

Online Conference Transcript

This is a transcript of the online conference [How Can We Move? Wellbeing in Dance – Dance in Wellbeing](#), organised and hosted by EDN on 29 November 2024.

EDN invited representatives from the contemporary dance sector: artists, administrators, public funders, and decision makers to explore how support structures can nurture both the societal impact of dance, and the wellbeing of those who sustain it.

The event offered an engaging programme of participatory movement practices, conversation sessions, keynotes, and the presentation of EDN's new research publication by Monica Gillette [Practices of Care and Wellbeing in Contemporary Dance: Evidence from the Field](#).

Movement Session “Energised and Grounded” Jean-Baptiste Baele, dance artist, choreographer, and educator (Norway/Belgium)

Monica Gillette:

Oh, good morning everyone. It's great to see so many people here. I love the good mornings already going in the chat. Today we're going to talk about wellbeing, and to start to talk about wellbeing, we need to start with the body. So first of all, I should say I'm Monica Gillette. I'm going to be guiding us through today. I'm also going to be sharing the research that came out of the last year. But first we're going to move. So I'm going to ask Jean-Baptiste Baele to join me and if you want to stand up or get ready to move for the next few minutes, here we go.

Thank you so much. We'll have more rounds of moving the body later in the programme, but first now, I would like to invite Louise Costelloe, the programme Director at Dance Ireland and Laurent Meheust, the Director of Le Gymnase CDCN, in France, to join us. They're also the co-presidents of EDN and they will give us a short introduction. Thank you.

Opening Words EDN Co-Presidents; Louise Costelloe, programme producer, Dance Ireland (Ireland) & **Laurent Meheust**, director, Le Gymnase CDCN (France)

Louise Costelloe:

Welcome colleagues, artists, friends, and allies to our final conference at the EDNNext project. We owe a huge thanks to Monica Gillette, the EDN office team, our network, and all of the project participants for bringing us to this place and sharing knowledge so generously. The experience of this project has given us new ways of working together and sharing across the sector. In 2025, we will start a new project with the cross-cutting themes of young audiences, digital innovation, fair practises and working conditions, and a cross-cutting theme of local advocacy, as well. There will be lots of opportunities to connect over the next three years as we

work through these themes and open them up. They've been designed in consultation with our network and we'll be supporting the future of dance. I'll hand over to my Co-President, Laurent.

Laurent Meheust:

Thank you Louise. Good morning everyone. Our annual EDN conference is dedicated to research on the past year. Monica Gillette is the one and thank you, Monica, for your involvement. The perfect one, we commissioned to do our research on wellbeing and the resulting publication is now available to all, so please visit our EDN website.

Regarding the turbulence that our society is going through on a daily basis, reinvesting the issues of wellbeing and asking how dance activates certain notions seems essential to us. More importantly, we want to emphasise how dance is a tool for developing wellbeing in our sectors, improving our practises, enabling the recognition of dance, the dance sector as a vital contributor to the societal wellbeing in public policy. This, as a possible declaration of our policy wishlist for dance to translate our recommendation into concrete actions such as; recognise the role of dance in societal wellbeing, ensure that dance sector is included in policies targeting working condition, public services, invest in sustainable infrastructure, create sustainable funding streams, establish dedicated wellbeing programmes, and support cross-disciplinary collaboration.

However, we are all the more pleased that this annual event brings together so many people, organisations, management, artists, researchers, producers, policy makers, based in all continents. And to continue this morning, I have the honour to give the word over, Georg Häusler, Director for Culture, Creativity and Sport in the European Commission. Mr. Häusler, thank you for your availability and contribution. Please, the floor is yours.

Opening Words Georg Häusler, Director for Culture, Creativity and Sport in the European Commission (DG EAC) (Belgium)

Georg Häusler:

Good morning everybody. Good morning. Thank you, Laurent, for introducing me. Thank you, also, Jean-Baptiste, for this great start of a morning. I didn't switch on the camera because I was a bit embarrassed because there were policemen outside my window and were watching me and I think they were thinking what are European functioners doing in this early morning hours? But I think it was a very good start for this meeting. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say a few words at the beginning of your conference.

European Dance Development Network has established itself as the true interlocutor for us of contemporary dance, and thank you for that because you give us this possibility now to have a network which is going across Europe and which is speaking for your sector. Now the subject you chose today, practise of care and wellbeing is extremely topical for the last years Brussels in policymaking. It has been part of our work plan, but it has also been in all the institutions discussed over the last years.

Now you know that we and Brussels, here, are facing, at the moment, a big change. Change is not always negative. Sometimes it's positive, as well. I think we have a new era coming,

particularly for the cultural sector. We will have a commissioner who will be starting his new appointment on Sunday, actually, 1st of December, Glenn Micallef, I believe we all are very optimistic to have now a very strong commissioner for culture who will be able, inside the Brussels' policy debate, have a strong voice for the cultural sector. And I think we all have a desperate need of that in order to be sure that we and our interests are well represented on the Brussels political level.

Now as I said, the topic you chose is very a burning issue in Brussels. I don't know if anybody, if you followed the hearing of the new commissioner, but actually culture and health was one of the main issues discussed in this hearing and he was questioned about his plans and about his ambitions in this respect. And obviously, we have quite a bit to offer, I hope. Now one of the issues, and you surely will have this today when you discuss, which makes it so difficult, is that the traditional gatekeepers for culture are the cultural ministries, and for health, it's the health ministries, and it is not always easy to bring those two together on the same table.

Now the way we work in Brussels, we have what we call the open method of coordination that's bringing people together from the member states on discussing on different issues, and we have one on culture and health. And this is actually the first time we managed. We established this last year. It's the first time we managed to have representatives from the cultural ministries and from the health ministries in one and the same group. And I believe that will be a good foundation for the coming years when we discuss these different issues having both positions well represented in these debates. In our work plan for culture, which is what's adopted last year until 2026, culture and health plays an important role, and as I told you before, it has been a very important issue in the European Parliament in the last period.

Now we will see with the new European Parliament with a lot of new MEPs, whether this subject is still having a lot of traction there, but I am quite positive about it. And obviously, in the current presidency from Hungary, there was an important conference in summer for which treated the same topic and there were quite of interesting conclusions of this conference. Now we have in the commission for the first time had a comprehensive approach, as well, bringing both culture and health issues together. There was a document which was adopted last summer.

Now what is important, as well, is obviously Creative Europe, our funding instrument. So we are funding new cooperation projects in this context, health and culture. We have actually also a new platform which is dealing with this. And obviously we have your contribution, EDN, and congratulations that you have been chosen for another period being very active in this area.

Now nothing else from my side. The main message I wanted to convey is that this is an important subject, but also that we are, obviously, expecting from you and from this conference and from you, as the ones who are close to the reality, recommendations, it's good that you did already in your introduction make a few strong points because that's the type of input we will need in order to develop a comprehensive policy approach for this important subject.

Nothing else from my side. Best wishes for the conference. Looking forward to hearing what you will conclude and what you will be having as a result of this conference. And I hand back to the moderator. Thank you.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you very much, Mr. Häusler. So in a moment, I'm going to invite Louise Costelloe back to offer some provocations for us to think about as we move through this. I also want to share a perspective of how I entered this research and what we're going to be travelling through today, which is a bit of the movement that we already got from Jean-Baptiste, which is looking in different directions.

So often, what we just heard, often when we're talking about dance and wellbeing, we go to the topic of what dance can do for society, but we should also be, and what the report focuses on, looking at our own practises of wellbeing and how dance can also support our own. Yeah, when I say wellbeing, I'm talking on so many different levels, which we're going to go into deeper over the next few hours, but it's going to be a movement of constantly looking at our own practises and also what dance can do for society.

So now I'm going to invite Louise back, and she's going to share with us the title of your offering is Practising Care, Looking Through the Lens of Dance Organisations.

Provocations “Practicing Care: Looking Through the Lens of Dance Organisations” EDN Co-President **Louise Costelloe**, programme producer, Dance Ireland (Ireland)

Louise Costelloe:

Thank you, Monica. I really have more questions than answers in this area. It comes from my experiences of this project, as well, the EDNext project, and in particular this year, but also our experience as a dance resource organisation for professional dance in Ireland. Over the last four years which have been, we've seen extraordinary change, challenge, difficulty, and it's surfaced a lot of things that weren't necessarily always explicit in the rush to keep delivering, to keep making, to keep supporting. And some of those questions are how do we take care of artists, arts workers, and audiences in a time of great economic precarity and political turmoil. All of these have exploded really, in the last two years. Globally, the global and local effects coming together for many people. Can we hold spaces for practises of care when funding policy and culture pushes us towards burnout and we are fighting to keep cultural freedom from political interference. It's easy to be overwhelmed by the rapid changes in our ecology of dance and the challenges that face us are coming quickly.

So when we think about the future, where do we start? And this was something we talked about at the think-in was how easy it is to be overwhelmed by the scale of challenges. But I think something that we've tried to do at Dance Ireland is to looking at somewhere to start, looking at the funding that we have and repurposing from a different perspective and a different lens. Some of the small actions we've taken so far is developing an EDI policy that's underpinned by principles which will also be part of our strategy, inclusion, interdependence, sustainability. And these are issues that we have been lucky enough to be talking in depth about through the last three years of the project. So we don't feel alone in these research and challenges to bring what our intentions into practise and to embed the practise of wellbeing in how we work with our artists, our audience, and us, as a team, as well.

I think a lot of our research and consultation over the last few years has also told us that the true cost of dance is often not reflected in the funding we receive. And that also we need to embrace

difference. Not every dance house and dance organisation across Europe is in the same context in society. And as I've been reminded, we will always keep making work regardless, and that is a vocation. So how do you take care when people are passionate and have a vocation? And I think some of the answers might be in looking how we can be a strong voice for the value of dance in a societal way, but also in terms of resourcing, process, research, practises of care in the communities.

From our perspective, we're putting our EDIA policy at the centre of our new strategy and our new practises, and that has meant some changes in how we do things. We have gone deeper into some of the things that we do. There's always a challenge to do more with less, and sometimes that means us saying no and taking care of who we're working with, and taking time, but also listening. I've learned so much in the last four years from listening to artists we're working with, and a particular thanks to Alexandrina Hemsley and Mercy Nabirye who worked with us on our EDIA policy to help us step out of the treadmill, the hamster wheel of funding and production cycles, and allowed us to challenge ourselves to look at different methodologies, different ways of using our budgets, different ways of working with artists, and to be open to dialogue and change.

That requires a way of thinking differently about how we plan. And it's about building flexibility into our contingency. And this is a way, I think, that we can flourish together, but it's even more challenging now than it has been when we first started thinking about this in 2020. And we have really seen the value of being part of this network and the research that has been going on in helping us to be a strong voice for new ways of working. And I feel there's never been a more important time for that and to hold the space for artists to make the work they want to make. It's a huge responsibility I think to be a venue, a dance house. We are a place, a hub, porous between the exchange between artists and audiences and taking this time to reflect, to look at how we can do things differently, to invite people into an experience and not just a transaction, to look at how our spaces can be shifted and changed to be more welcoming.

What can we offer but what can we listen to, as well? How can we create dialogue, conversation around work between artists and audiences. This is how I think we will bring people back to us is through experience. We know, as dancers and dance workers, the value of bodies together moving. And this is, I think I'm inspired every week by the people who come to our wellbeing classes. They have a knowledge of the value that it's so experiential and so inspiring, we mustn't forget to include them in the conversations we have around the value of dance. And they are great ambassadors for the power of the work that we do with communities and artists.

We are interdependent. This is something that Fearghus Ó Conchúir, the Irish choreographer talked about during the pandemic is our interdependence. And it's something we mentioned at the beginning of the EDNext project is that we talked about an ecology, and we grow together, and we talked about inviting more people to the table. We need to embrace difference, and in order to embrace difference, we have to get to know each other. So these spaces where we talk, where we exchange, where we share our knowledge, it is vital. It's not just an added extra, it has been vital, it has shifted how I've thought about things and I'm very grateful for that. And it's given us, I think, the energy to change how we work together and to value each other, as well.

And lastly, I wanted to talk about research, exciting research, but that this is not, again, not just something nice to have, but this is really vital because it is about practise informing policy. Policy is not something that's imposed on us from somewhere up here, this is something that we are taking from the grassroots and from the experience and from the experts who are outside the dance house and coming in and out of the dance house. And sometimes that's the experience of our participants and the experience of the practitioners, and this is a necessity now, is to help people understand the value of the work at dance and the value of the experience of dance is that we need to bring the practise into policy and not the other way around.

And this has been a huge part, again, of how we've been working for the last few years and bringing the learning from our projects and from our gatherings into this conference space is that we need to learn and evolve together. We're going to have to continue to evolve as new challenges come to us. We're going to have to continue to look for ways to work together, but it is by working together that we will solve some problems and open up new possibilities.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you, Louise. Now I'd like to invite another Monica, Monica Urian, to join me. We're going to have a discussion together. So Monica Urian is the policy officer at the European Commission in Belgium, and we've had the pleasure to also dance together already. But before we get to that, Monica is going to share with us some of her recent research and insights. And she's titled her presentation, brief presentation, is Let's Move, How to Connect Culture, Policy and Funding with Health and wellbeing at the EU level. So we're going to hear from her and then have a brief discussion.

Policy Insight “Let’s Move! How to Connect Culture Policy and Funding With Health and Wellbeing at the EU level” Monica Urian, policy officer at the European Commission (Belgium), conversation with **Monica Gillette**, dance dramaturg and facilitator (Germany)

Monica Urian:

Good morning, everyone and thank you. Thank you, Monica, for introducing me. It's strange to have another Monica, two Monica's in dialogue. I'm not used to it. And it's a great pleasure to be with you.

I have been quite close to the work of your network for many years now. As you said, Monica, dance projects have defined my way of thinking about this topic; culture, health, and wellbeing, for a number of years already. And they are all mentioned in your study; DanceWell, Moving Borders, Migrant Bodies and so on. So I'm really happy to be able to continue this dialogue with you, which we studied also last year in your other conference. This builds on what Louise has been saying. Policymaking should be based on grassroots experience and I consider myself very fortunate in the Directorate, general education, youth, sport, and culture to be able to be close to the sector and really, to build the thinking around this topic together with you and to be able to listen and to learn from you as we go along.

Now where do we stand? Why do I call it Let's Move? Because indeed, as I think the introductions have shown, we are in an age of polycrisis and everything from climate change, to conflicts at Europe's border or around the world, to terrible pandemic of mental health issues. And then the list can go on and on is really putting us in a place where, as I saw also from your study and from your policy brief, we feel that we need to act, and I say, "we" because I think we are here really on the same side, and we feel compelled to reply to these challenges with actions. So we need to move together and quickly.

Culture for Health has become a movement and a family that was created since in the last, maybe, four years. It was a little bit thanks to the pandemic, but to be fair, we need to mention the pioneering role of the World Health Organisation, which published in 2019 already, this major study which recalls for the first time in the health documents, the role of culture or artistic interventions for health and wellbeing. So we work a lot with them, and based on that with the pandemic influence, of course, but which started already before, we have worked on implementing this culture for health, what we call preparatory action. This was basically a European Parliament request to the European Commission to work on this topic, and it was implemented by a consortium led by Culture Action Europe, another Creative Europe network, and that's where, at the European Union, we started really working with the sector in a profound way.

And they issued a report, again, a scientific review of all the studies published on this topic building on the World Health Organisation report. And they also analyse all the challenges in society to which culture can contribute. They have political policy recommendations, as well. And I'm happy to see that your own policy recommendations are building on that. They have a repository of projects and initiatives where I have seen about 160 projects related somehow to dance, that is still online. And in this Culture for Health report, we started to talk also about the social aspect of wellbeing. So in the WHO report, it was mainly focused on individual wellbeing and health, and now we enlarge it to the social wellbeing where dance really has an incredible effect, which is maybe less researched, indeed, as dance for Parkinson or dance for people living with cancer and so on.

So this movement now continues, as Georg has said, we are building on all these elements and we have this expert group, which has been requested by the Council of the EU through the Cultural Affairs Committee, which is negotiating with the commission every four years, what we call a work plan for culture. So it's like the blueprint of what we are doing in culture policy at the EU level. And this is also a signal to the inside world, but also to the outside world. What are the topics that the EU considers important in the field of culture policy? And this is, for us, a major step because we really bring together representatives from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Health around the same table. And these are structures that don't necessarily talk to each other at the national level, or the regional or local level. And we really give an impulse to start this dialogue and to share good practises.

We are really grateful that we have had the participation of EDN in this conversation because we have inspirational speeches to share good practises with member states. And we have had presentations from EDN and from Dance Well. So dance has been, again, very present in this conversation with the member states. The reports that we will publish together with the member

states next year in autumn will be very important for you, as well, and I encourage you to stay tuned and use it in your lobbying initiatives because it will bring arguments on what is the value, for example, of this collaboration between culture and health and how different artistic sectors and broadly cultural sectors contribute to this.

So for example, just to give you an idea, because I saw that the question of value is very important in your conversation and in your report. We are talking at the moment about the cultural value, economic value, health value and social value. And of course for us in EAC, the cultural value is the starting point. This is our *raison d'être*. And we are very careful in this debate about instrumentalization because we do believe that we are able to apply the other angle, rather how this culture and health collaboration can support artists and creatives in creating, for example, better conditions, working conditions, and therefore, supporting their wellbeing, which is also another theme that is reflected in your study. Well, there are many things to discover. I will hopefully, we will be able to continue the conversation on this report after the publication.

I just want to say that there is also an external dimension to this conversation, which has not been, maybe, very much present in our current communication because of course we start with the EU dimension and then we go abroad. But we are very well aware that there is a lot of research going on, including very thorough neuroscience research on different projects applied abroad. And here again, the WHO has a major pioneering role. And also, for example, with the neighbouring countries, there will be a project covering the five Eastern neighbourhood countries. So Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Trying to, a little bit, spread what we have learned in the EU through thanks to the culture for health action and to do the same, to create the same dynamic in these countries where it's really acutely needed. And of course here, we will hopefully start working more, and this is funded by DG NEAR, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement. And we will hopefully work more on issues of trauma, of post-conflict reconciliation and so on, which we currently work in at the project level, but not so much at policy level. And then I want to finish to build on what Georg had said on the Creative Europe funding. Of course, we want to see more and more projects, networks, platforms working on this and even literary translation projects working on this. We have seen also European Capitals of Culture working on this topic and we are fed also by, for example, winners of the architecture prize of the EU and so on and so forth. There are other programmes also that are funding, for example, research in this area, Horizon Europe, or I know of Interreg projects working on Arts and Prescription for example. But the most recent event in this area was the launch in Vienna of the Culture and Health platform.

So this is the very first time when in creative Europe we are funding a platform dedicated to emerging artists who want to work in this field. And this again, is connected to the cultural value of the Culture and Health collaboration. And I encourage you to see what are the opportunities for dance artists to participate in these activities because they will have open calls. I also want you to see all these pieces of the puzzles as working together and as giving you arguments to go to your own decision-makers, whether it is in your city or in your region or country, or of course come to Brussels. Come and see not only us, because we are the convinced ones, but the new European Parliament, the new cabinets, and bring this topic forward and make sure that this Culture and Health movement is flourishing. And I give the floor back to you, Monica.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you, Monica. It's funny, Monica, Monica. What I really appreciated what you just laid out is the multiple areas where dance can be in dialogue with, ranging from if we look at health through let's say a disease lens, so people living with Parkinson's or cancer, which we're going to hear a little bit more from later from Emily Jenkins is speaking later. We can look at it through the lens on a scientific level or a diagnosis level. We can also look at it on the social level, how people are dealing with depression, anxiety, or trauma. And this was something that was very enlightening when I drove into this research is that there isn't one research that's saying dance does all of this, but multiple studies and research.

But it speaks to the many ways that dance can respond to needs, the many way that dance can respond to support on a cohesive level and a health level. And I'm curious to know from you, I was already very happy to hear from Mr. Häusler that the Cultural Minister and the Health Ministries are going to come together to collaborate and listen and work together because separating it is actually problematic for us going forward. So I'm curious to hear how you imagine that collaboration or what you think needs to happen.

Monica Urian:

Well, I think we can already look at existing initiatives. Sometimes you are surprised to see that things are happening. And of course we cannot be aware of everything that is going on even in Europe, and not to speak about the world. So this is an excellent opportunity to learn. And for example, we have learned that in France, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Culture have a memorandum of understanding that has been working for at least 10 years as far as I know. This is the type of practise that we want to bring into this report. And of course in the conversation around the table in this expert group and say, "Hey, if you want to do this, this is what you need to think about. How do you deliver this type of policy approach?" And then of course it's up to every country to decide if they can and want and need to do that.

But at least they have the tools on how to start. They don't need to reinvent the wheel. Another example that we have seen at the national level, which is quite amazing, is that Greece has used recovery and resilience funds to create a national scheme for Arts and Prescription, particularly linked to mental health. Now this is quite bold and it is at the moment being experimented with European funds, but it does show that everything is possible if you have a very motivated team, which has this vision on what this means for society. And it has also the skill to bring different partners in collaboration and everything is very solid. So there is already a methodology for a lot of different types of interventions or policies or project in this area. From the higher national level to the very small level. For example, to give a small scale example is the project Music and Motherhood that was implemented by the WHO.

Well firstly it was implemented in the UK but then it was tested in Denmark and in Romania. And there is a very thorough methodology, 200 pages of what to do, what not to do. And I think we need to bring this up to policymakers because often we do suffer in the cultural field from this sort of lack of understanding of what a culture project or a cultural intervention really means. Also in your work on dance, well, and I know there is a very serious scientific research behind. So we need to again and again bring these arguments and make people understand how do we

work and what are the proofs that this is working at all these different levels and then scale it up. So we have to work at both levels, top down and bottom up because we do have data and we have experimented enough now to be able to offer a solid approach to this.

Monica Gillette:

Yeah, and I think it's also really important to simultaneously as we're advocating for what dance can do for health, what dance can do for wellbeing and what dance can do for society is also to maintain the artistic integrity around that. The artists and the organisations that are doing that, that simultaneously were being celebrated for what we can do for health and wellbeing, our budgets don't get cut on the cultural level. And that's exactly what's happening across much of Europe right now is the cultural budgets are shrinking, yet there's this expectation and this new awareness about what dance can contribute to society. And I think having these two departments' ministries on EU level and local level is vital for understanding the role of dance and society.

Monica Urian:

Of course, of course. And this is very much in our mind when we advocate internally and externally. So internally, I mean among our colleagues in the European commission, but also with the member states. And I think we do have an understanding that this is quite, even among the member states, that this is quite an important topic. This is our approach. So we do want sustainability in these type of projects and programmes. And it's the only way at the moment to ensure sustainability by working with other sectors. And this is always a big question, who is going to pay for Dance and Health project or a Culture and Health project in general because it's falls in between the two-

Monica Gillette:

One can't be at the expense of another. It needs to be a collaborative funding streams that are not compromising either field.

Monica Urian:

Indeed, indeed. And this is hard. I mean, I'm not going to say that we have an open path and we can run forward, but we have to start this conversation and there are all kinds of challenges, of course. For example, the fact that even in health, we only invest 3% on average in many countries is actually even less in prevention and we invest most of the budget in treatment of disease. Already in the health sector, they have to switch completely these around and in the context of ageing of the population and so on. But I do believe that by continuing to bring these arguments and have patience and resilience to sustain this conversation in the medium term, we will manage to find a common funding and therefore create this funding sustainability and improve the working conditions of artists.

As you said, the artists that want to work in this field. We are not at all advocating for people. We are not forcing people to choose this path. For us in the [inaudible 00:41:28], respecting the integrity and the artistic integrity and the autonomy of artists is essential. And in fact, this is also

a precondition of any high quality intervention in this field as we have seen again and again. So this is really like the red thread of all our thinking.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you so much Monica, as always. I'm sure we could continue going and going and exchanging together. Thank you for being here and thank you for sharing where policy is at the moment. Speaking of wellbeing of the artists, we're now going to move to Luísa Saraiva, who's a choreographer, dancer, and researcher with a background in clinical psychology. And Luísa is going to share with us a presentation promoting better working practises for the mental health and the dance scene. Thank you so much, Luísa.

Lecture "Promoting Better Working Practices for Mental Health in the Dance Scene"

Luísa Saraiva, choreographer, dancer and researcher with a background in Clinical Psychology (Germany/Portugal)

Luísa Saraiva:

Hey, hello. Good morning. Before I start, I wanted to say it's very timely that we're having this today. If you are in Berlin, don't forget to go in the afternoon to the march of mourning for the cuts in the Berlin cultural sector. I'm unfortunately not in Berlin today, but I think it's quite interesting that we're having to talk in a day that where, I mean one of the cities where the most cultural workers live is experiencing dramatic cuts. And as we all know, Germany being a big reference for Europe, this is very bad news for all of us. Actually, yeah, I'm actually working mostly as a choreographer and a dancer and I did the pathway the other way around. I started by studying psychology and working as a researcher before doing a career transition into dance. So I have quite a specific view on how my trajectory in dance expresses some of the big challenges that we have been discussing so far.

And I think all cultural workers are working in a state of crisis constantly. So that's why we cannot really implement strategies for prevention and intervention as Monica was very well saying that allow us to be more resilient towards issues of mental health. And it's a known fact that all cultural workers at all levels are vulnerable to mental health issues. And this is something that when we approach the public outside of culture, I think it's always very important to state artists are not more vulnerable to mental health because creative professions are more vulnerable to mental health. We are more vulnerable of mental health because we are working in extremely undignifying, unstable, precarious working conditions. And actually we are one of the most resilient sectors because as Louise said very well, artists continue to work. We don't even know sometimes with what and how and with which resources, but we continue to work, because there is a lot of factors around it. But that's why I wanted to share with you a little presentation that is actually more to help organise the information that I'm giving.

Can you see my screen? So yeah, basically I just wanted to share with you these are the main topics of a very interesting scope review done by the artist union in the UK, a platform called Equity. The UK has been doing a lot of research on this. They also are very organised when it comes to health in the cultural sector and they have a union that can do research and they

published it in 2022. And I think the links will be shared in the chat. I'll be sharing two links. One of them is the link to this study, and another one is a link to basically a set of guidelines that CTB in Berlin has put together in a working group of called Work Culture that is how to make dance in Berlin. And they both are based on long research with a lot of group of people involved that have to do with this topic of mental health and the challenges of being in a performing arts career.

And the one in Berlin was made mostly by cultural workers trying to put together guidelines on how to make better working spaces, how to work in better conditions that promote mental health. And the scope review from Equity was made actually by mental health professionals, so by psychologists that really analyse all of the literature available in English on this issue of mental health. And what we see is that the biggest challenge to working with wellbeing in a performing arts career, so for all cultural workers is the precariousness. So basically the biggest cause of depression, anxiety, and burnout, which by the way are the most common mental health challenges that cultural worker face. With dancers, particularly also eating disorders have to do with the precariousness of the work. So not the nature of the work, but the conditions. And the main topics that I'm putting here, financial pressure, power imbalances, a culture of fear, very unstable working hours.

They even call it anti-social working hours, which I think is quite interesting. So we are providing as artists many times what happens in the free time and leisure time for everyone else in society, and it's never discussed how that has an impact on work-life balance for artists. And then of course, as most artists are now freelancers, the policies, the funding structures, the way that theatres work was not adapted to this kind of freelance structure. So this promotes a culture of fear and a very big imbalance because as an artist, we are always outside the institution or mostly outside the institution dealing then many times with structures that are just do not understand exactly how they work, that their hierarchies are not clear. It's very subjective, the criteria by which projects are chosen for funding. The curatorial discourses are very much opaque, this is on the level of the artists. And then the people that are doing the programmes and having direct contact with artists many times are subject to a lot of pressures from policy that cannot be shared throughout the levels.

So there's lack of transparency and lack of autonomy at all levels. And this of course is very different depending on your personal status and characteristics. So it's not the same depending on all these factors that I put here. Gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, disability, neurodiversity, which experiences you have before? Where are you living? What is your social status? What is your professional status? Do you have another side job? Do you have any kind of financial anchor? Do you have children? Do you have other dependents? So this interdependence between how the structure of the work is functioning, how the working conditions are affecting one's health, it's always in dialogue of course with the personal characteristics. And what we experience as cultural workers, but also what I experienced as someone who did a lot of counselling, for example when I was studying dance in Germany around 10 years ago, is that there are virtually no resources.

So if you are studying or working in any other sector, there is resources for a lifelong education. There is a lot of, let's say, human resources tools that are appearing already at the level of

education. If not in high school, they are appearing immediately at the university level. So they are lifelong. And we talk about lifelong skills, transversal skills, but this is not the case in dance education. So because I only have 15 minutes today, I really want to focus on this issue of prevention and early intervention on the lack, on the complete systemic failure of artist education to really bring up autonomy and responsibility in cultural workers at all levels so that we are more prepared, we are more resilient to deal with these constant changes that have nothing to do with individual solutions. So many times when I'm counselling artists, people are focusing a lot on their inability to deal with precariousness.

That they couldn't find the tools or they're not good writing applications. They don't know how to strategize, they cannot project themselves in the future. This is what I listen over and over again when I do counselling with artists. And what I would say is that no one is prepared. This is a skill that you have to practise, that you have to train. And if there are financial cuts and if the structure is not transparent and if there's a lot of power imbalance, it's not up to you individually to find solutions. So we are finding individual solutions to big systemic contradictions. We are trying to build careers in a system that does not promote careers. We do not have progression. As artists, we are constantly navigating in waves of there is a stability, there might be a cut, you go back down. And this mostly has nothing to do with your own skills.

It has a lot to do with systemic and political changes that your personal influence can't do anything about. But to raise awareness on these systems is very, very, very important. So I believe that a consistent intervention that starts in artist education in high school, but particularly now since, I mean, most artists also studying in an art university at the moment, that there is an intervention made by mental health professionals, by career counsellors for interpersonal skills. We work with people, especially in the performing arts sector. Most of us manage teams of people, but we are taught only artistic techniques. We are taught only how to improve our skills in an artistic sense, in a technical sense. But we are not taught how to manage a team, how to manage a project. There's some universities that do it now, but for example, how when we are studying dance, can we go through all the roles that come into making a dance project? The producer, the curator, the technician, I mean, just to make it very simple. So we are not even talking now about how to intervene or talk to people who make policy.

There is a lack of the skills even when we come to curators, programmers, artistic directors. And that's why I make here, it's very big. I think what we need is a structural support for cultural workers. There is no career counselling services that have a focus on lifelong development and education. There are a lot of services for production. For example, in Berlin, I mean, in Lisbon and in Porto, so I'm talking about the two countries I know the best, Portugal and Germany. There is support, consulting services to help you write your application. To help you know, how can I apply if I have a project, who to talk? You can get consulting for that, but you cannot speak to a mental health professional that will help you understand what might be that you need to work on that will help you have a more sustainable career, that will help you understand how to deal better with a system that you don't control, that you don't fall completely in a state of helplessness and hopelessness, which is what I see at the moment in most of my peers.

So how can we talk about implementing good working practises when we also don't educate our workers, we don't help them understand what could be good working practises for them when

we don't have any professional in theatres or any kind of consultation services, for example, for freelance choreographers and for freelance directors to help them manage their teams better. And this for me has to do with a practise of transparency, autonomy, and responsibility. And these are the three things that when we think about arts education are mostly not present. We are taught to be responsible by our technique and our skill, but not to be transparent about our hierarchies, not to understand ourselves as workers with agency and responsibility for our roles and to set boundaries and limits to what is acceptable and not acceptable. And this is many times an issue of communication and communication skills can be taught and practised.

That's what psychologists do by the way, for five years. And that's why mostly they're good at it. And this also will help us understand how to deal better with structures that are dysfunctional, because this is the reality, we cannot say that we work. And that's all that has been said so far has been focusing on this issue of burnout. And I would say actually burn on, most of us are in burn on. We are always on the verge of being out of work too stressed or with too much work because we can never plan, understand how things will be in six months, in one year, and in two years. But to work in this field is also a choice and how to keep that choice in a healthy way. This we can do, this we can promote, this we can build structures, consulting structures that can help cultural workers interact actually with mental health professionals and not only peer to peer initiatives, but to be in a real conversation with mental health professionals that can alleviate some of the pressures of this work that are really a lot.

So I think these are my 15 minutes and this is maybe the main contribution that I want to give and I'm very happy to see that we are all of course on the same page. But I really want to put this focus on early intervention and a lot of cooperation with art education and universities that I feel it's not so connected then to the actual working and the field of work. And by working with the younger people that are still not entering the market, we can help promote a working class that is more aware and has more agency.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you so much, Luísa. Now that you're done with your report, you can also look in the chat box and see the applause and support that you've been receiving throughout your presentation. I will take the moment to let everyone know that Luísa's available for workshops and presentations. So if you want to bring this research, bring her approach, bring the coaching into your institution or dance company or dance education environment, please reach out to Luísa. So I recommend you drop your contacts here in whatever way you want. Thank you very, very much for saying all this out loud and bringing this in the focus. Now I would like to invite another artist, Monique Smith-McDowell, choreographer, performer and artistic audio describer and Monique's going to share with us her presentation, Wellbeing Starts With True Inclusion: Wellbeing in the Rehearsal Spaces. So now we're going to zoom in on the rehearsal space and thank you so much, Monique, for being here.

Good Practice “Wellbeing Starts with True Inclusion: Wellbeing in the Rehearsal Spaces”
Monique Smith-McDowell, choreographer, performer and artistic audio describer
(Germany/UK)

Monique Smith-McDowell:

Hi, I hope you cannot hear me. It's quite fitting to come after Luísa as I think the topics kind of merge quite well together. So yeah, my name is Monique Smith-McDowell. I'm a dancer, choreographer and also working with creative audio description for dance. And I'm based then in Hamburg, Germany. And I guess my career spans somewhat over a period of, God knows, 11 to 12 years where I've very much worked in various areas of theatre, let's say in commercial theatre, in freelance theatre. I've been on both ends in that aspect of that that is privately and heavily funded. And that that is then at the moment struggling to find its funding and continuation, let's say.

And in that I'm also working very much with diversity and inclusion both again in freelance theatre and as well in commercial theatre. So that's the bit about me. And what I can definitely attest to from what Luísa said is to me it's very much about what is the mental health considerations of the people that we are creating spaces for or who are entering into our spaces and how do we facilitate a better environment for those artists, both as the choreographer or also as a fellow performer or dancer with them in this space. And I think during, let's say the last five years of my career, I definitely became a bit more in that way connected to various communities of dance environments and rehearsal spaces. And in that I definitely can see where there's a lot of old-fashioned practises, where there's a lot of practises that maybe can be evolved.

And definitely I learned a lot of new practises that actually make healthy environments for everybody. One thing that became very clear to me during my time in these spaces is the concept of room culture and what does it mean to have a very healthy room culture? What is a room culture? What does it involve to really actively say, "Okay, we're adapting this space and we're adapting this space to be inclusive for everybody." For those that don't know, room culture is generally then the term of creating a space where each person has an advocacy of the space. It's also creating a space where there's an open discussion constantly happening between facilitator of space and those that are in the space that is being facilitated. And so for example, it can be the idea that when we enter the space, the first thing we start with is a check-in, something that I learned from the disabled community that they're often doing within rehearsal spaces. And that means that every day that we are checking in, we come in, we are maybe giving 15 to 30 minutes of let's connect, let's figure out where everyone in this space is today.

What does it mean when someone turns up and says like, "Hey, I didn't sleep so good and I'm super exhausted," and what do we as the group within the space then offer this person? Or what do we do with this information? I myself continue this practise of check-ins because I found it's very effective, like on a recent project that I just did, one person, very openly, one day would come in and say like, "Oh, I had this horrible experience on the train and I'm trying not to bring my energy into the space, but it was so horrible. I felt super affected by what happened." And the good thing about the check-in on this day, for example, is that everyone turned around and said like, "Hey, no, arrive in this space as you are. If you're feeling super affected by something, why would you shut that off? Let it be in the space. Let it sit in the space and it's okay."

And what I can definitely say to that is when the person then had the ability to be themselves, they had the ability to advocate for what they needed in that moment of letting something out,

but also, they then had the choice to decide for themselves, do I shift this energy or do I then just let it sit and then figure out where it takes me today? Actually, I think in the end, that was one of the best rehearsals that we had with that person because they felt so supported by the environment.

So yeah, in that way, I would definitely say that those check-in moments I think have really helped to create a space of community. And that's maybe what rehearsal spaces need more. I mean, especially for myself as a dancer, I was often in spaces where I was very much a body in space, like something to be used for a choreographer's ideals, maybe not so much with a voice and an opinion in essence, yes, at times when it comes to choreography, yes, probably I had a bit more of a voice, but definitely in terms of structure of the day or maybe what my body requires for that day, I definitely didn't have a choice and I was very much put to a schedule.

So there is a study that's very much attached to mental health in work environments, which Luisa also pointed out, one of the leading contributions to a deterioration of mental health is the lack of advocacy and the lack to decide of what my body does when my body does it. I mean, mental health is probably the biggest contribution to wellbeing or not, one of the biggest contributions to wellbeing. When we really think of wellbeing. If my mental state of how I enter a space is not so solidified or not so concrete, how can I then give my best to what someone expects from me? Or how do I offer myself very vulnerably to the space then if it's not supporting my need for advocacy or my mental health and my mental wellbeing? So that's very much something that I've discovered connecting with artists from disabled communities.

I can also speak from my perspective as a black person or a black female who often is the singular black person in a space. And in that way, I can definitely speak to the desire... Often there's this need to educate and that also I think affects the wellbeing that someone can enter the space. I think for any marginalised person, that we are often very much the individual in the room from this marginalised community. And then there's always the responsibility on the individual to educate the space. And that in itself, you walk into a space very much trying to figure out when the mask of this space is going to deteriorate and you realise that they're just there ticking boxes and not trying to be inclusive.

Why do I say it like that? I think it's often when we are talking about inclusion, it's often really important to identify why we are trying to be inclusive and diverse. And that's a very hot topic at the moment. Let's say it like that. Not everyone now feels the need to step into those spaces, but maybe it's more about the intention and the attitude of why we're stepping into those spaces. Why do we feel the need to be inclusive? And why I say that is because as a marginalised person, it's very obvious when the boxes are being ticked and the intention is not there.

And I think in that sense, it's often about what research we do on the other side. If I want to work with a disabled artist, let's take a blind person for example, how much research have I done to make sure that when they enter the space, that then that space offers them independency? Did I think about creating a tactile system on the floor that then facilitates them being able to navigate from entrance to rehearsal space? Or did I consider that maybe there's an assistance person available so that then they're not dependent on another colleague that they then have to

work within another method, but then can really have one person responsible for the assistance during their time in the rehearsal?

And the same also goes, if I work with a black person, I can honestly say that I cannot tell you how many times I've had to speak to someone about lighting. And it's great that everyone decides, "Yeah, I would really like to have a black person in my project," and for all this inclusion, I'm very much up for it. But then I think it's a bit about how much labour do I then have to do myself when I enter the space and how much labour are you willing to do? And if the labour in your direction feels like it's too much, maybe the concept is not really inclusion. Why I say that is because if it feels like too much for you for one day or a period of time of two months, then you haven't considered how much work it is for me for basically most of my life.

So it's a little bit those discussions that I think maybe I want to highlight and leave in the space. I definitely agree with diversity inclusion, and I definitely agree with working for a better togetherness, a better community within dance, a better mental health state within dance. But I think it also comes very much down to how much are you willing to do for that? How much are you willing to explore for that? And how much are you willing to take away from those that are marginalised and somewhat burdened by the spaces that we currently have existing? Because I think in all of that, we can collectively make a better communal sense of caring for wellbeing among us.

And yeah, I think other practises that may come into that is then also thinking about timing. Yeah, sorry. I think in general what I really want to say is that the open discussion of saying something, the open discussion of allowing back and forth, deciding, okay, we enter the space and everyone can decide for themselves when they need a break, we communicate it, we say it together, and if someone says, "Hey Monique, it's been an hour, I know, but I need a 15-minute break, my system is off." Those discussions, those elements benefit everyone in the room actually.

And that's very much what I've learned. If we really take the time to see something from someone perspective or if we really take the time to implement what other communities already have existing among them, actually it benefits everybody in the room and provides a very productive constitution of working a very productive space of working. And actually in the end, we are getting the best out of performers rather than beating them to exhaustion, burnout, et cetera. We are creating spaces that maybe take away a bit of this burnout culture and allow really individuals to decide for themselves how much they can put into the rehearsal space and how much they can navigate. And when they say they have a day off, they come back and the next day and they're fully in spirit because they were able to recuperate in the manner that they needed to for themselves. I think that's where I can leave it.

So I just again, leave the open question of yes, if we are working for better wellbeing in our spaces, and if diversity and inclusion is something that everyone is really striving for, maybe we can just think about why we are striving for it and what boxes we are trying to tick. Or if we are going with the right intention to say that actually I'm here because I want that these spaces don't exclude anybody, or I'm here because I make this space and I make the space that everyone can be seen and everyone can be heard and everyone can be understood and that no one is left behind.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you so much Monique. And also thank you for the contribution of our interviews and exchanges of how they also came into the report. They were very precious for me to hear, so thank you very much. And also thank you for zooming up and down on this systemic level, also onto this very human to human level in the rehearsal room. And I would also like to advocate that this is a practise not just for the rehearsal room, but for all of our organisational spaces and to zoom in on the human-centred work as well as we move through the institutional. So thank you. Go ahead.

Monique Smith-McDowell:

So one more thing to add. Now that you said it, actually I remember. Yeah, and maybe it's yes, while we're in the topic of inclusion, that it's also about maybe having people within the institutional levels also that are from these different communities. It's also about not just having them as consultants and hiring them for one or two hours and saying, "Hey, come in the space and teach me something," but actually having these people on your team and having it be a culture of the team actually. So it's not just about room culture, like you said, but it's also about actual institutional culture or societal culture that we are adjusting.

Monica Gillette:

Yeah. Thank you very, very much. And now we're going to take a moment again for our body. So I would like to invite Jean-Baptiste back.

Movement Session "Energised and Grounded" Jean-Baptiste Baele, dance artist, choreographer, and educator (Norway/Belgium)

EDN Research Publication Presentation Monica Gillette, dance dramaturg and facilitator (Germany)

So this is the moment now where I get to share the research, but also because I'm hosting this, I get to use this as a moment to also catch up on our time. So I'm going to give us a very brief introduction, just a little overview of the structure of the report, and I'm going to share screen to do that. So about a year ago, EDN invited me to research this topic of wellbeing. And I think I was approached because in the last 10 years, I've been doing many projects that relate and engage with dance and society, a variety of creative Europe projects, a variety of projects of working with non-professionals, so who that's not their career to be a dancer, but working with people in society.

But over these 10 years, I've also seen a gap in what we're practising in the socially engaged work and what we're practising within the profession of the dance field. So I wanted to take this opportunity to look at that, to examine that and understand what are the motivations and what are the needs. So I started off almost every interview, every meeting, every beginning of the

research, what is wellbeing for you and what do you need to feel well? And of course it's individual and subjective and personal and it isn't always something that we can take care of alone. It's not only about self-care, it's also about conditions that are often out of our control.

So the focus of the report was to map the many ways that dance enhances societal wellbeing, to note, to examine, to listen to the strain on dance professionals, to maintain their own wellbeing, the various tensions surrounding this topic from policy level to perception, to feeling that funding systems are pitted against each other. I found out of course, that it's very different in many different contexts throughout the EU, and in the end-to-end with recommendations for a more cohesive approach. So I'm just going to jump through some of the chapters.

Context and motivating factors. So background, the context and motivating factors. So I started from the background of where the last EDN report about wellbeing kind of left off in 2021. And I tried to synthesise a variety of definitions around wellbeing ranging from the World Health Organisation to also different cultural influences of how wellbeing is understood. And I also drew from interviews of dance artists, and just to share a few details or a few quotes from them. So one practitioner described wellbeing as a combination of a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual state that is cultivated and a choice. Another dance artist described it as fully inhabiting one's conscious body and an environment. So this is a lot of what we're training as dancers. Also important is the freedom to make choices for oneself, and the ability to be accepted and to accept, to feel respected, and to be able to feel possibilities and potentials. So what I discovered on these socially engaged projects on this very human level are details and values that can really expand and be activated on the organisational and systemic levels.

I'm going to jump to the next one. I know it's not... Yeah, so dance and wellbeing in a societal context. So this is where I zoomed in on dance and health, which has gained a lot of visibility in recent years. What's exciting about dance and health is something I mentioned earlier in the conversation with Monica is that it can be tailored, it can be specific, it can be specialised, there can be specific interventions that really address, if it's someone dealing with Parkinson's addressing motor control. If it's someone dealing with cancer, then it can also be around the mourning or the loss or a sense of not feeling all parts of their body. So dance is highly adaptive to the specific needs.

There's also a great increase in dance in neuroscience, and we actually just practise this a little bit, the brain hygiene, the brain plasticity. I note this in the report about how we are practising brain plasticity when we try to learn a choreography, make a mistake, and then learn again. So we just practised, among many things, some brain plasticity and working with some movements that may have felt less familiar to some of us when we were moving with Jean-Baptiste aside from the joy of which is paramount. I also highlight dance in school settings.

So access to dance in early years enhances communication, mature and cognitive skills, nurtures essential social skills, and encourages collaboration and emotional expression. As kids grow older, it also reduces stress, anxiety, increases confidence. The benefits are endless. I also tried to address dance in various community settings and in response to societal urgencies. There are enormous amount of projects, artists, organisations, activities that are addressing a wide variety of societal needs. I can put in the report only a teeny tiny, tiny bit, but I hope if you click into some of those, you'll also find some inspiration and to be able to connect with other

people that are doing these projects. Often, each of those that I noted also have research in their own individual projects. So it's ways to also resource that.

Practising what is preached. So this is the moment in the report where it turns toward how are we working, what are the practises within the field? Luisa and Monique have highlighted already a lot of needs around this. In this section, I lay out some examples of how we can learn from these community-engaged projects as well as some different contexts where dance is being utilised as a catalyst for institutional transformation. Also, the impact on an intensity of workload level that many of these socially engaged projects then load onto the organisations without an increase of budget or hours or staff in trying to reach and engage with more people and to expand who we're dancing with. The resources aren't really also simultaneously increasing for the organisations to be able to really support that and be able to have enough time to do the care well.

There's also a very small section where I try to translate some of the skills being discovered and learned inside of community-engaged work, how this can also inform the relations with artists. So very often, we're talking about these structural and policy levels, but then there's also always ways that better wellbeing can be implemented that don't need big policy change, they just need a shift of work environment. Monique mentioned it a bit, and also Luisa, greater transparency, agreed upon timelines for a project, communication is key, establishing together the needs, mutual needs, having discussions around the way projects can flow with respect and realistic expectations.

Towards the end, I delve into the tension between what I call the tension between the art form and the cause. So this is where we get into the tension around dance being instrumentalized as a tool or being disconnected from its artistic integrity to solve societal problems, let's say, I'm speaking very flat here, but there's concerns. This dialogue is always going on around autonomy and instrumentalization. What's key is to maintain the artistic integrity inside of these projects and the needs around that. There's also often challenges now of what we call politically motivated funding, where you have to find the right keywords to try to reach and receive this funding, which is again, disconnecting to what the project needs to be.

And lastly, or second to last, I make recommendations for an integrated approach, which is looking at how different approaches to policy can support the work that's already being done. There was this constant awareness or constant discovery of who is leading who, what the artists and organisations are doing, or what the policy's requiring, and how can we be more in sync with each other to have more healthy and productive projects. And also, some of these recommendations are what Laurent referred to at the very, very beginning.

The transformative impact and breaking the bubble. So something that I hope to have time to dive into a conversation a little bit later in this programme with Roberto and Marketa is looking at how these projects that are often engaging with non-professionals in society, how they're affecting artistry, how they're affecting the way that we work. So kind of flipping the conversation that it's not only what dance can do for society, but also how these projects are informing and developing the artistry and the organisations. So to conclude, I just want to say thank you for everyone who contributed to this, everyone who shared very generously their ideas.

I want to thank EDN, especially Gaja, for your editing support on this and all the conversations. And yeah, thank you very much. We're going to move on now. I hope that the link will be, if it hasn't yet been, that the link for the... Yes, there it is. The publication is now dropped in the chat box. I look to hearing feedback and impressions. Feel free to reach out and sharing your reflections around it. Let's say it's a stepping stone in the conversation. So now, I'd like to invite Biljana Tanurovska, EDN board member, cultural worker, curator, writer and researcher who's going to speak about some of the embodied practises that you all have implemented in the Nomad Dance Academy. So I'm going to pass it over.

Good Practice “Wellbeing in the Workplace” EDN Board Member **Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski**, cultural worker, curator, writer and researcher (North Macedonia)

Biljana Tanurovska:

Thank you. Thank you, Monique and Christophe, EDN for inviting me. It is a pleasure to be part of the conference and privilege to have a voice and to share what we are working with and on with you. Somehow, now listening to Louise and Monique, some things what I would be talking about will be overlapping, and also Jean-Baptiste, what he was doing, it is also somehow interweaved into our practise. But however, I will be talking about Nomad Dance Academy. So briefly, I will talk who we are, where we are and how we work. And then what are these working practises? First to say that Nomad Dance Academy, it's an informal contemporary dance network or a platform that is active since 2005 in the field of dance, education, creation and production, artistic and interdisciplinary, I would say research as well as presentation. And in the last year, since 2012, very much advocacy. The title, what I put for this presentation and sharing with you it's wellbeing in a working space, which means I will be just sharing with you how we reshaped our working space.

And it's absolutely related not only with the individual, but the communal or collective wellbeing, meaning that the one state of being well is related to the state of the community or collective, what they belong to. So however, this community is Nomad Dance Academy, that through its cultural activism, I would say, seeks to strengthen the various creative and artistic forces in the local and national contemporary dance context in like post Yugoslav and let's say Balkan region. And our aim to overcome the challenges which are really big and connect it to local and national cultural policies, meaning improving working conditions of professional work, which are not meeting even the basics in some of our contexts and develop new production models, create these, let's say, overall dynamics of fluid, common cultural space that it's part of this European continent.

So the members of NDA considered the work in dance and of dance through levels of different systematic elements, education, creation, production, research, and also theorization, historization and archiving is what we are doing. And we understand the contemporary choreographies and artistic and social function, methodology or practise that deals with the working conditions of creating, composing, constructing, performing, and etc, but also thinking of various presences, absences or representations of the human body and its actions, but also

not only individual, also the collective sense as well as these traces, indications and potentialities in the past, present, and future.

So being aware of where we are, what are the conditions that we face, and the socio-political context that which is in a constant crisis, socio-political, but also facing all the time very precarious environment of working. But also, as I said, basic working conditions. We have developed working environment that would enable us to communicate and act with care and respect in some senses that has been challenged over during the times of COVID and afterwards due to these extensive Zoomings, what we have and the physical absences, what we faced, or rather than these live meetings, but still we are planning to work on the methods that would enable us convivial surrounding and a space of work to continue.

But however, I would try to now go through briefly what was the effort that has been done of some of us or all of us that are part of the platform. So this is the platform also to say of individuals, not of organisations, that is organised horizontally, and this is very important for us and in order to experiment and sustain this imaginary perspective of creating different options of being and working together. So all programmes, collaborations and exchange were developed through a format of so-called bodies that we had put on the horizontal level that plan further steps, politics and etc. So maybe I can share some photos here with you just to make sure we are... I hope you see, so it can kind of go through the ways how we exist together for our togetherness.

So besides this body that is there, we call it decision-making body, we took decisions regarding the overall workings of NDA in certain periods. We had this coordination office, artistic body and task groups, and everything is self-organised, I have to say. So the course of this creative production, artistic work of NDA is organised horizontally I said. And to enable that, thus to create taxes as well as this pluriverse space, I would say, where many voices can be heard and many worlds of dance can be developed. We started and we created several principles. So we created these principles in order to subvert this vertical relations into ways of working that would enable respect, communication, access, I don't know, meetings with each other and experiencing together. So we had this principle of balance, which is very important, that suggests that every artistic and production initiative should include a consideration of gender contextual, inter-communal and partner balance, which should prevent any closing off and paralysis of interests and knowledge, I would say. And this principle of balance is a principle that fundamentally erodes the inertia of any life and work form of the one or the unit and presupposes the creative handling of the uncertainty of differences. So this also principle includes this rule of three, what we insist on, and this refers to minimum number of people needed to form a basic creative group or a collective.

And then this principle of invitation replaces the selection method and the invitation is an affirmative form of selection we put approved, which the inviter is handling the invitee thoughtfully and sharing the responsibility and makes us to avoid this competition judging that puts us even on a bigger pressure and forwards the precarious condition even further, thus to produce a space of a common for us.

The next one is a principle of open space that is a tool that assumes that not all things or forms of creative life can be predicted in advanced. And it's somehow to avoid this projectization

where everything, it's predetermined and it's there, but to allow this openness where we can have a joyful communication about what we are doing. And tool uses this range of improvised and permanent work tools which transform this production, creative, and artistic work into a lively and playful work process.

So this NDA was established as a Balkan Dance Network with a group of dance artists, producer theorists from former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria at that time met in 2005 at ITM. And we wanted to develop diverse programmes from educational to research, as I said. And we started with a yearly educational programme in 2008 until 2010, which concluded each time with a series of artistic productions and performances. And this was going from Skopje, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Zagreb and ending in Ljubljana. And this was existing for a couple of years. And during those years, 45 students and their educators created this base for resilient and tenacious that we would say dance community from which all subsequent NDA projects have developed.

However, as a platform, we insisted on working regionally without one centre and horizontally, and we decided to reflect at one moment on the exhaustion and to think what are the needs and where to go. Thus, after these intensive years of working and developing of the dance community, from 2005 to 2010, we declared a resting body and statues of the platform dedicating time to reflection, rethinking, resting and development of the materials and ideas for advocating further needs of this community. So we decided to develop a programme, Nomad Dance Institute, that would be a research and education, but also focused on the knowledge production. But what we learned and what is the most important for us, and also from this distance nowadays, we reflect on that, is the decision and dedication to have this resting body for one year. That enabled us to reflect and think not being effective but caring for us at the moment and the future, which influence the wellbeing of all included, but also of the platform itself.

So one can say this is this to somehow avoid, what we said, antisocial working hours, but especially this self-exploitation that we were going through as self-organised network. So after this intensive time, there was a risk to stop. We felt overworked, underpaid, self-exploited at the moment. And since back then the whole region had very bad conditions for dance, some of us still, and some changes this have changed, but some not. So however, during this year what is important, what we learned is to listen to each other, to check us where we are, what we want to do, because things are changing, not also only in the context, but also in us, to be aware of the diverse voices and needs. And the most important is to have this to insist on this convivial space in which we can produce the knowledge for the future.

So those who had the better conditions somehow solidarized, we created several different kind of methods to support each other in this year in order to carry on and to continue. So after this year we decided to continue with creating an environment that would allow us firstly to start the meetings either with the bodywork, stretching or choreographing each other, walks through woods or meditation or sharing the dance practises among each other. So that enabled us to meet each other through other practises than talking and planning on paper and et cetera, and firstly to create this convivial work that kept us moving forward in the turbulent times. So I mentioned COVID affected deeply communication, ways of understanding of being together, but

we will keep forward insisting on such perspectives and practises as we have evidence from the past that I share that only through wellbeing of the community future together is possible.

So we also insisted to share our working hygiene with externals or to develop an events according to our working methods. Thus mostly we started our events with body work or short mapping of the space and body and then continue. But also we were building the environments in which we could share practises, knowledge, ideas, but also foods, stories, et cetera on our festivals, PLESkavica, CoFestival, Kondenz, Locomotion, which become these kind of places. So thus, while programming, we are always aware that we have to have these convivial spaces where we can meet through dance or body practises and knowledge ideas, but also foods, stories, et cetera. However, we worked since 2011 on the Nomad Dance Institute where we started different actions from archiving, co-teaching format, et cetera, but also advocacy.

And this advocacy actions, we started in 2012 and became a permanent programme advocating for more stable position and work conditions in the field of contemporary dance within the Balkan region. And these advocacy events took place in various cities throughout these years in the region and gathered artists and policy makers and representatives of ministries of culture, but also on the local level city administration along with representatives and other decision-making and funding bodies, dance curators, artists with the intent to enable them to meet directly communicate, but also with the help of performative and less formal communication and discussions, games, artworks, et cetera, to exchange the experiences around the field of the contemporary dance.

So we had these different advocacy events in Skopje in November, 2012, in Sofia in 2014, in Belgrade in 2017, Ljubljana 2019, Zagreb 2024. And we created these environments where we pushed forward, joyful and caring communication. This is the last one from Zagreb now in November, caring communication and enabled us through our working methods to open, I would say, these pluriverse spaces of conviviality where we can discuss diverse and even antagonistic positions and still be able to find a ground of common for the future. And only like that with this convivial surrounding for work and with working rights and conditions that would protect us from being over precarious, exhausted, and self-exploited. And these conditions that take care for dance professionals, we can continue the work and to continue with opening pluriverse spaces and worlds for many through dance. So wellbeing is possible with working conditions that would enable dance professionals' ground from which we can go further. So, thank you.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you so much. It's great to hear of examples the way bodily and artistic practise is integrated into the designing of an organisation and a network and a way to go forward also with policymakers. Great. We're now going to take a moment to sit back and receive a very beautiful film. It's a dance film called In My Skin by Sándor M. Salas. He's a film director in Spain, and the screening is with support from CineDance, and it's about 15 minutes, and then we'll come back to hearing from Emily Jenkins.

Dance Film “In My Skin” **Sándor M. Salas**, film director (Spain) Screening with support by Cinedans

Monica Gillette:

So we're going to move forward into a little programme switch. We're just going to flop the conversation that I'll have with Roberto Casarotto and Markéta, I hope I pronounced your last name right, Vacovská. Help me if I-

Markéta Vacovská:

Perfect.

Discussion “Transforming the Dance Field through Community” **Roberto Casarotto**, co-director of Aerowaves (Italy) & **Markéta Vacovská**, dancer and choreographer (Czechia) in conversation with **Monica Gillette**

Monica Gillette:

Okay, great. I think you're going to join us in a second. You'll pop down. There we go. So thank you both for joining me in this conversation. It's one that I've been wanting to have for a long time, which is to reflect together on the impact of these projects that we're doing with society, with people who are not professional dancers, but really engaging and creating these beautiful exchanges and collaborations, how that's affecting and impacting our choices in the dance field as professionals, how we're working, how it's impacting organisations.

So I want to start first just to introduce yourself, Roberto Casarotto, the co-director of Aerowaves and an initiator of many of these types of projects including Dance Well, which is movement research for people with Parkinson's, but also open to everyone and spread now throughout the EU through the Creative Europe project. And then also Markéta who's a teaching artist in Dance Well in Prague and also performing and making your own work so that the link is through Dance Well here. But I want to start by asking each of you about your own personal motivations in doing such projects and where that's coming from as a need in your field. Can we start with Markéta?

Markéta Vacovská:

Thank you, Monica. Hi, all. Yes, I will share my experience. Actually today I'm talking here from the perspective of someone who has been working in contemporary dance field as a dance artist and choreographer for about last 15 years as a freelancer. So I'm exactly the one that Luísa was describing perfectly.

In Czech Republic, we don't have any stable statues, artistic statues that would provide certain stability for artists. And I was with my work and with my presence in this field, obviously very much nourishing and following the system that we were talking about today. You probably all know it means applying for grants, for the financial support from the state, from other

institutions, then rehearsing a piece, then creating a premiere, and then perform the piece. And you never know if the future life of this dance piece will be, actually will exist. It depends on many, many factors, not only if the work is successful or not, mostly it decides the money cost. And I found it myself last, I don't know, maybe two years, even more probably, with this very annoying feeling before every show with repeating question that was coming back all the time, "Why am I doing this, and why am I following such a system? Why am I contributing actually to this system?" So that was my personal motivation to change something, to make a shift, to start redefining my role as artist in the society.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you so much. I think you're not alone in asking this question. Thank you for saying it out loud. Roberto, if you can share with us some of your motivations.

Roberto Casarotto:

Thank you, Monica. Thank you again and all the people that spoke before me. I think it starts from the deep desire to build meanings with what we do into the context where we live and work. Instinctively and intuitively, I think it started also as the desire to transform and contribute to those processes of change that come into society, into the arts. And I didn't know at the time, but it started a sort of collective approach. So it wasn't initially a decision, a motivation, but it fed the motivation, the idea of working together and be collectively engaged when you work with societies.

Monica Gillette:

So now I'm curious to hear what have you seen, what have you observed through doing these projects? How are they affecting the choices you're making as a dance professional? You each have two different roles in the field. So maybe Roberto, you can speak about how it affected your programming choices when you were building a programme, a festival, how it affects your thinking around where you're trying to make space for other types of ways of being together in the field, and Markéta also how this has shifted your way of moving forward as a dance professional. Maybe we start with Roberto first.

Roberto Casarotto:

Thank you. I think I became more aware of the demographics of the different generations and people around the dance programmes or the activities of a dance sounds, a festival. And therefore it immediately brought the idea and desire to dig more and get to know better what kind of society would eventually participate in these initiatives, which brought then the topic of building relationships and making them last beyond the life of a project or an activity. So it immediately brought this practise of thinking beyond the long-term and sharing the responsibility of keeping those relationships alive, which has of course changed somehow some priorities and some ideas and how to build care, the concept of care, and how to put that in action.

It has also opened new spaces for dance, meaning that in order to work with some groups of citizens, sometimes you start to imagine different locations, different venues where these

encounters and events can happen. It brought new forms of dialogues with artists that would eventually be invited or would manifest the desire to work with non-trained professional dancers, therefore new forms of dialogue, new forms of trust that were built together. Eventually when the non-professionals manifested the desire to be seen on a professional stage, this brought the great opportunity to see a variety of bodies on stage as we had never seen before. And that maybe brought a more plural offer of role models, ideals of beauty and excellence, and therefore it started a process of shifting perspectives around dance, who can do dance, who can judge dance also, what is dance for people. And immediately some of these processes brought the evidence that people lives can change through dance, through the dance practise. I could speak for an hour, so maybe I stop here.

Monica Gillette:

I have one question. I love the way you're pinpointing it and giving language to it. You talked about how it developed a longer term relationships with artists or a different way of having dialogue with artists. So it's shifting instead of having maybe the more classical approach of trying to set up a co-production or bringing a work to put in a festival, but creating a longer term dialogue of really working with artists and discovering with them how their practises meet the proposal and vice versa. And I'm wondering if you can describe some of the shifts that you saw from the artists that you invited into these projects.

Roberto Casarotto:

I'll try not to name too many people, but there's some artists with whom I collaborated over decades now, and I could see how they shifted completely, even the formats of their performances in order sometimes to make them participative, sometimes to engage directly as performers, some people that didn't have a professional training. Sometimes mixing professionals and non-professionals, building different forms of narratives, even different ways to share their practise, different ways to reenact existing works with non-professionals. So there's a lot of approaches and, I dare to say, practises that could be developed around that. And working with non-professionals also allowed us to embark in some projects that actually gave us the opportunity to research new language. I'm thinking of the work done around the soft skills that has empowered those artists that were part of the Empowering Dance project and those researchers that somehow built a language built ways to share the knowledge that most of the times many dancers carry with them, but sometimes they're not fully able to articulate. And that has generated also new possibilities for work, for further ideas and developments. So it's a very generative process.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you. The Empowering Dance project is mentioned in the report that I wrote, and in a moment I can also drop the link once I do a little quick search for it, or maybe Gaja can help me out. Markéta, I want to turn to you because you also have gone through a bit of the shift that Roberto just described. And you put focus on a different way to make a performance recently. So maybe you can share a bit about that project, why you chose to go in that direction. Thank

you, Gaja. Thank you very much. Yeah, maybe you can share that right now so we can have a little incline into it.

Markéta Vacovská:

Yeah, we can move on. I will be brief, hopefully. The shift I experienced was that I started to involve more social and documentary perspective into my artistic work and to open what I do to wider public, not to stay in the elite institutions, etc, as I was used to somehow. So I felt this obligation to engage my work socially to be more activist also politically. So I will share with you this performative work that I did with Tantehorse company, it's called Children D. It was actually created mainly to support children's palliative care. Maybe we can move on. And as I told you already, I was very annoyed to work in the system and I just didn't want to work alone. So I invited a lot of people into this project to create community, to create networking. And what was preceding to this project was a huge artistic research with experts from the children palliative care field.

So we met during several months, several artists I invited into the project, and some doctors, nurses, nurseries, social workers. Then also we met Chaplain, because palliative care is also taking care of spiritual level of the human being. And also we met bereaved parents who wanted or agreed to share their stories with us. So this was a very important part for me to step out of my artistic perspective and to meet people, to meet the reality actually itself. We can maybe move on.

So this was the meeting. Sometimes we were about 20 people, sometimes we were even more, and we were just sharing our experiences, not only from our artistic perspective, but also from their professional field and experiences. We can move on. I will briefly tell you or describe you each performances, because what was important, it was all walking, it was two and two and half hour walking so the audience could enter also physically into the performance, which for me was very important that you can really experience something physically and through walking, through moving, you can also digest a lot of emotions that comes logically with the topic as children palliative care is.

So there was one performative lecture. These two artists, they were thematizing the view of a witness of someone who is not really affronting the situation but who is witnessing, which is like majority of the society. Then we were having a reading section. You can go on maybe. There was in this beautiful landscape, there was two chairs, intimate meeting of two strangers just reading a book which was incredibly actually emotionally strong. And in the book there were also stories from the professional section of the palliative care, what is it, what are the tools as a palliative doctor for example, or the personal stories of parents. We can move on.

This is again the reading. Then we had a dance installation. Maybe you will know Dance Well people here you will recognise Roman, also one of the Dance Well teacher. These two dancers, they were thematizing through movement, support and care, but also what is heavy or what we cannot care anymore. Dancers were playing with those two principles. We can move on. Yeah, Roman. Then we had a Audiowall. It was thematizing one shared concrete story of a mother who lost her child, but also on artistic level it was more about this collapse of an image you create yourself in your head, how your life will be, or this expectations, and suddenly from one

second to another everything is collapsing. So in the Audiowall, the artist was thematizing this. And then there were two other performances. Can we move on?

Yeah. Actually maybe I will share with you why it was outside. We were all walking into the future children hospice where families and children will have the possibility to touch the palliative care and they can stay there for a while. So this hospice is now under constructions and it will be done in 2026. So there was this site-specific also location. We can move on. Very bad picture, but we could enter into video installation that was thematizing acceptance. It came very much from the Chaplain speech that he was really underlining this acceptance at the end of the live. And at the end for the last performance, we can move on, yeah, there was just a singing of this opera singer, Markéta Cukrová. She was singing Mahler's Kindertotenlieder. And we just wanted to give audience space to enter inside all the memories and to digest the work.

So I'm now describing this quite a huge project, but I wanted to end, maybe we can end with the presentation. If you want to know more, but it's all in Czech, so probably it will not really be helpful. But this is one example of a really huge project I did, but also, I wanted to mention that sometimes I just take my speaker, I go in the environment of the hospital, in front of the hospital, I take a friend of mine and we just dance together, and sometimes we really have people watching out of the window and they are so happy. And so I call it dancing hospital. I did it only three times, but I think there is enormous amount of possible initiatives that we could do as artists just to bring our experiences to wider public also in the places that it would never be seen. I finish.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you very much. This is a beautiful demonstration of also sector collaboration. You were working with nurses and people coming from palliative care, so the dance practises are also meeting other practises and vice versa. So you're nourishing each other. This is a rich space that isn't always easy to set up and to make happen. And that leads me to my final question for both of you, is a bit this prognosis question or recommendation, which is, these kinds of projects are not only allowing dance to meet members of society, but it's allowing also professional dancers to process the artistry and to think of other ways, also artist driven, that they're really driving this from an artist driven place, so not a mandate. So what do each of you identify of what is needed for these kind of endeavours, or what are shifts in thinking that need to happen or in policy or funding? I know it's a big question for a final one, but just I'd love to hear a taste from each of you.

Markéta Vacovská:

I think definitely it's a multi-year funding, because I think now in the system I am living in, we don't have any space for research, money for research, very little and once you finish one project you have to apply for another one and you don't have this space in between. But also I think there is a strong potential to work really with national institutions like galleries, hospitals, libraries, and for example the Dance Well class. That was very important shift also for me when I started to teach as a Dance Well teacher, I was like, "Why this is not accessible in every library or?"

Monica Gillette:

The classes are situated in museums just to mention. Yeah.

Markéta Vacovská:

Yeah. But also in every museum why it's not there accessible? Why we have it only once a week and we could have such more initiatives this way that the art is something that we can really touch as someone from the society, everyone. Because now I also work as a social worker with the excluded families, social excluded families and those people, they will never touch something as art. They will never go to theatre and why we cannot really bring it to them? I think we can, but if we are only working individually from the ground, I don't know, it doesn't help. We have to also do it from the up, from the minister of culture, etc, but then probably we have to have some expertises, because we want to have some exact results in our hands. That's what we hear as, I don't know, if I would be minister of culture maybe. I hear this more that, "I need exact results of your work." I don't care of what people think.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you, Markéta. Roberto, do you want to add on?

Roberto Casarotto:

Yeah, I would continue on around this topic of time and space. I feel like we have to share the responsibility to keep our spaces open for the very polarised society we live in and really prioritise the human encounter, the human connections that otherwise are fading more and more out of our daily experiences.

I also think that the word collectiveness is something to take into consideration. How to work collectively is probably what is going to help us to face the dynamic changes in society, in environment, in all the fears and traumas that we encounter where we can bring different expertise. So, working also in a multidisciplinary context where again the knowledge of dance can maybe inspire also other forms of research and disciplines.

I'm thinking of the dialogues that some scientists now are open to have with dance artists and they acknowledge the capacity, the capabilities, the talents, the intuitions of dance artists more than in the past to the point that they start to revisit the way they articulate protocols for the measurement of impact. And again, how we can involve science with the arts and social studies. There's a whole universe to be discovered there. But I think the key question for me is what kind of meanings are we building with these? What kind of meanings are we sharing or trying to share with our societies and can they really be part of these slow revolutions that we want to activate when we see where the world is going? And there I see the different form of activism that collectively can be shared and brought forward.

Monica Gillette:

Yeah, thank you so much. I love the slow revolution that we're all on right now. So, thank you very much both of you for taking the time and also thank you to Emily for switching so quickly

the programme due to time limits. So, now I will invite Emily Jenkins to come onto the spotlight. Thank you both. Yeah, so Emily is a dance artist and founder of Move Dance Feel and is going to share her project and findings. Thank you again Emily for switching schedule.

Lecture “Creating a Culture of Care” Emily Jenkins, dance artist, founder of Move Dance Feel (Netherlands/UK)

Emily Jenkins:

No problem. Thank you for the introduction and I'm really aware that we're nearing the end of a long conference. So, to begin, I actually invite you to lean away from the screen and breathe into your back space and just take a moment. We don't want to get into that irony of talking to care and wellbeing and not taking care as we're talking and listening. For those who might not be able to see me, I thought to just briefly describe that I am a Caucasian woman in my mid 30s.

I've got long, light brown hair and I'm wearing glasses and a black polo neck top. Yeah, thank you EDN for choosing to focus on this topic. It's one that is really close to my heart and I'm honoured to be here and have the opportunity to speak to it. And as Monica said, I am here using my voice as an independent artist, a freelancer who has delivered work for a range of different dance organisations, particularly in community and health settings and I'm also using my voice as someone who's worked on the operational side of dance over the last 15 years I've worked in management and development roles within dance industry and also founded my own company Move Dance Feel, which offers dance to women living with and beyond cancer.

And I'm not going to speak to that too much, but recognise that everything I'm sharing with you, all my learning has very much been informed by the work I do with Move Dance Feel. And so I'm coming at this topic from what I think is quite a unique position from the perspective of employee and employer and from being a small cog in the machine to then also being largely responsible for the operating of the machine itself, if you like metaphors. And additionally, in recent years I've been designing and leading training programmes for artists who are working at the intersection of dance and health. So, I believe I have a very good understanding about the rewards and challenges of this work, particularly in sustaining our sense of wellbeing, not just from my own experiences, but also from listening to others' experience in the field and I'm going to attempt to share a PowerPoint to see if I can get it up.

Yeah, I am hoping you're seeing that nice and clear, but let me know and if not. So, I thought to begin by tackling the question that EDN has proposed. How can we ensure that the principles of care and wellbeing are embedded within the dance sector itself? And I began by looking at the interrelationship of care and wellbeing and I believe a big contributor to feeling well is feeling cared for, which includes how we show care towards ourselves and a significant aspect of behaving well is to show care towards and to genuinely care about others. And I'm going to notice my use of the word show, because I think care is most visible and felt in action as opposed to just thought. So, to introduce you to Move Dance Feel work, I thought to share some of the actions I take to show care in Move Dance Feel company operations.

And I really feel these can be reflected at large across the dance sector. So, one of them is to communicate clearly and consciously, giving a lot of thought to my choice words, my tone of voice, my body language and the quality of my presence. The quality of our presence can be healing in and of itself and in general I'm to communicate with kindness and transparency, which is how I'd like others to communicate with me.

Another way I show care is to offer fair pay whereby fair is determined with artists or staff in conversation together and it's also really important to pay people on time, because financial uncertainty and cash flow challenges are a reality of this work. So, paying well and promptly can contribute to people feeling financially safe as well as respected and valued. I also schedule check-ins, moments to come together with my colleagues and reflect on the work and importantly how we are in the work and on a more personal level so that we can understand one another's needs and how we can best support one another and to allow time for rest and reflection, inserting breaks between projects and programming where possible and I heard Roberta MacArthur say, "This is so challenge when we are dependent on another application, another grant."

But this work is demanding, especially when we're trying to do a lot with very little resources and when the pressure is on to keep delivering without recharging, that does compromise our health, but we are the work, so if we aren't well, we can't do the work. So, it's really important to try and create space and time for rest and reflection.

And again with this question, how can we ensure that the principles of care and wellbeing are embedded? That word for me, I think it's paramount that we pay close attention to the health and the quality of the relationships within the work, within our workforce, within our sector and research shows that when we strengthen our connection to one another, we are healthier. It's one of the main reasons that I work as a community dance artist. Yet there does seem to be a disconnect between knowing that to the extent that organisations are programming participatory projects, but honouring that internally within the operating structures of the organisations, there seems to be a disconnect.

And yet we know, and again, research is showing us and perhaps more and more in the coming years that when we strengthen our connections to one another, we are more vibrantly creative, we're more resilient, we're more productive and more fulfilled, which I'm pretty sure the sector will want at large more productive beings, but very much stemming from the strength of connection between us.

So, I think this holds relevance to how we can move forward as a dance sector and I'm going to share with you the words of Adrienne Marie Brown. "The depth of relationship between the individuals in a system determines the strength of the system." And this is taken from her book *Emergent Strategy* and has become one of my mentors, because in preparation for this conference, wonderfully reflecting on my 15 years of dance, I've learned that our relationship to one another in the work significantly affects how we as staff approach, experience and sustain the work and also significantly affects how others, be that beneficiaries or stakeholders or audiences, experience our work.

And just to clarify where Marie Brown refers to strength of the system, I think of system being that which encompasses all aspects of how I work in dance. From facilitating dance sessions to

communicating with trainees or liaising with funders or strategic advisors. So, for me this sentence is incredibly powerful and gives me an embodied sense of recognition and discovering it a couple of years ago I was really able to see with greater clarity this cause and effect. And what I found most potent in Marie Brown's words is her use of the word depth, which is why it's highlighted.

And I'm someone who for many years has interrogated wellbeing theory and I understand our sense of wellbeing is very much determined once our basic needs are met by the depth of connection that we have with ourselves, with our environment, and really importantly with others. When there's emotional depth between colleagues and participants and collaborators, the work becomes more meaningful and the positive results last longer.

And so in my experiences I've noticed that there's a direct correlation between depth and sustainability and this is threefold of sustainability of the work itself because there are more people emotionally invested in it and willing it forward. Sustainability of its benefits. The more meaningful the work or the dance experience is, the more deeply it penetrates our hearts and bodies and minds and then continues to serve us not least in memory and sustainability of myself feeling well within the work, which can look like a greater sense of kinship, more energy or motivation, more trust, more resilience and more enjoyment, all of which enhance the quality of what's produced.

And to give you a small example of this quality I speak to or depth, I'm going to share just a two-minute video introducing the voice of Vanio who is a dance artist, an educator who took part this summer in a four-month Dance and Health - Advancing Your Practise training programme that I designed and led. And the premise of this programme is be nurtured and learn how to nurture. Connect and learn how to bring people into connection dance and learn how to enrich people's lives through dance, looking at the reciprocity of things. And I'm sharing the film with you because it's evident in Vanio's experience of the programme that it was deeply moving for her. And this short extract from a longer interview provides some rich insights in her words as to what contributed to that sense of depth. So, I will play it now, but just let me know if you can't hear.

Vanio:

This course has allowed me to position myself in the receiving end of being cared for, which I really needed and not just being given knowledge, technical knowledge or practical knowledge about pedagogy, but really a knowledge that is coming from the heart. And this is definitely thanks to you, your leading, your words, the resources you've given us, but also how you have designed it. I really admired the way we've progressed from meeting together in the physical space and really finding the sense of connection of collectivity through the joy of dancing together, the sense of acceptance of embracing where every participant is and nurturing their creativity, finding what is unique about each of us as participants, which felt so opening as you were saying today, also resting in the back space. So, really inhabiting our sense of self.

Yeah, so the sense of what is meaningful for us is something that we're not often asked for. It's like, "What is the aim? What is the objective of what you're doing?" But the sense of, "What is purposeful and meaningful for you?" Taps into ourselves as wholes, as whole beings and also

there's something existential about it. Why are we here? I could feel this genuine, authentic connection beyond what we carry in our everyday life that for me this is just really a playful exploration of identity, of being in the world and offering to the world.

Emily Jenkins:

So, you can hear an echo there of Roberto's words as well, as meaningfulness and collectivity and I'm going to repeat Vanio's comment or question, "What is purposeful and meaningful for you?" I'm going to give you a minute break while you think about this. What is purposeful and meaningful for you in the work that you do? Then if you feel comfortable to share, I welcome some responses in the chat box even though I know it's a question you might want to think about for longer than a minute. And I also just want to reflect that these choice words, Vanio has surfaced of purpose and meaning directly linked to contemporary definitions of health and wellbeing. And particularly this one by physician Machteld Huber from the Institute of Positive Health in the Netherlands, who says "Health is broader than the absence of disease or symptoms. An increasingly central role is played by other aspects such as resilience, sense of purpose, meaningfulness and self-management."

And so even by asking the question, what is meaningful for you, we're already beginning to create the conditions for wellbeing and witnessing Vanio's emotional response to the question. I see that it's not just the question that has touched her, but rather the fact that someone cares enough to ask, which again speaks to the depth of relationship and in what ways we can take care of people. Questioning is in many ways quite simple and yet sometimes so overlooked.

So, I'm going to try and weave these thought processes together and propose that by making an effort to deepen the relationships between us and us being the individuals working in the dance sector or the individual organisations working in the dance sector, by making an effort to deepen the relationship between us. We can naturally embed principles of care and wellbeing in the sector through practise, through the way that we meet one another in the work. And so to end, excuse me, I'm going to guide us through some suggestions and I'm informed by my own learnings and Vanio's reflections for how we can cultivate depth of relationship, knowing that this can nurture the wellbeing of those who work in dance and strengthen the entire system in a way that produces more meaningful results.

And it's already been spoken to today, but the first one is the privilege spaciousness and I loved what Louise said at the beginning of this conference, to embrace difference we need to create space to get to know one another and that's largely what this is. And it's spaces where people can come together and develop relationships that are more personal, allowing for organic evolution of them. So, for example, if we're scheduling a meeting or designing a programme of work, strategically create space within it for free moments without an agenda objective. And this spaciousness also brings up loads of benefits, allows different voices to be heard, enables us to behave and work more responsibly, in a way that's more person centred, responding to a wonderful new idea or perhaps to an issue that had been previously hidden, and the list goes on.

I think this was also mentioned earlier as well, listening, prioritised listening. And my grandpa once told me, I'll never forget that there's a reason we have two ears and one mouth. We need

to prioritise listening over speaking. We can learn so much about people and the effects of our work through listening, and when we listen with an embodied sense of presence, it enables people to feel truly seen and heard. And importantly, we listen without interjecting and free from distractions and particularly distractions in the mind. It's important that we are physically and mentally present and that's rare in modern day living. We might physically be somewhere, but mentally somewhere else. So, really prioritise embodied listening. Be heart centred and for me, what I mean by this is showing up authentically in alignment with my core values and also going an extra mile to be thoughtful and fair, considering others' feelings and treating them how I wish to be treated.

For example, I reached out to Vanio and talked to her about this idea and asked permission to use the extract prior to even considering it. I didn't have to, I already had the permission, but it's this ethos of no decision about them without them. To be heart centred is also to acknowledge the whole person in the full range of beautiful complexity and accepting people as they are. And this doesn't mean to say that you compromise your boundaries or allow yourself to be mistreated, but try to consistently act from a place of acceptance, from loving kindness and respect and compassion.

Markéta actually just spoke to this by saying she steps out of herself, but adjusting your position, where are you within the hierarchical order of things or your power status? Adjust where you are regularly, because it gives you different perspectives, it allows you to meet other people, hear new insights as a play like when you're giving or receiving when you're leading or you're following. Notice when you're an expert in the room and then make deliberate choices to put yourself in a space where you're a novice or you can step into the shoes of beginner. And again, this has been spoken to, time. Invest time. Time is needed to grow and nurture relationships. Time allows for fullness of expression and for us to feel witnessed in that.

And that's more palpable when people come together to share physical space. To deepen relationships as I said before, we need to ask questions and find out what people enjoy or they wish for, be that personally or professionally. Take time for that and actually compassionately also ask the difficult questions. Many people try and shy away from this, but it's through navigating difficult conversations that we can also develop, deepen and enhance the quality of our relationships.

My favourite one, create opportunities to experience collective joy. Joy is essential for wellbeing and very, very effective at creating, deepening and maintaining relationships. And you heard in the film that this can be powerfully felt through dancing together. That was the irony. Some of us working for dance organisations and don't really dance with our colleagues and if that's not for you, that's okay, but then find collective joy through the sharing of other activities.

And it can even be as simple as bringing everyone together to collectively celebrate a success. Sharing is caring and in terms of wellbeing theory, joy connects to increased trust, resiliency, gratefulness, and motivation and you're starting to see the interrelationship of all this phenomena. Two more, brave vulnerability. Again, evidence shows that we connect more deeply to people when we dare to be vulnerable with them and when we hold a brave space for others to be vulnerable with us.

Moving vulnerability modelling vulnerability shows courage and wisdom, which are two attributes of great leadership and I noticed, actually when I've worked for large and very famous dance organisations, I've actually rarely seen vulnerability modelled, especially by leaderships and I think this is for fear of being judged or being seen as unprofessional or maybe burdening someone, which is very British. But collectively, I think we have a responsibility to reframe this and acknowledge the power of vulnerability and forging deeper connections. And lastly, align words and actions. Do what you say you're going to do and if you say you care, show you care, because there's a clear correlation between consistency, reliability, and emotional safety. And when words and actions align, it helps to foster safe connections, which are essential for mental wellbeing and fundamental to shaping meaningful relationships and more so meaningful lives.

So, just to end, I'm pretty sure I'm probably out of time, but I'm going to leave you with the thought that healthy human relationships are essential for our wellbeing as much as food and water is. And I hope of giving you something to think about in terms of paying closer attention to the relationships within your workforce. And may they be mutually supportive and joyful and meaningful, reflecting the essence of community dance practise itself, but knowing that that contributes a long way to the health of the systems that we're in. So, I'm going to leave it there and I'll put a couple of links in the chat box to Move Dance Feel and website and also my email address if anyone would love to get in touch. I am personally feeling this hope of being virtually with you shoulder to shoulder at this somewhat crazy time that many people have spoken to today already. Thank you.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you so much, Emily, also for bringing this into such clear and tangible values and actions. It's a perfect start to bring this whole session to a close, to have this overview and summary of tangible qualities of depth. So, thank you. And now we get to do one last group session to dance our way to a close. So, I'll invite Jean-Baptiste. Yeah, thank you so much for moving us through this session. It's been a pure joy and yeah, take it away.

Thank you everyone. This has been grounding, energising, and inspiring. Thank you all for your time, especially for those who stayed a bit longer. Thank you, EDN, for making this space possible and for inviting me to do this and write the report as well. So, thank you all and I hope we cross spaces in non-virtual space, but physical space, soon.