fex. Together we already are holding up 5 balls).
- Next we bring in some exercises of 'social juggling'. Still in a circle we start with one ball each passing it on through the circle according to the guidelines given by the teacher leading the exercise. He shows certain movements that we have to copy and all have to do at the same time in order to make the whole work (1. Give ball from one hand to the other - 2. Bring hand with ball up above hand of person next to you - 3. Release ball and catch ball of person on the other side with the free hand). It is an exercise on concentration, accuracy and rhythm. Three basics of ball-juggling addressed through a group-supported goal.

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## BALANCING – STILT- WALKING

- Finally we made smaller groups according to the level of juggling-skills so to guide more personally and adapted to each own ability, difficulty and motivation. This meant unlearning the 'throw-give through' to a 'throw-throw' juggling-basic for some, learning the 'throw-throw catch-catch' basics for others, extending 3-ball cascade-skills for a few and even passing and taking-over cascades with 2 and more difficult tricks for the really experienced inmates.

This is a great technique to get confidence and self-esteem quiet fast in balancing. It literally is an transforming technique. Stilts are a real challenge, it feels and looks impressive but it is relatively easy. It is a great technique to build up confidence and get over your personal fears or doubts. The session went really well, after a nice warm-up we attached the stilts. Some guys can do it straight away, others need more time. With the help of so many teachers we could work individually and make great progress.

A nice thing we did for the warm-up of shoulders is to be in a big circle apart from each other and to circle both your arms backwards, each time you take a step forward and come closer ; the idea is that you cannot touch each other, until the circle is really close ( shoulder to shoulder).

Switching the groups between session 2 and session 3, each group did both techniques on the first day.

We evaluate the day and decide **to work in the same two groups during two sessions (1st and 3rd) the next day and to do a drama session (2nd) all together to build and keep up the group-spirit and sense of community.**

One problem we encountered already is that not all inmates can be in the sessions at all times as they are called away or have a visitor or have working-shifts in order to get more privileges or ...

Another difficulty was the division of leading tasks during the sessions. Because the teachers didn't work together before and the fast and intense progress of the working-time, it seemed very important to clearly communicate beforehand who would be doing the warm-up, explaining the exercises, keeping the time, ...

### Tuesday 16th of june

Meeting all together in the cinema room and split up from there. During the waiting all the circus teachers and -artists started spontaneously stretching out their muscles and doing morning exercises, all in their own personal way. Meanwhile the prisoners were brought in the room, they watched this process of personal warming up and preparation. It made them curious and interested, about the movements, about the effects, about the possibilities of muscles and the body. Some of them joined in this process, started imitating or trying out their own movements. In this way we made a very spontaneous organic group work-out and build up, before we separated the two groups for the different sessions.

**Session one and three** : acrobatics or balancing on tightrope, rollabolla and globe (2groups)

### Acrobatics:

With the young group of inmates we have a dynamic warm up and do some tumbling, acro-rolls and handstands. We go into acro-balance and work in pairs. The inmates really like this and are very quick in picking up the exercises. A lot of them are very strong and proud to show this, as they could as a base for acro-balance. The fact that as base they were responsible for the ones they were carrying, gave them a feeling of responsibility they didn't experienced before in prison (or in society for that matter).

With the older group we have a different approach and start with some exercises back to back to have a non-threatening contact. Some of them formulated the surprising, unexpected and positive effect of this new form of making contact with another person and how it gave them a new sense of trust they didn't know before.

Exercises two by two and we change partner regularly:

- Back to back and push each other of the mat
- Back to back and stand up together by pushing the shoulders to each other
- Back to back and have a rest
- Pyramid base of table and try to push it over and change
- Roll around the table, putting your head under the table
- Shoulder stand on the table with two helpers on the side
- Table as base, second person sits at back and third person climbs on legs and hangs backwards.
- Building straight principle: bunk bed pyramid
- Pyramid where 2 people stand side by side , knees bent and third person , from the back climbs , one foot on each thigh.
- Two by two: one lies on stomach and other person puts hand on part of the body and starts pressing , from soft to harder; person lying decides when he thinks it is enough and says ; that's enough. Some parts of the body the touch can stay very light.

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## BALANCING – TIGHTROPE, ROLLA BOLLA OR GLOBE

Before the start of this session we went to the library of the prison to get some cd's to make the atmosphere more circus within the chapel-room we were working in. We found a lot of nice music that suited the background of the teachers as well as the prisoners. Especially with the language-difference this was a nice way to keep an open, jolly, enjoyable atmosphere and when some of the inmates recognized their own ethnic music, they became very proud and enthusiastic. Because of the limited time we started demonstrating the different balancing techniques, giving a little explanation and showing the possibilities. Also this once again bridged the gap of language, by showing the skill we didn't need to use to many words in order to explain.

We let the inmates choose that what they wanted to try out. Quiet fast every inmate had his own technique they preferred and we started working in very small groups. With just 1. or 2 prisoners for 1 teacher, we could guide these



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## SESSION TWO : DRAMA (ALL TOGETHER)

techniques very individually, making big progress. They were so motivated that they started doing difficult jumps or movements on the balancing material fast. During the session we let them swap techniques, but after trying a little bit the other techniques most of them stuck with their first choice and developed further their balancing skills.

Here we could see some difference between the young group, who got over their fears and tensions easily and started experimenting with own invented movement, and the older group, who were less eager to jump or to stand on top of something and for who the security and building up skills in smaller steps was much more important.

We also brought some unicycles, but there was not enough space to practice this skill. Also none of the prisoners was very interested in practicing this particular skill.

Wim Oris guided us through a great drama session, all together, teachers and inmates participating. This were very important sessions because it helped everyone opening up (literally) within the group and it leveled out the different status between teachers and prisoners. The overall effect of the exercises was very group-enforcing.

- In a circle we make a humming sound, like you eat something nice and chew it , high and low sounds.
- Breathe out with a sassing sound until you have no more breath and then try to do it just a little longer. Let the power come from your stomach to help you.
- Breathe in and out and make sound with mouth open. It helps also to open your eyes very wide and direct your sound outward and towards the person on the other side of the circle.
- Then short sounds in 2 groups with Wim as director. We got surprised reactions from the inmates. They are not allowed to shout or scream in prison and the sound of 24 people all together is impressive.
- Walk around in space
- Walk two by two and copy the one walking in front of you
- Same idea but make the movement bigger; half the group watches the other group.
- In circle you cross and do "your inspired walk". Not to radicalize or make a fool out of the other, but to find inspiration and be aware and sensitive of the specific way or style every individual possesses. You can exaggerate a lot or just make a small change.
- Two by two: walking with your walk, finding this object (plastic cup), you do not know what it is , think it is great, give it to your partner and this while treating it as a "hammer", a "baby", a "ring", ...
- Same thing in circle , we do not agree who starts, max 2 people at the time
- HEEE UP.. PAAA shout in different rhythms and different build up of exclamation. (This grew out as our group-shout, our motto, our "group-hug", shouted after every powerful session, after the successful presentations and even during the goodbye-meeting.)

At the end of the day the teachers sat down somewhere outside of the prison to evaluate the 2 days and to decide how to go on for the rest of the week.

## Wednesday 17th of June

We had the same sessions as day two.

In balancing and juggling we cover the techniques that we have not done yet (diabolo, flowerstick, chinese plate-spinning,...) and repeat the techniques they want to continue. We started the juggling sessions with a reaction/spatial awareness-game where two people have to work together to knock down and defend at the same time a tower of diabolo's with a ball, a person may not move once he has the ball in his hands.

At the end of the day we sit together and talk about the show - or better the 'presentation' (this choice of vocabulary makes the product less important than the process and it takes away some of the stress or anxiety) - we want to do at the end of the week during the prison-walk in front of the fellow inmates. Who wants to do what? Is everybody happy to join in? Most Inmates seem to like the idea; especially those who achieved a high level of skills during the sessions. But there were some who said they don't want to show in front of the whole prison, because they were afraid of the reaction of the other inmates. They didn't want to make a fool of themselves in front of the others or they were afraid the rest of the inmates would make fun of them and laugh at them.

- We discussed for a long time in the group of teachers and these are the thoughts of the discussion:
- We will focus on the enjoyment and the fun when performing, doing it for ourselves. The process is more important than the result.
- We work and perform all together as a group.
- We need a strong start, we do not have a real stage with a backdrop and have to figure out a way to attract the audience. We decided to start in a line all together with our backs towards the audience and begin with a powerful, group-driven humming act (as we did before during the drama-sessions).
- Our goal is to get inclusion and to perform together, just like we worked together all week.
- We all come from different backgrounds and all have our own approaches and we all learned from each other all week long. Not one method that is used, but eclectic choices looking at the context and the situation.
- Costumes will be combination of prison clothes and t-shirts from Cirkus in Bewegung.
- Theatre = ritual = holy place = the stage where we work together. We combine different levels of techniques (teachers/prisoners collaboration on stage), all working together, never stealing the show but giving a good feeling to the inmates. Professionals lift the level of the performance, all of us stay authentic and connected with the group.
- Circus is a tool to work on personality and development. Circus- "attitude" of alertness and concentration.

## Thursday 18 th of june

All inmates have chosen 2 techniques they want to continue to work with.

They all like acrobatics in group and have chosen another skill like stilts, ball-juggling, diabolo, flowerstick, tightrope, globe walking or rollabolla. Some of them even chose to combine different skills in one act, like ball-juggling on the

rollabolla or flowerstick on stilts.

We all do a theatre-session in which we work on a good start using movement and sound. We repeated the breathing and humming exercises and build this up towards a harmonic, dynamic, powerful sound-wave in different tones and voices empowered by a fluent sequence turning one by one towards an imaginary audience.

We have acrobatic session in 2 different groups working on possibilities for acts. We have two groups working on the other choice. This last groups worked on juggling-acts with balls, diabolo, flowerstick, rollabolla, tight-rope, globe and stilts. The circus-teachers/artists spontaneously started helping out with the act of the technique he or she was most acquainted with for their own background. They gave technical tips and brought in little idea-balloons for the acts, but all of this in collaboration with the inmates; inspiring them to make the act their own and try out and experiment with their own ideas. At the end of the day everyone had an idea of which technique they were going to show and how the act was going to look like (some just one, some wanted to join in more acts).

The whole group agreed to play music during every act as it adds to the atmosphere and power of a performance. We were not allowed to bring in mp3-sticks, phones or laptops inside the prison and because of that we could not make the music choices together with the inmates. So after the day working on the acts in prison, the circus-teachers looked for music in their own repository, trying to fit it to the act as well as to the person they were collaborating with.

## Friday 19 th of june

Everybody is motivated and enthusiastic; they feel like performing and only two man have their doubts about doing it in front of all prison-men. Also because of obligations about their case or other reasons, not everybody was sure if they would be able to join the presentation. This made that we had to keep open the possibility of missing one participant in one or more acts. We kept this in mind during the practicing and rehearsing that last day. We were very glad to see all of them joining in the presentation, so we were on "stage" as one whole group.

During the morning session we rehearsed the powerful beginning act of the presentation in order to keep the group-spirit high from the morning on. Then we worked all together on a group-pyramid, consisting of smaller acro-balancing figures all put together into one nice image. This was the closing act of our presentation and we got a very nice result very fast. It gave a good confidence to look forward to the presentation. The following sessions were spend on rehearsing and getting ready for the show. We finalized the acts and showed them to each other with the music.

The 3 workshops we do preparing the demonstration run really well and are attended by all participants; as the week is progressing we notice that there is less and less absences and they all want to belong to the group.

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## THE DEMONSTRATION

We do the demo two times: First time for a small group of prisoners that are living in a separate block. Second time we perform for more than 100 prisoners, a lot of the guards, the director of the prison and some people from outside the prison.

"We did not know who was a prisoner and who was a circus-teacher/artist, during the performance we still could not see the difference.."

We got very nice responses of multiple spectators, not in the least from the guards, they were very impressed. Also the other prisoners were very enthusiast and positive. The whole group enjoyed both demonstrations totally. We were so excited and proud on our group. The inmates really felt as part of the circus-group, rather than as prisoners. "Guard: Take off your hat inside the prison! Inmate: But... I'd rather not... I'm with the circus! ;-)"

After the demonstration we cleaned up the courtyard all together and had a little reception with soda and chips. As a surprise the people of the 'Rode Antraciet' had made a group picture of the circus-teachers and printed it for all the inmates and circus-teachers. We all wrote personal messages on the back of each other pictures, we talked about our anecdotes, funny happenings, emotions,... of that week and finally had to say a painful goodbye.

Evaluation

Questionnaires are filled in.

These are on [www.educircation.com](http://www.educircation.com)

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## TABLE-ROUND EVALUATION/ 20TH OF JUNE:

*Question 1*

WHAT DO YOU TAKE HOME PERSONALLY FROM THIS PROJECT ?

*Question 2*

WHAT DO TAKE HOME FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION ?

### LUIS RECHE / SPAIN

1. Many things to share, many emotions , powerful; sometimes up and down; happy and sad: changing emotions all the time; it was good to work in a group with different influences and combinations; My vision about prisoners has changed; for me some prisoners were more like my father, brother or a friend. In my environment everybody can make mistakes; so I feel very lucky, what is right and what is wrong ?
2. Want to make a presentation about the work we did; Help and share with friends that also work in prison in Spain

### JACK REES / UK

1. Similar feelings; my preconception of prison has totally changed; after a few days and the connections we made they are really nice people. ; emotional rollercoaster as well: many emotions. The satisfaction you get out when you do this; when you work in prison I felt a great satisfaction.
2. Organize a meeting with colleagues and try to start to teach in prison; see how we can help. Help them focus their direction , their self-confidence.



## LIA GEROPOULOU / GREECE

1. The experience was very different for me ; in Greece the prisoners are treated like animals ; I fight with myself all week ; we can change the situation in prisons; how ? social circus for people who do not get the change to do this ; i learned a lot ; I can show my country how it worked in Belgium; people have great talents but do not always know how to use them; we give the chance ; this time people could escape with soul and body from prison; time was flying this week with us and them ; I hope to do it in Greece. All the people have nothing to lose; want to film about this ; i feel lucky.

## HANA CERNA / CZECH REPUBLIC

1. This was similar to the work I do in hospital; first thing people think it is terrible and focus on disease; cancer, pity , pain. It is taboo the disease, prison is also a taboo, circus as a tool and we act normally , they are not only prisoners, with circus we can just be people; learn to have fun, to live; I learned that circus is a lot about risk and challenge; I was worried to take the risk to put the prisoners in front of the big group of their friends; acrobatics is about transforming things , energy, transform destructive things into constructive and strong things.
2. For my clown-organization; the way all of us were teaching; the preparations; making things clear and structured; many games; tricks; social juggling.

## ILARIA / SPAIN

1. I had a conscience of prison from friends; activities for prisoners and political problems; it confirmed the things I knew ; circus is powerful in this context; I come from marginal context too; I feel no difference between the man and me, they do not feel comfortable I told them that I was sure they were good persons and all can make a good life. Why circus can help? No hierarchy, a lot of respect of each other differences; very good way of living together. I am lucky to have this in a group, to learn how to tolerate the differences. Group was brilliant, the fact we choose to do this made a very special group. We brought out the natural competences of each prisoner;
2. Maybe we can start to push something in Spain, but the mentality in Spain is not easy.

## STEF LANGMANS / BELGIUM

1. I give circus for everybody , no matter who it is for, I did not feel a teacher; They offered me a lot as well ; in the workshop space I did not feel in prison ; I was surprised how positive they were. To see, hear , feel how they accept their situation!!! They were very open and so it was easy to be open . To keep the idea going that circus can work for all; the importance of the safe environment; the anxiety to perform was acceptable because we were a group and believed in it; it is important to build first a group and then think about performing. Transformational thing: circus

gives you another definition of yourself!! You can see and show them so many positive sides of themselves.

2. Putting this projects on facebook share everywhere; websites !!! Stef can write an article and we publish it in as many places. Stefs professor in social circus. Community circus : have a multi team about it. circus in prison organization in Europe!!! The prisoners will make a rapport and have meeting. What is the influence after the workshops.

*We were like the oxygen in the prison, some said.*

## GLYNIS / TSJECHIE

1. Laughter!!! makes everything change!!! the joy is important to forget; more fun, laughter, humor; my anxiety was gone very quick; being in the community with the same goal to work on; inspiration from all of you!!! thanks!! we made them trust us , made them feel safe, so soon I felt sad that we have to go; but the quality of own life has changed. They felt good at something !!!!
2. At home we can see if we can start knocking on the door and start project

## FRANCO / SPAIN

1. I did not know what I could give in this project; group is open; no tone system to go; we start to create the pedagogy by always encouraging people positively!!! Discover your child in circus-theater, no fear to be stupid. To be able to be yourself!!! No strict teacher/student-relation; music was important.
2. In Spain; create a european organization

## PUMBA / HUNGARY

1. I had great conversations about ethical side of activities in prisons, people in need; for society people not always believe they are in need
2. Creating in Hungary something like this; sometimes it is not even their fault that they are there; they need help. They need another chance; they need to learn about how to do better when coming out. So I want to try and believe.

## RIKA / BELGIUM

1. For me the amazing thing was the power of the International group bringing in joy and laughter in prison and the natural way that circus can help people to feel strong and good about themselves.
2. It motivates me enormously to go on next year in this prison and to believe in it.

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## AFTER - MEETING INMATES OF CIRCUS BABEL - PRISON PROJECT

### Wim, Nadine, Stef

**Present:** Ringo, Robin, Ion, Casey, Bogomir, Michel, Ardian, Hadj, Johan

**Absent:** Kevin (fitness), Adrian (free before presentation)

On Wednesday 24/06/2015 Wim & Stef went back to Leuven Help Prison to have a talk with the inmates who joined the 'circus in prison'-project the week before. (the project: inmates working a whole week in sessions around different techniques together with a group of international circus-artists and -pedagogues, including a joint presentation/act for the other inmates)

This document presents transcript of quotes given during this - limited in time -after meeting. This brief overview of anecdotes, comments, testimonials, emotions,... noted and translated by Stef, might not capture the whole scope of the conversation and of the message the inmates have to offer, but hopefully it gives some deeper insight in the effect and value of their experience.

*"A pity we couldn't make an all-included-group-picture...  
it was so beautiful together!"*

**Wim:** What/how is your idea about "circus"? What does it mean to you?

**Robin:** "It really changed me... I want to do more with it, like I said before"  
"Very calming... I drop everything (worries, bad things or situation)"  
"...it gives focus"  
"Laughing", "Animation", "Educational", "Organization", "Entertainment/  
Having fun"  
"One Love"  
"Super-Mega-Fantastic!!!"

**Ringo:** "Family atmosphere"  
"Openness", "Open people"  
"No hostility/No distrust"

**Hadj:** "A way to open up people"  
"It's not easy to play/work together with people/others if you don't know them"  
"Doing something without thinking about what others will think of you..."  
"Walking/taking steps forward without knowing... Pure trust"  
"I did not expect this" --> "I discovered something inside myself... something I did not know/realized that it was there already"  
"Courageux/Brave!"  
"Discover the other... Opening the spirit/mind"  
"It develops something... it is more than juggling..."  
"How to work together with someone you don't know...without aggression and frustration... in collaboration?"  
"Everybody contributes... that is more than family" --> "Développement" = Development/Growth/Transformation/Improvement/...  
"Everyone takes his/her responsibility"  
"A person trusts/has faith in me without knowing me... He/she already assumes that I take my responsibility"  
"Technique as aid/tool/appliance" -->"difference with 'sports': No

competition, but cohesion/cooperation/coherence/connection"  
"The whole is coherent... dedication/surrendering/submission (to the whole)... connected"  
"A new process/way of co-operating and collaborating/working together"

**Michel:** "I did not expect that I could do all that..."  
"Instant trust... people standing on top of me and trusting me"  
"Forgot I was in prison"  
"We do know each other in here... but not in this way/manner"  
"I really would love to do it again!"  
"People of different countries and different backgrounds... working together like that... and they didn't even know each other before"  
"Maybe by/because of doing crazy things..."  
"very quick to pick up things... to have trust/faith"

**Casey:** "Striking/notable that 'trust' is so important"  
"[Circus is ...] physical, mental and spiritual" --> "People on the outside should take this as an example"  
"Outside it can be terrible... inside here it brings joy"  
"Very different and mixed group... a connecting whole that is a social process"

**Wim:** "Artistic attitude... Ready to connect, to observe, to work together, to be curious, to trust..."

**Casey:** "You learn a lot about yourself"  
"Physical: being touched by and touch strangers" -->"Normally only my wife and kids"  
"I am not used to this... it connects/creates a bond"  
"Mental: Vulnerability of each other... very moving"  
"Humor of Michel... very moving and authentic"  
"emotional connection"

**Michel:** "Not only tears from us... also from the people from outside... this moved me so much"

**Ringo:** "A bond"  
"We felt the difficulty there was to leave us behind bars"

**Casey:** "We are all touched/moved!"

**Johan:** [Makes everybody laugh with his everlasting natural character... Group gets exited]  
"From human to human... to different people with different ways"  
"This is the least a person should have..."  
"Being present... walking up the stairs... estimating how far you throw the ball"  
"Given the situation she does not work 'with' me..."  
"Basic condition to learn to work together, taking each other into account, making something together, trusting..."  
"The exercise then is to learn doing it, to be more precise"

**Ion:** "5 days circuswork is good!"  
 "Here energy is negative... now good energy to give to other people"  
 "I happy.. Others become happy"  
 "[Circus] blocks the negative energy, others see this and like"  
 "Opening up... connect with public"  
 "Before only see circus... now be circus... connects energy... goes happy"

**Wim:** "Complementary & from both ways... also with public" --> "by presentation, not words"  
 "Is possible!!!"  
 "Even those not interested are getting reached"

**Adrian:** "Circus is good!"  
 "Final is sad... We feel free during the project, the sessions and presentation, but when it's over we feel locked up again..."  
 "Coming out of the cell is already a magical moment"

**Hadj:** "It is a kind of therapy"

**Wim:** "Might be... But the effect is for everybody different"

**Hadj:** "The energy... That is interesting" --> "Sometimes we start clapping, or the public... But there is not so much to clap about..."  
 "Also magical moment to place yourself in an other state" --> "They don't look at us in the same way... You don't look at yourself in the same way"

**Johan:** "Also from a negative energy: You don't want to be inside your cell"

**Hadj:** "You get an energy that does not fit/belong inside a prison"

**Ion:** "The energy keeps you mentally very strong"  
 "I am no prisoners"

**Michel:** "I am very thankful for the people behind the scenes, who made this possible: Nadine, Fons, Rika, Wim, Elke, Ine"

**Wim:** "The prison-guards also became more sympathetic and trusting during the progression of the week... at first they were distant, but that changed completely..."

**Casey:** "Positive effect... also to those who did not participated in the project"

**Stef:** "A circusgroup is always more than the artists alone, also the people behind the scenes are part of that group" --> exemplary is Nadine remark before the meeting: "I never have time to join in with the fun stuff"

**Hadj:** "Wim was the key to open us up.. we 'broke' something.. crazy together!!!"  
 "Searching together... hurling ourselves together [into the group/activities]"

"Also the circus-artists had lots of insecurity to start with"  
 "Most of us didn't ever perform before... 'Won't we make fools out of ourselves?"  
 "Positive to do this as one big group"

**Michel:** "The messages on the back of the picture touched me very deep... in so many languages... I read it and think: Amaai, I didn't write a lot... I wish I would have written more..."

**Ringo:** "I discovered something that is inside me and I want to do something with that when I get out"

**Casey:** "There is a fire in the eyes of Wim to drive/inspire a group"  
 \*Hadj imitates Wims' facial expression\*

**Wim:** "It's about energy & focus..."  
 "In the beginning it took more effort to look for the focus, but this grew during the project" --> "Group-to-group, but also one-to-one... both helped to achieve what we did"  
 "We had a very difficult crowd/public, but we managed to do a performance as a group"  
 "The players had become invisible in favor of the whole/act/performance"  
 "Circus-techniques are a good/perfect tool to work fast and universal!"

**Ion:** "Circus = Machiné - Energy - Happy" --> "1 x 3 = J"



# QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE ORGANIZATION THAT PROVIDES THE CLIENTS

Name of the Organization \* : **Nadine Vandormael (Caw)- Elke Stallaert (De Rode Antraciet) - Ine Melis (De Rode Antraciet)**

Name of the Event/workshop: **circus workshop in prison**

Location\* **Leuven / Belgium**

Date\* **june 2015**

About the person filling out the questionnaire:

Position in Organization: Nadine is a coordinator of the activities in the prison of Louvain. She facilitates the program of all the activities and she also supports the people that give workshops/lessons/etc. Elke works as a social-cultural worker in the prison of Louvain. She supports the cultural program in Leuven Hulp. Ine works for sports in the prison of Louvain. She organises the sport activities in Leuven Hulp.

How long have you been working for this organization?

Nadine has been working for 15 years in this prison.

Elke works six months in prison.

Ine has been working for 7 years in prison.

How long have you been involved with the Social Circus project?

We're seven months involved in the Social Circus Project.

How long has Social Circus been a part of your organization?

Social Circus activities are part of the prison sport activities since two years.  
more than once a week - weekly - monthly - yearly

What are the main problems the participants are facing?

Social exclusion / behavioral problems / regulation of emotions /  
lack of self-esteem /

## About the organization and the care-takers

PLEASE RATE	AGREE	TEND TO AGREE	NEUTRAL	TEND TO DISAGREE	DISAGREE
The frequency of Social Circus activities is enough.					X
The information for Social Circus activities is appropriate and sufficient.		X			
The communication with the Social Circus organization is clear and smooth.	X				
The quality/teaching level is of a high standard	X				
Social Circus is valuable to the clients.	X				
Social Circus is helpful for the caretakers in their work		X			

Open questions:

*What do you expect from the Social Circus program in your organization?*

We think that it's important that the inmates can have positive experiences. It's also important that they feel like a participant and not as an inmate. Some of the inmates never had an applause, so we think it's important that they can learn to trust the teachers and that they can feel appreciated. Learning to work in group is also a very important thing that we expect from the Social Circus. It's important that Circus encourage them to try and learn new things in a safe environment.

*How has Social Circus influenced the organization and you as a caretaker?*

It was a very unique project! There was a great energy and it was interesting to witness how the participants and teachers became one group during this project. They learned so much from each other. It was nice to see how circus is something that makes people happy and that also is fun and challenging to do. It's not always easy but with the help from the teachers and other inmates there can be done a lot of great work.

It was nice to see that the circus week was a success! A lot of the guards were interested in what happened between the circus doors. There was a lot of appreciation and the atmosphere was very peaceful.

It was also very nice to see how circus can bring people with different ages, languages, ... together and to learn from each other. The circus teachers created an environment where it's safe to explore the different circus techniques and where it's not about winning and being the best in something.

## About the participants

PLEASE RATE

PLEASE RATE	AGREE	TEND TO AGREE	NEUTRAL	TEND TO DISAGREE	DISAGREE
Participants learn through Social Circus...					
Collaboration, co-operation, teamwork	X				
Social interaction	X				
Fellowship, solidarity, inclusion	X				
Being member of a group	X				
Patience	X				
Empowerment, more in charge of their lifes	X				

Open questions:

*Is there anything else the participants learn?*

They learned how to perform on stage. They also improvised and thought outside the box. They were really a member of the group, when someone had a problem/ or felt a bit down they helped each other. They motivated each other.

*How has Social Circus influenced the clients?*

We had an evaluation with the whole group at the end of the circus week. They discussed the impact that the circus week had. What was really surprising is how the group remained stable during the week. We started with almost the same amount of participants as we ended. One person was released out of prison the last day, but the rest of the participants didn't stop during the week. That's very unique.

Some reactions from the inmates:

- "It really changed me... I want to do more with it, like I said before"
- "Very calming... I drop everything (worries, bad things or situation)" "...it gives focus"
- "Family atmosphere" "No hostility/No distrust" "A way to open up people"
- "It's not easy to play/work together with people/others if you don't know them"
- "Doing something without thinking about what others will think of you..."
- "Walking/taking steps forward without knowing... Pure trust"
- "I did not expected this" --> "I discovered something inside myself... something I did not knew/realized that it was there already"
- "Discover the other... Opening the spirit/mind"
- "How to work together with someone you don't know...without aggression and frustration... in collaboration?"
- "Everybody contributes... that is more than family" --> "Développement" = Development/Growth/Transformation/Improvement/..."
- "Everyone takes his/her responsibility"
- "A person trusts/has faith in me without knowing me... He/she already assumes that I take my responsibility"
- "Technique as aid/tool/appliance" -->"difference with 'sports': No competition, but cohesion/cooperation/coherence/connection"
- "The whole is coherent... dedication/surrendering/submission (to the whole)... connected"
- "I did not expect that I could do all that..."
- "Forgot I was in prison"
- "We do know each other in here... but not in this way/manner"
- "People of different countries and different backgrounds... working together like that... and they didn't even knew each other before"
- "Striking/notable that 'trust' is so important"

- "[Circus is ...] physical, mental and spiritual" --> "People on the outside should take this as an example"
- "Very different and mixed group... a connecting whole that is a social process"
- "Artistic attitude... Ready to connect, to observe, to work together, to be curious, to trust..."
- "You learn a lot about yourself"
- "Mental: Vulnerability of each other... very moving"
- "Not only tears from us... also from the people from outside... this moved me so much"
- "Basic condition to learn to work together, taking each other into account, making something together, trusting..."
- "[Circus] blocks the negative energy, others see this and like"
- "Final is sad... We feel free during the project, the sessions and presentation, but when it's over we feel locked up again..."
- "It is a kind of therapy"
- "Also magical moment to place yourself in an other state" --> "They don't look at us in the same way... You don't look at yourself in the same way"
- "You get an energy that does not fit/belong inside a prison"

*About the workshop*

PLEASE RATE	AGREE	TEND TO AGREE	NEUTRAL	TEND TO DISAGREE	DISAGREE
The pre-workshop information was appropriate and sufficient.	X				
The workshop facilities & location were appropriate & satisfactory.		X			
The workshop material was presented in a clear & organised manner.	X				
The quality/teaching level was of a high standard	X				
Overall the workshop was informative & valuable to the clients.	X				
The inclusion of European Teachers has added value for the organization	X				
The inclusion of European Teachers has added value for the clients	X				

We think it went really well. In prison you've a tight time schedule so we need to be strict and respect the hours of the system otherwise it was possible that people who not be amused about the circus project.

Have you talked to people in your network about Social Circus?

Yes, we did. We were very proud of the results. Not only was there a great show at the end of the week, but most important of all they were one group performing together. The group had grown so much in just that one week. They didn't know each other at the beginning of the week and the last day was really moving when they had to say goodbye.

Would you recommend other organizations to incorporate Social Circus in their program?

Yes. It was nice to see how circus brought a lot of people together. Age, language, ... doesn't matter,

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## CIRCUS IN LEUVEN HULP

Tijdens de week van 15 juni wordt Leuven Hulp ondergedompeld in de circuswereld. In samenwerking met Cirkus in beweging en Europese circusdocenten kunnen gedetineerden deelnemen aan diverse circusworkshops. Het hoogtepunt van de week wordt het toonmoment waarbij het resultaat van de workshops zal worden getoond aan enkele genodigden, gedetineerden en personeel.

De Hulpgevangenis Leuven en Cirkus in beweging nodigen u graag uit voor het toonmoment tussen 19 en 20 uur van dit uniek Europees circusproject. U bent welkom om 18u45 in Hulpgevangenis.

Let u eropdat de veiligheidsvoorschriften vereisen dat u uw identiteitskaart meebrengt. Deze uitnodiging is strikt persoonlijk.

Indien u op deze unieke belevenis aanwezig wil zijn, gelieve dan voor 17 juni een seintje te geven aan Elke Stallaert via [elke.stallaert@derodeantraciet.be](mailto:elke.stallaert@derodeantraciet.be).

