

Színház-  
tudományi  
SZEMLE<sup>48</sup>

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01/02 2025

Cirkusz, oktatás, örökség

ECA nemzetközi tudományos konferencia

A 15. Budapest Nemzetközi Cirkuszfesztivál programja

Circus, Education, Heritage

ECA International Academic Conference

*Programme of the 15<sup>th</sup> Budapest Circus Festival*

- since 1977 -

SEPARATE

Annette Schwer



Circus, Education, Heritage  
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**Színháztudományi Szemle 48**  
**Theater Science Review 48**

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The author suggests drinking  
*Aperol Spritz*  
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to  
*End of Sky* by *Hang Massive*  
whilst reading her essay.

## ANNETTE SCHWER

Assessor of  
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# The Interaction Between Education and Culture as a Means of Securing the Future of the Circus

On the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which describes the child's right to education, a look is taken at the educational situation of children of professional travellers in Europe. In the UN Convention, the right to education has been enshrined as a general "cultural" human right, as described in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN Social Covenant). In this way, an explicit link between education and culture is established. Equal opportunities for education on the journey, at and with the circus on the one hand, but on the other hand also the aspect of preserving culture through education for the circus is internationally linked and anchored.

In this sense, the question arises as to how this educational obligation will be fulfilled in Europe with regard to children who live in circuses and travel with them. In most European countries, compulsory education for children is enshrined in law. Ultimately, it is the parents who are responsi-

ble for this, and the state exercises some control. In Germany, schooling is compulsory! Here, all children have to attend a state-approved school.

Both the ECA and ENTE repeatedly note that children on the journey rarely receive an equal opportunity education and are therefore rarely able to achieve a higher degree or complete a course of study. For this reason, two "Best Practice" films are shown below, which are intended to illustrate what a successful education for children and young people on the journey can look like. In addition, a scientific project from Germany will be addressed, which will deal with the educational opportunities of children on the journey in a large-scale study in 2024.

The aim of this lecture is to take a look at the educational opportunities of children and young people travelling with the circus in order to motivate all European countries to follow the example of the Netherlands and Germany and thus strengthen circus culture from its roots!



## Legal Basis and Educational Rights for Children Traveling with Circuses

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right to education while taking cultural aspects into account—a right that is considered an enforceable legal claim. ECA and ENTE advocate for the implementation of this right specifically for children and young people traveling with circuses.

## Challenges and Research Gaps in the Education of Children Traveling with Circuses

No valid figures exist regarding the number of children traveling with circuses in Europe; estimates for Germany are approximately 3,000. This heterogeneous group exists within a tension field between transnational mobility and institutional compulsory schooling, facing systemic disadvantages, institutional barriers, and a lack of recognition for family-based educational practices. Well-founded studies are lacking, while international research indicates discrimination, low school attendance rates, and bullying.

## The Significance of Education and Family Recognition

Education is a central individual and social resource, as well as a prerequisite for social participation. The family, as an educational institution, provides familial educational experiences. The social recognition of these experiences is essential, as education alone is not enough; it also requires recognition.

## Best Practice Examples and Educational Opportunities for Traveling Circus Children

In Europe, countries such as France (online instruction via CNED), Germany (School for Circus Children NRW), and the Netherlands (Stichting Rijdende School) provide access to education for traveling children. Various circuses finance their own educational offerings, and there are online A-level programs (Abitur) as well as distance learning degree programs (e.g., FernUniversität in Hagen, IU International University of Applied Sciences) for higher education.

**Best practice videos on YouTube:**  
#LS2023: Schule für Circuskinder in NRW

**Schooling for families on the move:**  
blended learning in the Rijdende School



**STICHTING  
RIJDENDE SCHOOL**



## Statutory Educational Obligation and Current Challenges

In most European countries, there is a statutory educational obligation for which parents are responsible and the state is accountable. In Germany, this is further reinforced by compulsory school attendance at state-recognized schools. Nevertheless, traveling circus children rarely receive equal educational opportunities and seldom achieve higher qualifications or university degrees.

PHOTOS:  
ÁDÁM URBÁN



## Goals and Activities to Improve Educational Opportunities for Circus Children

The objective is to enhance the educational prospects of traveling circus children and to strengthen circus culture, drawing inspiration from successful models in the Netherlands and Germany. ECA and ENTE advocate for educational rights, maintain contact with ministries of education, raise awareness within relevant committees, assist circus directors in securing state refinancing, and provide guidance to parents.



*„Az idei ECA-konferencia minden eddiginél sokszí-  
nűbb és összetettebb. Egy élénk, nemzetközi ku-  
tatói és szakmai közösséget hoz össze, és világosan  
jelzi, hogy az itt tárgyalt kérdések messze túlmu-  
tatnak egy szűk szakmai kör érdeklődésén: közös  
kultúránk jövőjének alapvető kérdéseiről van szó.”*

Fekete Péter

*“This year's ECA conference is perhaps more di-  
verse and complex than ever before. It brings  
together a vibrant international community of re-  
searchers and practitioners, demonstrating that  
the questions we address here are not the con-  
cern of a narrow professional circle alone. They  
reach far beyond that sphere and are fundamen-  
tal to the future of our shared culture.”*

Péter Fekete

