

## Summary

As a condition of its budget allocation from central government for 2017, Kulturrådet (the Swedish Arts Council) was commissioned to produce a special report surveying the status of professional contemporary circus and publicly funded initiatives in this field. Our remit was also to assess the possible need and propose funding models for additional government initiatives.

The survey by Kulturrådet was based mainly on interviews with organisations, practitioners and support staff working in the field. There were no previous surveys or studies of contemporary circus at national level in Sweden, and there was little in the way of written sources or data to work from.

The overall impression resulting from the survey is that contemporary circus is an artistic field with great potential for further development in Sweden.

The degree programme at the Stockholm University of the Arts School of Dance and Circus is now well established, drawing a high proportion of applicants and students from abroad. Since its launch in 2005, 86 students have obtained a bachelor's degree in circus performance. The programme has been a factor in the establishment of more companies with highly trained artists in Sweden.

According to the sector's own figures from 2015, there were about 350 practitioners working in contemporary circus, 50 of whom were working mainly outside Sweden. There were some 60 circus companies, of which two thirds were based in Stockholm county, around a dozen in Skåne and the remainder scattered throughout Sweden.

There is one major national player, Cirkus Cirkör, which receives public funding as a regional cultural institution. Cirkus Cirkör has a fairly extensive touring programme in Sweden and has also enjoyed international success. Three organisations work to promote contemporary circus in different ways: the national industry body Manegen and two local platforms: Subtopia in Stockholm and Karavan in Malmö.

Public funding for contemporary circus comes primarily from Kulturrådet and Konstnärsnämnden (the Swedish Arts Grants Committee), the latter including the Kulturbryggan programme. We also obtained information from Musikverket (the Swedish Performing Arts Agency) and Svenska institutet (the Swedish Institute). Contemporary circus has only fairly recently been recognised by funding bodies as an artistic field in its own right, and in some cases it is still included in another category such as theatre. Nor is there any unambiguous definition of what the concept encompasses, so interpretations can vary. From 2012 to 2016, total public funding for the circus sector increased from SEK 9.4 million to SEK 13.5 million.

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The 14 companies awarded project grants from Kulturrådet for productions between 2012 and 2016 presented a total of 240 performances of these productions to a combined audience of more than 44,000.<sup>1</sup> Since there are so few players involved, it is hard to relate these numbers to other artistic fields such as theatre or dance. Over the same period Cirkus Cirkör presented over 1,400 performances to 503,000 people.<sup>2</sup> In addition, 240,000 visitors attended 478 performances/events produced by Cirkör Events.<sup>3</sup>

Various advocates have pointed out that contemporary circus is an art form that appeals to a large, diverse, partially new audience and is perceived as approachable. It also has the potential to revitalise other art forms through collaborative projects. As part of an international circuit, contemporary circus could be an engine of cultural internationalisation.

One of the main problems attested to by all representatives of the sector is the difficulty that companies other than Cirkus Cirkör experience in finding opportunities to perform in front of Swedish audiences. As a consequence, artists and companies are working abroad instead.

Creating better conditions for more companies to grow over the long term is fundamental to the development of this artistic field in Sweden. Several players in the field have demonstrated the ability to create business models by focusing part of their activities on revenue-generating events, which can provide some of the funding for their more artistic work. However, it is clear that public financial support is necessary to facilitate long-term artistic development and production.

Our survey showed that a lack of knowledge and expertise at various levels is hampering the sector's growth. Promoters and venues, as well as performing arts institutions, need to become better acquainted with the players in the circus field and their technical requirements. Public funding bodies also need to improve their knowledge. Circus practitioners too must improve their knowledge, for instance on how to reach promoters and event organisers. More intermediary links between practitioners and promoters are needed. Several organisations have a key role to play in knowledge sharing, including the industry body Manegen and Riksteatern.

To meet the identified needs, in our report we have proposed a number of initiatives involving the central government level. However, many of the needs require action at regional and local government level. Likewise, some initiatives need to come from the practitioners themselves, from performing arts institutions, promoters, industry bodies and trade unions. Our report includes proposals in the following main areas:

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<sup>1</sup> The number of performances is for those productions awarded project grants during the relevant project term. It does not include other performances by the companies during the five-year period.

<sup>2</sup> Cirkus Cirkör annual reports 2012–16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

- To enhance the expertise of promoters, performing arts institutions, politicians, officials and practitioners.
- To boost efforts to promote contemporary circus through a strong industry body and by highlighting the important role of advisers.
- To help create better conditions for production through increased public funding, as well as by prioritising development grants to regional cultural activities under the collaborative cultural model<sup>4</sup>.
- To create better conditions for including ‘other performing arts’ in the collaborative cultural model by amending the wording of the regulations governing financial support<sup>5</sup>.
- To encourage the development of circus as an art form at Swedish performing arts institutions.
- To create better production conditions in the form of improved access to training and rehearsal facilities, residencies and daily exercise for circus artists.
- To enhance public access to contemporary circus, including a collaborative structure for touring productions.
- To clarify Riksteatern’s mandate to help develop and promote contemporary circus as an art form.

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<sup>4</sup> Under the collaborative cultural model, each county council receives a total amount in central government funding to allocate to regional cultural activities in its county. The funding is allocated by Kulturrådet. Before any funding is allocated, county councils have to produce a cultural plan setting out the direction of regional cultural activities.

<sup>5</sup> Regulations on the allocation of central government funding to regional cultural activities (2010:2012).

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