

ADVOCACY BRIEF

Dance and Wellbeing

This advocacy brief highlights the intersection of dance and wellbeing and calls for policy changes that recognize and support dance's contributions to societal development.

As the EU-funded network of dance development organisations, EDN advocates for improved working conditions for dance artists and other professionals, dedicated dance infrastructure, and sustainable funding mechanisms that rightfully reflect the public and societal value of the professional dance ecosystem.

Introduction

Dance is an expression of relational meaning, embodied in practices, movements, rituals and rhythms by which humans and other beings relate to one another.

Contemporary dance culture is both a multifaceted art form and a professional practice that enhances societal wellbeing by way of embodiment, belonging, deepening and diversifying our sense of identity.

Dance professionals* work in inadequate conditions, with insufficient funding and a lack of sustainable infrastructure. These issues not only affect the wellbeing of dance professionals but also hinder the sector's capacity to contribute to societal wellbeing on its own terms.

Dance requires specific conditions to thrive and to hold space for participatory experimentation. These conditions include sustainable funding, equitable working conditions, and dedicated infrastructure.

*Dance professionals refer to both artistic and administrative professionals, freelance, self-employed, employed and unemployed artists, and any other professionals working in the dance sector.

What is Wellbeing?

Wellbeing refers to the quality of life that allows individuals and communities to thrive with a sense of purpose, resilience, and the capacity to face challenges. It's a holistic measure of societal health, including physical, mental, and social aspects.

What is Dance?

Dance is a performative art form and a cultural practice that embodies the transformations of societies today. It encompasses diverse fields, from education to professional practice, including research, artistic development, and community engagement.

Who is the Dance Sector?

The dance ecosystem includes a wide range of citizens, organisations, and institutions, from students, educators, and artists to presenters, administrators, funders, and audiences. Each group plays a critical role in the sector's sustainability and contributes to its wellbeing. Together, they form a network of professionals and amateurs whose work and participation enhance the societal fabric.

Where do Dance and Wellbeing meet?

Dance fosters embodiment, builds community, and enhances the overall quality of life.

Contemporary dance culture intersects with wellbeing in private and public settings, spaces for dance development and presentation, education, settings with children, youth, and teachers, people dealing with forced displacement, medical settings, intercultural and intergenerational settings, and contexts of trauma, conflict, and grief.

Dance artists and other professionals who have cultivated their artistic practices specifically for the needs of those contexts deserve recognition, research and visibility on their own terms.

Wellbeing in dance means ensuring fair working conditions for dance artists and other professionals, access to healthcare and social security, access to resources, and the sustainability of professional dance practices.

What do Dance and Wellbeing miss?

RECOGNITION OF VALUE

Despite its contributions to societal wellbeing, dance is often undervalued as an artistic, cultural, and professional practice, a public good and a public service.

SUSTAINABLE WORKING CONDITIONS

Many dance professionals make work in precarious conditions, including low wages, lack of job security, hindered mobility, nomadism, administrative barriers, and inadequate access to healthcare and social security.

FUNDING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The dance sector is chronically underfunded and overworked. The existing funding mechanisms are fragmented, short-sighted, and do not address the sector's needs, which leads to instability, unhealthy work environments, and unsustainable practices.

Our Policy Wishlist for Dance

1. Recognize the Role of Dance in Societal Wellbeing

Acknowledge the dance sector as a vital contributor to societal wellbeing in public policy.

2. Integrate Wellbeing into Policy Frameworks

Ensure that the dance sector is included in policies targeting working conditions, public service, and workforce wellbeing, prioritizing fair remuneration, social security, and access to healthcare regardless of employment status.

3. Invest in Sustainable Infrastructure

Investing in dedicated spaces for dance education, research, production, distribution, and development will support the long-term development of the dance sector.

4. Create Sustainable Funding Streams

Develop funding models that enable dance professionals to focus on artistic creation and community engagement without compromising financial stability.

5. Establish Dedicated Wellbeing Programs

Launch complementary initiatives that alleviate administrative burdens for professionals, allowing them to focus on impactful work within their communities.

6. Support Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration

Create funding mechanisms that encourage collaborations between cultural institutions, social partners, healthcare organizations, and educational institutions to create supportive environments for dance.

7. Fund Documentation and Research

Support data collection and research initiatives that complement artistic production.

Conclusion

Supporting the dance sector through improved working conditions, sustainable infrastructure, and appropriate funding mechanisms is essential for enhancing societal wellbeing. Policymakers must recognize and support the vital role that dance plays in fostering embodiment, creativity, self-expression, social cohesion, and belonging. By prioritizing the wellbeing of dance professionals, we can ensure that the sector continues to thrive and contribute to the wellbeing and sustainable development of communities today.

Where do we go from here?

Move beyond the given and collaborate with experts, social partners, educators, cultural institutions, healthcare organizations, and policymakers to collectively contribute to change.

Raise awareness and launch campaigns that communicate the value of dance, the meaning generated by dance work and the impact of contemporary dance practices to articulate and reveal what may be kept obvious to some and hidden to others.

Advocate and engage your local decision-makers by outlining the challenges and proposing solutions to influence policy at local, national, and regional levels.

About this Document

This document is part of EDN's Dance and Wellbeing Campaign in the frame of the EU-funded project EDNext with the support of the European Union's Creative Europe programme.

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About EDN

EDN is a network of dance development organisations in Europe, cooperating for a sustainable, progressive, and equitable field of contemporary dance. The network serves as a hub, a mediator and an international connector. It supports the sector's professional development and raises awareness about what dance can do in our societies today. As an EU-funded network for dance, EDN represents the sector and advocates on its behalf to inform public policy and development programmes.

About EDNext

EDNext investigates important topics relevant to the contemporary dance sector and disseminates the findings. In 2024, the project facilitates a series of activities for the mapping of practices dedicated to care and wellbeing in contemporary dance. EDNext is brought to you with the support of the Creative Europe funding.