

EDN

EQUITY IN WORKING CONDITIONS IN DANCE

Alexandra Baybutt



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FOREWORD

Dance development organisations in Europe are diverse constellations of structures and professionals. They engage with and are part of the contemporary dance sector's transformations. Constantly moving forward, they work by trial and error to explore how best to support the art form and its professionals, and to find new ways to develop the relationship with audiences and citizens. Responding to changes and challenges within society is the basis of ongoing work that seeks to build more diverse, equitable and sustainable models.

In 2023, all of European Dance Development Network's activities have orbited around the topic of 'Equity' – a grand word that frames a broad range of issues in today's society. To narrow the focus and set a direction, the network started to identify specific topics and issues in 2022 at an EDN Think-In in Barcelona with members and professionals from the dance field, followed by a roundtable discussion at ICE HOT Helsinki.

Research started in earnest in January 2023 with Rivca Rubin's Upwording webinar. The aim was to create awareness around how words sustain hierarchies and how changing perspective through words can create more equity between colleagues (and in life). The webinar was followed by three EDN Atelier workshops, a Carte Blanche Artist Exchange, an Encounter, and a Think-in meeting, all bringing together international and local artists, programmers, curators, and cultural policymakers to exchange knowledge and models of practice.

Together, nearly 300 professionals from the broader contemporary dance field contributed their thoughts to the question of equity in working conditions this year. By looking at disabling conditions and systemic barriers, by discussing the periphery-centre binary, and by investigating equity in dance practices and collaboration models, we have collectively moved.

In her insightful overview, Dr Alexandra Baybutt captures the pluralities of our field and the depth of conversation and activity on this topic. With Dr Baybutt's tools for reflection and tools for practice, we can now make some of the emerging practices and strategies of the European contemporary dance sector accessible to many.

We are thankful to all the contributors to this research and especially to Dr Alexandra Baybutt for this immense work.

The EDN office team

Christoph Bovermann, Eva Broberg,
Gaja Lužnik, and Gebra Serra i Bosch

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EQUITY IN WORKING CONDITIONS IN DANCE

About the author

Alexandra Baybutt (PhD, RSME, CMA) works in dance professionally since 2004, and engages freelance in postdoctoral research, somatic movement education, and artistic practice in the UK and Europe. Recent research projects include exploring embodiment as an ethics of encounter for University College London in the Institute of Advanced Studies (2022); looking at the effects of Brexit and Covid-19 on the independent dance scenes of the UK (2021); and analysing the politics of curation of contemporary dance festivals in the former Yugoslav space (monograph published by Routledge, 2023). Each of these used a mixed-methods approach and constructivist epistemology, with concern for space as physical, affective, political and social. Alexandra teaches performance practice for UCL, and the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System for WholeMovement, EMove Institute (NL) and Choronde (IT).

SUMMARY

This research responds to the question of how working conditions in dance might become more equitable. It argues that increasing equity in working conditions in dance requires ongoing everyday practices in which preparation and evaluation meaningfully respond to tensions in dance creation, production, dissemination and reception. It is intended for cultural workers, artists, and other readers. The research is informed by dance having methods and needs distinct to those of other art forms, yet some of it is relevant beyond dance. The following sections address ways of thinking about diversity, inclusion and access to practically challenge existing ways of working together.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

What do you mean by ‘equitable working conditions in dance’?

‘Working conditions’ relates to all those involved in the labour of creating, producing, presenting, distributing, educating and archiving dance, and the terms on which they work. This constellation of people includes artists, programmers, directors, technicians, managers, cleaners, promoters, facilitators, educators and students. Implicated in the work of people in dance are ‘publics’, which can refer to audiences of a performance, a funder or stakeholder of a project, a researcher for a website, a student taking a workshop, an artist engaged for an event, and more. Working conditions are dynamic constellations of people, often with varying power to effect changes to those conditions. The relationships between people in dance are interwoven with politics, histories, environments and cultures that make certain ways of working ‘normal’. As a reader, you might recognise yourself and your role or position more or less distinctly: artist; public; cultural worker. Interconnectivity is foregrounded to increase sensitivity towards multiple perspectives, and perspectives yet to come.

So that’s a brief introduction to working conditions. What about the ‘equitable’ part?

‘Equity’ as a transactional, financial or legal term does little to explain its processes. Equity can be the access to or distribution of resources according to need. ‘Need’ is less about what you might wish for, but more what you need in your everyday life to be able to engage with, move through, and thrive in the world. Needs and resources might include a place to live, food, water, company, help, knowledge, space, items, objects, colours, durations, consideration, money. **If equality is more concerned with fairness or a sense of being just, equity refers to redistribution relative to needs that are varied.** Nevertheless, equity’s etymological root is intimately connected with similar terms: ‘even’, ‘fair’, ‘equal’. ‘Equity’ doesn’t translate similarly in all languages, so it’s still important to speak of equality. For the purpose of this text when ‘equity’ is mentioned, it includes ‘equality’ as part of the broader theorisation and application of the term.

Now back to fairness and recognition of difference

It isn't fair to work a 12-hour day with no lunch break, so everyone should get a break. But durations of work and breaks can be designed to reflect differences in circumstances. What if someone needs to leave earlier for caring responsibilities? To adjust according to need means recognising a difference and making an agreement – for example, that someone can arrive earlier to make up the hours. What is 'fair' changes based upon a specific context, rather than keeping to a 'standard' that everyone must meet. In addition to context, what matters is the sensibility to reflect on and recognise latent standards and different needs from which adjustments can emerge. Maybe you were wondering what was meant by a need for 'colour' in the examples of needs and resources. Some people with dyslexia can read more easily with coloured filters over white paper or screens/monitors. 'Standards' are all around, taken for granted unless questioned.

Intersectionality

There are many methods and practices that can be used to consider what redistribution of power, access and resources might look like and how to do it. Sometimes a specific intervention like a colour screen filter will enable smoother access to reading and writing. But this requires already knowing about dyslexia, plus sees it in isolation from other factors. More multidimensional strategies are needed to address ongoing struggle caused by intersecting structural obstacles (such as having access to a dyslexia test). Intersectionality is a framework to grapple with discrimination based on, for example, age, racialised identities, ethnicity, disability, visas, residency status, etc. underpinned by historical as well as contemporary issues. Naming intersections so as not to erase them is crucial because "what lies at the heart of intersectionality theory's critique—complexity, identity, and power—still works to privilege certain interlocutors and logics, while rendering others invisible" (Hancock, 2016: 8). Using intersectionality as a heuristic (an analytic or problem-solving tool) helps to show that major axes of social division in a given society at any given time are based upon aspects of identity that "operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities but build on each other and work together" (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016: 25).

Equity in structures at legal, financial, and domestic levels nationally and internationally are broader than working conditions in dance but impact upon them. Forms of discrimination that are recognised by law vary from country to country. For example, the UK Equality Act 2010 lists the following characteristics of identity as protected: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership (in employment only), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Understanding legal frameworks about equity, diversity, inclusion and access (sometimes referred to as EDIA) in your context is necessary and can help in developing arguments to increase budgets. But for artistic working life and dance to remain relevant, increasing equity in working conditions requires facing what is already happening and questioning perception.

Equity as an ongoing process

Awareness of inequalities in arts practice and production is not new, but different challenges arising from geographies, politics and histories raise nuanced questions. The Sars-Cov19 global pandemic (March 2020 – May 2023, UN News, 2023) showed that everyone is vulnerable but differently so. Some passages through life are made smoother at the expense of others. People who were already facing challenges to mobility, who were largely invisible or hurried past, saw their marginalisation increase and their vulnerability unaccounted for when declarations of ‘going back to normal’ were made. For some people, thinking about the so-called marginal cases was already a habit: who has a home to stay in? Whose homes were safe? For others, such reflexivity is a newer perspective to take. Increasingly people are asking **‘who is in the room?’** This question implies asking how those people present knew about the job/opportunity, how they got it, how they kept it, and if they had any input on passing it on. It includes questioning who isn’t in the room, which leads to recognising something about working conditions. The question invites asking more about processes and tensions in dance, characterised by more or less transparency and a network of unseen relationships.

Several arts organisations are investing in research on equitable working conditions. For example, work done on classism in the theory department of Tanzquartier Wien between January and August 2023, directed by Anna Leon, and in particular in a lab with Elisabeth Bernroitner, Barbora Chen, Deniz Güvensoy, Ralo Mayer, and Julischka Stengele, is informing the development of a classism tool for institutions. EAIPA – European Association of Independent Performing Arts’ analysis of funding structures resulted in policy recommendations that include seeking to harmonise applications and funding across Europe. IETM shared three essays that challenge the basic pillars of cultural production. Katja Praznik covers the practices or absence of unionising and collective bargaining, and Bojana Kunst explores the dominance of the ‘project’ and its fragmenting, alienating effects. A third essay by Hans Abbing presents the idea of stopping striving for full-time fully paid artistic work altogether, and admits that part-time paid labour alongside artistic work is normal and an advantage. Abbing (2022: 22) argues that “a precarious existence can actually coexist with joy and pleasure”, albeit with some financial safety net, friends, resources and skills. He describes examples in which someone’s artistic work exists alongside other work. In those roles, they are not producing artistic works but their input as artists has a profound effect on the work itself. Changes in artistic education could more directly facilitate this hybrid working life in which diverse skills can lead to more sustainable working conditions. Abbing’s observations about discrete and blurred roles in music, design, and performing arts open questions for working conditions in dance. It is important to acknowledge the different kinds of work that dance work is, and the many kinds of work dance artists and choreographers already do.¹ Blurring roles and titles

¹ Dance teaching and facilitation work is argued as ‘not artistic work’ in some contexts e.g. <https://www.danspunt.be/en/support/statutes-and-fees/small-fees-scheme-for-artist/> but is considered artistic work by choreographers like Jija Sohn. There are financial consequences for how dance work is defined that this document cannot attempt to answer. But it does address how valuations of practices and relations are debated through the lens of equity.

risks not mentioning dance at all or not acknowledging movement knowledge. Knowledge and practices would continue to be taken for granted or even lost along the way.

What was the approach to this research and why?

This research has been produced between February and November 2023 in the context of the [EDNext network project](#). The project creates opportunities for exchange and opens a space to collectively address current themes and challenges in contemporary dance. The aim of this research was to map and collect the recurrent threads in conversations, activities and workshops that were organised in the context of the EDNext project in 2023, all revolving around the topic of equity.

This research does not attempt to speak on behalf of the dance field with one voice, nor to produce any direct recommendations. It offers 'Tools for reflection' because of a shared need to name and rename the key words in power. It describes three central tensions in dance that exacerbate inequitable working conditions, and introduces tools for organisational and individual reflection. In 'Tools for practice', the research addresses examples of good (and bad) practices in professional organisation and communication when trying to create equitable spaces in collaborative settings.

The methodology and scope of this research draws from the following sources of information and activities:

- Following the activities and events held by EDN members over 2023 and their conversations, interactions and topics. [\[ANNEX\]](#)
- Perceiving dance as an ecology: interconnected perspectives, questions and arguments from artists, freelancers, organisations, and cultural workers about everyday working practices.
- Mapping existing research, guidelines and resources on inclusive practices to draw on a range of perspectives (many from UK arts organisations, as the author is based there).
- Crip spacetime theory.

Lack of time is a problem when trying to create equitable spaces. Crip² spacetime theory offers a way to account for the radical inequality of

²Reclaiming the word 'cripple', 'crip' defies its historic negative semantics. Carrie Sandahl (2003: 37) described four performances by US-based queer crip artists to argue that "cripping spins mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects" and disarming "what is painful with wicked humour, including camp". 'Cripistemologies' (Johnson and McRuer, 2014: 130) explores "ways of knowing and unknowing disability, making and unmaking disability epistemologies and the importance of challenging subjects who confidently 'know' about 'disability' as though it could be a thoroughly comprehended object of knowledge" (Millett-Gallant in Hadley and McDonald, 2019: 216). The discourse on the concept continues internationally through an edited collection, *Crip Genealogies* (Chen, Kafer, Kim and Minich, 2023), that challenges the white, Western, and Northern rights-based genealogy of disability studies, arguing against any single coherent narrative of the field for its exclusionary reliance upon logics of whiteness and imperialism.

the different spacetimes people inhabit. It is an intersectional theory not 'about' disability, but "about inequity as it emerges and is constituted in particular environments" (Price, 2017: 13). "The spacetime we move through and which constitutes us is composed not only of geometric space and linear time, but also of the affective impact and intangible knowledges that manifest these radical inequities" (Price, 2017: 9). The environments in dance are not simply the studio, the office, the theatre, the foyer, but their atmospheres, expected cultural codes, the visible and invisible forces enabling a smooth passage, or not.

Access to resources that recognise the differences between people and needs are more equitable when they enable a smoother passage of one's life with others in the world. Smoothness is taken for granted if access is never a problem. Questioning what we consider 'normal', and which privileges we have, affects how we look at the world. Often those who need more consideration to enable access to resources and opportunities have to do more in order to have a need recognised. It is challenging, exhausting and risky, not always visible and certainly unequal. Exposing this disproportionate burden and redistributing responsibility to increase equitable working conditions is an ongoing process.

Problems in working conditions that perpetuate inequalities call for clarification of artists and cultural workers' aims, values and methods. Said another way, why do you do what you do? Looking at the ground on which systems stand and from which things grow is necessary to restructure towards increased equity. **How things might be done in the future may be informed by increased familiarity, more capacity to plan, more resources for reflection and evaluation.** Practices that arise from seemingly peripheral practices become good practices for all. This document aims to increase powers of reflection and the ability to recognise gaps so opportunity, resources and power can be redistributed.

How to use this document

Begin anywhere.

Part 1 Tools for reflection

- Key words and power (because arguments)
- Three tensions in dance (because unspoken problems)
- Sensibilities and questions (because reflection)

Part 2 Tools for practice

- Organisations coordinating and collaborating (because people)
- Communication (because more people)

PART 1. TOOLS FOR REFLECTION

A: KEY WORDS AND POWER

During EDN discussions, words and their potential power often appeared as a significant factor in opening towards greater understanding of differences. Rivca Rubin presented a lecture-workshop in the [EDN Webinar](#) (Online, January 2023) on 'upwording', drawing attention to how words can shape thought, feeling, respect and trust. Words are in this example understood as a conduit to reinforce behaviour.

Concepts can act as tools for practice and thought, not boxes to tick. I analysed several best practice guides, looking at the content they present and how it is shared. For example, a guide for services and organisations working with older people is aimed at a predominantly straight, cis-gender reader. It is written in a way that assumes a lack of knowledge or no prior familiarity with the points of view of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people nor the latest debates. It is explicit about how misunderstanding concepts creates problematic assumptions.

For example, if needing to ask for someone's gender identity and sexual orientation, ensure that these are two different questions: 'Ten Top Tips for becoming more inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people by LGBT Health and Wellbeing' / LGBT Age (2014) [🔗](#) ³

³<http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Top-Ten-Tips.pdf>

By 2023, 'LGBT' has been updated to LGBTQIA+ to include queer, intersex, asexual, and more. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, and, as argued, they cannot be conflated. The concept of 'queer'⁴ has a wealth of analysis and discourse that is beyond the scope of this research to elaborate upon but needs a brief overview. 'Queer' has been part of performance studies and making for some decades, and is not reducible to any one aesthetic, though it tends to reflect the identity of a creator or performer. One definition from José Esteban Muñoz describes queer as "a utopian kernel and an anticipatory illumination" (2009: 91). From this, Smilges observes that the kernel refers to pure potentiality, with anticipatory meaning being "on the cusp of its own becoming" (2022: 4).

Languages of dominance, labours of learning

Communication in this document is written British English. This means there is the possibility for it to be share-able, converted through text-to-speech, searched, ideally translated. Language is slippery and changeable, though. Language follows opportunity, semantic shifts reflect use and misuse, and positionality is always conditional.

Words matter, but what if you are communicating with international colleagues through 'European English' as an additional language? What if an English word learnt 20 years ago for something has changed and hasn't been updated in memory? What if your language does not present the option of eliminating gendered pronouns? There is extra labour of translation. Working conditions in dance sometimes privilege those with easy access to the dominant working language. Someone in the room might point out an incorrect use of a term. Someone else might keep quiet about it because to bring up the meaning and appropriateness of words might be seen to be side-stepping the supposed focus of the conversation at that moment. Someone else might swallow difficult feelings. Regardless, words have consequences for the commitment to increasing equity. If you get something wrong such as mis-gendering someone, and someone points it out, just accept the mistake. Don't make it about you and say: "I'm sorry, let me try that again." And try it again.

⁴"Queer's politicization relies on its uneven distribution, and it is in the process of distributing—of allowing some objects to become queer while dismissing others—that the field's inherent liberalism is exposed. That *queer* can be stratified, despite its allegedly unshakable commitment to the abject and marginal, suggests that queer studies underestimates the rhetorical effects of normativity, the ways that language is not only a product of power but also its producer" (Smilges, 2022: 19). This is also traceable in feminist debates, e.g. in neoliberal feminism by Rottenberg, 2013.

Playing with words for creative purposes, for remaking identities, for addressing histories

Words matter, but what if your job is to rework the latest keywords of a cultural policy document that demonstrates to a reader/jury that you have read and understood the instruction to meet a concept halfway with your own interpretation? How do you make sense of what looks like a ‘buzzword’? How to take a maybe imposed concept and make it meaningful and something that reflects or informs practices? There is an ongoing responsibility among cultural workers to communicate to others about the values and practices of the broad field of dance. Describing these in terms of ‘excellence’ or ‘change’ for example may seem too simple, but they offer an anchor from which to elaborate another narrative.

To name someone a ‘mother’ is to reinscribe the category of women in a long history of gender-based labour discrimination. Some people prefer to use ‘parent’ or ‘carer’ to ‘mother’ as it might be a better representation of their gender identity and ways of building a family. These terms reference discrimination based upon gender identity and sexual orientation within, for example, histories of illegality, incarceration and sterilisation, and kinship ties at the level of DNA informing inheritance and legal systems of recognition.

Words that erase their meaning

Sara Ahmed writes about challenging sedimented privilege and embodying diversity that reveals the limits of what words do. “The word ‘diversity’ isn’t very challenging”, and Ahmed prefers to use other “stickier words [...] like ‘racism’, ‘whiteness’ and ‘inequality’” (Ahmed, 2009: 42).⁵ ‘Access’ can be considered entirely functional: signs, ramps, mobility devices, hearing loops. But that functionality betrays the sensibility required to continually perceive visible and invisible thresholds, in which access requires processes to ensure it is maintained and improved, and to make sure people know they are invited.

Because the concept of intersectionality is sometimes used to erase race and because (too) often EDIA work does not name the problems and focuses only on solutions, it risks glossing over historical foundations that perpetuate inequities in work and in life in which ‘diversity’ becomes a euphemism or deflection. This next part however is blunt and could be upsetting. Returning to the question of what equity is and why it is important to consider for working conditions in dance, it is partly because of the dominance of eugenics, a pseudoscience of

⁵ Peggy McIntosh (1989) wrote on giving up the myth of meritocracy and the invisible privileges of what whiteness involves. Her list gives more examples of what differences in perception of people and the amount of melanin in skin mean. The smooth movement through the world is taken for granted unless it is named.

racial purification that influenced thought and action, and continues to leave traces throughout lives and societies. Paraphrasing Jeremy Gilbert (2023), eugenics developed in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It is the convergence of ideas from early genetics, evolutionary theory, and entirely racist theories of civilisation development, plus the experience of colonialism and imperialism from the victor's point of view. The argument from eugenics was that to have and maintain a successful culture or civilisation, you have to maintain the high quality of your 'racial stock'. Anyone with any form of disability, or those who are not good at really hard work or who are not very clever are controlled to reproduce as little as possible, and the people who are good at all those things are encouraged to reproduce. Eugenics-thinking has shaped hierarchical systems and aspects of life in more obvious but also barely perceptible ways.

This description of eugenics is an extreme version of contemporary meritocratic thinking, and of the impression that winners are deserving of their position and/or inherited advantages. Efforts to make the *status quo* stay that way are everywhere, with explicit and implicit forms of violence appearing when efforts are made to fight it.⁶ Eugenics translates into an individualised version of itself in the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. For example, you can become obsessed with self-optimisation (e.g. mindfulness, sleep exercises, taking vitamins) for the purpose of becoming the best possible version of yourself that you can be. Whilst such practices can make people feel good, they feed a commodification of health and position it as a moral standpoint. They are part of the dominant hyper-individualisation of the twenty-first century in which self-optimisation can turn towards eugenics-thinking. For example, when someone gets sick they can be accused of not 'doing the right things' (which is the argument by some health insurance schemes that continue the monetisation of human life through a hierarchy underpinned by eugenics-thinking).

Racism

Ahmed and others point out that a word might change but the same bias or problem remains. Words can become empty signifiers where language as 'performative', in a negative sense, is limited in what action it can achieve (even though language itself is a kind of action). Reliance upon particular words as a way to enact a shift in values can shift responsibility disproportionately to individuals rather than systems. The radical antiracism tradition understands racism as a matter of how economic resources are distributed differently across racial groups (e.g. CLR James; Frantz Fanon; Cedric Robinson), rather than a question of belief that shows up in the individual use of language. For example, border guards and immigration officers can carry out deportation irrespective of their individual prejudice. Being denied the chance to

⁶ Natacha Kennedy refers to claims of being silenced as mechanisms of 'mirror propaganda' on this explanation of anti-trans action: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/anti-trans-transphobia-gender-critical-mirror-propaganda/>

live and work somewhere is the result of the way the system of racial capitalism requires division of labour around the world, upheld by borders (Kundnani, 2023). Europe, as a political and economic space, is embedded in globally organised systems that racialize people for capitalism to continue to function and creates boundaries to enable and perpetuate it. Part of racism, and other strategies of oppression, is the successful fragmentation of people based upon specific identity markers and ensuring people have limited resources to support others emotionally, financially, practically, and so on.

Christian Guerematchi's artistic work starts from the black body in relation to western cultural and social structures. As a queer man of colour with multiple experiences of having identities projected onto him, Chris outlined his needs of being understood and equally placed among other bodies, the importance of representation, of having a voice and having ownership over the narratives of his body. On stage, with his body placed under lights, he explained how this frames how to look at bodies and that a Eurocentric gaze is heightened. Unless questioned, such stages racialize bodies. As such, moving from dancing in companies for others to his own artistic practice reclaims and shifts the narrative. Chris acknowledged that as a black European, "my idea of blackness is not *the* idea of blackness" and stresses the ongoing need to engage with intersections and questions of multiplicities and diaspora. His collaborator Richard Kofi added to the question of 'what does blackness mean' with an observation that "whiteness is a constructed identity that all Modern people want to fit into". In the UK, the term 'Black And Ethnic Minority' has been replaced by 'Global Majority'. This has not made racism in the UK's institutions disappear, but it carries greater specificity and acknowledgement of a worldview that does not place the UK and white Britishness at the centre of the map.

Disability, ableism, disablism

Whilst words don't always seem to do what they say they do, words matter for how thought, experience and action meet. Disability is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of difference, including physical, intellectual, cognitive, psychiatric, and sensory variation, as well as forms of neurodivergence, D/deafness, disease, and chronic illness that may be less readily associated with disability. Disability scholarship and crip studies interweave with disability justice. Together, these movements continue to work to usurp medical authority that distinguishes normal instantiations of human difference from abnormal ones. 'Diversity' references the former, 'pathology' the latter. The medical, pathologising model of disability says people are disabled by their impairments or differences that should be 'fixed' or changed by medical and other treatments, even when the impairment or difference does not cause pain or illness. The medical model looks at what is 'wrong' with the person and not what the person needs. The medical model is highly criticised for creating low expectations and leading people to lose independence, choice and control in their own lives. The social model of disability, conceptualised by disability rights organisations in the

1970s, understands that disability is something created by society. This is because disabled people or people with disabilities face barriers that stop them from taking part in society in the same way as non-disabled people. A medical model of disability is often used for deciding if someone can receive any state subsidy or support for their needs. 'Ableism' can be used to describe the way a society and people tend to favour non-disabled people. 'Disablism' can be used to describe more "direct, conscious acts of discrimination or abuse against disabled people" (Sense, 2023).

In some disability scholarship and activism, 'disability' is written 'dis/ability'. Reading is disrupted to highlight the disabling of ability, reflecting the way the concept has emerged from an ableist perspective. Like 'queer' and 'crip' "*disability* has been reclaimed by some people as a source and signifier of pride" (Smilges, 2022: 6). Some people prefer to use 'disabled person', others prefer 'a person with disabilities'. As this discussion shows, someone's reference to disability is not THE idea of disability. Debates in equity/equality, diversity, inclusion, access, and social justice continue in and out of academic contexts, drawing on different voices and matters of concern. Hadley and McDonald state that shifts in terms and contestation about language are part of "efforts to establish new ways of seeing, speaking, and thinking about disability, embodied difference, and identity that move beyond the limited and limiting paradigms of the past" (2019: 6). This informs the approach taken in this research, which moves between issues and concerns in working conditions and might point out several aspects of identity in any one example to explore it intersectionally.

With reference to hip-hop and 'urban dance', Afro Irish artist Tobi Balogun observed that he doesn't like the term 'under-represented' as it notes a previous devaluation of artistic forms. Similarly,

I hate using ethnic terms now, because I feel it just puts everyone into a particular box. And it's almost like, 'Oh, I don't fit that box, that box doesn't really matter to me.' There was a period where there were certain positions in Ireland – whether it's careers, hobbies or art stuff – I just wouldn't see myself in. It's a systemic racial thing, the idea that you don't belong there until you have people that think you belong there.' (Balogun, 2021)

Visibility, invisibility

Sometimes what appears as 'different' to you is more obvious. Visual information provokes specific action and judgement, e.g. offering a pregnant person your seat on the bus. Judgements can have major consequences for how someone is treated or expected to act. Being the one who 'sticks out' can mean experiencing stigma and abuse. Conversely, if there is no obvious visual difference, assumptions of 'sameness' might arise that reflect dominant identities and values. Consequences can be insulting and alienating. White people and non-disabled people with lack of knowledge and experience can make a lot

of exhausting extra work for the person on the receiving end of invasive questions or misjudged sympathy. Along with ongoing education, a matter of fact, non-judgemental approach towards practical hospitality is needed.

There are many invisible and/or undisclosed disabilities, conditions and situations that affect how working life is navigated. Examples include and are not limited to holding a temporary visa; having precarious residency status; attempts at pregnancy (e.g. undergoing IVF, the first three months of pregnancy when typically people don't share widely); perimenopause; undergoing processes of gender reassignment; caring responsibilities; trauma; going through diagnoses and treatment; grieving. These come with invisible labour for navigating ableist, sexist, ageist, racist, trans-phobic, nationalist and/or capitalist structures interconnected with dance as additional thresholds for access and participation. For some people, 'passing' and not 'sticking out' as different is important. For others, being seen and understood in the differences is important. For example, Nick Walker (2018) gives a detailed first-person account of neurodivergence and the discovery of dance and aikido. Nick shares how his autism was both experienced and perceived from the outside with major consequences for his sense of safety. Holding an awareness of likely ongoing visible, invisible and changing conditions that affect or inform identity and movement through life means it is vital to question assumptions and judgements.

Here is some more information about invisible disability: [🔗](https://uncharteredcollective.com/new-page) ⁷

⁷ <https://uncharteredcollective.com/new-page>

B: THREE KEY TENSIONS IN DANCE PRODUCTION EXACERBATING INEQUITABLE WORKING CONDITIONS

Passion-based work environments

The tendency to push through or mask injuries or ongoing conditions (which may fluctuate) provokes questions about patterns in dance production. Social reproduction of negative practices in dance appears very clearly in some ballet company apprenticeship schemes, where low pay is still common (for example, c. €300 per month). In these contexts, systems of hierarchy and expendability are reproduced, exploiting 'passion'. A tension in dance worlds is the reliance upon younger able-bodied dancers who are keen for experience; they are often less able or willing to complain, or if they do, they can be easily replaced. There is expertise from dance and sport science about motivation and injury that is not reaching company practices, perpetuated by the inequitable systems of higher education, conference echo chambers, paywalls on publishing, and lack of translation. Similarly, lack of knowledge about or access to artists' unions and associations that support information sharing about contracts, career support, and crisis management exacerbates conditions of inequity.

The pandemic further revealed very uneven protection for artists and cultural workers, and lessons can be learnt to improve systems of communication and redistribute power and responsibility. **Even between artists and cultural workers in one city, let alone in different countries or regions, there are wildly varying financial plans, as well as uses of or relationships towards insurance, income protection, sick pay, and access to physiotherapy and therapy.** Similarly diverse are

expectations, opportunities for, and experiences of peer, kin and social relations to support one another alongside or instead of the presence of state-led support. Narratives created about ‘freelancers’ and ‘institutions’ can create biases about the other side. However, dance organisations might have dancers/artists working in them part time, straddling several worlds. Commonly, there are people who have moved from dance practice to production. In what ways is this reproducing some similar working practices?

The tensions intersect and return us to the ambiguity of Crip spacetime, which is made of failed attempts, stop and goes, tiredness, and other aspects. Neoliberal/capitalist spacetime is not made of such unpredictability but rather hyper selectivity. **How companies, organisations, collectives, institutions and individuals navigate decisions about increasing equitable practices relies upon clarifying principles of work.** Crip spacetime helps to rethink dance to be more inclusive for artists, publics and cultural workers, especially those with invisible disabilities/conditions, and to question not the presence of passion, but the reliance upon it that acts as an excuse for perpetuating poor working conditions.

Naming ‘dance’, contemporary or not

Many people feel excluded from dance, especially from contemporary dance. Internal or academic debates on cultural forms do not necessarily reach broader publics or have much consensus. So ‘contemporary dance’ can mean anything from high art; to a lyrical Modern Dance style; an expanded relationship towards choreography; jazz ballet; a postmodern dance epoch and history of the east coast of the USA and western Europe; a 1980s aesthetic boom via Belgian foreign policy; a symptom or catalyst of the festivalisation of Europe; a canopied platform in a forest; an investigation into posthumanism through entangled spacetime mattering; taking your shoes off.

Artists and cultural workers sometimes refuse definitions and instead work with the blurriness of naming practices. For example, choreographer Catherine Young at the Limerick Atelier hadn’t expected to work in socially engaged dance practice and articulated her position in the following way: “I make work”, and “there isn’t a separation between professional and community work”. However, naming a practice becomes important when considering funding streams: ‘theatre’, ‘dance’, ‘opera’, and so forth, as well as acknowledging practices that are specific to bodies and movement.

In positions of cultural management, you are obliged to tell stories that make sense on the terms of the funders, even if you or others might not recognise these as meaningful stories elsewhere in the discourse and practice of dance. You might be obliged to perform dance through specific indexes of appraisal (that then become the measure of success

or validation and that broker your future reliability), and not share certain parts of a wider story. This form of story-telling is sometimes emotional, often functional, but also makes a space to contest inequity. **Sometimes pressure on organisations to create many new projects obscures other modes of dance creation, audience development, and dissemination. Funders can and must recognise diverse modes of creation and valorisation of projects and dance, and the other stories of it that are told.**

The naming and placing of dance styles can challenge pre-existing ideas. Tobi Balogun, realising a lack of diversity in Dublin, created a training course comprised of several weeks of morning classes in different styles. He described the process of making a space for himself, as well as making space for others, through a process of adjustment and communication with Dance Ireland. For the project to make sense for both sides, changes were made to aspects such as the time of the class, while reflecting upon which 'names' would attract participants. Making space for voices to be heard doesn't always make them heard, and Tobi observed that Irish dancers and street dance artists in Dublin are still quite separate. Tobi reflected that some artists are not motivated to learn new styles, and what counts as 'professional' is a complex notion.

Dance classes/workshops described as integrated or inclusive that indicate to disabled artists that they are explicitly welcome or that they are led by a dance artist with a disability sometimes find that non-disabled dance artists don't attend. When asked why, some seem to expect a lower level of challenge or rigour. This shows ableist gulfs in understanding approaches to dance practice, and hesitancy to learn from people who are 'different'. These examples show how perception of differences in people and in dance styles/approaches impacts upon participation and inclusion in a broad sense. Methods of invitation and education need ongoing consideration.

Institutional authority and power

Aminata Cairo (2021) writes that in any situation there are hierarchies of power based on the context. Often dance institutions and organisations (across production, education, creation, etc.) consider themselves to be the authority and to have the answers. Some find it hard to admit that they don't know or might not have the most relevant suggestions, methods or approaches to programming, employment, recruitment and collaboration. Institutional change relies upon the sensitivity and sensibility of its workers to find ways of questioning or even hacking systems and practices. **When institutions allow for flows of information and people in, as well as out, this porosity recognises that perspectives (including theirs) are partial and unique.**

Nevertheless, distinctions between individuals and organisations place them in hierarchies of power or capacities to act. It is important to recognise that individual freelance artists might be taking a bigger risk by refusing something and being public about it. Artists use blogs and forums to post dissent, such as named or anonymous open letters to organisations. These act as public education about conditions. For example, Sara Wookey's refusal to participate in a project at MOCA - Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, USA (open letter 2011: <https://theperformanceclub.org/open-letter-to-artists/>) has been an important part of the debate on working conditions for dancers. It insisted that institutions know more about what they are reproducing and question low-pay practices, and that dancers question passion. Freelancers in relationship to institutions are particularly vulnerable. **If there is a system for artists to feed back to institutions, how accessible is it and how does it communicate that issues are acted upon?**

C: SENSIBILITIES AND QUESTIONS

Next follows a series of provocations that address the interwoven tensions of institutional power, passion-based work, and defining dance, and that revisit some of the issues around terms and concepts. Forms of social reproduction concerning position, place/space, and time are intended to increase the capacity to act equitably through deepening self-awareness and sensitivity towards others.

We are all publics

Introducing ourselves or being asked/invited to do so is a foundational part of hospitality and building trust. There are many methods and responses.

For example, here is a guide about describing yourself for people with blindness or visual impairment from UK charity VocalEyes: [🔗](#)⁸

There are power dynamics to consider. In some spaces, hosts automatically ask for pronouns to be announced. Whilst this makes it possible to share pronouns, it cannot be assumed that all people in that space feel safe to disclose them, or any other personal details. Making the invitation to share your name and if there is anything you need the group to know about you offers a more flexible structure. Examples can be given to ensure the group shares relevant information for safe/ safer and respectful practice, like pronoun use, or disability or condition, rather than meandering into long life stories. **There is no such thing as a safe space but there are spaces that attempt to invite and model what equitable, inclusive behaviour looks like.** For example, offering options and choices, making it clear if pausing or leaving the room is okay, indicating if using different languages is welcomed. People need to know where the toilets are, where the emergency exit is, and if there is a quiet room. The use of phones as notebooks and the presence of people filming/photographing is becoming more common. Increasingly there is transparency in advance about what can be expected, and consent is sought for filming, photography, and the future use of images. Open, flexible invitations to introduce yourself, guidance on how to use the

⁸ <https://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/services/resources/digital-accessibility-and-inclusion/self-description-for-inclusive-meetings/>

space and how to interact, and on how questions will be fielded, helps to anticipate some needs that would otherwise go unseen and unheard.

These examples support individuals to give themselves permission to do what they need in spaces that are historically hierarchically ordered, where, for example, the teacher is expected to know more than you, or where you must behave a certain way to be accepted or assumed to be clever. **Artists and producers participating in the same room may generate some specific choices of behaviour or inhibition because of power dynamics, and might make it even less likely that people disclose their needs.**

Whilst it is good practice to try to make space for needs to be shared, don't assume that once something is disclosed it is fully answered. Crip spacetime theory highlights that we might all be in the same space, but we are all experiencing that space differently, as emphasised by Tobi Balogun:

There are other things that I have to consider, be it for cultural reasons or safety reasons that no one else in some of these spaces has to consider. I'm hoping that Black Canvas, my Arts Council project about intersectionality, issues of diversity and race, will create a space that can facilitate cultural interactions – not only within the Black community, but with other ethnicities as well. I don't know if it's going to get any better. I've been up in situations where it feels like I'm only being brought in because I can provide a more diverse crowd. Whereas if you actually just hired somebody who was a person who happened to be Black who was qualified, they could bring someone in. It shouldn't need a social movement and trying to adjust projects, and bringing somebody in to address that one thing. There are some spaces in Ireland that are being very open-minded and inclusive without it. (Balogun, 2021)

For initiatives to become more inclusive, recognition needs to be matched by redistribution of access to positions more broadly. Otherwise, hierarchies of power can be reproduced by so-called diversity work through instances of tokenism.

Who are your publics? (increase knowing # 1)

If you know your public's needs, you can respond to as well as provoke them. On whose behalf are you working and with whom? And who do you want to be working with and for? Who is in your space and how did they know about it? What steps took place to get them where they were? Who would you like your publics to be and who not? How do you know who your audience is? Are you talking to them, asking to be introduced, introducing yourself, seeing your space's events? How do you welcome and host? With whom do you work, plan, curate, host, invite and why? There are no formulas. **Hospitality as an ongoing practice means entering into a dialogue, multiplying narratives and perspectives to take into account many layers and stratifications. Hospitality requires planning. Does your event reflect your goals?**

Do you attend the performances, events, classes or workshops you host, and ask people who went what they think then and there? Do you send a message later to find out more? What channels are already part of how information is passed on? It's not just about counting, but counting matters, too. Audience profiling through demographic analysis is relied upon for understanding how to find and speak to people based on shared markers of identity and taste. Whilst this supports some choices of marketing style and is the dominant method in commercial entertainment, sales, and brand management, demographic profiling itself risks perpetuating categories of personhood that ignore plurality. This fixes and reduces personhood in narrow ways, contributing to ongoing separation and polarisation in contemporary life.

Intersecting oppressions intensify inaccessibility. Institutions engaging in long-form consultation and becoming more educated on how to become more accessible conceptualise 'access' less as a list of things to do and more as an approach to cultural programming and education. Equity with publics is about:

- Engaging audiences through consistency, with different price structures or freely accessible events such as open-house days, events, and performances.
- Finding intersections of people and ideas, in which education in a broad sense includes communication, partnerships, alliances.

We are all somewhere

Histories of dance, dance education, and labour systems in each context inform current working practices. Questioning the vitality of a 'somewhere' means looking to who is around, especially those who are less visible or invisible. We are all somewhere with different conditions and different contacts. Who are your peers, near and far? Are they peers of sameness *and* differences? This section explores 'somewhere' literally through place and existentially through positionality.

Dance creates multiple centres implicating politics, economics, geography, forms of travel, historical connections, and contemporary barriers/affordances. It is important to stress the asymmetries in cultural funding and material/resource provision that can affect working conditions in an individual country. Rural environments need special support that recognises differences in distances and transport, such as increased subsidies for travel to better enable local people's participation. A public steering group provides a context in which local people have a say in cultural production and output. An organisation's connections with its local area as well as its dialogue with networks elsewhere mean 'somewhere' is dynamic.

The question 'where are you from?' might seem simple. But it is full of possible stories that wield or deflect power. At the level of passport, visa rights, and opportunity for work and travel, such identifiers matter, but a person is not reducible to these. The question 'where are you based'

better reflects the possibility of movement. **‘Where are your homes?’ implies understanding of a multiplicity of belonging and movement, for whatever reasons. Many people in dance practice and scholarship already describe themselves as ‘wearing many hats’ in which ‘somewheres’ collide⁹ and shape belonging across several places and times in their hybrid working lives.** Your role as part of a constellation of practices in a dance ecology plays out amongst a dynamic relationship, even if you’ve been ‘there’ a while. How and when do the relationships and hierarchies of power to act shift? Is it based upon election cycles, fixed term contracts, or how a team might grow and shrink according to how many roles can be afforded? Careers in dance meander on different paths, related to points of departure, obstacles, and opportunities.

However, working conditions are affected by nationally governed systems (or an absence of them), hiring processes, forms of pay, regulations, tax, insurance, pension schemes, and accountability. Minimum rates for artists in residence, in pre-production, or in a performance are different in each country. There are models in which artists receive a subsidy even if they do not perform. Examples such as the Intermittence in France, the system in Flanders, or the German model do not include all artists and cultural workers in each country but act as a standard to attempt to minimise asymmetries. From 2023-25, the Republic of Ireland is experimenting with 2000 eligible artists selected at random receiving a version of Basic Income for the Arts.¹⁰ It remains to be seen how this affects working life and the work made, and the impact it will have upon different scenes. Differences in ways of working reflect fundamentally different ways of existing that follow amounts of and access to resources and support. Unions and associations that might mediate the relationship between the state and artists/institutions are absent in some countries (e.g. Romania) and present in others (e.g. Netherlands). In contexts with these mechanisms, the procedures become more standardised and can move towards increasingly equitable conditions, especially if there are ‘collective labour agreements’. Although even with agreements in place, there are discussions to review and adjust their terms.

The EDN 2022 campaign recognises that working lives in dance require both residing and travelling. It urges consideration of the modes of transport based on pollution, and to take the opportunity to connect with a place and people once there. Ecological thinking requires us to see the human in an environment and as part of it, affecting it and affected by it. Connecting ecology and equity is important: “mobility was the consequence of that will to integrate other voices, not its cause”; “solving an ecological problem without considering social inequality is just another way to reinforce the colonial structure” (Rodriguez, 2021). As such, there are tensions concerning mobility when thinking about inclusion that appear along several intersecting concerns

⁹ For example, dance artist, Romani scholar, sociologist, Flamenco historian, activist Dr Rosa Cisneros: <https://rosasencis.org/about/>

¹⁰ France: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermittent_du_spectacle Flanders: <https://www.kunsten.be/en/disciplines/performing-arts/the-performing-arts-in-flanders/> Germany: <https://darstellende-kuenste.de/en/topics/social-conditions> and <https://www.touring-artists.info/en/social-security/social-security> RO Ireland: <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/unemployment-and-redundancy/employment-support-schemes/basic-income-arts/>

including and not limited to class, disability, and caring responsibilities. For example: having the means to afford slow travel; being able to take more time away from caring responsibilities or another job to travel over longer periods and be away longer; being able to afford the time to apply for a bursary to subsidise travel; physically being able to endure longer travel options; being someone whose conditions require extra recovery time on arrival. Slow travel places responsibility at an individual level rather than addressing wider issues connected to capitalism but also to inclusion, where different needs require different options. A range of practical choices is necessary and cannot be reduced to moral debate.¹¹

Changes of scene (increase knowing # 2)

There is a qualitative difference between choosing to have a change of scene and having it changed by force. There are people in your context for whom a change of scene was not by choice but out of necessity for work, safety, family. When by choice, what does a change of scene look like and mean for you? Maybe you have deliberate practices of reflection and connection individually and with your peers built into your schedule. Maybe you only get the chance to speak to colleagues in your scene in the interval during a performance. Reflection, digestion and connecting happen in all sorts of ways, but most people benefit from taking some space and time (it doesn't have to be far or long) in order to return refreshed or with a change in perspective. **What opportunities for secondments for cultural workers are there in your context or networks? Learning and bringing back new perspectives can mean the opportunity to reflect on one's own context with some distance.**

Choreographer Raquel Meseguer Zafe's research explores what it is to take rest in public spaces, inverting the idea of 'getting away' for a change of scene by working with what is already present. Raquel questions access beyond obvious material design to enable belonging in public spaces that vary across contexts for their degrees of surveillance, commodification and hospitality (2020).¹² Spaces of dance and performance provide specific contexts for people to meet and be, in the same city, as well as internationally. Jija Sohn and Aleksandra Lemm's¹³ processes exemplify the time 'of the body' for landing and grounding. To undo the social face, reuse an available space, AND deconstruct expectations of a space, they question how meeting is undertaken. Inviting the institutions they work with to meet them on their terms in their artistic practice is part of how their work radically challenges (a) a product-based notion of dance where teaching or facilitation is not considered art, (b) divisions in labour power, and (c) who is 'in' the work and who the work is for/on behalf of. It is a change of scene at many levels.

⁹In spite of the critique of slow travel, here is a tool for searching: <https://www.seat61.com/>

¹²https://issuu.com/raquelmesequerzafe/docs/crip_tech___belonging_pages and <https://uncharteredcollective.com/crip-tech-belonging> Raquel Meseguer Zafe/Unchartered Collective, (2020).

¹³Jija Sohn <https://www.jijasohn.com/about-1/> and Aleksandra Lemm <https://aleksandralemm.com/> work together on creative therapeutic projects.

Summary

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We are all late-comers

We were all late-comers once; we are all late-comers still. Picture the example of someone arriving late to a dance workshop. There are a few scenarios of how that person is treated and what is needed. The way the late-comer (or newcomer) is treated by a workshop leader models to the rest of the group how to approach overlapping phrases of experience where an individual is 'out of synch' with a majority. How the group brings that person into a space shows if they understand that a group learning experience involves more than only their individual experience (and that it requires mutual recognition through bodily co-presence and affect). The late-comer requires the group or its facilitator to catch them up on what's happening to include them. This means the group would hear the instructions/theme again and wait. Or maybe a facilitator seizes the opportunity to see if the group can explain back what they just heard for the benefit of the late-comer and for the benefit of the facilitator checking for comprehension. If the facilitator almost pretends that they aren't there or ignores them beyond a cursory hello, it means they are expected to catch up on their own. Rather than 'interrupt' or rewind and repeat, the group is considered more important, and continuity of its process is held in higher regard than the lone late-comer, who also might not want to disturb the flow or draw attention to themselves.

In this example, inclusivity operates for the group, the individual, and the facilitator(s) in different ways and shows how processes of hosting can normalise and reinforce or challenge hierarchies of knowledge, power and priority. **What is crucial is that isolation creates more isolation unless someone notices and intervenes. Passing on knowledge, values, and methods is embodied and relational. Dance worlds rely deeply upon this.** There will always be new questions and occurrences: that is what art can provoke and frame. The social structure, and you in it, can act more like a wave moving back to go forward to carry the newcomer along. Sometimes that newcomer is you.

Tools for self-understanding and organisational reflection (increase knowing # 3)

At the Paris Atelier, Monica Gillette proposed a choreography of questions designed to trigger internal reflection and bring to the surface accountabilities, responsibilities, beliefs, doubts. Monica encouraged responses from a personal place, and asked if there is tension between your job/role and personal experience/position. To work more effectively and meaningfully, it is helpful to reflect upon oneself and the methods and values of a working context. The following stream of questions follows where Monica leads.

What does competition for funds, resources and opportunities look like at your local/national level? Is it the same funding pot for organisations as well as freelancers, or does the system differentiate? Does this help

identify what needs to be lobbied for to enable better conditions for you, your peers, and current/future publics? Where are the spaces for coordination, coalition, and power/decision-making redistribution, locally and internationally? Who doesn't speak to whom and what obstacles is that creating? What can be done for working sustainably at a local level? Sharing costs, spaces, transport, resources? Who is doing what around you? Can you support it, and/or acknowledge the contrast? Who do you consider 'in' the scene and who or what isn't? Are you upfront about your class privilege, if you have it? How do you use it? What are your ideas about dance and how you understand merit, quality, rigour? How are these reproduced where you are?

Heart, lungs, O₂ & CO₂ aka What are we/I doing, why are we/I doing it, does it matter, who could it matter for?

Personal reflection

Imagine, sense, or look up a diagram of the heart and lungs. Think about the oxygen going into the lungs, being transformed as the heart pumps and lungs inflate/deflate, and carbon dioxide leaving. Use these four interrelated terms, heart, lungs, oxygen (O₂), and carbon dioxide (CO₂) for some thought experiments.

- Something I learned or was excited by (O₂, inspiration, freshness/newness from others/the environments, ideas being shared).
- Something I want to implement (lungs, take in, transform).
- Something I want to let go of (CO₂, something not needed/wanted any more).
- Something I want to question (heart, beliefs, feelings values).

Institutional reflection

Match terms in column 1 with column 2. Why did you match them that way? How would it look to swap them? (e.g. artists as heart)

1	2
Arts organisation/collective/institution	Heart
Its cultural workers	Lungs
Artists	O ₂
Publics	CO ₂

This is a very reductive version of anatomy as metaphor. It aims to think about what and who is moving where, how artistic scenes appear and reconfigure, how there is a need for repeatable events (e.g. festivals) and consistent points for gathering (e.g. houses, theatres, studios, centres) in supporting the (semi-free) movement of people, ideas and practices.

Equity = healing x access + invitation

(From Connor Schumacher) What do each of these words in the equation mean to you?

What does 'balance' mean to you?

The need to receive something could also be about giving to create equity. It is never balanced but recognising exchange and contribution can achieve some harmony. For example, one partner has 30% money, 20% knowledge, and 50% power to put into the collaboration. Independent Dance, London subsidises morning class for dance artists and pays teachers through other parts of the programme to keep the cost of attendance low but the rate of pay reasonable. There are models like 'paying it forward' or different ticket prices matched with different profiles. There are structures of fundraising through tiered donation plans. Pay-what-you-can models can be more equitable, and function more often in the independent sector, but are difficult to implement in (state) institutions. In a state institution, what ways of rebalancing can be found?

Social Justice Curriculum at the Wellcome Collection: [14](#)
**and transitioning to becoming an anti-racist and anti-
ableist organisation [15](#)**

Staying with not knowing

Increasing knowledge, developing sensitivity and a sensibility for reflection is an ongoing process. But it is useful to also linger in not knowing as a precondition for self-understanding, being wrong, and changing course. For discovery, humility, maybe joy. Knowing, like working towards increased equity, is always unfinished. Practicing not knowing, not assuming, and useful doubt matters for these arguments:

Predictability is a metric in the operation of inequity in academic space. Appealing to whatever form of predictability one can muster, or masquerade, may allow one to achieve a greater degree of individual autonomy; that is, it can enhance one's appeal to deserving rights. However, such appeals have the simultaneous effect of further oppressing those who cannot offer such performances. In other words, the rich get richer. (Price, 2017: 18)

Gaining recognition for one's needs is not evenly distributed, and people with less predictable conditions often do not disclose them for fear of the consequences. So, what to do?

¹⁴ <https://stacks.wellcomecollection.org/the-social-justice-curriculum-at-wellcome-collection-cceeaf76bd72>

¹⁵ <https://www.wemakecamden.org.uk/the-wellcome-collection-is-on-a-journey-to-becoming-an-anti-racist-and-anti-ableist-organisation/>

PART 2. TOOLS FOR PRACTICE


A. ORGANISATIONS COORDINATING AND COLLABORATING

“I’m not suggesting we try to ‘fix’ inaccessible spaces by making them more predictable. Rather, I’m arguing that we recognize the predictable/unpredictable binary as a mechanism that is tacitly used to widen gaps in power and privilege: between nondisabled and disabled people, and also between disabled people who (for whatever reason) can perform enough predictability to be ‘accommodatable,’ and those who can’t” (Price, 2017: 18). **Increasing access to a workspace for current and future cultural workers, artists or publics involves thinking about what elements are constructing a given space, even if those elements are not immediately apparent from a dominant point of view.** This section explores some regular practices and the communications of dance organisations. It continues the use of reflective questions to consider planning, unpredictability and communication, and looks at strategies to redistribute power and privilege.

Any meeting

It is important to figure out if any collaboration is appropriate and on what terms. The phrase ‘make more keys’ arose at the Paris Atelier. Renegotiating institutional gate-keeping is a question of access. **What keys do you have? What keys do you need? If I can open the door, do I hold it open for others? If you are inviting people in, how are you making the invitation and what do you need to consider?** It is also important to consider who is in a meeting. Although a one-to-one conversation between a freelance artist and a director about their work

after, for example, a premiere, might be more convenient to schedule, the presence of a third person at such a meeting can modify the sense of power bias such a conversation can hold, or at least be part of a system of accountability.

This Primer on Working With Disabled Group Members for Feminist / Activist Organisations by disabled artist Romily Alice Walden takes you through basic considerations for holding meetings with disabled group members that can be applied to any meeting: discussing disability; planning meetings and events; considerations for low-income and unfunded groups; sharing access information; caring time; creating an inclusive environment and an example of an access questionnaire.  ¹⁶

The first meeting between an institution and an artist/artists

Artists are often pushed after school to become PR machines, project managers, to leave where their networks are and participate in cultures of co-production between multiple residency spaces across several countries. Pitching has to an extent become normalised as part of the individual entrepreneurship expected of independent artists, who are often their own managers, communications departments, producers, etc. Some dance institutions forget or are not so aware of the funding conditions for freelance artists. Whilst some arts organisations also need to reapply for funding every 3 or 4 years, institutions sometimes do not appreciate that an artist might be working on their own or in self-organised ways to secure their means of creative production. Pitching is part of the fragmented, competitive working conditions artists are often part of. Not all artists can or want to present their practice in the manner of a succinct pitch, though. **Equitable practices take more time, especially at the beginning of a project to plan better, develop understanding, and find common ground, often across more than one meeting.**

Consider the first meeting between the institution and artist. How is the setup, who was invited and who did the inviting? Where is it and how is the room organised? How many people from each party are present, how much of the constellation of people involved is apparent? What words are being used? Is it framed as the provider and the receiver, or can it be equally giving and receiving? Who is at a meeting in which their time is not paid for? Expanding collaboration means constantly thinking beyond oneself and one's position and privilege.

¹⁶ <https://files.cargocollective.com/c340789/Primer-June-B-W-Screenreader.pdf>

It could help to 'enlarge' the first meeting by including visions from both parties. Instead of starting with asking artists about their needs, the meeting would start with both talking about their visions for artistic development and development of the institution to share perspectives. It matters who gets to speak first and who has the advantage of hearing the first description to shape a response, so whilst this approach is more equalising, it still retains dynamics of negotiation. Nevertheless, it creates substance for mutual understanding/appreciation before 'offering to' or 'asking for'. It might more meaningfully lead to an articulation of 'our project together', rather than 'we (institutions) support artists'.

Sometimes artists do not feel secure in the context of a first meeting to let the institution know real needs (such as childcare or how much time is wanted for production). It is more important to secure and agree to the collaboration than to give an honest answer. Although there are less established artists who are confident and well-informed, this dynamic refers to a tendency in less established artists and reflects the expectation of discrimination based upon having needs. In the discussion it was raised that more established artists can more easily specify needs, due to experience and the power dynamic of a situation, and therefore may negotiate better resources and could also be able to turn down proposals.

Is the question 'what do you need' posed to an artist in the room or in advance through an access rider? This is a map for discussion to better understand access needs. It contains open questions such as 'How long do you like to work, what does your working week look like, what kind of space would you need?' Access riders can pose challenges with GDPR and how to record these forms legally on a database but are increasingly used for artists and sometimes staff.

Examples of and how to create Access Riders: [17](#) [18](#) [19](#)

Co-curation and inclusive practices

Anikó Rácz created the [Values of Solidarity](#) game, a tool to help international collaborators get to know each other before they start. She says: "what I learnt is that I never know who someone is, what their context is, what they bring, I would never be able to know, so it's an ongoing process of asking questions, acknowledging an ongoing process of not-knowing". **For equity in collaboration, not knowing is equally important as knowing, and acknowledging doubt can be generative.** Collaboration is a dynamic process in which methods and relationships involve ongoing negotiation and renegotiation. The need

¹⁷ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/creating-your-own-access-rider/>

¹⁸ <https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/>

¹⁹ <http://alexandrinahemsley.com/resources/access-rider-open-template/>

for trust and dialogue are significant in overcoming misunderstanding and keeping curiosity alive. It is okay to say you don't know, it is okay (some of the time) to ask.

There are distinctions in the theory and practice of inclusive or integrated arts, and disability-led practice. Nuances of terminology are intended to help:

[...] define and describe the differences between mainstream work which 'normalises' disability in typically negative terms; therapeutic work that 'helps' disabled people with communication, expression, and community engagement skills; post-therapeutic work that 'facilitates' disabled people's efforts to express their own stories and engages with notions of professionalism, excellence, or political effect; and socially and politically subversive 'professional' work in which disabled people themselves challenge conventional notions of what it means to be disabled whether via direct reference or simply by presenting work as a disabled person without direct reference to disability as a topic (Hadley and McDonald, 2019: 6).

At the Limerick Atelier, UK-based artist Kimberley Harvey described how she worked with the Holland Dance Festival. Kimberley was invited to co-create a day-long symposium, which was a case of "a non-disabled programmer-curator inviting a disabled artist". It generated extensive discussion about power between them, with conversations about 'the internal stickiness' of the disabled person being invited in, that Hadley and McDonald would define as therapeutic or post-therapeutic. But Kimberley emphasised that the experience and role was co-curation, and that she wasn't being invited in as an access consultant to this established international festival. She described needing to build foundations for how to work:

Even though we trusted each other, to start from an equitable place was to understand the position one is coming from. I've never experienced that level of care being invited in as a dance artist. Irene really took the time to do the other work before we got into programming. Not just a contract. Not assuming everyone is just nice and friends, but that there is work that needs to be done to be equitable. (Kimberley Harvey, February 2023)

Kimberley described seeing the effort required when the relationship between the organisation and the freelancer can't be equitable from the outset. It took a lot of care by the organisation to do that work and "it's not always the case" that they do.

Examples of disabled artist-led performing arts festivals in the UK: Liberty Festival ²⁰ The Social Model...& More Festival ²¹

²⁰ <https://www.fairfield.co.uk/liberty-festival>

²¹ <https://www.theatredeli.co.uk/news/meet-the-artists-for-the-social-model-more-festival>

Performances, festivals and conferences that recognise different experiences of energy and time for publics, presenters and artists are seen in forms such as the slow conference.

An example of this was the Elevate conference at the Gulbenkian Arts Centre: ²² This included hybrid forms of presentation (in-person, streamed, recorded) to enable a wider reach of each contributor's work, and to facilitate the creation of archives.

The open call

The open call is a form of competition as well as a redistribution of access in dance worlds, although an open call is not always accessible. For applicants/artists, it requires knowing about the open call; knowing where to look; speaking the correct language for application; having the time to make the application. For those receiving applications, how much time can be taken to assess applicants and meaningfully reply? What are the criteria and principles? How were they made? How often are they revised? By whom? Is there a curatorial priority that indicates to applicants whether their work is suitable or not? How many voices and places are there around the table of selection? Does the selection process include artists on the panel? Is an open method used for only part of programme development? If not using the open call, then what (curation, invitation)? How much is familiarity with the artist and their practice an advantage/disadvantage for looking at their application? How are conflicts of interest dealt with?

Some artists are more used to being invited or self-organising and not used to having to engage with an open call. An organisation or institution seeking to change its methods of commissioning, inviting, open-calling and programming would need to explicitly communicate that a process was going to change, and why and how it would, in order to have that change in situation and method understood.

Selection and recruitment

Arts organisations or institutions may be more bound by employment laws to publicly announce and recruit for posts. But in short-term engagements, like a photographer for a show, selecting people based upon previous experience with them and their work is common practice as it is time-efficient and less risky if their work was effective on previous occasions. Freelance artists may also choose to work with people known to them (composers, lighting designers, dramaturgs, producers, stage managers), or may actively seek new colleagues and partnerships. Or

²² <https://thegulbenkian.co.uk/festivals/elevate-slow-conference-in-inclusive-accessible-and-disabled-led-arts/>

if the usual person isn't available they may get asked to recommend someone. Using word of mouth to fill opportunities is a common practice in dance, and can be used to overcome gaps in funding or make time for longer recruitment processes, but also reinforces exclusive access to certain opportunities and roles, and places more emphasis on candidates having strong social skills and personalities.

Why is debate about open calls and forms of selection so important in working towards greater equity in working conditions in dance? Because of the tension between asking who you know or want vs sending out an open call. Dance is self-organised and self-initiated as well as institutionally driven and supported. 'Un-regulation' is part of the conditions of emergence and creative experimentation and development, and as such can foster outcomes (performances, spaces, connections, forms of education) that are wonderful, as well as exploitative and violent. People sometimes arrive in privileged positions or contexts of opportunity based on criteria or rationales more commonly found in friendships or relationships: personality, desire.

Arts organisations are often expected to be clear about why they are giving which opportunities to whom. To invite still requires researching, knowing someone, trying to know more people and their practices, considering existing relationships, reflecting upon current audiences/ publics and possible future ones. Whether an open call or invitation, a selection is inevitable as each context has limits to what it can implement and remain in a position to share.

11 tips for accessible commissioning: ²³

Selection of artists for a festival might require balancing a programme to reflect local, national, regional, international artists and works, as well as offering a residency platform, so that decision-making is geographically less limited. Artist selection is often context-oriented with many freely established or flexible parameters based on the existing (local) community, the artist themselves, the organisation, the environment, and the resources.

Responsibility for the possible consequences of invitation requires thinking beyond one's own experience and context. If you run a festival or residency and an artist of colour is coming to another country they are unfamiliar with, the duty of care is to inform them of things like if they should always carry their passport with them in public, and if there are any specific rights they need to know. I live in a country where the police are known to disproportionately stop and search black and brown people, and engage in racial profiling in-person as well as digitally. Whilst expecting self-responsibility in adults is part of liberal society, hospitality requires ongoing attention and information-sharing.

²³ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/accessible-commissioning-tips/>

Summary

Introduction &
Background

Part 1.
Tools for reflection

Part 2.
Tools for practice

Begin again,
begin anywhere

Resources and
bibliography

EDNext Activities

Reaching marginalised participants and artists sometimes relies upon recommendation within the community. For some organisations, ‘representation’ is written into the strategy. In one example, the strategy itself was designed by the team and modelled by three external consultants: one for the finances, one for cultural policies, and one moderator or mediator from the local independent scene. This steers the decision-making process and criteria. Some examples of programming do not engage with representational quotas at the start of the selection process but make an adjustment when filling the last third of the programme. Motivations and the systems of value need to align when filling a quota, and being explicit or not about labelling differences remains a context-specific matter.

Video formats for artist applications are common, and from these it is easier to understand what is needed. Increasing the formats of application is more inclusive, although processing and storage need to be factored into planning. Multiple formats still might not overcome linguistic gate-keeping (at the level of language as well as dialect). Selection criteria need to be clear in order for different formats to be approached as fairly as possible, and guidelines are required so applicants know what the expectations are for length, sound/picture quality, and so forth. Standard expectations (e.g. through a word/character count, length of video, specifying whether footage should be unedited) are restrictive, but they also attempt to make a selection process fairer.

Job listings and casting

Sometimes dance and performance jobs are listed as accepting applications from artists with EU passports only. This reflects that the person doing the call out either cannot afford or is unwilling to pay for additional visa cost requirements. But without giving a reason, it reads as elitist and discriminatory. If you see these jobs, do you call them out?

Sometimes job descriptions for dance and performance jobs specify age or imply it through saying ‘recent graduates’. This is tapping into a pre-curated workforce who have had access to graduate education and/or conservatoire dance education, which is already an elite, exclusive path to work, albeit a competitive one to get into and then afford. Routes of education supporting younger, largely able-bodied dancers towards further education have been part of a particular way of sustaining dance worlds. However, these modes of education are not the only contexts of learning dance and developing creatively. **Increasing equitable working conditions means addressing what ‘opportunity’ looks like and for whom.**

In 1969, Dr. Robert N. Butler coined the term ‘ageism’ to denote the way society denies older people the opportunities to pursue work, to live, and to reinvent themselves.

²⁴ <https://antiracismtouringrider.co.uk/blog/>

Writing on ageism in art worlds, Berlin-based artist Melanie Jame Wolf describes the effort made “to hack the trail of their digital identity”. Lying about your age, she adds, has “everything to do with access and survival, and absolutely nothing to do with vanity” [25](#). Similarly, artist Wendy Houstoun offers comments on ageism in dance from a UK perspective: [26](#)

Debate on casting for specific identity characteristics reflects the need for changes in access to education. For example, in 2018 disabled actor Mat Fraser called for a quota system for UK Drama schools to ensure disabled performers are fairly represented there.

In the UK, BAiD - Black Artists in Dance offer dance conservatoires consultation on how to increase applications from students from an African Diasporic heritage and how to support them once accepted: [27](#)

If you are responsible for casting and auditioning for a company, here is a casting guide for deaf, disabled and neurodiverse dancers: [28](#)

Recruitment also relates to specialisation that can help the quality of the work and define what can and cannot be tackled. Not everyone can, wants to, or has to do everything. Bringing people in can be done through various methods.

How diverse is your team? How is this diversity encouraged?

**Here are 10 tips for Accessible Recruitment [29](#)
Point 7 is UK-specific and references an Access to Work scheme. Are there similar schemes that are actively supporting people to find work in your context that you could partner with?**

²⁵ <https://www.covenberlin.com/beginning-middle-age-end/>

²⁶ <https://medium.com/@southeastdance/wendy-houstoun-an-article-apropos-of-nothing-19f3eee50a48>

²⁷ <https://www.baidproject.com/about>


²⁸ <https://www.equity.org.uk/advice-and-support/casting-and-auditions/casting-guide-for-deaf-disabled-and-neurodiverse-dancers>

²⁹ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/ten-top-tips-for-accessible-recruitment/>

Who is present and represented at your organisation: cultural managers, technical staff, directors, as well as artists? Is this decided internally or at a national level? For example, the Council of Ireland issued a new requirement that institutions need to have an ecological/ environmental and equity policy. The Council also questioned hiring practices. What is changing is the language to make people understand more, and there is a shift towards multiple formats of communication that recognise different ways of processing and sharing information. For example, Dance Ireland offer a guide for video applications with different proposals, and if needed they give applicants the choice to do a second interview. It is important for Dance Ireland to find the right person for the position but also to be open to what that person can contribute to the project. The next step is that Dance Ireland will give resources to people who want to apply, which recognises that people cannot always afford the time to make an application.

Succession

How directorship is made and changed varies across organisations and has important implications for access to specific positions. Changing directors does not always lead to more equitable working conditions. But succession planning helps to think about who is not in the room and who might be in the future, and so can propel an organisation to start looking around early on to spot people who could apply. Leadership includes figuring out access to the room as a shorter term and longer term process, as well as creating access in the room. Work with who is there and who might have the expertise, and if you don't have the expertise, where can you find it? This is summarised through the idea of 'calling in' (and on the terms/ fee of the person called in if their expertise is wanted), rather than calling out (see Flanders Arts Institute, 2023: 122). The implications of sharing leadership as co-directors can potentially balance working conditions more effectively with other work, needs, and/or caring responsibilities. It also brings two perspectives and means that each can take the lead on different aspects of the job and work with shared accountability.


This research from the UK 'Leadership – Gender balance in UK Dance Sector Report' (2023) might offer an example of how you could commission similar research in your context, or at least be able to reflect upon it and compare notes.  ³⁰

A series of EU-level projects, alongside the work of researchers, has been gradually shifting discourse about leadership and disability/ inclusion in dance.³¹ As Hadley and McDonald note, "those working in

³⁰ <https://awadance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/1-FINAL-Research-AWA-DANCE-Gender-Balance-UK-Dance-Sector.pdf>

³¹ Disability arts has a substantial literature of which dance is part, including analyses of creative methods and self-education (Whatley in Hadley and McDonald, 2019: 232). Dance and disability have been a topic of several EU research projects and collaborations (e.g. Marsh, 2017; Panagiotara, 2019; Baltà Portolés, 2023) which reposition disability in policy and funding agendas, as longer term consequences of UNESCO discussions in the 1980s on rights to culture and human rights more broadly.

disability arts, culture, and media studies tend to be suspicious of any terminology, or any research aim, approach, or outcome, that positions disabled people as subject, spectator, or research participant rather than as producer of culture” (2019: 5).

In the UK, the performing arts company Extant (1997) explores visual impairment, and gives an example of a different approach to succession planning in its first visually impaired Trainee Artistic Director scheme:  ³²

The Team

How organisations organise within themselves before they consider audiences matters for how work is done. Who is in the team, how does that change, on what basis? If you’re a value-based arts organisation, like many arts organisations tend to be, what are these values and how are they defined? What are your processes? What are your current access policies? What are your programming goals?

How you understand your work might be supported by this self-reflection tool:  ³³

It is important to have a sense of working in and towards a common project. Regularly creating space to enable everyone to communicate what they need helps. For example, meeting every two weeks with the whole team, or creating a one-off workshop for all staff offering a space to know why decisions are taken. Taking time for a team can create more cohesion, and can be supported through a change of scene, sometimes referred to as ‘away days’. **Connecting away from the usual contexts can propel new perspectives and reflection.** What online or in-person regional/national/international networks and associations support ongoing dialogue and knowledge exchange? Being in a context to share and listen to one another’s concerns and questions without the expectation of having to have all the answers is important, however long you have been in your role. Without ignoring the problems of insider groups being impenetrable and not transparent in how they work, not everything needs to or can be transparent to all people at all times.

Who is in your team might be woven in with your accessibility and diversity aims. For example, engaging mediators as staff, as educators, and/or as accessibility managers for projects. A mediation team can include a researcher, a policymaker, and an artist. The choices of language, how the staff and board work together, and what artistic support looks like all affect audiences/publics. Mediation for a staff/team might include re-

³² <https://extant.org.uk/>

³³ <https://transformyour.work/>

education, sensibilisation workshops, working with external experts from a government, or looking at international projects and establishing long-term goals. As part of this, understanding who is in the team and their additional needs and responsibilities matters for working conditions – not only for the individual but for their way of working with others.

See for example Hettie Judah’s research and guidelines ‘How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and Other Parents) at Work’: [🔗](#)³⁴ (available in 17 languages).

How accountable are you to the person who appointed you and in what ways? Do you have a line manager? Were you appointed by an artistic director, a Board, a funding body, a current political party state representative? Are you accountable to public opinion? Who audits what you do? What parts of a team might be missing? Knowing what you bring to a team is helpful. What’s your superpower? What are you exceptionally good at?

Leadership

Whilst an organisation experiences the boundaries or constraints that it is limited as well as protected by, leadership matters for how transparent or concealed decision-making is, how a team is expected to work together, and how it can communicate amongst itself. Although there are collectives that share all parts of labour, in other instances not everyone in a team wants to share all the responsibilities or to learn about other parts of what the organisation does. This means the responsibility of the person in a leadership role must work with different capacities and maintain an overview of the different parts of the programme, and current as well as future needs and interests. These needs might be responding to a demand, for example from a funder or new project call, or a shift in local circumstances. Needs might be those of publics, co-workers or artists.

Defining the limits of what an organisation can and cannot do is part of leadership, in dialogue with others, and requires review dates. Sometimes capacity changes are obvious and point the way forward; at other times changes burst forth from crisis. Decision-makers at the top, as it were, are often operating on a different rhythm, and sometimes their needs contrast with other practices and working ethos. What comes first: needs or demands? From where? How is leadership creating or matching needs? A sensibility of trust can be created through actions like avoiding micro-management, or actively showing possibilities for employees and colleagues in your workplace.

³⁴ <http://www.artist-parents.com/>

Hierarchy is not an imposition to equity as you have a pre-decided process of decision-making. Whilst HR (Human Resources) departments are common in other sectors, not all arts organisations have one to refer to for recruitment and complaints procedures, and there is not always someone obvious to look to for help with negotiating a contract. If you know about a local or national union, then you might know about collective labour agreements and have access to someone who would negotiate pay. People in leadership roles might assume the people they work with know about labour rights and obligations, but guidance could be offered and known contexts for advice pointed towards.

Volunteering

Choice about the use of one's power for paid or unpaid labour is unevenly distributed amongst the constellation of people in dance. The ambition in the arts to over-do, and to still want to produce despite not having money for everything, is high and recalls the presence of passion. Such ambition can create reliance upon one's own voluntary labour, and the enthusiasm of others. **Relying upon voluntary labour of any kind is inherently inaccessible and unfair.** This impacts even more upon disabled people who are more likely to be financially unstable, which limits their participation. In countries such as Ireland or the UK people in receipt of disability allowance from the state (based on a medical model of disability) cannot earn above a certain amount. This impacts upon the possibility for these artists to gain grants, be paid properly, and have the resources to produce work. Campaigning is happening to change these clauses that create more inequity.

See the research of Dr Delia Ferri regarding EU disability, access laws, and dance: (ending 2025). [🔗](#) ³⁵

Audience development is sometimes designed to increase inclusivity and involves work with volunteers. An organisation's programme might include participatory events with cooking, music or education structures. If the work of a volunteer is integral to the work needs of a context, then they should be paid. Volunteers in festivals and events are often eager to gain more experience of how cultural production functions, to meet people, and to learn about artists. People also volunteer because they want to support the event, or its makers, and are 'just happy to be there'. In either case, an agreement is useful to ensure the festival is accounting for the contribution and any expectations. **Increasing equitable working conditions means redistributing labour and payment to recognise the different parts of the work involved in preparing future ground, hosting, and evaluating.**

³⁵ <https://ercdancing.maynoothuniversity.ie/>

Contracts and pay

Some organisations openly share what is paid to each company as a matter of transparency. All fees and budgets are communicated, with responsibilities for their artist residency space assumed/assigned according to availability. The challenge with this is not always feeling at full capacity to do a specific job and keeping up with fluid changes. These methods of working might function more effectively in a project, but they raise questions for long-term sustainability of distribution of work, expectations of responsibility, pay and the content and function of a contract.

Contracts are a space to develop more equity and to tailor the contract to the needs of the team/individual, or better reflect their lives so they can be present properly. How to develop them based upon what matters and what is possible? For example, how does the gender pay gap appear in your context? Does your pay reflect the cost of living? Is it under/over? Pay or pay scales for a team might be immovable, depending upon the legal frameworks in your country.

Pay disparities between those on salaries and freelancers matters for how the risk to the freelancer is or isn't included in or reflected in a fee.

Artist and scholar Gillie Kleiman articulates how the differences are never just about the money but about the stories around freelance work: [🔗](#) ³⁶

Here are some examples of tools for reflecting upon and working out asymmetrical pay based on need, rather than equal pay that doesn't take any differences into account. These might not entirely cohere with your working context but might inspire further discussion: [🔗](#) ³⁷

This is a tool for a socially just wage system: [🔗](#) ³⁸

Here is a guide to contracts: [🔗](#) ³⁹

³⁶ <https://www.gilliekleiman.com/blog/>

³⁷ <https://www.kunsten.be/en/now-in-the-arts/earn-what-you-need-a-plea-and-a-tool-for-unequal-pay/>

³⁸ <https://platformlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/social-justice-waging-system-dec-2005.pdf>

³⁹ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/contracts-and-finances/>

Several organisations guide or support artists with fees and contract templates. Some organisations ask artists when creating their budget to specify that they pay themselves a certain minimum amount, and then add the rest of the budget. There is the need for fair negotiations regarding pay, and empathy and honesty are key. Do you ask artists what fee they want or expect? Even if you have a set amount, do you try to find out what their perception is, based on other industry guides/standards, self-perception of worth etc?

The 'happy money story game': ⁴⁰

A toolkit for artists and freelancers when asked to work for nothing: ⁴¹

Creating contracts beyond the rules: ⁴²

Whilst not everyone uses formal contracts, even a verbal agreement or email acts as 'the contract'. **However, with or without a contract, where do you go if there is a problem?** For example, if an institution makes a contract for a freelancer and forgets to put something in it, the freelancer is not obliged to agree to an amendment. But a power imbalance means the freelancer often says yes to changes if they want to maintain positive working relations (which in dance often means working closely with one another in small teams) and the future possibility of more work. Ideally, the contract issuer would admit errors, properly remunerate contract amendments, and not feed a culture of exploiting the most precarious. How the speculative future impacts upon the present is compounded by lack of recourse to negotiation or third party support from a union or association. But agreements between freelancers themselves can be even more fluid and reliant upon motivation and willingness. This reflects how personality as much as skill sometimes contributes to a decision to work together.

Do the contracts you make or receive mention what happens if the work agreed upon isn't completed, and on what grounds? What recourse to complaint is there? Do you see a couple of options for a fee and always ask for the higher one? Which one do you choose? Why?

⁴⁰ <https://www.charlesdavies.com/moneystories>

⁴¹ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/a-toolkit-for-artists-and-freelancers-when-asked-to-work-for-nothing/>

⁴² <https://darkmatterlabs.notion.site/Contract-ing-Between-the-Rules-Employment-contracts-a6a967f1f78f4f3f9aef4c1ab6f8cc9a>

The Board

Who audits you and who audits them? How are teams of cultural workers and artists in a community of practice mutually accountable for working conditions? How do ecologies of practices function?

Increasingly artists are asking arts organisations and institutions if they have artists on their Board or if parts of the programme are in any way artist-led. For example, Movement Research in New York rotates its artist members into the Board, so the Board and members understand each other closely. How a Board functions varies across the range of organisations, institutions and associations supporting dance and performing arts. Some Boards are entirely separate to the organisations and members are not paid; in others Board members also are part of a team operationally, or with other kinds of decision-making, and are paid. The function of the Board concerns collective input, range of expertise, and financial as well as procedural accountability. The Board helps expand the sense of evaluation and reflection as well as planning and dreaming. Some publicly run organisations have Boards that are imposed. In an attempt to balance, these organisations may appoint two members from the independent scene to the Board with the same mandate. Some charitable organisations are able to elect their own Board and increase the quantity of members to become more diverse and inclusive. There are challenges with publicly-run hierarchical structures when the Board is not sufficiently representative, in comparison with staff, the artists, the audiences and the communities. This can be addressed with quotas. But implementation of quotas raises other issues around who is making the selection process and on what grounds, and in some contexts quotas are illegal.

Artistic work and development

For artists to do their work they need the resources of space and time, often uninterrupted. Artists also want and need feedback and dialogue. Showing artists' work at various stages of development, and with different publics, is important for the artists, their publics, and the work. Artists want different kinds of feedback or kinds of conversation following the presentation of their work. Some artists use specific practices⁴³ or have developed their own methods. It is important that if you are hosting or presenting an artist with any audience/public, you agree in advance with the artist(s) how that will go. Respectful handling of conversation or feedback is significant for both artists and public at any time, though a work in progress or a premiere are particularly vulnerable moments. Opportunities to create understanding between presenters and artists is helpful so needs can be better understood on both sides. It takes a lot of effort to create a common understanding/ language. Accordingly, artists sometimes work with a dramaturg,

⁴³ Liz Lerman Critical Response free sheet: https://lizlerman.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Critical-Response-Process-in-Brief_CRP-one-pager_updated-2020_03_24.pdf

mediator or producer to be part of the communication of a work, including its concerns or intentions and creative methods, to wider publics as well as programmers and artistic directors. Inviting publics into different spaces breaks down barriers to accessing those spaces, meeting an artist, or encountering artistic work more broadly. Inviting publics to venues to learn about artists' work happens through open rehearsals, free sharings, or practical workshops. Through 'friends of' supporter schemes, audiences can become partners through a sense of co-ownership of a theatre or venue.

Artist-in-residence schemes remain needed and deeply valued, but also problematic for their emphasis on constantly changing place to develop a piece. Moving around to make work is not available for all artists because of work / caring responsibilities / finances / visas, nor always desirable based upon artists' ways of working, especially if they work in response to a place and with the people in it. The need for travel for education and training, plus the grounding of practices in place, creates another tension in working conditions in dance.

Organisations recognise that it is important to support existing collaborations and be open to new aesthetics/artists. Individual artists themselves coordinate with partners and networks unless they have a producer or diffusion manager. This practice varies across Europe. It takes different methods to communicate to producers or venues that a work is ready to be presented or ready for touring, such as building relationships, being part of a network, accessing funding streams, and building processes of shared consensus and conversation around quality and relevance. These steps do not need to become standardised, but they could become more transparent and equitable. **More producers and tour bookers / diffusion managers are needed to connect artists and contexts.** There are several mentoring, training and exchange contexts.

For example, the NB8 Nordic Circle Mentoring Program in the Nordic and Baltic region operates on an open call basis for different cycles [🔗](https://www.nb8circle.com/2nd-cycle)⁴⁴; the Independent Dance Management Network in the UK operates on a membership basis [🔗](https://www.idmn.co.uk/)⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ <https://www.nb8circle.com/2nd-cycle>

⁴⁵ <https://www.idmn.co.uk/>

B. COMMUNICATION

Organisations are expected to put out bold statements outlining aspirations and goals to which they might be held accountable. There is a difference between the clarity and confidence of these statements on the one hand, and the small steps that achieve them and that are used to reflect upon and alter working practices on the other. Action taken in manageable, incremental ways contributes to changing patterns of perception and transforming working conditions. **It is important to avoid what Ahmed writes of when “diversity becomes a brand, and a form of organisational pride” (Ahmed, 2009: 44) through statements only and no changes in practices.** Indeed, bold statements without changes in action have led to accusations of being ‘performative’.⁴⁶

Discussion, internal communication, conflict

It is easier to talk together with a team of five to decide things. With 40 people in a team, such coordination is harder, and there can be a bigger need for hierarchy to manage communications and work. An external consultant can help make sense of communication issues internally and externally if there are problems. Some organisations have consistent internal news sharing amongst colleagues that helps people know what is happening. Nurturing a team and offering opportunities for learning and development, with forms of mentoring and regular reviews, can create a more trusting context in which needs might be more easily shared, discussed, and responded to. It is also important to create space for leaders to receive feedback, although this is difficult when the boss holds the power. In some organisations, there is an external figure who holds quarterly meetings to try out new flows of communication. Conversations can be anonymous, and any member of the team can ask whatever they want.

Solving disputes and tensions can take several approaches, depending upon the already accepted ways of working. For example, some people would object to having an outsider brought in and would rather engage with resolving an issue from the inside of the group through discussion.

⁴⁶ In performance studies, linguistics and philosophy, performative means acts of presenting and/or representing that help prefigure action or propel imagination. But ‘performative’ has undergone a semantic shift in which performing no longer holds its meaning, where intent no longer aligns with statement (e.g. ‘I promise’). It now also describes a speech act done for show and has become an insult. Activists identify statements being made that, rather than leading a change in action, are used to protect an organisation’s reputation and status – e.g. the 2017 Pepsi advert with Kendall Jenner handing a police officer a can of the drink is amongst many examples of what has become described as ‘performative wokeness’: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/apr/05/from-cokes-flower-power-to-kendall-jenners-pepsi-ad-how-ads-co-opt-protest>.

For others, the presence of a mediator from outside the dynamic of a group can be helpful. It is useful to acknowledge that there may be disagreements and that ways of approaching them have already been thought about. Both those who avoid confrontation and those who are comfortable with it may find the methods from **Non-Violent Communication** helpful for separating needs, feelings and actions.⁴⁷

Public-facing communications

Creating a respectful space for disagreement requires people knowing what is and is not appropriate in advance. This can be supported by the way the event is announced, and through the introductory welcome speech that says that disagreement is welcome but that the space is against, for example, fascism, ableism, racism, sexism, misogyny, ageism, homophobia, nationalism. Pre-empting conflict over forms of discussion and the stating of expectations means preparing policies to refer to if needed, and hosts must have the skills to mediate disagreement. Board members are usually the most equipped to articulate aspects of an organisation and have their voices heard.

However, there is the need to develop the capacity to stay with difficult situations and become available to conversations, rather than exclude. Hosting artists and holding public conversations requires additional planning for the safety of artists and publics. Each working context will imply different possible tensions.

But as examples, NDT (NL) has a safe workplace guide: [🔗](#)⁴⁸
and cinema and cultural centre FACT, Liverpool (UK) has a 'safer conversations' guide: [🔗](#)⁴⁹

On any occasion, asking yourself who is in the room reflects upon past examples of communication and helps to reflect upon future needs. Who is there reflects interconnected, contingent issues including and not limited to: levels of investment in dance, disability and access; education broadly conceived; institutional frameworks, histories and affordances; capacity for self-organised work; partnership and relationships involved in invitation and hosting; time and resources available for people to attend; the accessibility (forms and placement of information) with which an event, performance, class, workshop, open studios, audition, consultation, or interview has been communicated. Communication is part of what you do deliberately and unintentionally. **Public-facing communication is about what you have, what you do, and why you do it.**

⁴⁷ Non-Violent Communication free resources: https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/resources/?doing_wp_cron=1692456594.6458790302276611328125

⁴⁸ <https://www.ndt.nl/en/ndts-golden-rules/>

⁴⁹ <https://cdn.fact.co.uk/uploads/documents/Safer-Conversations-Guide.pdf?v=1662566263>

Websites, access, and being 'findable'

Summary

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Part 1. Tools for reflection

Part 2. Tools for practice

Begin again, begin anywhere

Resources and bibliography

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“When done properly, accessibility is not mere logistics, despite highly specific standards outlined in accessibility legislation. The risk, however, is that accessibility may inadvertently focus on people with physical disabilities, or transform disability into a fixable problem rather than a complex cultural category” (Kelly, 2013: 789). However, websites are major communication tools to consider how access is designed and tested, taking into consideration both visible and invisible disabilities and conditions.

The Orlando Festival in Bergamo, Italy set a precedent in the region by being explicit about how and in what ways its performances were accessible. Taking responsibility to be honest about access inspired other arts organisations in the region to be similarly clear about the accessibility of their performances.

Specifications about general accessibility (e.g. lifts, availability of spaces for wheelchairs) or declaring accessible events on a website is redundant if the website itself is not translatable and accessible. How is information shared? How legible, and in what formats and languages? Make sure your website has a dedicated Accessibility page to update publics.

Here is an example of an accessible website and what to think about: [50](#)

Colour contrast and text size guide: [51](#)

Check your writing for clarity: [52](#)

Accessible marketing guide: [53](#)

Demystifying Access: A guide for producers and performance makers: how to create better access for audiences to the performance arts (Claudia Girard and Nicola Miles-Wildin, 2015): [54](#) **from** [55](#)

⁵⁰ <https://disabilityarts.online/accessibility/>

⁵¹ <https://colourcontrast.cc/>

⁵² <https://hemingwayapp.com/>

⁵³ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/accessible-marketing-guide/>

⁵⁴ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Unlimited-Demystifying-Access.pdf>

⁵⁵ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/demystifying-access-a-resource-pack-for-the-performing-arts/>

It is becoming more common to support people's participation in a meeting or performance workshop by making a space for sharing needs when booking or confirming attendance. Asking about access requirements during theatre/workshop ticket booking needs both a list of possible options as well as space to be able to add something that is not already on the list. Booking options by both website and telephone need to be in place (there are instances in which booking the one spot for a wheelchair in a theatre can only be through calling, which is not always a convenient option). A list for booking a ticket online might include checkboxes next to each of the following statements: I'm a wheelchair user (electric); I'm a wheelchair user (manual); I'm D/deaf or hard of hearing and a BSL (British Sign Language) user; I'm D/deaf or hard of hearing and use captions; I have a registered Assistance Dog; I use a wheelchair but prefer to transfer to a seat; I'm unable to use stairs for any other reason; I'm blind or visually impaired; I need to bring a Personal Assistant/Companion; I require Audio Description; I require a seat close to an exit; I have an access requirement not listed here; I need to know about strobe lighting / fog / gunshots. This last point refers to conditions that are invisible like epilepsy, migraine or allergies, and to conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Consider holding a 'relaxed performance': [56](#).

It is a proactive position, rather than needing to request information about audience members to know what to adjust. Comedian Sophie Hagen describes how venues can become fat-friendly: [57](#)

If you host performances, classes/workshops, seminars, your accessibility page should give details on these in general, with specific information about each workshop/performance as part of the listing on a part of your website / social media that may be updated more regularly.

Being 'findable' online affects open call respondents and recruitment, as well as audiences and publics. Increasing access to online information means using Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) methods such as tagging posts and pages. Ensure key information is easy to find to someone new to your site or organisation, ideally at the bottom of the home page (e.g. addresses/country, opening times, dates, booking systems, where to go for updated listings if the site is more an archive and social media is more the shop window). Which platforms are you using to share info and update audiences? Do you need to use all of them, and which ones in which ways? Who is not being reached? If you are not using them, do you need to keep them?

It is important to recognise that 'findability' may not be desirable for those working in conditions where censorship is operating

⁵⁶ <https://access-theatre.co.uk/2019/06/17/what-are-accessible-performances/>

⁵⁷ https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/jul/18/heres-what-venues-can-do-to-become-fat-friendly-spaces?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

and where, for example racist, anti-trans, homophobic, sexist or ableist attacks happen. If you don't want to be 'too findable', how do you selectively communicate your context? What channels of communication, networks, mailing lists, or private groups held within social media / messaging platforms might be available? How can you be accessible and inclusive whilst protecting the space and the identities of artists and publics? In such conditions, word of mouth remains significant. Total inclusivity is impossible and full transparency is not always desirable for individual safety or the sustainability of practices.

Archives, galleries, digital access

Access means conceptualising your audiences and publics of the future, and resources need to be allocated for upkeep. How are archives and resources held? Are they in online libraries or physical libraries in semi-accessible contexts like arts organisation bookshelves? How is futurity built into projects? How is documentation budgeted for and part of practices? Over recent years, many festival websites have been remodelled, often towards greater ease of access as there are no longer as many pages to click through, with most information on one continuous page. But archives are either no longer available or very hard to find, and rarely accessible.

On websites and social media, always credit the people in the photos and the photographers. Photos and images require descriptions so screen readers can access them. A virtual tour of a building on a website immediately supports increased familiarisation with a space.

For a long time, multiplying strategies for engaging with publics occurs through what are sometimes referred to as 'collateral' or 'wrap around' projects of a choreography or performance. Some artists and producers consider them as equally core to performances, as they engage with existing and new publics. During the lockdown periods in the pandemic there was more access to online performances and workshops and more opportunity to connect with publics digitally. Although many artists have been exploring digital spaces and modes of connection prior to 2020, since the pandemic, digital tools have become more commonly used for auditions, rehearsal processes, digital residencies, streaming live events, or sharing recordings. These expand the possibilities of who might engage with dance, where and how. Some organisations have since decided to reduce or end digital access to livestreamed performances or workshops, for reasons related to available time, resources and skills. The pandemic also affirmed an ongoing position or perspective found in dance that in-person contact serves the work better, as it was designed and intended to be experienced that way. However, this fails to take into account people for whom coming to a theatre or workshop was not possible before the pandemic, nor after. This might be because of, but is not limited to: disabilities/conditions; caring responsibilities; shift work / evening work; inaccessible online booking systems; lack of access to digital technologies. Reaching publics requires considering the methods.

Word of mouth

Alongside increasingly sophisticated and well-funded marketing strategies by corporations and governments, more than ever the role of word of mouth, knowing someone personally and being invited, matters for building relationships with publics known and unknown. Personal contact goes a long way in overcoming issues of access by multiplying the forms of invitation and hospitality. Invitation involves the newcomer and the old-timer alike being welcomed, recognised and valued. Artists and publics who have faced multiple barriers to accessing artistic development opportunities and performances will often assume that such activities aren't 'for them'. Inviting people to attend a workshop in person, by email, or over the phone helps to assure them that they are welcome, and that their individual needs are being heard. 'Time-consuming' activities are relationship and trust-building. What does word of mouth look like? At the end of his lecture with Chris Guerematchi, Richard Kofi declared "let's fill up the last part of this talk with shout outs to other artist's projects".

Safety

The Covid-19 pandemic, like the AIDs/HIV crisis, SARs, Norovirus, Monkey Pox and so on are public-facing indicators of the ongoing impossibility of full immunity against life, and the fact that 'safety' is relative. Nevertheless, there are steps to take to improve working conditions that are important for everyone. Safe working environments might include: ergonomic design and chair height for sight lines and computer use; that emergency exits are clear and accessible for wheelchair users; that there is access to drinkable water; clean air; temperature control; data/identity protection; insurance.

See this disabled access reviewing site, working to make accessible toilets safer: [🔗](#) ⁵⁸

Guidance on working with staff with autoimmune conditions: [🔗](#) ⁵⁹

See guidance about safety at work and workplace dignity for organisations and individuals: [🔗](#) ⁶⁰

⁵⁸ <https://www.euansguide.com/>

⁵⁹ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/staff-with-autoimmune-conditions/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.safetocreate.ie/>

Studio space

Summary

Artists want and need space, cheap or free, to develop work in, platforms to show it, and contexts in which to tour it. How is access to studio space structured where you are? Do you offer it for free or can you offer it for free if it is possible? How do you keep track? Is there a membership system?

Introduction &
Background

Part 1.
Tools for reflection

Squatting is a way to establish a space and find alternative methods of social organisation. The gentrification of Europe's cities and changes in legal frameworks are making this harder, though not impossible. However, for people with disabilities or additional needs squatted spaces can be less accessible or not accessible at all, as well as sometimes not compliant with safety standards (fireproofing, testing of electrical equipment, emergency exits, and so on).

Part 2. Tools for practice

Begin again,
begin anywhere

Does your organisation provide a list of available cheap space in a city? This is a useful resource for artists, especially when held and updated by different people. It needs to list whether the space has a lift big enough for a wheelchair or buggy, what kind of flooring (sprung/unsprung, wood/marley/other) it has, what ventilation and heating there is and if it is controllable from the space, whether there is access to fresh air, if there is a sound system and changeable lighting, if there are shower/kitchen facilities, whether wifi is available, what the cleaning system is.

Resources and
bibliography

EDNext Activities

BEGIN AGAIN, BEGIN ANYWHERE

Turning towards multiple perspectives and affirmative action still requires understanding goals, values, and commitments. Crip spacetime theory supports that. **Thinking equity in working conditions means to nurture ecologies of practices and people in places and take care of the/their movements in between.** This follows the shift in the identity of EDN that recognises other infrastructures sustaining and developing dance alongside the dancehouse. Whilst equity means many different things to different people, recognising and redistributing power, opportunity and resources are ways to practice it. It means understanding the values and reasons for current practices, maybe discarding some and proposing new ones. For this, a collective, company, organisation or institution might be better equipped than an individual to implement and support equitable working practices, but this needs dialogue with individuals to ensure relevance and flexibility. The 'we' is not equal, and so this research emphasises appreciating dance as a vast constellation that thrives on generous coordination between artists and arts organisations, both as publics and for publics now and yet to come.

Begin anywhere.

Part 1 Tools for reflection

- Key words and power (because arguments)
- Three tensions in dance (because unspoken problems)
- Sensibilities and questions (because reflection)

Part 2 Tools for practice

- Organisations coordinating and collaborating (because people)
- Communication (because more people)

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[ANNEX]

EDNEXT ACTIVITIES

What follows is a list of EDN activities that contributed to the mapping for this report. Between January and July 2023, a series of online and onsite events were presented and produced by EDN together with the hosting member organisations: AREAL Space for Choreographic Development, Dance Limerick, Dance Ireland, Dansateliers, ICK Dans Amsterdam, la briqueterie CDCN du Val-de-Marne and Lavanderia a Vapore. All together 283 participants attended the workshops and meetings, coming from diverse contexts, backgrounds and professions within the contemporary dance field and beyond.

EDN's central mission is to discuss, implement and promote sustainable ways of working in and with the contemporary dance sector by facilitating cooperation, exchange of knowledge and practices between dance professionals, organisations, publics and partners. To this end, EDN co-creates a space for exchange to address current themes and challenges collectively and promote the relevance of contemporary dance in societies. The EDNext 2022 - 2024 programme is co-funded by the European Union under the Creative Europe networks strand.

INFOGRAPHICS

EDNext 2023 Statistics

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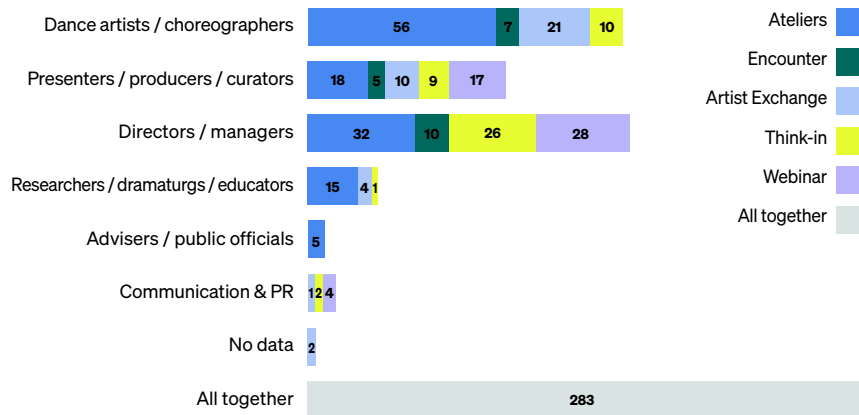
Part 2.
Tools for practice

Begin again,
begin anywhere

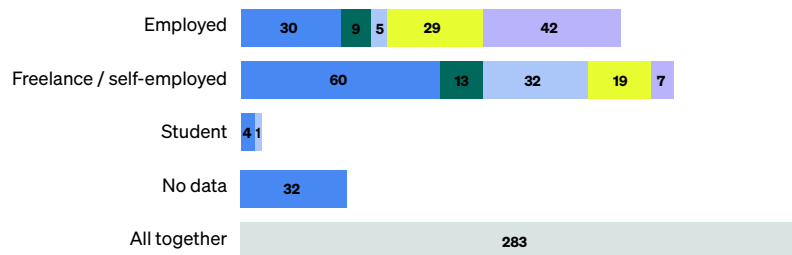
Resources and
bibliography

EDNext Activities

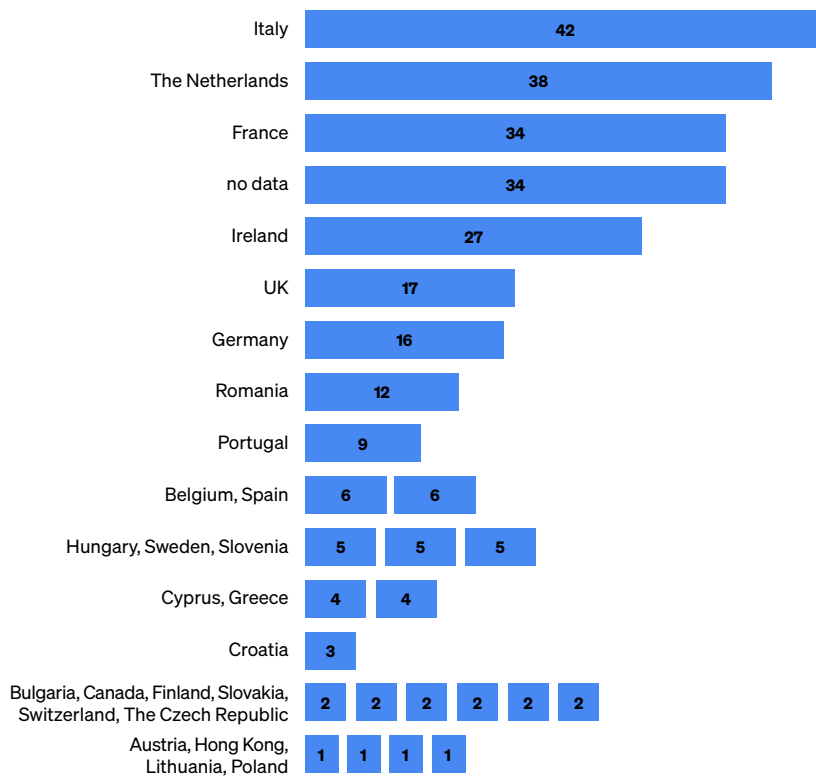
Participants by Role / Profession



Participants by Work Status



Participants by Countries



EDN Webinar: Exploring Equity

Introduction to the theme and activity programme 2023

The online network meeting was the occasion for EDN members to regroup, present the upcoming activities, meet the researcher who will follow the red thread of the yearly activities and take part in an online Upwording workshop by Rivca Rubin.

EDN Atelier: Dancing on the Edge: Peripheral Practices

Hierarchies of place in practice and performance

The Atelier, hosted by Dance Ireland and Dance Limerick, took place on 9 and 10 February 2023 during the What Next Dance Festival in Limerick.

EDN Atelier: Equity in Dance: What Challenges?

Equity in creation, in relations with publics and in international collaborations

The Atelier was hosted by la briqueterie CDCN du Val-de-Marne and took place on 22 and 23 March 2023 as part of the 22nd edition of the Biennale de danse du Val-de-Marne.

EDN Atelier: The Body of Skill and Opportunity: Equity Through Embodied Practices

Equity as an integral part of dance practices

The Atelier was co-organised by Dansateliers Rotterdam and ICK Dans Amsterdam and took place in Rotterdam on 17 - 18 May and in Amsterdam on 19 May during the Moving Futures festival.

EDN Carte Blanche Artist Exchange: What makes you disabled?

Raising awareness about disabling conditions in contemporary dance

Lavanderia a Vapore hosted a 4-day exchange of artistic practices, led by disabled artists collective Al.Di.Qua in Collegno (Turin), Italy, from 22 to 25 May 2023.

EDN Think-in

The 2023 Think-In was an invitation for EDN members, local and international guests to share their knowledge and experiences for the mapping of equitable practices in contemporary dance.

EDN Encounter

EDN Encounter is a visitors programme for representatives of regional dance development organisations to meet, share and network, embracing a model of intercultural dialogue and collaboration beyond EDN membership.

EDN



Co-funded by
the European Union