

Dance Well *the European Journey*

Discovering the fundamentals of Dance Well,
its impact and relation to health care systems



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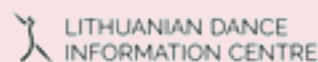
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Table of content

Dance Well Fundamentals and Soft Skills3

- Key Ingredients of the Dance Well Practice4
- In Conversation with Roberto Casarotto.....7
- Developing a Dance Well Ecosystem.....11
- Soft Skills and the Dancer’s Embodied Agency in the Dance Well Context16
- Being Social for Social Beings: How Dance Well Helps Generations Meet Through Soft Skills.....22
- References.....26

Dance Well A Journey Of Change27

- An Invitation to Movement, Change and Inquiry.....28
- Outputs of the Dance Well Project29
- Impact Evaluation Framework31
- Dance Well Dancers.....32
- Dance Organisations: The Challenge of Embracing Change.....39
- Dance Well Teachers: Expanding the Role of Dance and the Dance Practitioner.....44
- Choreographers: Dance Well Creation as a Contextual and Adaptive Experiment.....50
- Researchers What Did We, as Researchers, Take Away From This Experience?.....54
- Key Takeaways.....57
- Methodology.....60
- References.....62

Positioning Dance Within Health Care Systems. Reflections From Dance Well and Tools for Dialogical Art-Based Collaborations64

- Introduction.....65
- 1. Setting the Stage: Dance, Health and Wellbeing67
- 2. Out of the “Dance, Health and Wellbeing” Box: Dance Well83
- 3. Working on Cross-Sectoral: The Case of Dance Well European Project.....87
- 4. Evidence Revised: Towards Pluralistic Forms of Accountability.....99
- 5. A Toolkit for Dialogical Art-Based Collaborations104
- References.....110

Acknowledgments.....114

Authors.....115

Participants of the European Journey of Dance Well117



Dance Well Fundamentals

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Dance Well and Soft Skills

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Key Ingredients of the Dance Well Practice

Monica Gillette

What Is Dance Well?

Dance Well supports the professional development of dance artists and organizations that engage people living with Parkinson's and other movement disorders with dance. Central to Dance Well is its commitment to fostering wellbeing and social cohesion through dance, while simultaneously supporting the professional development of dance artists and organizations. The project supports dance professionals in deepening their skills and knowledge, expanding their potential to meaningfully contribute to the societies they live in.

Dance Well creates opportunities for people to experience dance as a vital part of everyday life, fostering spaces where communities can discover and engage with the transformative potential of dance through both artistic skill and shared experience.

Dance Well also contributes to a shift in thinking in multiple realms, generating what we call a **slow revolution**. *Slow* to allow for lasting change to take root and to acknowledge the pace that is needed for more people to have greater accessibility, and a *revolution* because it shakes and reshapes prior understandings of dance, illness and ageing. Dance Well simultaneously celebrates and challenges how dance is engaged with and perceived in society as well as within the dance sector, stimulating the cultivation of new narratives and collaborations between dance artists, cultural organizations and local citizens.

Fundamental Aspects of Dance Well

- Dance Well offers free-of-charge dance classes in artistic spaces, such as museums, galleries, cultural centres and historic theatres, as well as outdoors in dialogue with nature.
- Dance Well brings together dance artists and choreographers to lead the classes with their own

distinct approaches, practices and styles, creating a rich and diverse learning environment.

- The dance practices offered are primarily based on improvisation and real-time composition, but are also responsive and dynamic to include the dance techniques and movement languages of the teaching artists and cultural contexts where the classes take place.
- The classes are designed for people living with Parkinson's or other movement disorders, but are open for everyone.
- Participants in the classes are known as *dancers*, emphasizing the artistic rather than therapeutic nature of the practice, although there are clear therapeutic outcomes.
- Dance Well is based on horizontal exchange, held together and nourished through active collaboration between professional dance artists, dance organizations and the Dance Well dancers.
- Dance Well is commitment to developing and sharing dance practice within society, fostering trusting and inclusive environments where everyone can explore dance together. This continuous journey has no predetermined endpoint, allowing the practice to evolve and grow with its communities.
- Dance Well celebrates a collective ownership by all who have contributed to its core values and development and is not owned by a single entity.

What Is Parkinson's? And Why Dance?

"With Dance Well I re-found my body - a different body - that I could engage in conversation again." -Dance Well Dancer Arianna Ulian

Parkinson's disease is a complex neurodegenerative condition that affects millions of lives worldwide. The disease occurs when the brain loses dopamine-producing cells in the basal ganglia region. Dopamine, a crucial neurotransmitter, acts as a messenger that enables communication between the brain and body, playing a vital role in movement initiation and control.

In addition to affecting how the body moves, one of the most profound impacts of Parkinson's is its effect on communication and expression. The disease can significantly alter a person's ability to convey emotions and thoughts through traditional means. This includes reduced facial expressions, diminished gesturing and limited body language. The loss of the ability to smile - a fundamental human expression - can have far-reaching social implications, often affecting how others interact with and respond to the person.

In response, dance can offer several meaningful benefits for people living with Parkinson's. From a physical perspective, it can improve balance and coordination¹, which helps reduce fall risks², while also enhancing flexibility and range of motion³. Dancing can support better posture control and body awareness, along with activating muscles and improved mobility⁴. Dance can also respond to a wide range of differing symptoms that come with Parkinson's, ranging from slowness and freezing to dyskinesia (continuous, involuntary movement) and can be done seated or standing, allowing it to be highly responsive and inclusive to a wide range of needs and abilities⁵.

The cognitive benefits are equally significant. Dance encourages mental engagement through exploring a wide variety of dance movements and activating the imagination to bring the body into physical action and expression⁶. Dance can also enhance memory through movement patterns and improve spatial awareness and rhythm. Additionally, dancing organically promotes better multitasking abilities as participants combine movement with spatial composition, music and social interaction⁷.

On an emotional front, dance provides regular social interaction in a supportive environment, which helps reduce feelings of isolation and depression⁸. Dancers often experience increased confidence, finding joy and creativity through artistic expression, while developing a sense of accomplishment and empowerment⁹.

The unpredictable and progressive nature of Parkinson's adds another layer of complexity that can significantly impact quality of life. Parkinson's manifests differently in each individual, typically beginning on one side of the body before progressing gradually. Symptoms can also fluctuate dramatically within a single day with "on" and "off" periods, creating a constantly shifting landscape that individuals

must navigate. Through dancing, many individuals with Parkinson's find new strategies to respond with creativity to those fluctuations and to lead more active and engaged lives despite the challenges posed by the condition.

While the Dance Well practice is fundamentally artistic, it incorporates rehabilitation strategies developed in collaboration with healthcare workers, doctors, researchers and people with Parkinson's themselves. This interdisciplinary approach has proven highly valuable for the participants, who often describe improved quality of life, enhanced sense of confidence and balance, better movement capabilities and stronger interpersonal relationships. Perhaps most importantly, Dance Well helps combat the isolation that often accompanies Parkinson's disease, while also nurturing creativity and new forms of expression.

Collaborating with Science

The relationship between dance and brain health is a rapidly growing area of study, with researchers uncovering new evidence about how movement influences brain function and wellbeing. Over the course of the Dance Well project, [scientific perspectives on dance and Parkinson's were collected in a variety of video interviews](#).

In one of the interviews, [Dr. Ramune Dirvanskiene](#), a neurologist and Associate Professor at Vilnius University in Lithuania, highlights neuroplasticity as a key mechanism in how dance affects the brain. She explains how dance activities enhance the brain's capacity to form new neural connections, which can help compensate for diminished cognitive or physical abilities and facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances. Dr. Dirvanskiene points out that dance is particularly valuable because of its improvisational nature, providing diverse neural stimulation. The learning process involved in dance, including making and correcting mistakes, actively engages the brain in ways that boost neuroplasticity. She emphasizes that self-initiated movements, rather than mere imitation, generate significantly more neural activity.

In another interview, [Dr. Bas Bloem](#), neurologist and Professor of Neurological Movement Disorders at Radboud University Center in The Netherlands, emphasizes another crucial aspect: the immediately felt positive effects of dance. In contrast to medical interventions that often

¹(Batson et al, 2014)

²(Hackney & Earhart, 2010)

³(Sharp & Hewitt, 2014)

⁴(Dos Santos Delabary M et al., 2018)

⁵(Houston, McGill, 2013)

⁶(Hashimoto et al, 2015)

⁷(Meulenberg CJW et al., 2023)

⁸(Lewis et al., 2016; Westheimer et al., 2016)

⁹(Houston, 2015)

require several months to show results, participants in dance classes can very quickly feel its benefits, such as discovering new movement pathways and reduced motor blocks. This immediate positive feedback encourages continued participation while helping address depression and anxiety symptoms. In his recent publication ["If Art Were a Drug: Implications for Parkinson's Disease,"](#) Dr. Bloem and colleagues found that artistic activities, including dance, show promise in addressing both motor and non-motor symptoms while enhancing emotional and cognitive wellbeing and life quality. They noted that arts-based approaches are particularly valuable due to their ability to adapt to individual needs and foster empowerment.

The medical community is increasingly valuing dance as a therapeutic tool. Some health insurance providers have begun to reimburse for dance classes, often called 'social prescribing', recognizing their potential to reduce hospitalizations and enhance quality of life. However, Dr. Bloem notes that broader acceptance requires additional research. He advocates for stronger partnerships between dancers and scientists to generate the comprehensive evidence needed for widespread adoption by healthcare systems and insurers. Such collaboration could transform approaches to neurological care and overall wellbeing.

History and Evolution of Dance Well

Dance Well began in 2013 at Comune di Bassano del Grappa, in the frame of the Operaestate Festival promoted by the city's Municipality. Since 2016 Dance Well has expanded significantly, engaging numerous cultural organizations across Italy as well as Japan and Hong Kong. Through the support of the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, a consortium of European cultural institutions including Comune di Bassano del Grappa (Leading partner), K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg, Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix, La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine, Tanec Praha, Lithuanian Dance Information Centre, Fondazione Fitzcarraldo and Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari of Venice, new Dance Well communities have been generated in five European countries.

Through intensive teacher training, regular classes, creation of dance and audio-visual works and ongoing research, Dance Well continues to develop innovative practices and share knowledge across European regions and parts of Asia.

Where Is Dance Well Practiced?

The following map shows the European partners involved in the Creative Europe project, but there are additional Dance Well locations throughout Italy as well as Japan and Hong Kong.



In Conversation with Roberto Casarotto,

Initiator of Dance Well, Regarding the Origins and Essential Values of the Project

Monica Gillette: How did Dance Well begin? Why did you decide to initiate the project?

Roberto Casarotto: In 2013, with the project *Act Your Age*, we were digging into the questions: How do we engage people who are not dance professionals in the practice of dance? How can we bring people of different generations together to experience what dance can do? So the 'why' comes from the desire to explore approaches and practices that could be shared beyond the usual professional dance landscape. This opportunity came in Maastricht, when I was attending one of the dissemination events for *Act Your Age*, and there was a sharing of a dance practice for people with Parkinson's from [David Leventhal](#). There were also a few discussions around the disease itself and how dance can be important for people living with the illness and I heard this incredible neuroscientist, Dr. Bas Bloem, describing Parkinson's as a disease that affects motivation. I immediately connected it to the question, what is it that moves people? What is it that moves people physically or emotionally? And that's where I began to activate my imagination and how to design a practice that could bring motivation for people that live with 'the lack of motivation' disease, but also for people who might have other social difficulties or live in situations where they cannot fulfill their pleasure, their desires, their social engagement.

MG: And how did you begin to manifest this vision? What was important to you for the formation of Dance Well?

RC: From the very beginning it was clear that it could not be done by a small circle of people or only institutions. It had to be developed together with artists and the people that work in the organizations. It was also important for me to collaborate with the local civic museum, because I was already foreseeing how a practice that deals with health could immediately be labeled as a therapy and I wanted to make sure it stayed an artistic endeavour and valuable art form. In our context in Italy, whatever happens inside a

museum is immediately legitimized as artistic or as relevant from a cultural and artistic point of view and I had noticed how the citizens of Bassano didn't connect with their civic museum, so everything started there.

MG: An important element of Dance Well is that it is designed for people with Parkinson's, but open for anyone to join. I am curious if at the beginning you were already imagining the wider society to participate or did that come later?

RC: It was imagined from the beginning. Parkinson's is a progressive disease and when we were in the early stages of developing Dance Well and observing other practices, I could see how the gazes traveled in the room and could sense how people living with Parkinson's would evaluate the others who were further along than themselves and in a more critical state. I realized this might not work so well for the idea of activating bodies, activating the emotions and the senses and enjoying dancing together. I wanted to avoid the almost clinical context where one might foresee where their body could be in a few years, also for the caregivers who were joining the classes, and I thought maybe a mixed group with a lot of people could create a situation where you don't even know who has Parkinson's and who doesn't.

MG: How did you build the initial group of dance artists to lead the classes?

RC: So, there was a miracle. Our regional government of Veneto was launching some professional development funding and we applied and got the funds. Then we did an open call, taking care to share the call with all the people we knew already had an interest in working with communities, pedagogical research and in embarking on something that we didn't want to have an end date. It was more about looking for artists who had an interest in nourishing, producing and sharing their practice and to work collectively

MG: How many teaching artists did you start with and how did it grow?

RC: Around ten people and most of them are still teaching to this day. In the beginning we collaborated with [Marc Vlemmix](#) and [Andrew Greenwood](#) from the Netherlands. They were very generous in sharing their practices and approaches and we also connected with other experts

around the world that they had been in dialogue with. We were scientifically discovering the elements of Parkinson's, thanks to the connection with Dr. Danele Volpe at the Fresco Parkinson Institute. With each of those encounters we were processing collectively what would or wouldn't make sense in our context. We realized it was important to call the participants 'dancers' and to also inject the word 'dance' into their daily vocabulary, so we were asking them to say that they're doing dance and not 'physical activities' or 'gymnastics'. We were interested in shifting perception of the word 'dance', which until that time, was mostly associated with performances on big stages.

MG: Could you be more specific about how your context in Bassano del Grappa shaped Dance Well?

RC: Well, first of all, cultural settings sometimes demand

one to deal with the notion of safety and regulations in different ways. What is probably not allowed in some countries due to regulations or rules, is actually possible in our context. I could feel that possibilities are sometimes prevented if we are too afraid or concerned with applying all that is written or prescribed in a formal sense. Towards the beginning of our experiences, there was even a man who would come to dance class with a cane and then forget it, walking all the way home without it, which shocked the medical people that were with us. And I was like, well, if you're not used to this and you're in charge of physiotherapy, what's wrong here? Or when physiotherapists came at the very beginning to take part in the classes, they were constantly surprised about the variety of paths that a class could take and sometimes saying what is not possible, like jumping, but then it would happen organically before our eyes. Later on we also experienced classes in Tel Aviv/Jaffa with Yasmeen Godder and their group [Moving Communities](#). I saw how they went even more extreme from certain perspectives and everybody was safe. And that confirmed to me how one needs to trust the collective knowledge that is in the room and work together; not to put people in danger, but also to allow possibilities and to be surprised.

MG: I have witnessed over the years how you make sure Dance Well stays in dialogue with artistry and artistic practice. Could you describe some of your strategies to make sure it stays connected to art?

RC: For me, it is important that the people leading the class share some common values or integrities to offer an experience that is artistic during the dance session. And I think it's really important that we align on some principles so there can also be a lot of freedom for people to use whatever artistic practices they have. What we try to do is to expand the possibilities of physical activation through the imagination, through building images that can somehow take the body to places that are unforeseeable. But then it's not just creating imaginative physical journeys; it's also what meanings those images have for people, to the point that they can really trigger movements that they will never have accomplished alone.

For me it is also about considering what keeps their embodied focus connected to the experience. I think if it is not developed as an artistic act, the class becomes something else. The idea



of engaging people in a way that potentially they don't have time to think of anything else is the most amazing, achievable result that you can have when you lead the class and you can use any references around you. It can be nature, it can be architecture, it can be artworks, it can be heritage, it can be other bodies. It is all an act of constant creativity and what we want to do is to activate a process of embodied creativity.

It was early in our process that we intuitively went much more into the improvisation based practices, thanks also to the exposure of the work you did in Freiburg in the [Störung/Hafra'ah](#) project. After that we began to use the word 'score', which had not yet been in our vocabulary. We realized that a score, meaning using specifically devised language to cue dance improvisation, requires a lot of creativity and artistry, because you design an experience and that experience needs to organize the body using space, time, and rhythm, which is the basis of choreography. So early on, we departed from the notion of asking the participants to copy and repeat movement.

MG: You have described how teaching artists had to develop new skills. In regards to Dance Well, how conscious were you in trying to feed the local environment in a way that could influence artistry?

RC: In the original group, we had people with varying levels of dance experience and for me it was very consciously about activating professional development in the regional context. Over the years, as the complexity and research layers increased and the program has generated new tools for active teachers - they've completely changed how they teach in dance schools and even to professionals. Their language, strategies, attention to inclusion and motivations have transformed. This will likely impact future generations of dancers, offering a different experience from traditional academic approaches.

MG: At some point there was demand to expand the practice to other parts of Italy. How did you approach this expansion?

RC: We needed to understand what we were building and what tools and values we had. We realized this practice's significant impact on people's lives meant we couldn't treat it like typical community programs with clear endpoints.

The first question to those interested was: 'Are you open to start and not finish this initiative?' We looked for places with appropriate artistic contexts and interested local artists, exposure to dance, and regional differences between the North and South of Italy. The practice needed to adapt while maintaining its core values. It was also important that the artists were interested in becoming part of a larger community where they would need to be in dialogue and exchange over a longer period of time. So it grew slowly, but based on strong fundamentals.

I really believe that this journey shouldn't stop. There should be continuous opportunities for the artistry to keep developing and exchanging.

MG: With this expansion, how do you understand Dance Well as far as ownership?

RC: I think Dance Well is a movement and a process that is creating and bringing change into civic society. It is generating communities of people who love dancing, communities of teachers and choreographers, and audiences are becoming aware of the creations that bring Dance Well dancers on stage.

There is also a community of dance organizations and museums who start to be more and more involved and they can feel the immediate impact the project has on their premise and in society. There is a huge process of shared responsibility across many contexts where each tries to articulate the values and what Dance Well means for them to make sure that people can align with it. There is also a responsibility process that comes with embarking on such a journey and because the responsibility is shared on so many levels, it can not be on the shoulders only of the organizers, it can not be on the shoulders of only the artists and teachers, it cannot, of course, be on the shoulders of the dancers, so it becomes a new concept where all care and take responsibility for the initiative.

And that's where I feel the seeds for a public property are planted, because at different levels, everybody owns a piece of Dance Well. It's also the researchers, it's also the people that come sometimes as guest artists to bring their own experience, they all share a part of themselves and gain something in return. So I feel that ethically, we should acknowledge that we are all a part of it.

MG: It is very powerful to hear this from the person who founded Dance Well, because you are very conscious to make it not about you and not about your own personal idea. You've always been facilitating and labeling it as a collective process to make sure everyone understands that they have a role in it. Has this become a requirement of Dance Well for you?

RC: I think it's important to acknowledge the work that has been done in all the cities, within all the museums and cultural spaces – this is part of the slow revolution. It is a collective effort. It is a collective joy, but it's also a collective mission, meaning that you need to understand that it's not something you're doing to build a CV or to build the prestige of one person or one organisation, but it's actually something that can hopefully change and stay with society. It also requires the courage to be critical when things don't evolve anymore, or they get stuck in some situations. It can be critical also, when with a partner, you are open to try new things that have not been tried before, and you trust them, but then you have to be critical in maybe exploring together what didn't work and where is it going if that direction is taking some elements that we all acknowledge as valuable away from what we are doing. So in that sense, it's a living organism.

I don't have examples of structures that deal with such collective leadership, but I'm more and more convinced that this idea that it is a collective practice, that it is a collective community generator, may also require a collective leadership in some ways. Through this process we have established and nourished long-term relationships and I think this is another very important factor. Some collaborations, exchanges and dialogues have been lasting for decades. I think this is quite exceptional in the dance field and I think long-term is essential.

MG: You've mentioned the word 'mission' a few times - what is the mission for you?

To change people's lives. And I really believe that it can. It can really bring a drop of water in a sea that will chemically create a reaction. It's something that can bring light, especially in a context where we're more exposed to darkness than to bright sun. So I really believe that with these kinds of initiatives, we can bring change. And I don't just mean the participants, but everyone directly and

indirectly involved. Growth is a choice, and in that sense, when I say it changes people's lives, it changes it in different ways according to how open one is to grow or not.

MG: How would you define integrity in the context of Dance Well?

RC: There's artistic integrity, there's human integrity, there's social integrity, there's ethical integrity, there's all these different layers around it, but if I refer to Dance Well, I think it starts from our practice. It starts from the fact that we want to offer what we call a dance class and share it. So I think integrity comes from the ability to share a space metaphorically together, which implies an act of generosity, active listening, compassion, solidarity, joy, all these things are part of the way we engage or invest ourselves in the space together. And I think that if we are too focused outside of that mission, then the topic of integrity starts to create a territory where we don't feel balanced anymore.

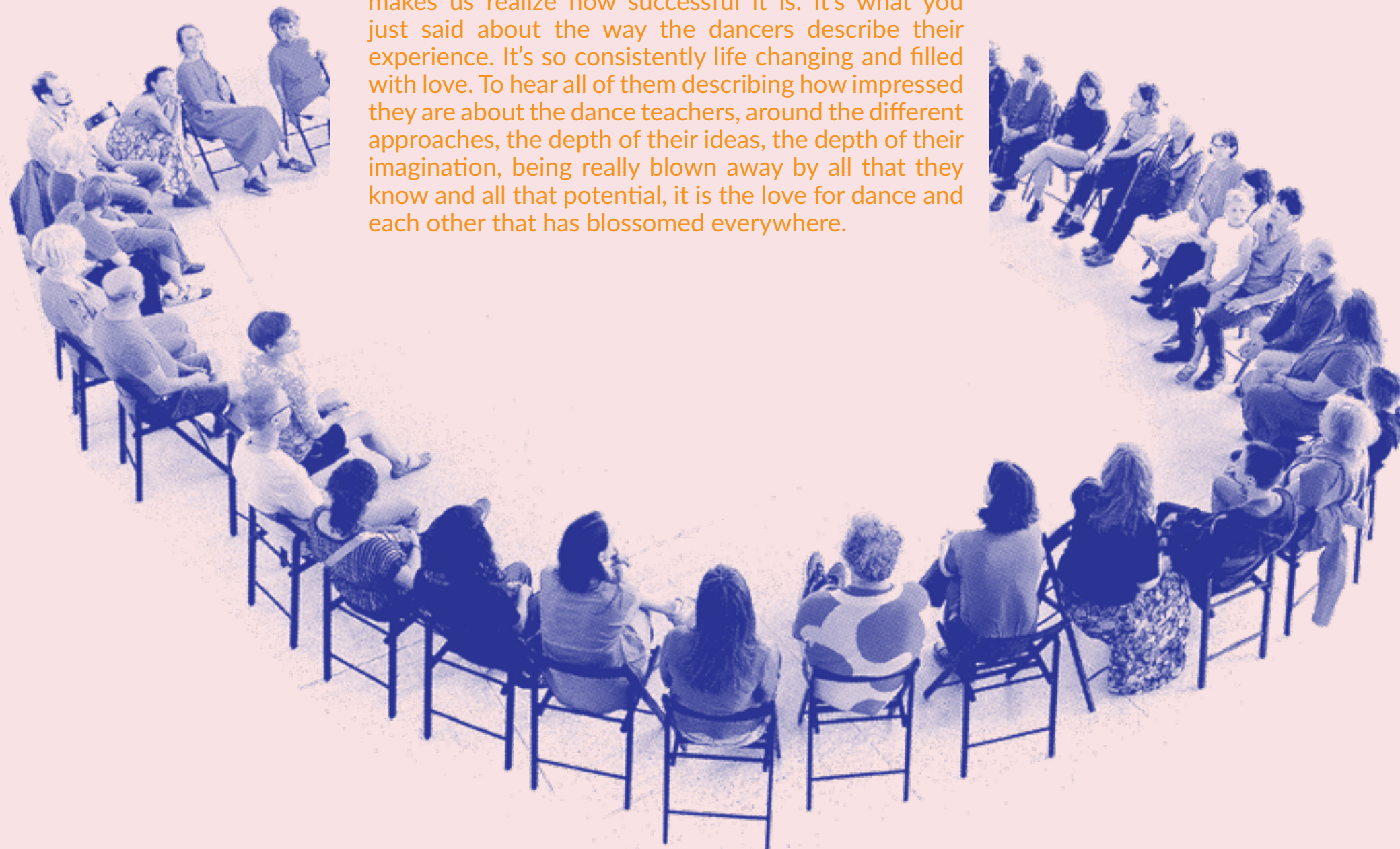
MG: Sometimes I feel like the experience of Dance Well reveals other parts of our professional or personal life that aren't quite working anymore. Meaning, the Dance Well environment is where I feel growth or feel safe or feel inspired and when I'm not feeling that in other areas, I realise where some change needs to happen.

Yes, it is true. I notice it in all the elements that accompany, prepare or enable a class. The way people are welcomed and the overall sphere that is built around it is very revealing. It is in the practice. If people are not welcomed with care, you notice. If the people of an organization never meet the dancers, that tells a lot. And likewise, the way the teachers are connected with the organizations or not, the way the teachers are connected to each other, you can not fake it.



And the way the Dance Well dancers respond, the way they articulate their thoughts or their language about what they've experienced, the way the relationships are kept from one class to the next, that's a revelation.

You are capturing one of the greatest joys we have had as the research team. We have been visiting every location in the EU project and we have been hearing pretty much the same feedback everywhere, which makes us realize how successful it is. It's what you just said about the way the dancers describe their experience. It's so consistently life changing and filled with love. To hear all of them describing how impressed they are about the dance teachers, around the different approaches, the depth of their ideas, the depth of their imagination, being really blown away by all that they know and all that potential, it is the love for dance and each other that has blossomed everywhere.



Developing a Dance Well Ecosystem

Dance Well is built on relationships and multiple layers of community. Central to its establishment and evolution is a horizontal approach between everyone involved - artists, organizations and local citizens. Often activities that engage people for whom dance is not their profession, the terms *socially engaged* or *community engaged dance* is used. In the context of Dance Well, the word *community* does not only refer to the community of participants in the classes, but also the global community of dance artists and arts organisations who are in continuous exchange and dialogue regarding their approach and practice. This is one of many aspects that defines Dance Well as an artistic practice that has far reaching influence, ranging from improving quality of life of local citizens to the simultaneous professional and artistic development of artists and organisations.

Developing a Community of Dance Well Dancers

To form a new group of dance participants, it is important to tap into the Parkinson's communities that already exist, such as associations, self-help groups and information networks as well as to build relations with the doctors and rehabilitation experts who are already well connected to Parkinson's communities. It can take time to reach the people for whom the classes are designed, but collaborating with local museums and art galleries as a location for the classes can also help raise awareness, while providing an enticing alternative to doctor's offices and therapy rooms.

"No one asks you if you are sick or where you come from. It is a protected room and a safe space." -Dance Well Dancer K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg

Although the classes are designed for people with Parkinson's, keeping the classes open for anyone to join allows for a less exposing entry into the class. Meaning, people are not identified by their Parkinson's diagnosis but rather as anyone interested in dance. An open group also supports building a community that is broad in age and

background. Several participants have underscored that one of the main values of Dance Well is meeting people who come from very different backgrounds than their own.

In various localities, Dance Well groups have also offered other forms of refuge. For example, through collaboration with the EU funded project [Migrant Bodies – Moving Borders](#), Dance Well in Bassano del Grappa opened its classes to people dealing with forced displacement and migration, fostering connection and belonging across language barriers and loss. They also regularly host school groups of teenagers, supporting intergenerational exchange. In other localities there are examples of young adults coming who are dealing with depression as well as others who feel disenfranchised from society for various reasons.

In each locality Dance Well dancers have become an integral presence in their local cultural landscape, multiplying opportunities to dance together, to develop a passion for dance and to meet different audiences to introduce the practice to. In this way the project not only enhances individual wellbeing and strengthens social bonds, but also advances dance culture and its positive influence on society.

“I have a big respect for the professional quality of the dance teachers. They all have their own approaches and creativity. I also feel acceptance and love here. It is so important to witness what can happen for healing outside of a medical context.” – Dance Well Dancer K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg

Forming a Team of Dance Well Teachers

Before the formation of any Dance Well group, dance artists must attend teacher trainings held in Bassano del Grappa, Italy, where they come in direct contact with Roberto Casarotto, the curator of Dance Well for the Municipality of Bassano del Grappa, as well as local dance artists who were formative in the origin and development of Dance Well, namely Giovanna Garzotto and Michela Negro and guest experts, such as Yasmeen Godder, Sara Houston and Monica Gillette. Within these training programs, dance artists learn about the fundamentals of Dance Well, complemented by scientific research, and also actively generate dance classes. They receive feedback not only from those leading the training sessions, but also

from dancers who have Parkinson's. Following the in-person training sessions, the development and knowledge exchange continues through online sessions.

Each teaching team in the varied locations work together to develop themes for the classes, to collect feedback from each other and the participating dancers and to archive the material they are generating, creating a collectively built body of knowledge. The teaching teams provide a rich professional exchange of artistry, techniques and tools as their Dance Well practice is created and developed together over time. There is always a minimum of two teachers per class, often with one leading and the other supporting, but many varieties of co-leading exist across each location. The archive of the teaching practices and form of communication between artists between classes becomes a practice in itself as well as a rare opportunity for artists to work together outside more typical pathways in the dance field.

Dance artists who wish to become Dance Well teachers should be interested in an open-ended commitment, as Dance Well should be a project with no end date. They should be interested in nourishing long lasting relationships and to explore and develop their practice in dialogue with the other dance artists and Dance Well dancers. This means analysing and sharpening the language they use to bring people into movement, the dance environment they are co-creating and how they can shape and be responsive with their practice to both challenge and meet the needs of the group.

It is important that Dance Well does not fall solely on the shoulders of a few teaching artists or one person in an organisation – its success lies in the shared leadership and participation of several dance professionals with varied expertise holding it together. This is not only for practical or organisational reasons, but also to support the flow of knowledge across different roles. Having a team to share and carry the project together, and to rotate who is leading the teaching, is also vital when confronted by the realities of a progressive disease such as Parkinson's. It can have an emotional toll on the dance professionals who may be confronted by such decline, and even death, for the first time. Having a team to process those emotions is essential.

Institutional Involvement and Context

Each time Dance Well is introduced into a new organisation and location, it is important that members of the organisation, when possible, participate in the classes, actively engage in the development of the practice and meet the growing community. This is important not only for generating a welcoming environment, but also so the encounters with the teaching artists and Dance Well dancers can have an impact on how the organisation develops, and hopefully to also benefit from the practices for their own wellbeing.

Through the support of the Creative Europe Programme, Dance Well could be established and grow in four additional European countries outside Italy. The needs and context of each location shaped the Dance Well practice in new ways. For example, in order to reach people throughout the city and also to discover the many cultural landmarks the cities have to offer, some groups moved location often throughout the year. Rather than the ongoing change having a negative impact on the participants, it enhanced how they processed the artistic practice, including how they built collective memories of certain dances in specific spaces. They also highly valued the access to cultural spaces they had never been to and reflected on the changing spaces as a way to break habits.

While offering the dance classes in an artistic setting is a large part of the Dance Well identity, for some locations, using the dance studios connected to the dance organisation was also important to shift perception of who dances in those buildings. For those institutions it was important to transform how their buildings are perceived within the dance field and local neighbourhood.

Development of Dance Well Classes

Dance Well is not a 'method' that is delivered, but rather something that is built through trust, continuous exchange and shared values. As already mentioned, one must attend a teacher training course in Bassano del Grappa to develop a Dance Well teaching practice in relation to their own artistry and dance knowledge. However, the following section offers a few key elements to the practice.



First and foremost, Dance Well is an **artistic practice**. The dance classes are developed with the dance and choreographic knowledge each teaching artist brings with them and in continuous inquiry and exchange regarding how the artists' tools, practices and artistic explorations can bring people into movement. Hosting the classes in museums and galleries aims to not only situate the classes in artistic settings, but also to link one's perception of themselves to a place of societal value. Museums are where art is preserved and beauty is cared for. It is not associated with illness, but rather of excellence, making it an ideal place to dance for people living with Parkinson's. Additionally, museum spaces offer endless artistic stimulus to enhance the dance practice and open the imagination through movement.

The **use of imagery and clear language** to ignite the dancer's creativity is a key element to bringing people into movement. Focus is placed on cultivating clear vocabulary as well as meaningful and relevant language to cue new ways to move. Imagery can also be used to relate to the space or to activate body memories, with the aim to create positive and new memories.

*"When the muscles are stiff, the imagination still works" -
Dance Well Dancer Arianna Ulian*

A core foundation in the evolution of Dance Well was to orient it on Abraham Maslow's categories of six **human needs**, which are the need for balance between both safety and surprise, meaning, connection, growth and a sense of contribution. With these needs in mind, a class can be shaped with the intention to meet those needs through a wide variety of dance proposals.

Essential to every Dance Well class is to establish a **non-judgemental environment** where there is no right or wrong way to move and all movements can be modified as needed. Additionally, the team of teachers collaborate to identify **themes**, often spanning over a few months, as well as a 'hidden agenda' they may want to achieve for each class, such as the growth of certain skills, awakening of a sensation or way to approach movement. Through the arc of a class it is important to maintain a sense of flow to activate movement and to also incorporate moments of stronger physical exertions to trigger the endorphins.

Due to the diverse abilities of everyone who may be in the class, a term was coined, described as ‘**chunking**’, which describes the way a movement proposal or task can be broken down and simplified into smaller pieces in real-time, as well as to layer them back up, depending on the needs of the class. The **awareness of performing** is also often utilised in a class to trigger large, full-bodied confidence in how one moves.

“People come to experience possibilities, not to be told what not to do” – Giovanna Garzotto, Dance Well Teacher

Dance Well on Stage

In addition to the ongoing dance classes, in some localities there is also the option to perform. The performances range from pop-up actions, such as group dances across street intersections or performing short choreographies and improvisations in gardens and public squares, to commissioned stage productions. Since early in the development of Dance Well in Bassano del Grappa, choreographers have been commissioned to create performances with dancers from the local Dance Well group, which were then shared with the public during the international B.Motion Dance Programme of Operaestate Festival. Through the support of the EU project, each partner organisation did the same, commissioning seven different choreographers to create a performance in each locality.

Creating and presenting performances in professional settings adds a vital dimension to the Dance Well program, offering the dancers an opportunity to delve deeper into artistic processes beyond their regular dance classes. Often the choreographers who are invited do not come with training in regards to dance for people with Parkinson’s. With their focus primarily on an artistic creation process, they can provide additional ways to embody a concept and stimulate ways to move and perform with less focus on the needs of a class structure. As the creation process is always accompanied by the teaching team, it also provides new learning opportunities for the teachers, allowing them to also see the dancers from another perspective.

These commissioned works serve multiple purposes in expanding dance horizons. For choreographers, it’s an opportunity to work with performers they might not typically collaborate with, challenging conventional

notions of who belongs on stage. The performances also prompt curators and programmers to reconsider their traditional programming approaches, while activating audiences to broaden their understanding of who can dance and what dance can be.

“Through Dance Well I gained an awareness of a different way to work. There is so much knowledge and understanding that can not be ignored or forgotten in my future work. The whole process has made me reflect about my own practice and how I can translate what happens in Dance Well into other institutional processes.”

– Yolanda Morales, Choreographer of Rhythm of Our Lives for the Dance Well Group at K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg



How Dance Well Has Shaped My Dramaturgical Practice

My practice of dance dramaturgy has been greatly shaped by participatory projects and collaborations with non-professional dancers for over a decade. In Dance Well there is a constant search for how to bring someone into movement. When I am engaged in a dramaturgical practice, I am often on the same search, also regarding thoughts, ideas, emotions and expressions. One of the first aspects I learned from Dance Well about how to bring people into movement begins with an essential understanding that when people feel unjudged, welcomed and accepted, there is greater possibility to move. When communication is clear and people feel respected and seen, their presence and potential expands. The investment in trust building also triggers a ripple effect in regards to what can be generated and created together. These key ingredients that I have felt on a deep level in Dance Well have become fundamental to cultivate in all my work settings and creative processes.

Additionally, Dance Well has been a context to explore expression and dance making with people that are typically less visible in society. Witnessing numerous Dance Well performances in multiple locations has reinforced for me the value of developing new narratives for the stage and the necessity to cultivate artistic practices and dramaturgical pathways that highlight the dances coming from underrepresented bodies. Overall, Dance Well has provided an environment for me to move closer to deeply meaningful work within the dance field, allowing me to develop my dramaturgical practice in a direction that can help support artistic and organizational growth that is more responsive and reflective of the society we are living in.

Soft Skills and Dance

From 2018-2023 Dance Well provided a landscape for research into how soft skills are developed in dance through two Erasmus+ funded projects: [Empowering Dance - Developing Soft Skills](#) and [Empowering Dance – The Soft Skills Teaching and Learning Approach](#), which led to a digital [Guidebook](#) to support dance artists in identifying the soft skills living in their dance practice.

Soft skills encompass patterns of thought, behaviour, and communication that help one navigate emotions and relationships. While these skills in dance often develop implicitly through practice, they mirror qualities highly valued in society today, such as creativity, adaptability and understanding differences. Dance offers a unique pathway to developing soft skills through embodied experiences and interactions with others, as our bodies play a central role in how we process emotions and respond to the world around us.

Following are two articles that go more in depth into soft skills in dance and the role they can play in fostering agency and social cohesion across generations.



Soft Skills and the Dancer's Embodied Agency in the Dance Well Context

Sara Houston

I would like to talk to you about a thought that I had whilst piecing together ideas from over several years of being welcomed into Dance Well, and from a project that I was part of where we studied the presence of soft skills in dancing within community settings. This chapter takes you through my thought on how soft skills (things like taking care of others, empathy, creativity, adaptability) might be connected to a state of embodied agency. Embodied agency isn't normally in dance associated with dancers with Parkinson's, or really any community dancer, so let me take you through my argument about why I think it is there in Dance Well classes.

Embodied Agency: What It Is and How It Produces Great Dancers

You are a dance artist. You have probably gone through at least ten or fifteen years of learning and training to dance. You may have decided to go to dance college to learn intensively to be a dancer. You are now a professional of however many years of experience. Within your own body you hold a wealth of information, understanding and knowledge about how to move well; about how to move with fluidity, efficiency and grace; about how to become virtuosic. You may now be working on questions that interest you about art and about movement, as well as mastering your craft. You may be honing your practice, finding nuance and fine-tuning interpretation; finding the power, magic and wonder with which audiences fall in love.

This description of professional dance training and practice points to the dance artist, having agency over their body, the power to alter and develop how they move. It is an *embodied* agency. The dance artist has power over how they move because they have had years of training and developing their technical ability to move efficiently within

the forms of movement they've learnt. They train to such a high level that they can move within a technique without thinking too much about how to place a leg or arm, or how to move from one movement to the next. Knowledge is so ingrained in their 'muscle memories' that their movement becomes habitual and instinctive. The process of thinking is not done before doing, but wrapped up and activated in doing, and it is only by doing and practising the doing that dance artists come to really know and understand what they do and make it meaningful, but it is often difficult to explain how. This process is sometimes called 'tacit (silent) knowing'.

A little summary:

Embodied agency can be defined as control over how to move and moving as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Dancers who have embodied agency usually are so practised at moving well they do it without thinking about it.

But What About the Community Dancer Who Only Dances for Fun?

Tacit knowing fuelling embodied agency in dancers has been the mechanism from which springs the dazzling, graceful, awe-inspiring performances. Yet what I'd like to talk about isn't the professional dancer, but the community-based dancer; perhaps someone who hasn't had much, if any, experience of dancing let alone training. Given the description above of embodied agency in dance, you'd be forgiven for thinking that there isn't any hope that the community-based dancer could develop any embodied agency: that it is reserved for those who have trained over many years and who possess a valuable bank of tacit knowledge about their dance practice.

Yet embodied agency is crucial to the vision of many socially engaged dance practices, which community-based dancers can experience. Socially engaged dance practice

seeks to create connection, community, relationship and even sometimes social change through the actions of dancing together. It is a set of practices that engages community-based dancers, often as collaborators, co-creators or engaged movers. Embodied agency is important to socially engaged dance practices because the moving body is at the centre of these activist practices, where the vision is one of a better, more equal world where people can feel they have ownership over their decisions and their bodily expression.

But what about the virtuosity of movement? What about not needing to think through how to do a move or a phrase of movement because the pattern and technical-know-how is so ingrained in your body? What if you couldn't do this because you'd just started dancing, or were only dancing occasionally or your body wasn't up for too much? What if you had Parkinson's Disease?

Socially Engaged Dance for People with Parkinson's

There are springing up many dance programmes specifically made for people with Parkinson's around the world. Dance Well is an important example of a socially engaged dance programme for people living with Parkinson's.

Parkinson's is a neurodegenerative disease that strikes usually after the age of 50 and affects, among other things, how a person moves. Take a look at some of the many symptoms of Parkinson's in the box below.

Parkinson's (or Parkinson's Disease) has many symptoms.

These are a few of the main ones:

Rigidity of muscles

Tremor

Postural instability

Slowness of movement

Lessening of the ability to multitask

Lessening of movement done voluntarily

These symptoms – and especially the lessening of movement done voluntarily – mean that when it comes to dancing, a person with Parkinson's needs to consciously think through what to do and it takes more effort to perform those movements. Their ability for tacit knowing (moving purposefully without a lot of conscious thought) is reduced.

So is it ever the case that a person living with Parkinson's and participating in socially engaged dance sessions could ever achieve embodied agency? I'd like to say yes. Yes they can, but not in the way that we usually define embodied agency. I'd like to suggest that embodied agency can happen for dancers through other mechanisms too.

Let's look at what soft skills are and how they appear in socially engaged dancing practices, such as practices seen in the Dance Well programme.



Soft Skills and Socially Engaged Dancing

Soft skills are patterns of thought, communication and behaviour that we may use within our interpersonal relationships. They are hugely important for our emotional and social wellbeing and for the emotional and social wellbeing of those around us. They may occur, or be regrettably absent, from all kinds of situations. In the box below are soft skills that are developed or highlighted by dance artists and participants in contemporary dance work in community settings:

- Problem solving
- Conflict resolution
- Empathy
- Self-confidence
- Active listening
- Self-evaluation
- Dealing with uncertainty and complexity
- Self-discipline
- Critical thinking
- Self-efficacy
- Understanding and appreciating differences
- Negotiation
- Navigating impulses
- Cooperation
- Perseverance
- Risk taking/risk management
- Identifying emotions
- Managing information
- Patience
- Recognising strengths
- Taking care of others
- Goal setting
- Creativity
- Stress management
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Resilience
- Self-perception
- Team work
- Leadership



These soft skills were highlighted in a project called Empowering Dance, which examined soft skills in community programmes led by dance artists across Europe and of which I was part.

Soft skills are also skills that may not occur to us that we are doing them. Unlike hard skills – the technical skills that can be learned from a manual – soft skills are less obvious in how to achieve them, less easy to articulate, less noticeable. They are the hidden layer of skills that support the quality of our activities and relationships. In other words, soft skills too are worked through tacit knowing.

But it is possible to see pathways to soft skill activation through attitudes that enable and support a situation, a person, or a group. I will talk about these enabling conditions below.

What is also clear is that when soft skills are activated there can be certain outcomes, for example, outcomes of connection and belonging. When working in socially engaged dance sessions, where connection, relationship and community are the most important goals of the process, some of these soft skills are used to help support people’s journey in dancing and to help navigate socially engaged processes.

So What Is the Connection Between Soft Skills And Dancers with Parkinson’s?

I want to advocate that it is through soft skills that dancers with Parkinson’s, and other community dancers, can achieve embodied agency. To do this, I will tell you about some of the observations I have made when studying Dance Well classes, which point to the development of soft skills, before I come back to discuss embodied agency.

I was part of a Europe-wide consortium called Empowering Dance. We came together to study soft skills in dance provided for local community groups, including Dance Well which welcomed people with Parkinson’s. We discovered that there were specific actions and approaches that were key to developing and nurturing soft skills and which then fostered connection and belonging.

A Welcoming Attitude

Each individual in the Dance Well group was welcomed every time they came. This welcome was seen through speech, gesture, dance tasks, facial communication. The dance artists greeted each participant, finding out how they were faring that day. Gestures, such as a hug, a touch on the shoulder, clasping hands accompanied this and other greetings throughout the class. Dance tasks, such as blow kisses to everyone on the screen when Dance Well had to turn online during the pandemic, find a partner to dance with, walk around the room meeting each other's gaze, an invitation to stay afterwards for conversation and refreshment were equally embracing of people in the group and augmented the act of welcome to integrate it in the approach to the dance content. Smiles were abundant. In fact one dancer in the Schio Dance Well group commented that "I'm tired, but inside I'm smiling". The vision and determination of a smiling body shines through the reality of fatigue that can severely affect people with Parkinson's.

Inclusion

The feeling of being included with a sense of care, of being acknowledged and welcomed was strong. So strong that the welcome modelled by the facilitators was taken on by the dancers. This was seen in the welcome offered by all the dancers in the Dance Well group in Bassano del Grappa to a group of North African young people seeking asylum who were housed in the city. The connection and belonging were felt so powerfully that two of the young people took the Dance Well teacher training course.

Understanding and Appreciating Differences

Soft skills were developed within the actions taken to make people feel included. For example, taking care of others, making sure needs were catered for and that people felt welcome was certainly one skill that was important here. Another important soft skill helping cultivate an inclusive atmosphere was the soft skill of understanding and appreciating differences. This skill is sometimes characterised in the term 'respect for diversity' and certainly at Dance Well there was health, ability, cultural and age diversity amongst the group.

People with Parkinson's often suffer from social marginalisation because of their visible physical



impairments, their own perceived dropping in self-confidence, as well as isolation from social systems (such as public transport) that cannot deal easily with disability. Similarly those who are stateless, seeking asylum from an often hostile other state, see their cultural, ethnic and political marginalisation and exclusion impact on their personhood and bodily expression.

For people whose bodies are both part of their identity and the cause of their marginalisation, being welcomed into a place where bodily expression can flourish and there is respect for their difference is very important. Soft skills are part of creating this environment and to create this environment well, socially engaged dance has to prioritise relational, person-centred practices where the people in the room are the priority, rather than drilling the technique of the form of movement used.

Understanding and appreciating differences was one soft skill seen through a welcoming attitude that led to an outcome of connection and belonging. These two outcomes, though, can be developed through a variety of approaches in the Dance Well classes.

Collaboration

Many of the movement proposals within the classes were collaborative. Creating improvised scores together, for example, was one type of collaborative proposal where it was necessary to work as a team, to negotiate and cooperate, as well as to understand the other's perspective. Collaborative decision-making was also carried out by Dance Well dancers leading to a sense of ownership over artistic choices. In Bassano del Grappa, the Dance Well group commissioned choreographers appearing in the Operaestate Festival to make work on them. Such decision-making is a key artistic contribution to the festival and indicates not only critical awareness of aesthetic preferences (again a soft skill), but also membership of the artistic curation team.

Play

Invariably, the Dance Well sessions were filled with fun, joy and laughter. The movement tasks were playful, focusing on imaginative approaches to moving the body; for example, proposing dancers move in such a way as to transform the clouds that are floating around them. Not

only did the playful movement give dancers the opportunity for their own imaginative expression but allowed them to connect and also witness the imaginative work of others. Dance sessions became a chance to move together in embodied, imaginative movement dialogue.

The work of Dance Well creates pleasurable connections, as well as collaborative aesthetic decision-making. An environment where these connections and choice-making happen helps support an environment where differences are appreciated and as a result it opens up the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging.

Recognising Humanity

Going further with the idea that this way of working might lead to belonging I want to introduce you to a philosopher, Sean Ginwright. He's also a social justice activist. He talks about belonging as when you can see the humanity in someone who is different to yourself by recognising the same things in them as you see in yourself. So when dancers with Parkinson's, dance artists, the dancers who have gone through forced migration and visitors to the class play with movement together in an atmosphere of joy and curiosity, the whole person is more readily seen. It isn't the Parkinson's bits of a person which is highlighted, but the person who has just taken your hand and twirled you underneath their arm, the shared smile, the laughter when you are asked to pose like it's your birthday. Pieces of humanity are shared this way; shared through an imaginative, joyful playfulness that is cultivated at Dance Well.

Empathy

What I am describing could be seen as the soft skill of empathy in action. The usual definition of empathy is of understanding the feelings or situation of another and whilst not having the same experience still recognising those feelings or situation for oneself. Empathy in dancing with others is about being affected by others and affecting those others through sensations brought up when moving rather than through words. Think of it as a time when you are sharing movement between you and you both feel in tune with each other; that connection is opening up personal boundaries to move together.

In the Empowering Dance guidebook on soft skills in dance, there's a video where Dance Well teacher Giovanna

Garzotto describes her feelings of empathy and gives an example of a dance task where it happens. She relates:

The point of empathy in a Dance Well class is not understanding but being available to experience with someone else. As a Dance Well teacher [I] experience a sense of going beyond my own body. Empathy is when the borders of my body expand and go beyond. It is a very physical experience to me. It can be recognizing that we share the same speed intensity based on a proposal or that we have reached the same level of engagement.

You can recognise here the feeling of empathy in the being in tune with each other that happens. Giovanna describes it as "going beyond my body". She continues to describe the task:

It's difficult to conceptualize this experience. But there is a task that can be a good example. It's the mirroring task. It is the first improvisation task that we propose to newcomers and new groups of dancers because it triggers movement, and it breaks loneliness. But we then realize it also activates active listening, empowerment, co-leadership, and breaks the barrier between bodies even without touch. If I think back to the first years of Dance Well, we used this practice because it was the easiest one available. We then experienced through practice how many soft skills it activates, including empathy. (Garzotto in Soft Skills in Dance: A Guidebook to Enhance your Practice, 2022)

The mirroring task is done in pairs where one partner leads in improvising movement and the other, facing them, follows them as closely as possible. Then they swap roles. It is a powerfully simple exercise that, as Giovanna points out, develops different but connected soft skills: active listening, co-leadership, and empathy. In improvisation active listening is really important in order to be in tune with what the other dancer is doing and their capacity to move. In listening actively to each other, you build up your empathy: to be affected by the other person, as well as to affect them. And in affecting and being affected you move, you shift, you change your perspective. That ability to shift and be shifted is the power of choosing to be in a relational movement practice with others, and particularly one where improvisation is invited.

Embodied Soft Skills

When Empowering Dance studied the groups of socially engaged dance practices, we realised that these relational skills are embodied and are crucial to how people engage with others and their environment. So just like the mastery

of technical movement is embodied and operates on a level of tacit knowing, so too are soft skills embodied and tacit. But unlike the mastery of technical movement, we saw people with little formal dance training, including those with a neurodegenerative movement disorder, practice and develop these skills whilst dancing.

Embodied Agency

Let's now return to my claim that dancers with Parkinson's can have embodied agency. I have just explained that it is through embodied soft skills that there is the potential to change perspective of the person who acts and those with whom he or she comes into contact. I suggest this is an act of agency – where the person has the power to change and to shift the perspective of others, however small an act this is.

Decision-making is very much part of having agency. It operates on several levels at Dance Well. First, I have described the improvisatory practices that Dance Well uses to bring people to movement. These encourage choice-making. It is no accident that Dance Well's full title is Dance Well: Movement Research for People with Parkinson's. This isn't research *on* people with Parkinson's, but *by* them. Movement research suggests that dancers generate movement. They produce, create and co-create movement, rather than being inhibited by it, or being objectified by their movement disorder, as often happens in daily lives. They generate movement with the frequent visitors too thereby making an impact beyond their own circle.

Second, I have also described the enthusiasm to make curatorial decisions amongst the Dance Well group and that decision making operates not just within an improvisatory setting, with movement being chosen by the dancer, but also at the level of the system that operates Dance Well and the dance offerings in the city. Part of having agency is the ability to innovate and propose change to the social and artistic structures and systems that affect our lives. In making choices that impact on these systems – in this case the curatorial decisions in how people see dance and

art in the city – shows agency. Through soft skills dancers with Parkinson's create the groundwork to step away from social marginalisation and disempowerment.

Concluding Embodied Agency

What I focused on in this chapter is how, in the context of Dance Well, dancing as a physical, aesthetic, relational practice, can build sensory experiences that affect everyone that takes part. These affective, sensory experiences in turn develop qualities and soft skills of care, active listening, understanding and appreciating difference, empathy, among others. To conclude, practising soft skills through dancing might be an important step to embodied agency where change by dancing, through dancing and in dance happens. Embodied agency therefore has the potential to transform through acts of care, empathy, active listening and respect for diversity. That is the power of using soft skills in dance practices with others.

Further Reading

If you would like to read more about this topic, I've selected some texts that might be interesting for you.

The text that this chapter is based on:

Houston, Sara (2024) Embodied agency through soft skills development in dance, *Frontiers in Cognition*, [online] 3:1396904, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/cognition/articles/10.3389/fcogn.2024.1396904/full>

Sean Ginwright's book is here to learn more about his ideas on social justice and transformation:

Ginwright, S. A. (2022). *The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves*. Huichin, unceded Ohlone Land (aka Berekley, California): North Atlantic Books.

Empowering Dance soft skills guidebook:

Empowering Dance (2022). *Soft Skills in Dance: A Guidebook to Enhance Your Practice*. Available online at: <http://empowering2.communicatingdance.eu/guidebook/en/>

Being Social for Social Beings: How Dance Well Helps Generations Meet Through Soft Skills

Greta Pieropan

One of the key principles of Dance Well is making the classes accessible to a broader community, allowing dancers to engage with various people and become active participants in the local cultural scene. This quickly raised the question of how to introduce different communities into their space. In Bassano del Grappa, community work was already established, primarily through the summer festival and residencies program. However, the growth of the Dance Well community brought new insights into framing and nurturing community work, addressing specific needs, and creating a space of shared values where everyone feels valued.

An open space for community growth is one thing, but what happens when another community joins in? In Bassano, Dance Well's openness and adaptability have been crucial for bringing different communities together. The artistic practice, based on tasks rather than explained exercises, for example, has helped overcome language barriers when working with refugees during the Migrant Bodies project. Any background is welcomed in the creative response to an invitation, making it easier for people to find common ground rather than solely focusing on differences, which can be challenging in this setting.

The artistic and, initially, the social value of the practice also caught the attention of local schools. Through a fundamental bridge built by schoolteachers already interested in performing arts, Dance Well was introduced to high-school students as a case study for social inclusion. Schools also favoured Dance Well and brought the students to the classes because the practice incorporates movement into a setting that typically focuses on the mind rather than the body. They are particularly interested because the dance practice creates a judgment-free space where "there is no right or wrong," and it is accessible to everyone, even those with no dance experience. After the class, students

usually provided feedback, and schoolteachers reflected on the experience with their students.

Thanks to the intersection with two other Europe-funded projects — Shape It¹ and Empowering Dance² — Dance Well classes have been accompanied by a structured feedback practice. This aimed to raise awareness and observe the impact of dance, particularly Dance Well, on students.

The Shape It project, focusing on dance for young audiences, shifted the perspective from viewing youth as a future audience to recognizing them as an existing audience and creating shared access to dance rather than merely teaching it.

Key questions arose: How do we build a vocabulary together with students in the classes? How do we ensure it is a shared experience, not just an obligation during school hours?

In the first try-outs, since students attended only one class, we provided context for Dance Well and encouraged them to focus on their state before and after the class, raising shared questions about movement, being outside the school context, and their positions in a space shared with non-professionals.

The Empowering Dance project further evolved the approach to student participation in the classes. The knowledge of how dance enhances soft skills, the ability to name and recognize them in practice, has enriched the dialogue with schools. This led to integrating Dance Well classes into the schools' training plans for students aged 15-18 (second to fourth year of high school), with a dedicated feedback session. The need for a longer experience comes from the question of the needed conditions for starting a dialogue with a new group: time, trust and co-ownership. While the first two may be clear and basic, the topic of co-ownership is related to the need to feel part of the Dance Well practice even if their access is limited in time.

What do we want them to bring home from the classes? What is their contribution to them? What does their presence bring into the space that we can name together so that their being there feels and is valued? How do two different communities share the same space?

Facilitators and artist-teachers actively considered these questions, fitting students into the flow of the classes, rephrasing tasks, and adding new ones to ease

¹Shape It has been an international project supporting artists to reimagine their existing work for young audiences, through labs, residencies and touring. Supported by the Creative Europe programme of the EU. (<https://theplace.org.uk/work-with-us/projects/shape-it>)

²Empowering Dance – The Soft Skills Teaching and Learning Approach has been a two-year research project that has investigated how soft skills in dance practice can be identified, articulated and shared with others, as well as positively impact the confidence of those engaging with dance practice. The project built on the experiences of earlier initiatives (Communicating Dance and Empowering Dance – Developing Soft Skills). (<https://empowering2.communicatingdance.eu/>)

their introduction. For the artists-teachers, it is another occasion to put in practice their flexibility, adaptability and capacity to quickly respond to unpredictable situations. But during the years, we’ve observed with them that there’s an important ally in facilitating the presence of the students in the space: the dancers themselves.

Due to their sense of ownership of the practice and space, and the embodied agency mentioned in an essay by Sara Houston³, dancers naturally break the flock of students who enter the space together. While dancing and serving as a model for the students to copy their movements, they one by one enter the flock, and open the space up until each of the students is taking more space for themselves to dance⁴. It is interesting to notice how they do that without talking; we’re not even sure they have a secret agenda to help the students fit into the class. The Dance Well dancers seem set in a welcoming mode, that is shared through the gaze, the smiles and the invitation to dance together.

After classes, students often spend time with dancers, asking questions, and sharing their experiences. These meaningful encounters sometimes lead to shortening the feedback sessions to allow these interactions.

The four-class feedback path aims to help students understand the practice and its positive impacts on individuals and groups. It is a shared diary of the experience, with prompts and tasks from the facilitator, building vocabulary until students name soft skills without realizing it, before the map developed by Empowering Dance is presented. These sessions combine personal, emotion-driven feedback with practical thinking on group goals and allow the facilitator to monitor the practice’s impact on students, particularly in terms of personal wellbeing compared to the school environment.

Common pre-class emotions include *embarrassment*, *nervousness*, *anxiety*, *stress*, and *curiosity*. Post-class emotions often shift to *peacefulness*, *lightness*, *freedom*, *happiness*, *joy*, *acceptance*, and *connection*. These emotions develop into a broader discourse in the following session, categorized into:

Personal	Relations	Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I put myself out there more than I expected”• “I believe in myself a bit more”• “I found out I can be at ease with others when I am with me”• “I found out muscles I think I never used before!”• «I have a sense of rhythm!»• “That everyone can dance”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “It’s possible to connect with older people too, if we are in a space of mutual support”• “I can connect with people of different ages”• “I found out that with dance, people are much more open”• “The link between different generations”• “Dancing with people I don’t know can be fun”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I found out about residencies»• “I did not know dance could be this”• “I found initiatives like this one”• “The importance of movement”• “the art of/through dance”.

When discussing soft skills, common ones include: “I tried to be less shy,” “feeling comfortable with my body,” “patience,” “openness,” “smile,” “balance,” “flexibility,” “moving in space,” “following or leading a rhythm,” “expressing yourself and understanding others beyond words,” “empathy,” “looking others in the eyes,” “leading,” “adapting quickly,” and “feeling welcomed.” Students often recognize these skills as inherent rather than learned, appreciating the horizontal/shared approach. Interestingly, most groups choose “teamwork” and “empathy” as skills to practice further.

This practice is also beneficial for schoolteachers: they have the opportunity to dance with their students, observe them during the feedback session (which they are invited to participate in), and some of them share direct insights with the facilitator. Schoolteachers are often surprised when a group that is usually difficult to manage or unite in a common project becomes cohesive. This highlights

³Houston S (2024) Embodied agency through soft skills development in dance. Front. Cognit. 3:1396904. doi: 10.3389/fcogn.2024.1396904 (https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/cognition/articles/10.3389/fcogn.2024.1396904/full)

⁴Thank you to Dance Well teacher Elena Sgarbossa for pointing that out to me.



how a change in setting and how providing a space where possibilities are an actual possibility (as school teachers often feel bound to the teaching program and lack time for students) can shift the high-schoolers' approach.

On the tenth anniversary of the practice in Bassano del Grappa, we also gathered schoolteachers from different grades to reflect on the needs and strategies that the Dance Well approach can enhance in their classrooms. Starting each day with a short physical practice, teachers were invited to reflect on their own needs and those of their students and to identify the soft skills that guide them and those they wish to incorporate into their teaching practice. It was an opportunity to reflect on the "modelling attitude" of the teacher, inspired by the Empowering Dance guidebook:

"What supports the growth of soft skills in others? How might you bring your dance practice into other sectors with the interest to foster soft skills in other settings? [...] Your attitudes, behaviour and actions are the conduits that soft skills pass through.

*Examples of attitudes in action are trust building, inclusivity and adapting how you communicate to the needs of the group. Examples of behaviours are vulnerability and compassion, which help open the opportunity for deeper connection and transference of soft skills to others. [...] Attitudes and behaviours, combined with the environment and institutional systems (if you are collaborating with an institution) combine to form the enabling conditions for soft skills to flourish"*⁵

This conversation prompted schoolteachers, Dance Well artist-teachers, and staff to reflect on leadership. Who holds leadership in a Dance Well class? What kind of leadership is it? Is it shared? What does it mean to lead a class and practice leadership in a Dance Well class? During a feedback session, one student, discussing a task where dancers had to copy her movements, shared:

"I wasn't worried about doing things right or being creative; I was thinking about how to move so everyone behind me could easily follow without getting hurt or lost and easily transition to the next leader."

This feedback echoes Houston's words:

*"The act of moving with others in the space intentionally prioritizes connection and the purpose of the act is primarily focused on the people in the room, rather than on the technicality of the form of movement".*⁶

Houston also quotes Dance Well teacher-artist Giovanna Garzotto, who defines empathy as "when the borders of my body expand and go beyond."

This reflects the activation of numerous soft skills through a single thought on leadership, and explains the broader conversations that arise from a shared reflection on a Dance Well class.



⁵<https://empowering2.communicatingdance.eu/guidebook/en/activating-soft-skills>

⁶Houston S (2024) Embodied agency through soft skills development in dance. *Front. Cognit.* 3:1396904. doi: 10.3389/fcogn.2024.1396904 (<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/cognition/articles/10.3389/fcogn.2024.1396904/full>)

A Final Personal Desire

I'd like to focus on a specific point for a final reflection on working with students, again drawn from Houston's piece on embodied agency:

"Dance anthropologist Grau (2013) argues that it is dance's special relationship with embodiment that makes it an effective medium for the recognition of each other's humanity and "a favorable medium for dealing with issues of social conscience", as seen in Ginwright's work in social justice".

In developing feedback sessions over the years, my secret agenda has also been to investigate Dance Well's impact on teenagers' mental and social health. It's only an observation, the topic would take a much deeper study. I recently came across a World Health Organization piece on mental health and social media, listing soft skills practised in Dance Well classes, as part of their list of recommended practices: critical thinking, non-judgmental spaces, open dialogue, effectiveness, and inclusivity. These (and other) interventions should counter the negative mental health impacts of social media use. ⁷

An article in The Atlantic on mainstream and social media's impact on US citizens' social behaviour describes our era as the "Anti-Social Century": "The best kind of play is physical, outdoors, with other kids, and unsupervised, allowing children to press the limits of their abilities while figuring out how to manage conflict and tolerate pain. But now young people's attention is funneled into devices that take them out of their body, denying them the physical-world education they need. Teen anxiety and depression are at near-record highs [...]. Socially underdeveloped childhood leads, almost inexorably, to socially stunted adulthood".

Dancing together, reconnecting with our bodies, and embodying social and personal skills in a shared space can balance the need for solitude (and the surge of loneliness) with meaningful human interaction.

As ethnologist Ingrid Mugalu said in a Springback Magazine interview for Norrlandsoperan's Re-Think initiative:

"Observe all the non-institutionalised dances: those people are going to dance in their own way, own it, share it and create a parallel world where they can be what they want to be. I feel the common ground is that sort of resistance: the need to tell a story that is not necessarily being told if you don't tell it yourself".

As an improvisation-based practice, Dance Well is not institutionalized; it's a parallel world for personal and community stories. Embodying resistance is Dance Well's secret ingredient.

What does this mean for future health matters?

My desire is to find out while still dancing together.



⁷<https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/25-09-2024-teens--screens-and-mental-health>

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Dance Well A Journey of Change

*Luisella Carnelli
in collaboration with
Sara Marconi*

An Invitation to Movement, Change and Inquiry

Dance Well is more than a project - it is a lived experience, a process of change that unfolds through movement, bodies, and relationships. It challenges us, as researchers, to embrace uncertainty, fluidity, and the transformative potential of embodied knowledge.

But what does impact mean in this context? How do we evaluate it without reducing it to just static indicators?

Our approach to evaluation is itself an experiment building upon a longitudinal approach rarely seen in projects of this scale. Though the Dance Well European project formally unfolds over 36 months, it is deeply rooted in a history of practice, observation, and reflective inquiry that has been present since the inception of dance activities which started in Bassano del Grappa in 2013. This means that our evaluation does not start from scratch; rather, it is enriched by years of accumulated insights through continuous refinement of methods aimed at understanding and enhancing the experiences of those involved.

This narrative is shaped by a dual perspective: an auto-ethnographic approach, where one of the two researchers finds herself embedded within the movement of Dance Well, and an external perspective, where another researcher acts as a critical observer, ensuring coherence and accountability. This interplay allows us to capture from within the richness of change brought about by the project while maintaining a necessary distance to reflect upon it critically.

Rather than treating evaluation as a retrospective judgment, we embrace a methodology that is participatory, relational, and situated (Schön, 1983). We recognise that change happens through lived experience rather than by following predefined milestones and that its **impacts are often felt before they can be measured** (Appadurai, 2013). Dance Well's evaluation aligns with arts-based research methodologies, which acknowledge that experiences of the world are multifaceted, thus requiring sensory, emotional,

and intellectual responses (Leavy, 2009). In this light, **research is not just about data - it is about perception, embodiment, and the layered complexities of meaning-making.**

Arts-based research allows us to explore change beyond verbal articulation. It enables us to capture and express ambiguities, liminalities, and nuances that traditional methodologies might overlook. In Dance Well, research is not merely about documenting transformation, it actively participates in it. It shapes and is shaped by the movement of those involved, resonating through every embodied interaction.

This methodological stance challenges dominant models of impact assessment, shifting from an approach based purely on metrics and textual analysis to one that integrates data with embodied, sensory, and emotional dimensions of experience. It invites us to consider questions such as the following: how can movement itself become a tool for research? How do we develop methodologies that capture the embodied and affective dimensions of dance, rather than merely describing them? How do we translate the affective and the embodied into knowledge? Dance Well is not just a project we evaluate: it is a space where we continuously reimagine what evaluation can be.



Outputs of the Dance Well Project

Who Took Part in the Project and Where

36 MONTHS

(August 2022 - July 2025)
founded by the Creative Europe programme developed by:

8 PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

↗ 5 dance organisations
(La Briqueterie, Le Gymnase, K3 I Tanzplan, Tanec Praha, Lithuanian Dance Information Centre)

↗ 1 local authority
(Comune di Bassano del Grappa)

↗ 1 university
(Università Ca' Foscari of Venice, / AIKU – Arte Impresa Cultura)

↗ 1 foundation
(Fondazione Fitzcarraldo)

32 DANCE WELL TEACHERS

20 STAFF MEMBERS

9 CHOREOGRAPHERS
5 RESEARCHERS
1 FILMMAKER
1 DRAMATURG

DANCE WELL TRAINING COURSE

The training course within the European project was essential to foster and expand the community of Dance Well teachers, not only in breadth but also in its boundaries, to create a dance community with European relevance.

The 32 new Dance Well teachers were involved in the following activities:
2 days of kick-off (in-presence in Bassano del Grappa)
20 hours of training sessions (online)
16 hours of trans-local exchanges (online)
The hybrid format of the course made it possible to combine the technical training needs with the importance of exchanging knowledge and practices, while also considering the activity's sustainability.

Sustainability here is understood not only as an environmental dimension but also as an economic one, particularly for the Dance Well teachers who could attend training remotely without having to give up professional activity.

Despite the good level of participation, effectiveness, and satisfaction observed and investigated for the online training course, all Dance Well teachers expressed the importance of at least one more in-presence gathering during the project life, after 2 years from the first one at kick-off.

The high level of listening, openness, professionalism, and collaboration within the consortium enabled all partners to work together to address this need and open the possibility for a new gathering at the dissemination event in Bassano del Grappa, scheduled for April 2025.

The European project has been taking place in:

5 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

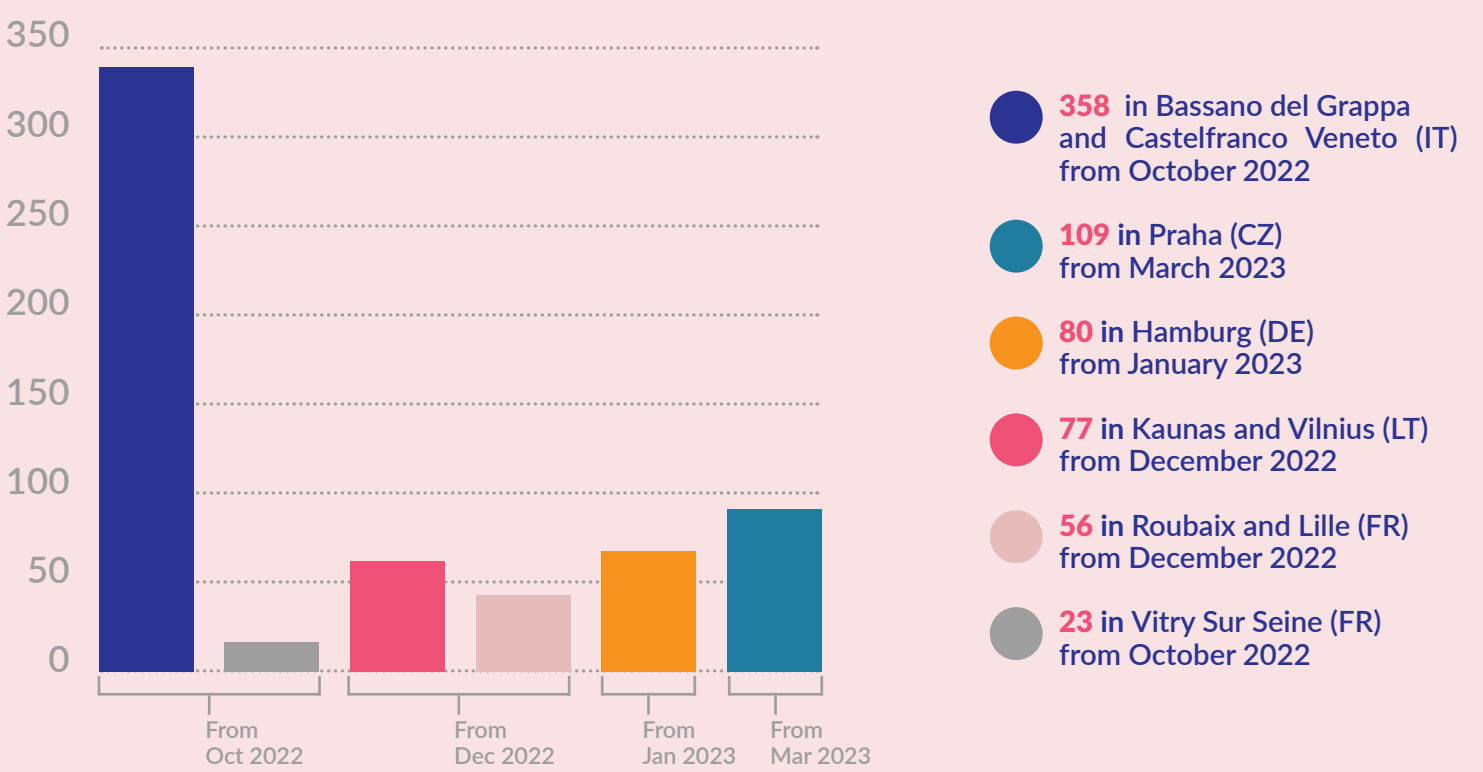
Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania

9 LOCALITIES

Bassano del Grappa, Castelfranco Veneto, Vitry Sur Seine, Lille, Roubaix, Hamburg, Vilnius, Kaunas, Praha

NUMBER OF DANCE WELL CLASSES¹

A total of 620 Dance Well classes were conducted during the project's life, reflecting the adaptability of the Dance Well model across diverse regional and institutional contexts.
The distribution of classes per location is as follows:



¹The data presented covers the period from the start of the classes (which varies by location) to December 31, 2024, while the classes are still ongoing at the time of writing this report.

How to interpret the variety of numbers, format, and implementation of classes?

Start date variability:

DW classes started between late 2022 and early 2023 depending on each location's readiness, infrastructure, and strategic partnerships. Each partner had to develop the conditions to start and implement DW classes regularly.

Adaptive class formats:

class frequencies and durations were adjusted to fit local needs. Most locations hosted 1-2 weekly sessions (1.5 hours each), while Vitry Sur Seine conducted monthly 3-hour sessions to optimize travel time for participants.

Italian context exception:

the initiative in Bassano del Grappa predates the European project, having been launched in 2013 by the Bassano del Grappa City Council through CSC | Comune di Bassano del Grappa.

What Else Matters Beyond Numbers?

Early implementation:

in most locations, DW classes began earlier than the official project schedule (January 2023), thus demonstrating the strong commitment and organisational readiness of project partners.

Consistency and longevity:

classes were held regularly for at least 22 months in each location (based on the latest monitoring assessment). The regularity of DW classes is recognised by the dancers as one of the main conditions of accessibility and relevance of the project.

Sustainability and legacy:

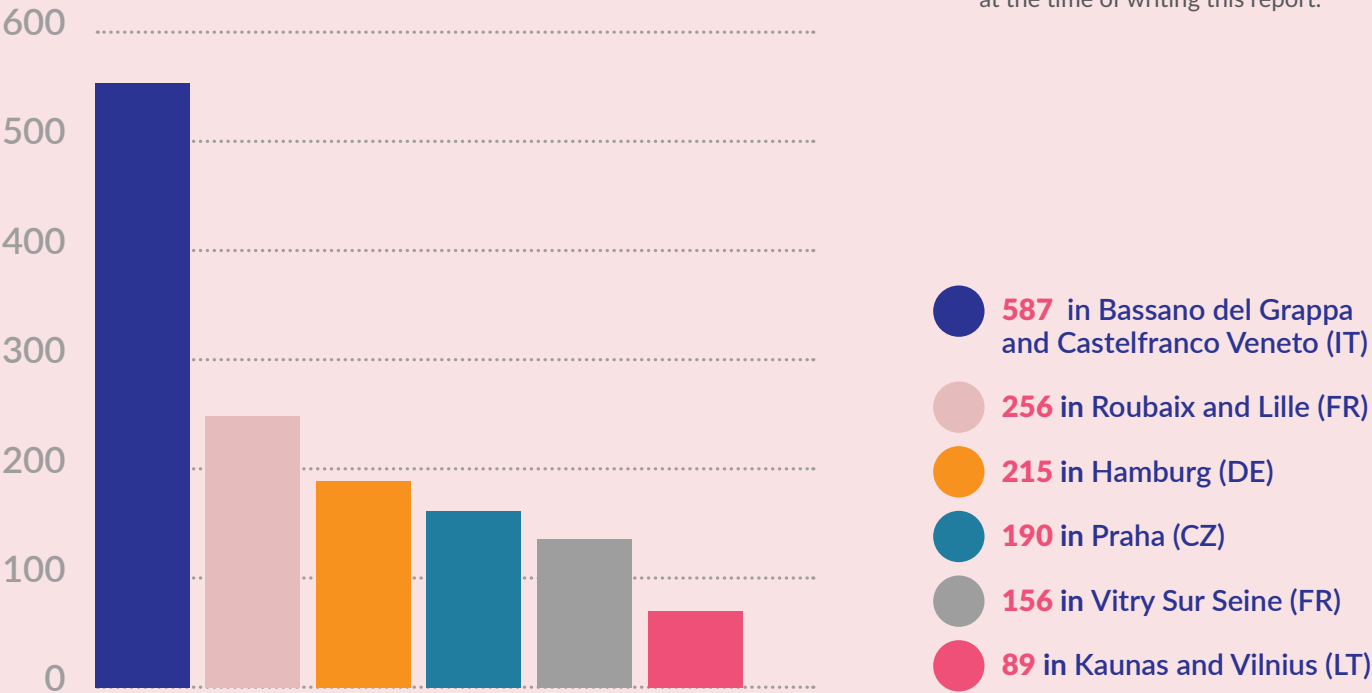
DW classes continue to be held. Partner organisations are actively working to continue DW classes beyond the European project's duration, recognising their significance for accessibility and social engagement.

Venue diversity:

DW classes took place in a variety of venues beyond dance organisations, including museums, libraries, public spaces, and community centres, thus reinforcing the programme's inclusive and interdisciplinary approach to dance engagement.

PARTICIPATION IN DANCE WELL CLASSES

1493 persons² took part in the Dance Well classes. Throughout Europe, they are close and connected as Dance Well dancers



²The data reported refers to the period from the start of the classes (which began at different times in each location) to December 31, 2024, although the classes are still ongoing at the time of writing this report.

55% of Dance Well dancers attended more than one class, bringing the total number of attendances amounts to 17351

The most common pattern, observed in 67% was attending up to four classes.

Meanwhile, around 10% of Dance Well dancers across Europe participated in at least 30% of the available Dance Well classes, with this figure ranging from a minimum of 5% to a maximum of 21% depending on the location. This level of sustained engagement suggests Dance Well's capacity to foster a sense of community for participants (see Dance Well dancers chapter).

From the data collected, a common element emerges for all the Dance Well classes: there is a prevalence of female dancers (between 79% and 88%, depending on location).

This aspect also emerged as relevant in focus groups with Dance Well dancers. They confirmed that gender variety is an important factor contributing to the 'diversity' among the Dance Well classes. Diversity is recognised as a pillar to enable Dance Well's impact.

The data related to persons living with Parkinson's was not collected systematically to protect the privacy of Dance Well dancers and to guarantee informal access to classes, which is one of the essential conditions for ensuring free participation as a pillar of this initiative.

CREATIVE OUTPUTS AMPLIFYING THE PROJECT'S IMPACT (2022-2025)
7 DANCE WELL CREATIONS
Involving 105 Dance Well dancers

6 DANCE WELL PODCAST EPISODES
1 for each location

7 DANCE WELL FILMS
1 for each location + 1 extra film

6 DANCE WELL INTERVIEWS
with the scientific community

49 SHORT VIDEOS
for the International Dance Day from the wider Dance Well community in Europe and beyond

20 NEWSLETTER
8 DISSEMINATION EVENTS
1 in each partner location

over 30 DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES
including both formal and informal discussions, where Dance Well was either presented or integrated as a topic within various contexts such as training courses, seminars, and conferences.

Visit the website to find out more and browse all project outputs

Dance Well's European project communication strategy played a crucial role, due to the relevance and resonance of its ecosystem, which includes 1 website, Instagram and Facebook pages with a total of 7k followers and over 80k views³

³The data reported refers to the period from the start of the project to February 28, 2025

Impact Evaluation Framework

The impact evaluation framework was designed based on the four key beneficiaries for whom the project aimed to generate a positive change, considering their respective roles in the process. While Dance Well dancers represent the only group of non-professionals, the other beneficiaries - Dance Well teachers, choreographers, and dance organisations - are all professionals engaged in the artistic and cultural field.

For each of them an *impact vision* was defined.

Building on the impact vision defined for each beneficiary, three key impact areas were identified to structure the evaluation. Each of these areas explores a specific dimension of change, ranging from individual transformation to broader societal and artistic shifts. From these impact areas, specific outcomes were derived, capturing the tangible and intangible effects of the Dance Well experience across different stakeholders.

BENEFICIARIES	IMPACT VISION
Dance Well dancers <i>non professionals</i>	The Dance Well project aims to contribute to individual wellbeing and social cohesion, as well as to the development of the culture of dance and its social impacts.
Dance Well organisations	The Dance Well project aims to contribute to the societal relevance of dance, through transformative dance practice making dance organisations more responsive to societal and artistic needs at European level.
Dance Well teachers <i>professionals</i>	The Dance Well project aims to foster artists' competencies, skills, tools and practices, by shifting their perceptions of what dance is and of their role as dancers, choreographers, and teachers.
Dance Well choreographers <i>professionals</i>	The Dance Well project aims to rethink the role of the choreographer, by challenging conventional hierarchies, and expanding what it means to create with and for diverse bodies.



Dance Well Dancers

The Many Dimensions of Wellbeing in Dance Well

Dance Well's impact is deeply felt through its dancers - each carrying their own story, challenges, and transformative experiences. In this space, movement is more than a physical action; it is a pathway to rediscovery, a way to reclaim agency over one's body, and a medium for forging profound connections. Through dance, participants navigate personal wellbeing, re-imagine their relationship with movement. These are not just testimonies; they are lived experiences of change, resilience, and joy.

Stepping into a Dance Well session often brings an immediate shift - both physical and emotional. Participants describe a sensation of **lightness, presence, and playfulness**, where the body, once constrained by pain, illness, or self-doubt, finds new possibilities.

"Pain had closed many doors for me," shares one dancer, "but Dance Well was the key to opening them and expressing what I had inside." – Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

This transformation is not singular or linear; **wellbeing** in Dance Well is a **multi-dimensional process**, shaped by movement, self-awareness, and the collective experience of dancing together. It resonates with contemporary research on the arts and health, which highlights how dance fosters neuroplasticity, emotional regulation, and social connectedness. Yet, Dance Well goes beyond these frameworks; it reveals that movement is a site of **agency, self-perception, and shared meaning**.

The **joy and poetry of movement** are recurring themes in participants' reflections. Through improvisation, imagery, and guided exploration, Dance Well encourages new ways of experiencing the body, unlocking gestures and sensations that remain long after the class ends. These images - of

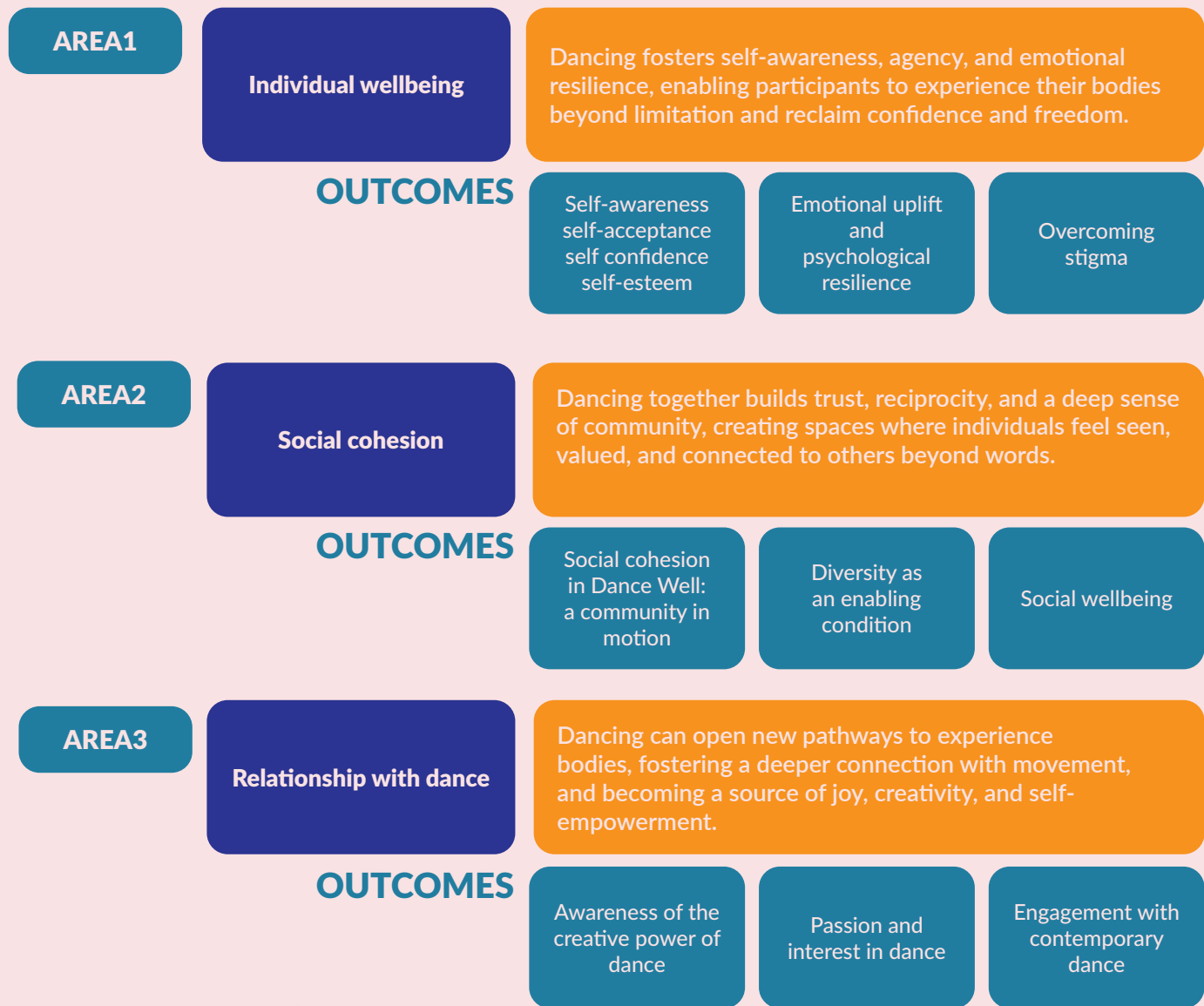
fluidity, expansion, resistance, and flow - become **tools for daily life**, subtly shifting the way participants move through the world.

"When I'm here, I forget about my symptoms and just enjoy moving. There's this playful energy in the room that makes me feel young." – Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

But perhaps the most striking impact of Dance Well is its ability to transform isolation into presence, and individual movement into shared experience. Dancing together creates a space of **trust, reciprocity, and care**, where relationships grow not through words, but through the simple act of moving in rhythm with others. This deep sense of **interconnection** emerges from a practice that places listening, kindness, and collective engagement at its core. Dance Well is not about erasing challenges, but about creating a space where limitations are met with possibility, where movement is not just something one does, but something one shares.

At its heart, Dance Well is a **radical act of presence**, a space where agency, joy, and community replace invisibility and isolation, where dance is not just an art form, but a way of being in the world with greater confidence, curiosity, and connection to others.





Area 1.

Individual Wellbeing

Self-Awareness, Self-Acceptance, Self-Confidence, and Self-Esteem

At the core of Dance Well lies a profound process of self-discovery, that allows participants to redefine their relationships with their body, mind, and self-perception. The dance floor becomes a space where individuals experience movement not as a challenge to overcome but as a means to **embrace their identities beyond limitations.**

For many, this process is about **reclaiming agency.** In daily life, certain movements may seem lost or inaccessible, yet within Dance Well, guided improvisation and instant composition offer pathways to reconnect with those gestures in unexpected ways.

“Dance Well means physical coordination with the emotional release.” –Dance Well dancer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

“Dance Well helped me reclaim my body, which I once wanted to make invisible. Now, I feel a sense of pride and freedom that I’ve never experienced before. This community has no judgments, and I feel comfortable being fully myself.” –Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

The process is also deeply tied to **confidence** and **self-esteem.** By participating in a non-judgmental and artistically engaging environment, dancers describe an enhanced sense of **self-worth** and **self-expression:**

“For the first time, I stopped thinking about what I couldn’t do and focused on what I could.” –Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

“Dance Well is a place where we can come whenever we want and where we can find the best of each other.” –Dance Well dancer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Dance Well invites participants to rewrite their bodily narratives, replacing uncertainty with newfound assurance and fluidity, strengthening neuroplasticity but also reshaping how individuals perceive their own capabilities.

“Before Dance Well, I had lost the ability to feel my feet due to neuropathy. Now, I can sense them again, reconnecting with parts of myself I thought were gone.” –Dance Well dancer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

“Dance Well practice helps to connect the left and right sides, ...(by) accepting some differences.” –Dance Well dancer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

“When movement takes longer, it calms down my shaking. At the beginning of the class, I feel shaking but then along in the practice I feel less shaking at the end of the class.” –Dance Well dancer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

One of the most profound impacts of Dance Well is its ability to enhance **coping mechanisms through movement.** The practice of improvisation and instant composition, guided by teachers who introduce varied stimuli, allows participants to access and reintegrate movements into their daily lives. This adaptability is particularly significant for those experiencing movement limitations, as it encourages the rediscovery of motion in unexpected ways.



"Sometimes, when I struggle with daily tasks, I remember a movement from class - it helps me find another way to do things." —Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

"I thought I had lost the ability to turn quickly, but in Dance Well, I found I could do it again when it's part of the music." —Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

"Thanks to the Dance Well I feel more confident, stronger, and more capable of dealing with problems, stressful or unexpected situations." —Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

This process aligns with research on embodied cognition, which emphasises that learning through movement can create new neural pathways, improving adaptability and resilience (Bloem, 2024). Dance Well provides participants with a space to recognise and accept their bodies, emotions, and abilities with greater compassion.

"It helps me to accept myself: if my hands are closed, if my legs do not work before I get nervous, now I accept more." —Dance Well dancer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

"Here, I am not my disease. I am a dancer, a mover, a person who is seen for who I am, not for what I lack." —Dance Well dancer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Emotional Uplift and Psychological Resilience

Emotional wellbeing in Dance Well is not simply an outcome, it is an **ongoing, shared process** shaped by movement, relationality, and self-expression. Participants describe the practice as a way to **release tension, reconnect with emotions**, and **find unexpected strength through dance**.

"Practice allows you to feel yourself. Through Dance Well, you are more centred, open, and improving the capabilities to feel the feelings." —Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

For many, Dance Well provides a space where emotions surface organically. The act of dancing - guided but open, structured yet free - allows participants to navigate their emotional landscapes in a way that feels both authentic and liberating.

"Dancing here is the moment of my week when I feel truly at peace." —Dance Well dancer, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

"We feel better than when we entered. We have the impression that the world is more open to us...(and that) we are more centred." —Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

"The rehearsal is the highlight of my day. It's where I can truly relax and let go of everything else. It's like a celebration." —Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

"I feel it's a refreshment for the body, mind, and eyes." —Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This emotional reset is not just anecdotal. Research on arts-based interventions for Parkinson's and mental health highlights that dance can reduce anxiety, improve mood, and provide a deep sense of accomplishment and control (Houston, 2024). Neurophysiological studies have shown that movement, particularly when combined with music and social interaction, activates brain regions linked to emotional processing and resilience.

Many dancers highlighted the idea of "wellbeing that comes from within" during the Dance Well classes, speaking about calmness, relaxation, joy, fun, and happiness to describe it.



In Dance Well, emotions are not managed or contained; they are expressed and acknowledged through the body. The practice fosters a space where joy and grief, struggle and triumph, can coexist, creating a **unique model of emotional wellbeing** that is **embodied** rather than prescribed. This intertwining of movement, memory, and emotion is what makes Dance Well not just a practice, but a transformative experience, which in some cases helps people transcend loneliness and isolation.

"After class, sometimes I feel like I've left depression outside the door." —Dance Well dancer, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

"My husband passed away two years ago, and I feel like I'm dancing with him here. I talk to him while I dance, and it feels as if he's here with me, even though he's not physically here anymore." —Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Overcoming Stigma

For many participants, Dance Well is the first space where they are seen **not as patients, but as artists** - where movement is not about limitation, but about expression, connection, and reclaiming agency. The experience of dancing together in a space that **does not categorise or define** allows individuals to move past the societal narratives of illness, ageing, or physical constraints.

"Here, we are not categorised. There are no levels, no labels, just movement." —Dance Well dancer, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

The impacts of this **radical openness** go beyond the individual. Participants describe how being in a **diverse, non-hierarchical** group fosters a sense of

mutual recognition - where differences are not obstacles but sources of strength and beauty.

“Being with people who have disabilities made me more empathetic. It taught me how to wear others’ shoes.” –Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

Beyond overcoming personal stigma, Dance Well challenges societal preconceptions of **who gets to dance, who gets to be visible, and who holds artistic agency**. This resonates with broader discussions, which advocate for reframing artistic spaces as co-created environments rather than exclusive domains of expertise.

“It was a liberation. I never danced before because I was told I couldn’t feel the rhythm.” –Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

In Dance Well, participants are not asked to adapt to an external model of dance; instead, dance adapts to them, reshaping itself around who they are, how they move, and how they choose to express themselves. This, ultimately, is the most powerful act of reclaiming dignity. Dance Well is a space where **movement transcends limitations and redefines what is possible**.

“I was not chosen for dance as a child because I was ‘too big.’ But when I came to Dance Well, I saw everybody dancing, and the courage was contagious.” –Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

“I used to think I couldn’t move like this anymore, but here, I feel confident and even excited to perform.” –Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Research in the field of the arts and wellbeing highlights the importance of

non-competitive, participatory spaces for fostering dignity and resilience. Dance Well provides just that a space where identity is shaped through movement rather than limitations (Fancourt & Finn, 2021; Stickley, 2019).

Wellbeing in Dance Well is not an individual achievement, but a **collective practice** - a shared dance of trust, connection, and belonging. It challenges traditional understandings of health by emphasising joy, agency, and the power of being fully present in one’s own body.

“Dance Well is not about therapy. It is about rediscovering what it means to feel alive.” –Dance Well dancer, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

Area 2.

Social Cohesion

Social Cohesion in Dance Well: A Community in Motion

Dance Well fosters more than movement; it nurtures a profound **sense of togetherness**, where participants, regardless of background or ability, become part of a living, breathing community. This sense of belonging is not accidental, it is **actively shaped** through shared movement, mutual support, and the embodied experience of being present with and for others.

From an analytical perspective, **social cohesion** can be understood as the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. The Council of Europe defines a cohesive society as: *“a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing common goals by democratic means.”*

Social cohesion is often articulated through two interwoven dimensions, as outlined in sociological and cultural research:

1. the sense of belonging to a community: the feeling of being recognised, valued, and integrated within a shared space. This resonates with theories of cultural participation, which emphasise the role of artistic engagement in reinforcing identity and social ties. For instance, participatory culture, as explored by Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, 2015), highlights how active involvement in creative processes fosters social

connections and a shared sense of identity. Similarly, social practice art focuses on community engagement through collaborative artistic endeavors, aiming to create social and political change by strengthening communal bonds. (Putnam, 2000; Delhey & Dragolov, 2016).

2. the relationships among members within the community itself: the social capital dimension, which includes trust, reciprocity, and active participation (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990). Research highlights that arts-based community projects foster bonding and bridging capital, strengthening social networks and reducing social isolation (Matarasso, 1997; Flinn & McPherson 2020).

These dimensions are deeply reflected in Dance Well’s practice. Dancers consistently describe the experience as a **safe** and **inclusive** space, where bonds form not only through structured activities but also in the unspoken gestures, the shared silences, and the collective creation of movement. Dance Well classes are perceived as a protected environment where participants feel a sense of security and openness, enabling deeper engagement.

Beyond the individual experience, Dance Well also resonates with broader frameworks of social inclusion. According to the World Bank, social inclusion is *“the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people - particularly those disadvantaged - to take part in society.”* Dance Well embodies this principle, fostering conditions where every individual, regardless of their physical or social constraints, can engage as an active participant.

At the heart of Dance Well, social cohesion is not just about dancing together - it is about **being together**. It is about the emergence of shared trust, support, and a collective rhythm, where individuals find not only movement but also a community that moves with them.

Diversity as an Enabling Condition: Dancing across Differences

"The essential and revolutionary aspect of Dance Well is the mixed group dynamics, it's truly inclusive. Here, we are all together without distinctions of age or skill. This closeness and sharing are invaluable and don't exist in many other places." —Dance Well dancer, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

Dance Well is built on the belief that **everybody has the potential to dance**, regardless of age, ability, or background. This fundamental openness ensures that diversity is not merely welcomed but actively contributes to the depth and richness of the experience.

"Bodies that move in a different way develop an imagery of dance that's very strong."

This **radical inclusivity** is seen in the wide range of dancers.

- People of **different mobility** levels, including those with Parkinson's, stroke survivors, and individuals with other movement disorders.
- A **mix of generations**, from retired individuals to younger participants, creating an intergenerational exchange of knowledge and support.
- People from **different professional backgrounds**, including healthcare workers, artists, and cultural

practitioners, who bring unique perspectives to the classes.

However, participation is not entirely balanced - there is a noticeable predominance of women, which reflects broader trends in cultural and community-based artistic participation, where women are often more engaged in collective and expressive practices. This gender imbalance raises questions about accessibility and perceptions of dance as a space predominantly occupied by women, potentially limiting broader engagement.

"There are people with Parkinson's, but not only. What brings people together is dance. Dance is one of the aspects, and people are starting to do steps together even after the classes." —Dance Well organiser, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Unlike many structured dance settings, Dance Well removes hierarchies between professional dancers and non-professionals. The result is a space where **dance is co-created** rather than imposed, making every movement part of a larger, collective choreography.

At the same time, diversity in Dance Well is not an abstract goal, but an actively cultivated practice. The accessibility of classes is a key factor in enabling participation:

- Offering sessions at **different times** to accommodate different life schedules.
- Ensuring that classes are **free of charge**, reducing economic barriers.
- Actively communicating **openness** to all, including those who may not traditionally see themselves as dancers.

This approach aligns with broader research on cultural participation and social cohesion, which highlights how inclusive artistic spaces contribute to social wellbeing by fostering relationships across divides. In Dance Well, participants themselves describe how this sense of connection develops.

"Through beautiful dance, I have met many beautiful people, like a family. It is an opportunity to find a community, to be part of something together." — Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

Furthermore, reflections from the sessions highlight that co-creation in dance allows for an **evolving sense of belonging**, where the shared experience of movement reinforces interpersonal trust and reciprocity.

"Dance Well has established a meaningful and sustained community, one that values inclusivity, respect, and mutual support." — Dance Well dancer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

Social Wellbeing: the Power of Connection

For many participants, Dance Well is more than just a dance class - it is a **home, a family, a space of mutual care**. The relationships formed here extend beyond movement, shaping long-lasting friendships and a **profound sense of social belonging**. Participants repeatedly describe the experience as one that combats isolation, nurtures trust, and creates a dynamic support network that continues even outside class settings.

"I was feeling lonely, but I found a beautiful way to socialise and be with others. Here, I found a real sense of community." —Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

In Dance Well, social wellbeing emerges through three key dynamics:

1. **Empathy and emotional closeness:** many participants develop a heightened awareness of others, learning to read non-verbal cues and respond with care. This sensitivity strengthens a collective sense of belonging.
2. **A safe and inclusive space:** Dance Well fosters an environment free from competition, where individuals feel seen, heard, and valued without the pressure of performance.
3. **Deep and sustained relationships:** unlike fleeting social interactions, the bonds built in Dance Well extend beyond the dance floor, as participants continue to support and connect with each other in daily life.

"Even those who aren't able to join us anymore still care about how it goes for us. It's the sense of being together that lasts whether they're dancing or not. It reminds us that we're not alone in this journey." —Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This process reflects broader research on participatory artistic experiences, which highlights how dance and movement foster trust, reciprocity, and shared identity (Halprin, 1995; Paxton, 2003; Bausch, 2010).

One of the most profound testimonies from Dance Well illustrates the depth of this connection:

“Before coming here, I felt like I had no space where I truly belonged. But in Dance Well, I found people who understood me without words, who moved with me, and who made me feel seen. The friendships I built here are unlike any others - they extend beyond dance and into everyday life.”
—Dance Well dancer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Beyond words, Dance Well is built on **encounters of bodies, people and stories**. The act of moving together becomes an intimate way of meeting, where connections are forged not through speech, but through shared presence and motion.

“Through the encounter of the body, there has been the encounter of people. Then there have been friendships created through these encounters.” —Dance Well choreographer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Coming together in movement offers a rare form of proximity that transcends social labels, personal histories, and preconceived ideas.

“Looking into each other’s eyes, moving in sync without needing to talk, creates a closeness that is difficult to find elsewhere. You don’t know anything about the other person, but you start to laugh...” —Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

These moments, spontaneous yet profound, open up new ways of being with others, where **trust** and **recognition** emerge organically. Dance Well is not just about dancing in the same space; it is about being together in a way that nurtures understanding, solidarity, and a shared sense of belonging. The body

becomes both the bridge and the language, making the invisible ties between people tangible, shaping a community. This reciprocal support and care bloom among participants, expanding to Dance Well teachers and staff too.

“I was on the tram and I was coming back. There were two ladies from the class sitting next to me. One of them had mobility problems. I noticed that the other lady helped her to get back home even though she was supposed to go in a different direction.”
—Dance Well organiser, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

This sense of togetherness emerges within what participants describe Dance Well as a bubble. They refer to the inclusive and open environment that rarely exists outside, a protected space where practice allows for deep engagement, shared values and principles: kindness, openness, welcoming, solidarity, listening, and care. While initially seen as a potential risk, as it may limit interactions with those outside the immediate Dance Well community, participants highlight how far they are from isolation.

This *bubble* is, in reality, an expansive and permeable environment that nurtures connection while encouraging individuals to engage with the world around them with renewed curiosity and attention. Rather than disconnecting from reality, it fosters an outward-looking perspective and equips participants with the tools to approach societal challenges with hope and a sense of collective agency, as well as trust, resilience, and shared responsibility.

It allows participants to transition from feeling lost or powerless in the face of global crises to recognising their capacity to take action - not just for themselves but for future generations, fostering an intergenerational perspective.

For many participants, Dance Well is not just a weekly class, it is an essential part of their lives, a space where they feel recognised, supported, and empowered. The bonds formed within this community extend beyond the dance floor, shaping relationships and routines that persist long after the sessions end. This deep attachment brings with it a shared concern: *what happens if Dance Well were to end?* Many dancers express a profound **need for continuity**, recognising how vital this space is for their wellbeing, sense of belonging, and personal growth.

“I can’t imagine not having this space. It has changed the way I move, the way I connect with others, the way I feel in my own body. Dance Well is not just something we do - it’s part of who we are now.” —
Dance Well dancer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

This concern reflects a broader reality: initiatives like Dance Well are not merely projects with a beginning and an end, but **living ecosystems** that require care, commitment, and long-term vision. Participants recognise that sustaining Dance Well means safeguarding a space where dance is not just an artistic practice, but a vehicle for connection, resilience, and collective wellbeing. The urgency they express is not simply about maintaining an activity but about preserving a way of **being together** that has become indispensable.



Area 3.

Relation with Dance: Rediscovering Movement as Creation

Awareness of the Creative Power of Dance

For many participants, Dance Well is not just about moving - it is about experiencing the **creative power of dance**. Here, movement is no longer tied to technical execution or physical ability but becomes a tool for **expression, transformation, and storytelling**. Participants often describe a shift in how they perceive dance: from something external, to something deeply personal and alive within them.

"I feel free to move in my own way, and I am so happy to be part of the creative process." —Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Dance Well fosters an expanded understanding of what dance can be, challenging traditional norms of beauty, technique, and performance. Participants describe how the practice has reshaped their perception of movement, turning even small gestures into meaningful artistic choices.

"Walking slowly is perceived as a difficulty in society, but here, it is an ability." —Dance Well dancer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

"Dancing here, I feel my presence expanding beyond my body. I become part of something larger." —Dance Well dancer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

"You realise that dance is not about copying a step, but about finding your way of being in movement." —Dance Well choreographer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

Dance Well stimulates the **imagination**, by introducing images, metaphors, and poetic suggestions that persist well beyond the duration of the class. Teachers use visual and sensory prompts to unlock movement, guiding dancers to explore actions that might otherwise feel inaccessible. These creative images - whether a hand becoming a feather, a breath drawing lines in space, or the sensation of waves moving through the body - become reference points that dancers recall in their everyday lives, subtly shifting the way they perceive and inhabit their bodies.

"The images stay with me. I find myself moving differently, even when I'm not in class. I notice the way I walk, how I use my hands, the way I sense the space around me." —Dance Well dancer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

Dance, in this sense, is not merely a performed act but a **lived experience**, that continues to unfold in daily movement, in heightened self-awareness, and in a renewed sense of agency over the body. Through this process, Dance Well does not **just teach movement**; it **transforms perception**, offering participants a new lens through which to experience themselves and the world around them.

Passion and Interest in Dance

As participants engage more deeply with Dance Well, many describe a **growing passion for dance**. What starts as an experimental practice often becomes an integral part of their daily lives.

"I find myself at home, listening to music, and suddenly I am dancing alone." —Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

"Dance Well made me understand contemporary dance from the inside. It gave me the opportunity to create with choreographers and perform. It is something very special." —Dance Well dancer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

The process of co-creating movement rather than following pre-set choreography enables a more personal connection to dance. This engagement aligns with theories of participatory performance, where the dancer is not a passive executor but an active agent of creation (Overlie, 2016; Bogart & Landau, 2004).

Engagement with Contemporary Dance

According to the collected evidence, Dance Well introduces participants to the language of contemporary dance, bridging the gap between community practice and professional artistic research. Through improvisation, instant composition, and guided creative tasks, participants gain access to an artistic process that is both structured and free.

"We are not just moving; we are composing with our bodies." —Dance Well teacher, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

"Being part of a performance makes me feel connected to something bigger. It is not just a class, it is an artistic journey." —Dance Well dancer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This experience of **becoming co-authors of movement** rather than passive learners is transformative, echoing shifts in contemporary dance that emphasise authenticity, presence, and lived experience over technical virtuosity.

In Dance Well, dance is not an external skill to be acquired but a language to be explored. It is a process that unfolds through curiosity, vulnerability, and connection. Participants do not 'learn to dance', they discover new ways of seeing themselves and engaging with the world.

"This is not about getting better at dancing. It is about finding a new way to be." —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Dance Organisations

The Challenge of Embracing Change

Revolutions don't always start with protests in the streets. Some begin in studios, in meeting rooms, in whispered conversations that challenge the status quo. Dance Well is a **slow** and **kind revolution**, but make no mistake, it is a revolution. It can shake the foundations of cultural institutions, questioning **who holds power, who gets to decide what dance is, and who benefits from its practice**.

Cultural institutions today face critical questions: *how can they evolve to remain relevant in contemporary society? Can they transition from an output-driven model to one that prioritises reflection, inclusion, and sustained engagement, while ensuring that these shifts are viable and sustainable over time?* Moving beyond the logic of overproduction, where quantity eclipses meaning, demands a model that values depth, process, and the well-being of staff, artists and

communities. This evolution is not without challenges, as it requires institutions to rethink established frameworks and adapt to new ways of working.

Dance Well encapsulates a fundamental tension present in many cultural organisations today: the divide between those who hold on to traditional structures and those who envision a new, more inclusive ecology for dance and the arts. This is not merely an administrative challenge but a shift that encourages institutions to reflect, questioning established models of artistic value, governance, and the ways in which dance practices are shaped and legitimised.

From what we have observed, Dance Well has brought these questions to the surface, making generational and institutional barriers more visible within organisations. It has encouraged a re-evaluation of traditional organisational structures, governance systems, and hierarchies, urging institutions to reflect on how they distribute agency and decision-making power.

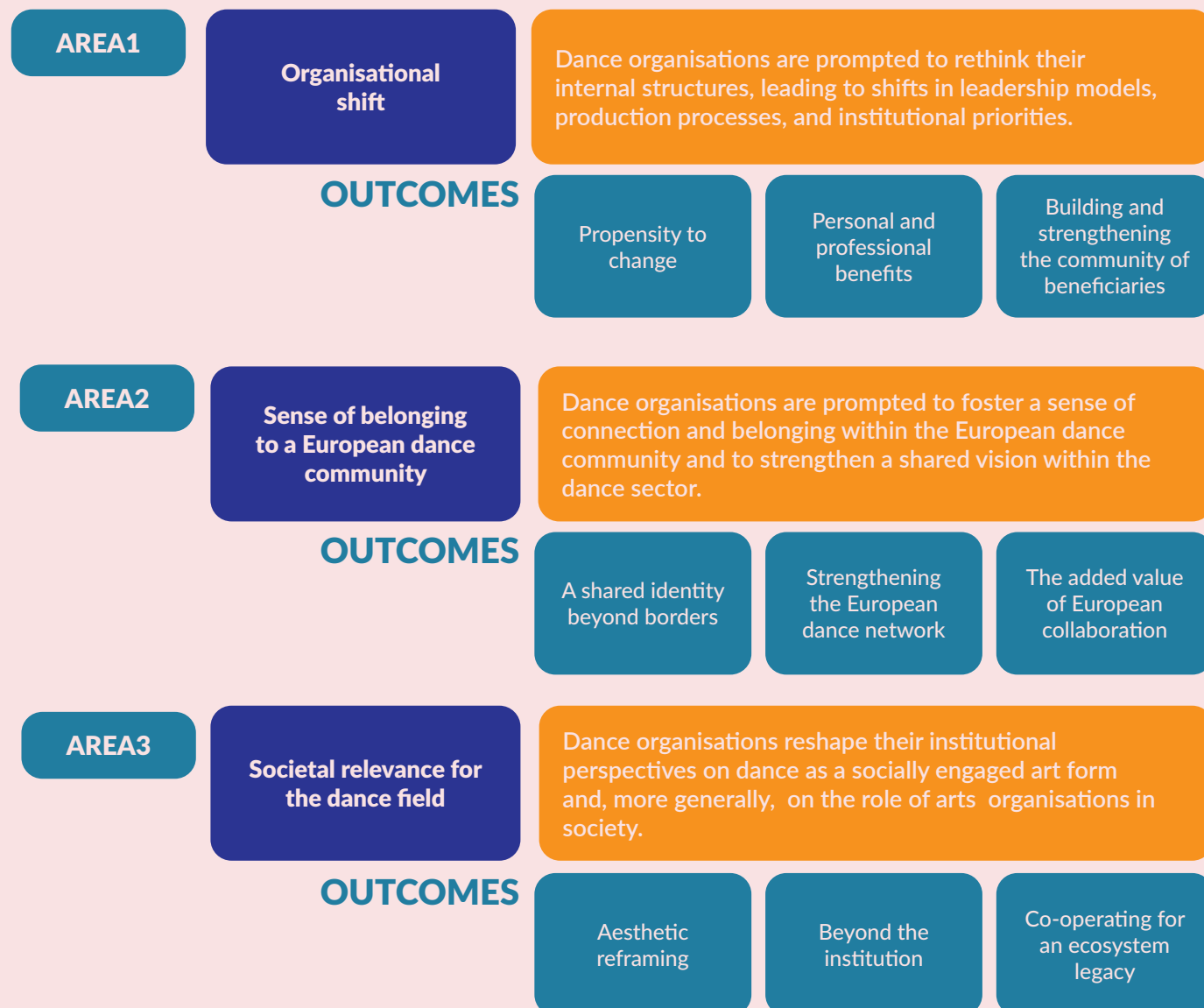
The tensions that emerged were not just about methodology but about deeper struggles over legitimacy, authorship, and institutional responsibility. In some dance organisations, a clear divide surfaced: while some leaders were reluctant to embrace change, others saw Dance Well as an opportunity to expand their strategic vision, renew the organisation and make space for younger staff advocating for socially engaged approaches. The debate runs deeper than a shift in programming; it raises a fundamental question: *what kind of cultural institutions do we want?*

Yet this transformation must be carefully balanced against another pressing reality: *how can institutions align these ambitions with the realities of financial and operational sustainability?* Without a pragmatic approach, the risk remains that these necessary changes will struggle to take root, leaving institutions caught between the pressure for efficiency and the need for deeper, more meaningful cultural engagement.

These questions echo Gramsci's notion of 'organic crisis' - a moment when the old world is dying, but the new one has yet to fully emerge. Dance Well, at its core, is an attempt to shape this new world, reclaiming artistic and institutional practices that place **people, rather than products, at the centre**. But for this vision to truly take hold, institutions must go beyond simply welcoming change; they must be willing to relinquish the very structures that define them, making space for new ways of thinking, creating, and relating.

"It's not just a theoretical conversation about representation or inclusion. You're actually moving with the people you're thinking about, which makes it real. You realise how our field often trains us to overlook certain bodies, but here I've had to rethink who we consider part of the dance community." —Dance Well organiser, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre





Area 1.

Organisational Shifts

Propensity to Change: Dance Well and the Transformation of Organisational Structures

The Dance Well project has been a stress test for institutional adaptability, revealing varying capacities for integrating non-hierarchical and collaborative methodologies. It has provoked a rethinking of how dance organisations function, not only at an external level in their engagement with communities, but also internally in their governance, leadership models, and operational approaches.

The challenge for many organisations was not only to shift their external relationships with communities but to **restructure internal dynamics** and **rethink leadership models, decision-making processes**, and even the **pace at which they work**. Dance Well demands time, negotiation, and shared authorship, which often contrasts sharply with the fast-paced cycles of production and output-driven models of dance organisations.

"We've learned that change isn't just about bringing in new projects. It's about shifting mindsets, reimagining structures, and embracing the unknown." —Dance Well organiser, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

The shift has not been uniform: organisations have navigated the integration of Dance Well in different ways, reflecting a spectrum of adaptation rather than a binary of success or resistance. While some embraced the transformation more fully, others approached it with caution, balancing established structures

with the potential of socially engaged methodologies. Dance Well has introduced tensions, at times fostering constructive dialogue, at others highlighting internal differences in perspectives and priorities. Some institutions integrated their principles seamlessly, demonstrating flexibility and openness to risk, while others engaged more selectively, positioning it as a complementary rather than central practice. This variation in responses, influenced by factors such as institutional culture, team composition, and leadership vision, shaped a nuanced and evolving landscape of change, rather than a singular trajectory.

Beyond leadership styles, Dance Well revealed deeper structural challenges within institutions attempting to shift towards participatory and socially engaged dance:

- The most adaptive organisations fostered **cross-departmental collaboration**, breaking the silos and bridging gaps between artistic direction, education, and community engagement.
- Institutions struggled to **move beyond an output-driven model** focused on numbers towards a more holistic understanding of impact that considers listening, soft transitions, and attention to individuals.
- Organisations reliant on project-based funding often faced **difficulties in embedding participatory practices structurally**, making it harder to sustain them beyond the funding cycle.



Personal-Professional Benefits

Beyond institutional change, Dance Well has significantly influenced the people working within these organisations. Facilitators, dancers, and administrators described a profound shift in their professional identities, gaining new skills in facilitation, relational work, and adaptive methodologies. Many felt their approach to dance had evolved, incorporating a **greater awareness of inclusion, accessibility, and shared authorship**.

"I often found that soft skills were undervalued compared to organisational skills. I used to take those soft skills for granted, but through this work, I see how central they are to what we do in culture. In the cultural sector, there's this expectation that everyone is open and accepting, but that's not always true in practice." —Dance Well organiser, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

"Sensitivity towards others - an awareness of the people around you and their needs. I've started noticing things like how elderly people navigate public spaces, which I didn't pay much attention to before. I think that's the biggest impact - learning to truly see people and be aware of how we interact with them." —Dance Well organiser, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

The project also provided a **sense of purpose** that extended beyond artistic production, reinforcing the idea that dance can be a tool for wellbeing, connection, and community building. Many participants highlighted the emotional and intellectual rewards of working on a project that prioritised people over performances.

"For me, it's meaningful impact, heartwarming moments, and community building. I've always wanted to do something meaningful, and I can't think

of anything more significant than this. It's emotional and sometimes overwhelming, but it creates a very special atmosphere. —Dance Well organiser, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

Furthermore, Dance Well strengthened essential **soft skills**, such as empathy, adaptability, and active listening, elements crucial in participatory artistic work yet often overlooked in institutional training. Many professionals reported a **deeper emotional engagement** with their practice, gaining new perspectives on collaboration and the importance of interpersonal connection in creative processes.

"It helped me to be more conscious about what I'm doing in my professional and also human level. Conscious that you both need and can give space to what is not under control and give trust." —Dance Well organiser, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

"Dance Well values are reflected in our work. It has such strong values that can empower. The project empowers the relationships between people every day. It is a model of human relations." —Dance Well organiser, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

Building and Strengthening the Community of Beneficiaries

Dance Well has redefined the essence of relationship-building within dance organisations, moving beyond traditional engagement to cultivate profound, attentive, and evolving connections. The heart of this transformation lies in **care as a practice**, not just in movement, but in the way people listen, support, and create space for one another. The experience is not transactional; it is shared, lived, and deeply felt, reinforcing a sense of belonging where every participant is not just seen but valued.

"Dance Well is not about proving yourself, it's about being present, about finding value in movement, connection, and shared experience." —Dance Well organiser, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

These relationships, rooted in trust and sustained presence, have given rise to diverse and interconnected communities. The **intergenerational exchange** between seniors, individuals with Parkinson's, and younger participants has enriched the experience for all, fostering mutual discovery and learning. What emerges is not just a community but a network of reciprocal care, where differences dissolve in the shared act of stepping outside comfort zones, embracing vulnerability, and expanding self-perception.

"Even if they come from different walks of life, they are all here to cross borders and challenge themselves." —Dance Well organiser, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

Time plays a crucial role in this transformation. The slowness of being together, the depth of attention, and the rituals that anchor each session create a rhythm of trust and reassurance. From welcoming moments to the final reflections, every detail contributes to a sense of safety, presence, and continuity. The discovery of new spaces - museums, galleries, opera houses - further deepens this experience, shifting perception and opening access to places previously unseen, reinforcing the idea that dance is not confined to a single location but extends into the broader cultural landscape.

The group remains open and welcoming, offering a sense of continuity while embracing the new. Each person, whether a long-time participant or a newcomer, is

absorbed into a **supportive and evolving community** that values presence over performance.

"The same people keep returning, but new people always join. There is a rhythm, a ritual. It builds belonging." —Dance Well teacher, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Dance Well is more than a programme; it is a radically different way of relating to others, where judgment fades, and respect, care, and active listening take its place. It is a practice that **reshapes perceptions of self and others**, making space for vulnerability, shared presence, and a new way of co-existing: where dance is not just movement, but a language of feelings.



Area 2.

Sense of Belonging to a European Dance Community

A Shared Identity Beyond Borders

For many institutions, participating in Dance Well was not just a funding opportunity; it was a **transformative experience** that reshaped their identity, networks, and approach to collaboration. The project allowed organisations to step beyond national silos, fostering a shared ecosystem of artistic exchange that extended far beyond their immediate context.

At the heart of this transformation is the realisation that dance institutions do not exist in isolation. Through Dance Well, organisations experienced deep trust-building and knowledge-sharing, exchanging methodologies and confronting shared challenges. The project demonstrated that socially engaged dance is not a fragmented, local experiment, but part of a broader European movement.

“Being in a European project changes your perspective. You see your work in dialogue with others, and that’s powerful.”
—Dance Well organiser, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

Strengthening the European Dance Network

Dance Well reinforced the idea that collaboration at the European level brings both **artistic** and **structural benefits**. Many institutions reported a stronger sense of legitimacy and recognition, using

the project as a catalyst to deepen their commitment to participatory practices. This experience enabled them to expand their artistic collaborations, access new funding streams, and engage in policy dialogues that would have been difficult to navigate alone.

At the same time, the project highlighted the challenges of sustaining European cooperation beyond its immediate network. *How can these relationships evolve beyond the funding cycle? To what extent does participation in such initiatives truly extend beyond an established European circle?* Dance Well opened up these questions, prompting institutions to reflect on the future of their cross-border collaborations.

“Being part of Dance Well gave us the confidence to think beyond our national context. We saw ourselves as part of something bigger, and that shifted how we approach our work.” —Dance Well organiser, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

The Added Value of European Collaboration

For all the organisations involved, European collaboration offered **credibility** and **visibility**, opening doors to new opportunities for funding, artistic residencies, and advocacy in cultural policy. Institutions were able to position themselves within a broader discourse on socially engaged dance.

More than anything, Dance Well instilled the understanding that belonging to a European dance community is not just about access, it is about **responsibility**, recognising shared struggles, amplifying collective learning, and ensuring that participatory dance practices continue to thrive as a movement rather than as isolated initiatives.



Area 3.

Societal Relevance for the Dance Field

Aesthetic Reframing: A New Approach to Dance and Performance

Historically, dance institutions have centred their work on **performance-based excellence**, prioritising technical mastery and audience engagement within a spectator model.

"We are no longer just producing performances. We are creating spaces where dance has a different kind of impact, one that is lived rather than simply watched."
—Dance Well organiser, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

This shift is not merely symbolic. It has tangible implications for how institutions structure their programmes, allocate resources, and define success.

The integration of Dance Well performances within established programming - such as festivals and seasonal events - demonstrates that this practice is not ancillary, but is a recognised and valued artistic expression. Dance Well dancers are not amateurs seeking validation; they are acknowledged as dancers in their own right, embodying movement with authenticity and artistic integrity. So in this sense Dance Well goes beyond the limitations of community dance projects.

"Watching Dance Well dancers perform challenged my perception of professionalism. There was no separation between artistic integrity and authenticity, just pure presence and depth of movement."
—Dance Well organiser, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Dance Well does not just challenge traditional dance structures, it also redefines the role of dance artists, positioning them at the intersection of **artistic excellence** and **social engagement**.

"Teaching artists are not just 'teachers'. Their work needs to be valued properly. It helps elevate their role and recognise their impact at a European level." —Dance Well organiser, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

By **bridging art and society**, Dance Well offers a model where dance is deeply embedded in the social fabric without losing its artistic essence.

Beyond the Institution: Dance as a Vehicle for Social Wellbeing

A key finding from Dance Well is that institutions face an existential dilemma: should they actively advocate for dance as a tool for social transformation, or should they prioritise their existing artistic legacies?

"Dance Well asked us to rethink everything - not just what we present, but why we present it, and who it's for."
—Dance Well organiser, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

This challenge is compounded by funding structures and evaluation mechanisms, which often prioritise quantifiable outcomes over the deeper, process-based impacts that Dance Well fosters. Institutional change, therefore, is not just about internal decision-making but also about **shifting policy frameworks** to recognise and support dance as a driver of social wellbeing.

The Dance Well experience highlights that institutional transformation is both necessary and fraught with challenges. The project has demonstrated that dance can be a powerful tool for **social connection**, **cultural democracy**, and **institutional renewal**.

Co-Operating for an Ecosystem Legacy: Creating the Conditions to Keep Dance Well Alive

The will to continue Dance Well has emerged across all participating organisations, not only for the profound impacts it has had on beneficiaries but also for the way it has transformed staff perspectives and institutional priorities. This practice has proven to be illuminating, not just as an artistic and social intervention, but as a long-term vision for integrating dance into community wellbeing.

"It became part of the regular programme very soon. Now it is something organically embedded into our activities." —Dance Well organiser, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

However, sustaining Dance Well demands more than enthusiasm; it requires enabling conditions that ensure its longevity, particularly in terms of economic sustainability. One of its foundational pillars - the accessibility and gratuity of participation - is both a strength and a challenge. Institutions now face the need to **build economic models that uphold these values** while ensuring that the practice remains viable.

"You can't leave these people now [...] This community needs to be maintained."
—Dance Well organiser, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Yet sustaining Dance Well requires more than just funding; it demands a long-term commitment to integrating its methodologies into institutional frameworks, ensuring its values continue to influence artistic and social landscapes beyond the project itself.



Dance Well Teachers

Expanding the Role of Dance and the Dance Practitioner

Dance Well is more than a methodology to learn and replicate; it is a radical reimagining of what it means to teach, to create, and to be part of a collective movement. For the dance artists engaged in Dance Well, the experience has reshaped their practices and their understanding of artistic excellence, accessibility, and the power of dance as a social force.

The training of Dance Well teachers is a journey, paving the path for a process of **collective empowerment**. This empowerment has core characteristics that resonate across all locations, while also taking on specific dimensions shaped by the distinct contexts in which it unfolds. The development of teachers does not merely concern the acquisition of competencies and immediately applicable skills. Rather, it is fundamentally driven by a deeply embodied shift in their perception of what dance is and what their role is as dancers, choreographers, and teachers.

At its core, Dance Well challenges the traditional hierarchies of dance, shifting the focus away from virtuosity as a technical achievement towards **virtuosity as relational intelligence**, the ability to connect, adapt, and co-create. Teachers describe how their practice has expanded beyond the conventional boundaries of performance and pedagogy, embracing a form of dance that is deeply embedded in human relationships, community needs, and social transformation.

“This is not just about dance technique; it is about being in relation, with oneself, with others, with movement itself in new ways.” —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Above all, Dance Well has given a contribution to redefining the meaning and significance of dance and its role in contemporary society. It moves beyond the neoliberal vision that frames dance and live performance as spaces of production and consumption, where artistic efforts and investments

culminate in performances that are often confined to a handful of presentations, with limited circulation. Instead, dance is reclaimed as a **space for building connections** and **fostering community**. This transformation allows dance to be seen not merely as a domain of technical mastery but as a space of possibility, where established norms are deconstructed and the roles and meanings of practice are redefined.

Through this shift, teachers have embraced a more inclusive, non-hierarchical approach to dance. They have learned to see artistic potential in diverse movement vocabularies, allowing them to work with a wider range of bodies, experiences, and expressions. The project has cultivated a heightened awareness of the power of movement beyond conventional performance settings, where excellence is about the capacity to create shared meaning through movement.

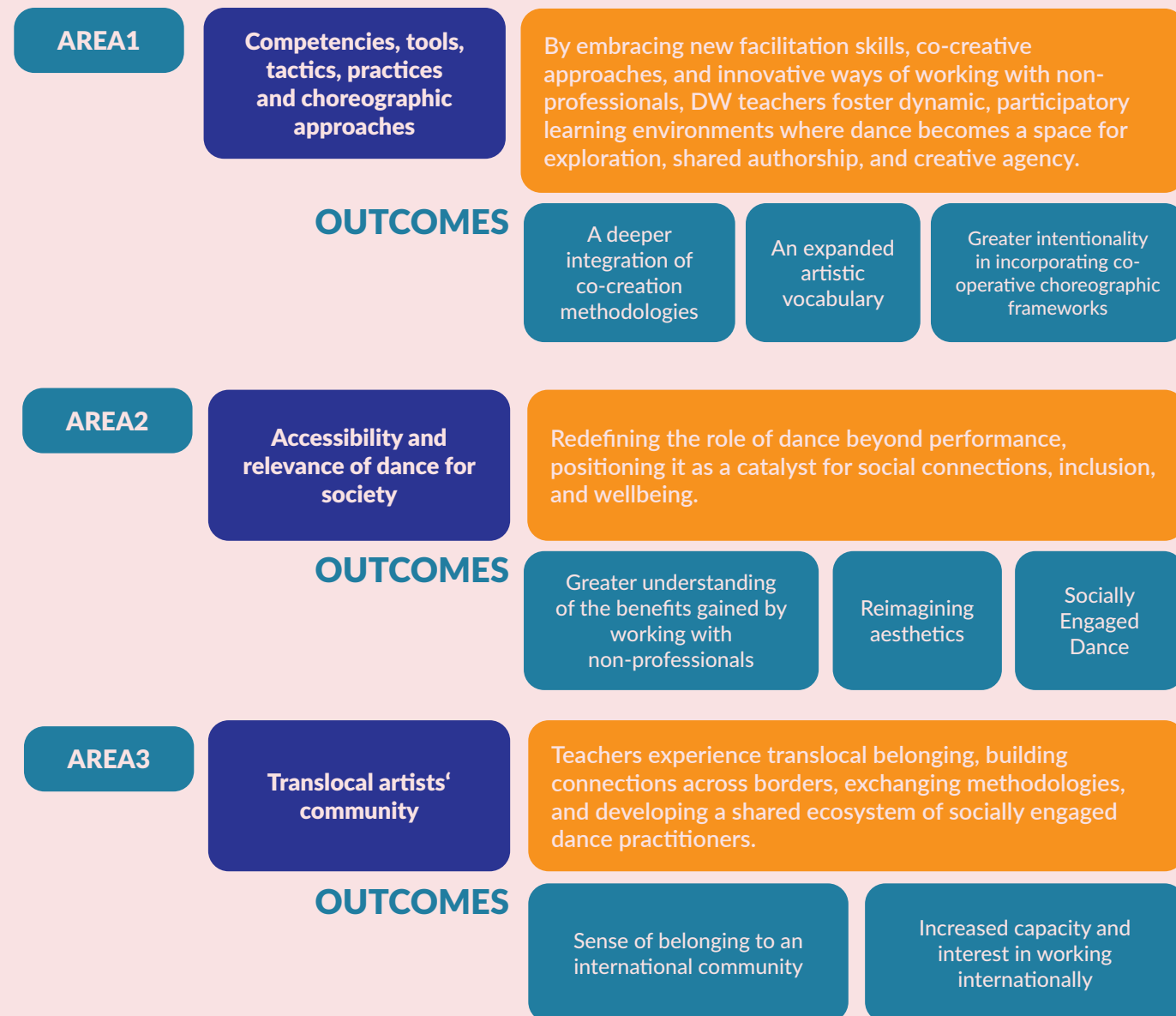
Through Dance Well, teachers have also developed new forms of agency, gaining the confidence to advocate for inclusive dance practices, co-creation methodologies, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Many now see their role not just as dancers or choreographers but as facilitators of spaces where people feel valued, seen, and empowered through movement.

This shift is an intentional, sustained transformation in the way dance is conceived, taught, and shared. Whether through ongoing collaborations, redefined teaching methodologies, or expanded professional networks, Dance Well continues to shape the practices of those who have engaged with it, leaving a lasting imprint on their artistic and human journey.

“This is not just a project, it’s a way of working, a way of being that I will carry forward.” —Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

At the same time, Dance Well has created a translocal network of artists who are redefining their professional roles. The experience of working across different cultural and national contexts has fostered new solidarities, expanded artistic dialogues, and reinforced a sense of belonging to a global dance community. Teachers highlight how this community of practice is both a professional and a personal anchor, offering support in a field that often feels isolating.

“I step into a Dance Well session anywhere in the world and immediately recognise the shared values, the sense of purpose that unites us.” —Dance Well teacher, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine



Area 1.

Competencies, Tools, Tactics, Practices and Choreographic Approaches

A Deeper Integration of Co-creation Methodologies, Ensuring Participant-Led Exploration of Movement

Teachers describe a shift from instructing to facilitating, where they guide rather than dictate movement choices.

No longer viewed as a detached technical expert, the dancer reclaims a role as an **enabler of processes**, as someone who fosters care, both for others and for themselves.

The artistic evolution of teachers within this framework is not merely an abstract idea but a lived experience that translates into concrete creative developments. Teachers across different locations consistently report a profound shift in their artistic methodologies and engagement strategies.

"I no longer see my role as just teaching dance steps; instead, I provide an open space where participants can discover movement in their way." –Dance Well teacher, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

At the heart of this transformation lies a profound **intertwining of aesthetics and ethics**, where dance is no longer just about mastery of movement but about its capacity to generate meaning and connection. This redefinition of purpose shifts the focus from performance as a product to dance as a space for collective inquiry, empowerment, and care.

"For me, Dance Well has fundamentally changed my perspective. I now see my role as helping people feel their bodies, their presence, rather than pushing for an externally imposed standard." –Dance Well choreographer, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

The interplay between artistic rigour and ethical responsibility creates a learning environment where vulnerability is not seen as a weakness but as a source of strength and creativity.

"Through Dance Well, I discovered that tenderness does not imply a lack of rigour but rather a deeper, more intentional engagement with movement and the people sharing it." –Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

This transformation is deeply linked to the principles of **compassion**, where teaching becomes an act of care, **both for others and for oneself**. Teachers frequently mention how their interactions with participants - many of whom arrive with no formal dance background - require attentiveness to the emotional landscapes that unfold in the dance studio or in the rooms of a museum.

As we transition from the broader conceptual shifts brought about by Dance Well, it is crucial to detail the specific ways in which these transformations manifest in practice.

"I've learned to listen differently, to recognise the moments when silence and presence are more valuable than instruction." –Dance Well teacher, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

"In Dance Well, I developed a kind of softness in between voice and movement trying to avoid the imitation process in movement." –Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

With human complexity, vulnerability, fragility, and transience at the core,

this necessitates a refinement of communication and listening skills, relational capacities, and an expansion of the toolbox from which to draw.

Beyond movement, this includes **voice work**, the **use of time** and **space**, the use of **imagination** through images, colours, music, sounds, rhythms, and creative exploration.

The obsession with precision and meticulous details gives way to a **philosophy of 'letting go'**, intentionally opening up expressive possibilities previously unconsidered and legitimising movements beyond traditionally accepted forms.

"Intentionality is the clarity in action and desire. I simultaneously look for clarity and enabling possibilities: to give tasks in a precise way, to give a framework but in a way that meanwhile gives a lot of freedom." —Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

This co-creative approach fosters agency, encouraging dancers to contribute their movement vocabulary, thus enriching the creative process. Sara Houston's concept of embodied agency aligns closely with this shift, highlighting how developing soft skills through dance empowers individuals to move with intention, confidence, and self-awareness (Houston, 2024). The result is a reciprocal learning experience where both teachers and participants engage in a continuous process of artistic and personal growth, that extends beyond technique into a realm of relational, affective, and ethical transformation.

An Expanded Artistic Vocabulary

Teachers describe how engaging with non-traditional movers has broadened their understanding of movement, shifting away from rigid technical expectations towards a more **holistic appreciation of embodied expression**.

"Through Dance Well, I have learned to see movement as something that transcends formal training, where every gesture carries meaning and intention." —Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

"I no longer measure excellence by precision alone, but by the depth of connection and the sense of authenticity that emerges in shared movement." —Dance Well choreographer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

"I developed a multi-sensory approach to movement in teaching: it brought the idea of connecting movement to other dimensions (i.g. colours, flavours) that affect movement itself... to approach movement more holistically." —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

This process has allowed for the integration of new artistic approaches, blending choreography with improvisation, storytelling, and participatory engagement, reinforcing the idea that dance can serve as a medium for both personal transformation and collective agency.

Additionally, the spatial context of Dance Well - museums, galleries, and cultural spaces - has significantly amplified this transformation. The intersection between dance and these arts environments has provided a unique stimulus, encouraging teachers and participants to rethink movement as a dialogue with space, history, and artworks.

"Dancing in a museum alters the way we perceive our bodies, it creates a conversation between movement and the artworks around us." —Dance Well teacher, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

"The space itself becomes a partner in the creative process, allowing us to explore movement in ways that would not be possible in a traditional studio." —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

These environments offer new layers of meaning and deepen the engagement with dance as an art form that transcends mere physical execution, connecting it instead to a broader cultural and social narrative.

Greater Intentionality in Incorporating Co-operative Choreographic Frameworks

Teachers describe how they have moved away from rigid, prescriptive structures towards frameworks that allow for **co-authorship**, where participants actively shape the creative process.

"I've learned to create spaces where dancers with different abilities can contribute equally, shaping the choreography through their unique movement language." —Dance Well teacher, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

"As a teacher, I'm setting the condition, but then it is something collectively created, it's not bringing my ego." —Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

This transformation is deeply linked to the **practice of co-teaching**, which has emerged as a crucial support mechanism within Dance Well. The collaborative nature of co-teaching provides teachers with a safety net, fostering a continuous learning environment where they exchange

methodologies, reflect on challenges, and develop strategies together.

"Knowing that I have a teaching partner allows me to take risks and try new things, knowing that I am supported." —Dance Well teacher, Germany - K3 I Tanzplan Hamburg

"Co-teaching has become more than a pedagogical approach; it has redefined how we work as a community, sharing not just knowledge but also responsibilities and even financial compensation, ensuring a more equitable structure." —Dance Well teacher, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This intentional shift fosters not only greater **accessibility** but also enriches the choreographic language itself, expanding the expressive possibilities of dance.

The equitable and collaborative model extends beyond the classroom, influencing financial agreements and reinforcing a collective ethos where the contribution is recognised and valued irrespective of the number of classes taught. This approach solidifies the **radical collectivity** at the heart of Dance Well, where artistic, ethical, and practical dimensions align to create a truly **inclusive** and **sustainable practice**.

Area 2.

Accessibility and Relevance of Dance for Society

Greater Understanding of the Benefits Gained by Working with Non-Professionals

Teachers involved in Dance Well have highlighted the profound artistic and personal **enrichment** that comes from engaging with non-professional dancers. In this space, the traditional boundaries of dance dissolve, giving rise to an approach that is more inclusive, human-centred, and responsive to diverse bodies and movement experiences.

Non-professional dancers bring an invaluable variety of movement, challenging conventional notions of technique, aesthetics, and performance. For teachers, the **joy** and **fulfilment** experienced serve as a powerful reminder of the intrinsic pleasure of dance, rekindling their connection to its deeper meaning beyond structured practice.

“It is a variety that enriches the range of possibilities.” –Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

“Dance Well gave hope and new joy to perform. I found again the energy of the body.” –Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

Working with dancers of different physicalities, abilities, and life experiences opens up new creative avenues, where movement becomes an open field of exploration rather than a fixed set of predetermined forms. This continuous

exchange of perspectives fosters innovation, encouraging teachers to rethink their approach to movement in ways that are deeply connected to the lived realities of their participants.

*“Dance Well opens space and dialogue for new ideas and a fresh perspective. I learn all the time because people are the source of learning in their human variety.”
–Dance Well teacher, K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg*

The **collective nature** of Dance Well shifts the focus from individual virtuosity to shared movement, underscoring the value of relationality in dance. Teachers navigate open groups where participants frequently join and depart, shaping dynamic, welcoming spaces that embrace flux rather than resisting it.

*“Dancers in Dance Well embody the values they carry; they become facilitators of inclusion, welcoming newcomers with care and fostering a collective learning space.”
–Dance Well teacher, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine*

Intergenerational classes further enhance this dynamic, creating a dialogue between diverse movement histories. Through this process, teachers have learned to embrace fluidity in their methodologies, recognising that movement is about the connections it fosters.

“Parkinson’s or not, what matters is how we move together, how we respect and support each other.” –Dance Well choreographer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine



Reimagining Aesthetics: Dance as a Space of Connection and Transformation

Aesthetics have long defined the boundaries of **artistic legitimacy**, shaping who is seen, valued, and recognised within the dance world. Rooted in rigid ideals of technical mastery, symmetry, and physical ability, traditional aesthetics have often excluded bodies and movements that fall outside predetermined norms. Dance Well disrupts these conventions, asserting that beauty in dance is not about perfection but about presence, connection, and the ability to generate meaning through movement. It invites a radical rethinking of what dance can be.

“I used to think of excellence as something defined by precision and skill, but now I see it as the ability to connect, to be present, and to create meaning in movement.” — Dance Well teacher, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Engaging with non-professional dancers has led teachers to embrace **diversity** as a **creative force**, expanding their understanding of movement beyond conventional technique. Physicality, rhythm, and approach are no longer seen as limitations but as catalysts for new artistic languages. Movements once considered unrefined or imperfect reveal a powerful expressiveness, capable of conveying emotions, experiences, and identities that challenge traditional stage aesthetics.

By dismantling the hierarchy between those who ‘can’ and those who ‘cannot’ dance, Dance Well creates an environment where every movement holds equal artistic legitimacy, independent of technical training. This shift in perspective has sparked a critical reflection on

representation in dance, prompting teachers to question the structures that dictate which bodies are deemed legitimate on stage. Dance Well reclaims **vulnerability** as a source of creativity, diversity as an artistic imperative, and **imperfection** as an invitation to new possibilities.

“This experience has shown me that dance should not be confined to elite stages; its power lies in its ability to belong to everyone.” —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

This redefinition of excellence extends beyond individual expression. Dance Well shifts the emphasis from the solo performer to the collective, where movement is understood as a shared act of listening, responding, and co-creating. Teachers describe how their perception of artistic value has transformed, realising that meaning does not reside in isolated technical feats but in the interplay of bodies, in the relationships that emerge through movement.

“Dance Well has helped me realise that dance is about relationships, not just steps.” —Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

“Before dance was a personal journey, a way to communicate his inner self. But with Dance Well, I now see dance as an inclusive, humanistic expression and a communication tool. This shift gives me natural joy and deep satisfaction.” —Dance Well teacher, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

Once You Dance This Way, There’s No Turning Back: Socially Engaged Dance

One of the most lasting outcomes of Dance Well is the conscious and sustained commitment by teachers to continue engaging in the project, in socially engaged dance and working with diverse communities. The experience has not only transformed their immediate practice but has planted the seeds for long-term change in how dance is taught, structured, and envisioned.

“This is not just a project, it’s a way of working that I want to carry forward.” —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

Teachers recognise that fostering inclusivity requires intentionality, adaptability, and a proactive effort to reshape spaces in truly participatory ways. Rather than focusing on access alone, their approach involves **actively creating** environments where **diversity** is not accommodated but **fully integrated** into the artistic process. This shift has led to a reevaluation of methodologies, ensuring that participation remains **open-ended, flexible, and non-hierarchical**.

“Dance Well has taught me that true accessibility is not just about opening the door, it’s about actively shaping spaces where everyone feels valued.” —Dance Well teacher, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

At the same time, Dance Well has offered a critical space for reflection for artists who feel exhausted by the relentless demands of production-driven systems.

For many, this shift is also deeply personal. As their bodies evolve over time, Dance Well has offered an **alternative to**

a **performance culture**, which focuses on the final shows. It has opened up new pathways for longevity in dance, allowing artists to remain engaged in movement in ways that are sustainable, fulfilling, and relevant to their changing physical realities.

“Dance Well made me rethink my role as an artist. I now see dance as a way to build connections, to amplify voices, and to create spaces where people feel seen and heard.” —Dance Well teacher, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

By embedding Dance Well principles into their long-term vision, teachers are shaping a future in which dance is not just an art form, but a **space for dialogue, advocacy, and empowerment**. Their methodologies continue to evolve, ensuring that dance remains a dynamic, responsive, and accessible practice, not only for participants but also for artists seeking new ways to sustain their engagement with movement throughout their careers.

Area 3.

Translocal Artists' Community

Sense of Belonging to an International Community

Teachers consistently describe how Dance Well has expanded their understanding of the dance community, revealing that their artistic journeys are not solitary but deeply interwoven with those of others across different places and cultures.

"I no longer feel like I am working in isolation [...]. There is a sense of being connected to something larger, something that gives meaning and continuity to our practice." —Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

The programme's international dimension fosters an ecosystem of exchange where knowledge, methodologies, and experiences circulate freely, but intentionally at the core of teachers' training. Teachers emphasise how these exchanges are not merely professional but profoundly human:

"When I go to another country for a Dance Well session, I don't feel like an outsider. I step into a space where the values, the approach, and the way we relate are shared. That makes all the difference." —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

This collective space offers **resilience** in the face of professional precarity, reinforcing the idea that artists do not have to navigate challenges alone. **Mutual support** manifests in practical ways, such as sharing strategies for inclusion, co-

teaching models, and pedagogical insights, but also in emotional sustenance.

"We support each other in ways that go beyond dance; there is trust, there is care, there is a shared sense of responsibility for one another." —Dance Well teacher, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This interconnectedness makes Dance Well not just a methodology but a living, breathing **network of solidarity**. Crucially, the formation of this community of professionals is made possible within the structured and protected framework of the dance organisations, which ensure that teachers can fully dedicate themselves to the artistic dimensions of their work. The presence of dedicated staff within the institutions provides essential logistical and operational support, handling participant coordination, welcoming processes, and organisational management. This **cohesive teamwork** allows teachers to remain fully immersed in their practice, fostering an environment where dance is not only a shared artistic experience but also a sustainable and well-supported professional endeavor.

Increased Capacity and Interest in Working Internationally

Participation in Dance Well has nourished a deeper curiosity and willingness to work beyond local contexts, leading many teachers to engage in international projects and collaborations they had never previously considered.

"Before Dance Well, I thought about my work on a much smaller scale. Now I see the possibilities of connecting with people across different cultures and learning from them." —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

This shift is not only about mobility but about a transformed perspective on collaboration. Teachers describe how Dance Well fosters an **openness to cross-border partnerships**, reinforcing the idea that artistic and educational work is most impactful when shared.

"I used to think of international work as something logistical, something difficult to achieve. Now I see it as essential, it expands the way I teach, the way I create, and the way I think about dance." —Dance Well teacher, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

Additionally, Dance Well has enhanced teachers' ability and confidence to navigate diverse cultural and artistic landscapes. The experience of working in multilingual, multi-contextual environments has strengthened their adaptability and deepened their appreciation for diverse artistic expressions.

"Working internationally through Dance Well has given me a new sense of professional agency. I feel capable of stepping into different contexts, knowing that my practice is relevant and that I have something to contribute." —Dance Well teacher, France - Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix

By fostering these international connections, Dance Well not only strengthens individual careers but also reinforces the larger movement toward an inclusive, socially engaged dance practice that thrives beyond borders. It transforms the idea of dance from a localised practice into a global dialogue, one rooted in shared values, mutual exchange, and a profound commitment to accessibility and human connection.



Choreographers

Dance Well Creation as a Contextual and Adaptive Experiment

The Dance Well project provided dance organisations with full autonomy in selecting the artists with whom they would collaborate for production, leading to highly varied approaches across different locations.

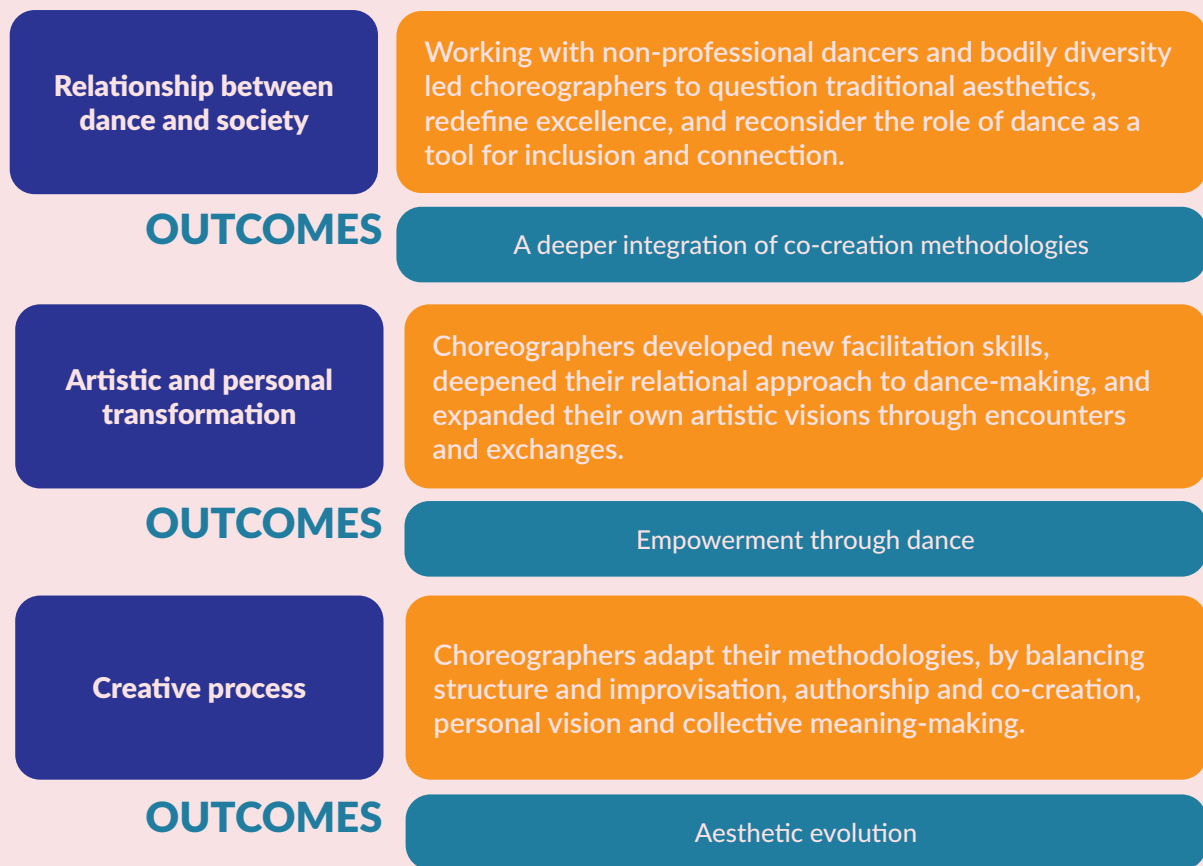
The duration, intensity, and structure of the rehearsal periods were tailored to both the specific needs of the locations and the individual choreographers involved. In some cases, such as in Bassano, the choreographers' presence was temporally limited, with a handover to one of the Dance Well teachers who further developed and echoed elements introduced by the choreographers. Conversely, in Hamburg, the creative process extended over approximately two months, culminating in a series of intensive weekend workshops - an approach mirrored in Paris as well.

This adaptability allowed for both deep contextual engagement and a dynamic exploration of collaborative methodologies. In every location, however, choreographers were invited to actively participate in Dance Well classes to familiarise themselves with the ongoing practices. In almost all locations, one or more teachers were designated to follow and support the creative process in a non-intrusive way, fostering reciprocal dynamics between choreographers and the local dance community.

This structural openness led to highly individualised yet strikingly convergent experiences, revealing shared challenges, discoveries, and artistic shifts across locations. While all choreographers were accustomed to working with non-professionals, Dance Well often proved to be either confirmatory or transformative, reinforcing existing approaches in some cases while radically reshaping artistic and pedagogical perspectives in others.

What emerged was a set of transversal insights that cut across geographic, aesthetic, and methodological differences, shaping a broader understanding of how Dance Well impacted professional choreographers, both artistically and in their career trajectories.





Reshaping the Role of the Dance Artist in Society

Although the reflections shared here may be influenced by the enthusiasm and insights of choreographers interviewed just before or after the debut of their productions, their words capture the depth of transformation they experienced through the Dance Well project. It has reshaped their understanding of authorship, inclusivity, and the role of dance in society.

As Dance Well unfolded, choreographers found themselves shifting from acting as movement facilitators to **artistic mediators**, engaging in a space where inclusivity, bodily diversity, and aesthetic exploration intersected. The project provided a structured yet flexible framework, challenging them to rethink their creative processes.

"It was no longer about shaping a performance, but about shaping an experience." –Dance well choreographer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

Many described Dance Well as a welcoming space for **social change** and **connection**, where choreography evolved beyond rehearsed movements to embrace natural, spontaneous gestures such as tremors, which became expressive material.

"Everybody is capable of being a dancing body." –Dance well choreographer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

This redefinition of movement allowed dance to become a way of perceiving and engaging with the world.

"Dance became a way of seeing the world differently, through movement." –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Working with individuals with Parkinson's and other motor limitations introduced new dimensions to their creative approaches, reinforcing a grounded aesthetics that valued authenticity over convention.

"It's not about perfect lines, but about what feels real." –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This experience solidified the idea that each dancer is a co-creator, rather than someone who must conform to an external ideal.

"Each person brings something valuable, and that's the essence of Dance Well." –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This collaborative approach influenced not only the artistic practices but also the personal growth of choreographers. They developed greater patience, empathy, and sensitivity, leading them to reframe dance as a tool for building meaningful connections.

"This made me a better human, not just a better choreographer." –Dance well choreographer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

However, the choreographers also acknowledged the tensions around institutional inclusivity mandates. While they strongly valued the real impact of inclusive practices, they emphasised the need to protect **creative freedom**, advocating for inclusivity as a genuine practice rather than a checkbox requirement.

"Inclusivity should be organic, not a checkbox." –Dance well choreographer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

Another major realisation was the role of Dance Well in questioning who

and what is represented in dance. Many choreographers underlined the disparity between public representations and the lived reality of diverse movement practices, advocating for a more honest, **human-centred portrayal of movement**.

"It's time for the stage to reflect the real world, not an idealised one." –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Indeed, Dance Well challenged choreographers to expand their perspectives on dance, pushing beyond the boundaries of traditional performance into a more relational, inclusive, and socially engaged practice. Their reflections highlight a deep shift in how they view their role as artists, reinforcing that dance is not about perfection but about participation, presence, and shared experience.

Empowerment Through Dance: Rediscovering Agency and Expression

One of the most powerful impacts of Dance Well on choreographers has been the profound shift in their understanding of empowerment, both for themselves and for the participants they worked with. Dance, in this context, became a tool for agency, self-expression, and connection, rather than a set of predefined techniques to be mastered.

For many choreographers, the experience challenged traditional hierarchies, requiring them to **listen more, impose less, and trust the process**.

"At first, I thought I had to teach them how to move. But very quickly, I realised they were teaching me how to see movement differently." –Dance well choreographer, Czech Republic - Tanec Praha

This reversal of roles revealed that dance was not about dictating steps, but about enabling individuals to rediscover their bodies and their ability to move with confidence.

The absence of traditional technical training among participants did not limit artistic expression; on the contrary, it highlighted the importance of adaptability and trust. Instead of correction, choreographers learned to offer suggestions rather than instructions, allowing movement to emerge organically.

"You give people the mood, and they find their own way to make it possible." –Dance well choreographer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

This process required a radical rethinking of leadership and authorship, fostering a more horizontal and participatory creative approach. Many choreographers spoke of the **power of co-creation**, where each participant's contribution added layers of meaning to the collective experience.

"It's essential to let people create together rather than impose our vision on them. This approach extends to my work with collaborators; I invite them as co-creators, not just bodies to fit a role." –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This not only broadened their choreographic approach, but also enhanced their ability to navigate uncertainty, adapt to different group dynamics, and embrace a more relational way of making art.

Beyond artistic development, this shift also fostered soft skills essential to socially engaged artistic practices, including:

- **Flexibility and adaptability.** Adjusting to the unpredictable nature of each session and participant.

- **Active listening and patience.** Learning to step back and let movement emerge naturally.
- **Empathy and trust-building.** Creating a space where participants felt safe to explore and express themselves.
- **Leadership through facilitation.** Understanding that leading does not mean controlling, but rather holding space for collective exploration.

Ultimately, Dance Well reinforced the idea that dance, at its core, is a human experience, deeply intertwined with identity, agency, and emotional expression. It was no longer about achieving a polished final product, but about giving individuals the tools to reclaim their bodies and voices through movement.

Aesthetic Evolution: Rethinking Beauty and Choreographic Norms

If Dance Well transformed choreographers' approach to leadership and empowerment, it also challenged and reshaped their artistic vision. Many found themselves reconsidering what makes dance "beautiful" and who gets to define excellence in movement.

For choreographers accustomed to working with trained dancers, engaging with bodies that move differently forced a shift in perception. Movements that were once seen as imperfections - tremors, pauses, shifts in weight - became expressive material, rich with meaning and authenticity.

"It expanded our idea of which bodies can represent dance. People typically think of 'trained bodies' when they think of dance, but Dance Well reminds us that every body is capable of being a dancing body." –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre



This rethinking of aesthetics was not just about physical expression, but also about the underlying principles of choreography itself.

“Dance is no longer something that happens on stage, it’s something that happens everywhere.” –Dance well choreographer, France - La Briqueterie CDCN Vitry sur Seine

The choreographers highlighted how **limitations** became a **source of creativity**. Rather than seeing constraints as obstacles, they discovered that they opened unexpected possibilities, leading to moments of discovery.

“At first, I thought certain movements were impossible, but then something surprising emerged, something I would never have created on my own.” –Dance well choreographer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

Working with non-professional dancers required a shift in perspective, one that embraced letting go of control and allowing oneself to be surprised by the unexpected. This process transformed not only the choreography itself but also the way choreographers approached their role:

“I learned to stop trying to dictate the movement and instead allow the dancers to reveal something new.” –Dance well choreographer, Italy - CSC / Comune di Bassano del Grappa

The experience also blurred the lines between performance and everyday movement, emphasising the fluidity between dance, memory, and daily gestures. In some projects, participants were encouraged to bring personal objects and photographs that connected them to dance, reinforcing the idea that choreography is not only about shaping

bodies, but also about shaping stories and experiences.

“Each movement carries a memory, a personal truth.” –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

This newfound appreciation for authenticity over technical virtuosity led to a deeper commitment to representing real bodies and real stories on stage. Many choreographers spoke about their growing discomfort with the lack of diversity in mainstream dance imagery and their desire to address this problem.

“It’s time for the stage to reflect the real world, not an idealised one.” –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre

Ultimately, Dance Well prompted a rethinking of what dance can be: not just a performance, but a social practice, a relational art form, and a way to experience the world differently.

“This experience changed not only how I work, but how I see dance itself.” –Dance well choreographer, Lithuania - Lithuanian Dance Information Centre



Researchers

What Did We, as Researchers, Take Away from This Experience?

And what about us, the researchers? What did we carry away from this experience? How did Dance Well impact us, not just as professionals but as human beings immersed in a process that was at once intimate, disruptive, and generative?

For sure, Sara and I were affected differently. Not only because we are two distinct individuals, shaped by different social and educational backgrounds, but also because our exposure and immersion in the project followed different trajectories.

Luisella Carnelli

For me, Dance Well left an imprint of professional expertise, one that is recognised, valued, and tangible. Dance Well expanded my understanding of dance, not merely as a performative discipline but as a constellation of embodied languages, articulated through verbal and non-verbal expression. It taught me to see dance not as a means to produce an artwork meant for circulation and consumption but as a practice of **enabling human experiences**. Dance here is not an end in itself but a medium through which new modes of participation and of relationality unfold.

A Political Space of the Possible

If the logic of neoliberalism reduces culture to a product, Dance Well resists that by fostering a different temporality of artistic experience, where judgment is suspended, intergenerational nourishment is enabled, and aesthetics take on new forms, allowing for a redefinition of artistic practice beyond commodification.

At a very personal level, Dance Well has been a school of soft skills, not in the corporate sense of upskilling but in the

deeper sense of unlearning. I have learned to observe and listen with heightened attentiveness, activating not just my hearing but my vision, my proprioception and my emotional radar. This project trained me to let sensations and emotions become spaces of negotiation and understanding.

From a methodological standpoint, it has taught me patience, flexibility, and adaptability, not as passive resignation but as an active form of attunement to the unexpected. Research is often about structuring, ordering, making sense of things. Yet here, I had to let go of the researcher's obsession with tidiness and control, embracing what Amartya Sen calls **capability development**, not imposing predefined structures but creating enabling conditions for emergence (Sen, 1999).

Dancing with Uncertainty

This experience has also made me reflect on the **body as a boundary**. Dance, as experienced in Dance Well, disrupts the idea of the body as an enclosed entity. Instead, it becomes a porous space where identities, vulnerabilities, and strengths are co-constructed. The act of dancing is both deeply personal and profoundly collective. It is at once self-affirming and self-dissolving.

Above all, Dance Well has reinforced my conviction that new artistic practices can emerge from experimentation, mutual trust, and relationality. These are practices that do not merely serve social needs but recognise the **full humanity of all participants**, strengthening their agency rather than framing them as passive beneficiaries.

Imagining Otherwise

None of this means that art must be instrumentalised. Quite the opposite: Dance Well reaffirms that dance is not merely an activity but a **space of the possible**, where we rehearse alternative (social, relational, and even political) modes of being together.

To dance, in this sense, is to dream and temporarily inhabit a different world, beyond imposed canons and roles. And if, as Appadurai suggests, the capacity to aspire is a fundamental human right, then Dance Well has created a space where aspiration, in its most profound sense, is exercised through the body (Appadurai, 2004).

Sara Marconi

Challenging Evaluation, Towards an Inclusive Research Practice

I believe, like many others in the evaluation field, to evaluate means to give meaning to our actions, equipping ourselves to investigate and interpret the value generated.

From this perspective, intentionality, processuality, reflexivity and learning are key elements of evaluation as a practice to discuss, evolve, and improve activities, projects, programs, and even policies.

But evaluation, particularly impact evaluation, also involves measurement and methodological rigour for collecting precise data and information that, first and foremost, aims to be comparable.

This implies, in some research environments, a different legitimisation, when not supremacy, of certain methodological approaches - counterfactual and based on statistical analysis - at the expense of others. These approaches insist on the objectivity of the researcher and push for a clear separation between the one who studies and the one being studied.

As soon as I approached Dance Well, it became clear that this was not the natural way.

Dance Well's values, principles, approaches, and dynamics are so clear, central, and infused in every aspect of the practice that it's impossible not to adapt one's posture to even just get close to it.

It represented both the need and the opportunity for me to learn and enhance my professionalism in balancing methodological rigour with the adaptive capacity of evaluation.

But it's not just a matter of adaptation, but of deep transformation. The same values that I observed in the project from the very beginning have become part of my evaluative research practice: openness, flexibility, humanity, and co-ownership. This means challenging the power relationships generally embedded in research activities and opening new paths to question the traditional relationship between researcher and research subject.

Dance Well Was Not Only Searching but also Finding

It was for me an opportunity to deeply explore concepts that have nourished and influenced my professional practice for years, as well as my personal life: care and radical tenderness.

*"radical tenderness is to turn a tremor into a dance and a sigh into a mantra
is to dissent with maximum respect
[...]
radical tenderness is to share dreams, wildness
to tune in with, not just empathize with
it is to find a galaxy in the eyes of another and not break the gaze
to read the body of another as a palimpsest
radical tenderness is to channel irresistible energies and convert them into
untamable embodiments"*

Observation and listening during our research visits, but especially moments of shared physical practice, allowed me to witness - surprised - the profound and poetic embodiment of these words.

Dance Well creates the conditions to overcome the fear of being afraid, to embrace fragility and uncertainty, making diversity a real condition for encounter and creativity.

Hearing the encounter described through bodies expresses the power of the connections that Dance Well can generate: opening oneself to another's gaze while overcoming fear, allowing oneself to be seen, lifted, or supported by someone who may seem foreign, and together navigating uncertainty (D'Emilia, Chavez, 2015).

With deep emotion and gratitude, I meticulously collected and analysed the numerous voices that described the bonds created and woven through the project as family, friendship or community.

It made clear to me the universal care society approaches that extend family bonds beyond blood ties and multiply care circuits, broadening the understanding of networks and flows of intimate relationships and care (The Care Collective, 2020).

Dance Well gave me an idea of how to inhabit differences while highlighting affinities - from the shared joy of dance to aligned worldviews.

This insight, combined with other observed outcomes, has deepened my understanding and reinforced my belief in the political impact of internal movements.

Embracing the Process: the Unfinished Choreography of Research

And yet, let's not romanticise the process. Working on a European project for 36 months inevitably means navigating tensions and conflicts. As researchers, we are often pulled in multiple directions, caught between different project demands, expectations, and timelines. Communication does not always unfold in smooth or gentle ways, and at times, friction arises, not only from the pressure of deliverables but also from differing perceptions of involvement and commitment. The reality of co-working in an international, multi-stakeholder environment is that misunderstandings and competing priorities emerge.

Despite these challenges, what remains is the profound recognition that Dance Well was not just an object of study but a shared space of learning, where our perspectives, shaped by different methodological backgrounds, converged in unexpected ways. We did not simply document a process; we inhabited it, negotiated it, and, in the end, carried it forward with us. And in that space, we found not only an alignment of thought but a shared passion that moved us, quite literally, to imagine otherwise.



Key Takeaways

Dance Well as a Radical Practice of Care and Transformation

Dance Well is not just a project; it is a prefiguration of a different way of being together, an insurgent practice where diversity is not tolerated but celebrated, where limits are not constraints but invitations to new possibilities. It crafts a **relational ecology** based on mutual respect, intergenerational co-existence, and the radical reversal of vulnerability into strength. It is an **embodied manifesto** of **care** and **radical tenderness**, where movement becomes an act of belonging, a gesture of resistance against invisibility, and a field in which to reimagine what inclusion truly means. In Dance Well, choreography is not confined to the stage; it unfolds in the way bodies relate, listen, and create space for each other. Here, every step is a statement, every shared breath a quiet revolution.

Building upon this vision, our dual perspectives - one embedded within the movement, serving as the narrative voice of embodied transformation, and the other observing from a necessary critical distance, acting as a dialectical counterpart - allow us to uncover the deeper currents of Dance Well's radical potential. Far beyond a conventional dance practice, it is a **slow revolution** that reshapes bodies, relationships, and institutions. It asserts diversity as a cornerstone, amplifies wellbeing beyond physical restoration, and foregrounds social cohesion as an embodied practice of inclusion. Long after the music stops, Dance Well leaves behind a new relational infrastructure, a space where bodies claim their right to **visibility, presence,** and **agency**. This embodied shift extends its reach beyond the dance space, touching every individual who steps into its flow - dancers, teachers, choreographers, researchers and organisations - each carrying forward the imprint of a practice that is both deeply personal and profoundly collective. What follows are the tangible ways in which Dance Well redefines artistic practice, wellbeing, and institutional frameworks.

For the Dancers: a Symphony of joy, Belonging, and the Fullness of Humanity

For the dancers who take part in it, Dance Well is a journey that begins with a step, a gesture, a breath, and unfolds into a profound reimagining of **what it means to move, to belong, and to create**.

Stepping into a Dance Well session means stepping into a space where the body is no longer defined by limitation but by possibility. Dance Well Dancers speak of reclaiming their **agency**, of rediscovering parts of themselves they thought lost, of learning to trust their movement again. Here, dance is not about executing steps but about unfolding **presence**, about feeling the **joy** and **poetry of motion**, about realising that every movement - however small or slow - is an act of expression, resistance, and renewal.

But Dance Well is not just an individual experience; it is a **collective practice**, a shared dance where differences become a source of strength. In this space, movement builds bridges, dissolves hierarchies, and creates community. The fear of being seen is replaced by the courage to be present, and isolation gives way to a deep sense of belonging. Here, participants are not defined by illness, by age, by external expectations, but by their presence, their movement, their humanity.

This experience ripples outwards from the classes, shaping how dancers move through the world, how they perceive their bodies, how they connect with others, how they carry themselves with renewed confidence and joy. It dismantles the notion that dance belongs only to the stage, to the trained, to the young. Dance Well expands the definition of **who gets to dance**, reclaiming movement as something that belongs to everyone.

And this is why Dance Well is not something you simply take part in and leave behind. It becomes part of you, shifting not just how you move, but how you see yourself, how you experience the world, and how you connect to those around you. For those who enter this space, dance is no longer an activity, it is a language, a lifeline, a way of being. It is a **radical act of presence**. It is a movement that changes everything.



For the Teachers and Choreographers: Dance as a Revolutionary Act of Embodiment and Resistance

Dance Well has been defined by some teachers and choreographers as a slow but profound revolution, a reimagining of what dance can be, who it belongs to, and how it shapes both those who practice it and those who teach it. It dismantles the hierarchies of movement, dissolves rigid aesthetic codes, and expands the **meaning of dance** beyond the stage or the walls of a dance studio, beyond the confines of virtuosity as a technical pursuit. Here, excellence is no longer measured by precision but by **presence**, by the **ability to listen**, to **connect**, to allow movement to emerge rather than impose it. Dance Well invites choreographers and teachers to **unlearn**, to step away from the authority of form and into the fluidity of discovery. It is no longer about shaping dancers to fit a vision, but about creating the conditions for movement to take form in unexpected ways, to honour the body as it is rather than as it is expected to be.

This **shift** is **aesthetic**, **political**, and **deeply human**. The choreographers who have entered this space speak of how their perceptions of dance have changed irreversibly, how tremors, pauses, and weight shifts - once dismissed as imperfections - have revealed themselves as pure expressive material, expanding their notion of choreography itself. Dance is no longer a fixed language but an evolving dialogue between the bodies that practice it. Those who teach within Dance Well speak of a transformation that has reached beyond their classes and into their own artistic identity. They no longer see themselves as teachers or dancers, but as **facilitators of encounters**, as **creators of space**, as **holders of trust**. Such a shift is not about abandoning rigour, but about redefining it, placing it in relation to the people in the room, to the lived realities of those who move, to the stories their bodies carry.

This movement does not exist in isolation; it resonates with the broader European discourse on the role of artists today. Across the continent, the status of artists is being reexamined - not just as cultural producers, but as essential actors in the social fabric, as agents of transformation, as architects of collective meaning. The European Parliament has called for new policies that recognise artists beyond the market-driven economy of cultural production, emphasising their role in community cohesion, in participatory practices,

in shaping a more inclusive cultural landscape. Dance Well is already enacting this shift, by offering a model where artistic practice generates connections, builds relationships and activates presence, and is not just something to be consumed. Those who enter this space do not leave unchanged. The way they teach, create and move through the world is altered in significant ways.

This is not just about making dance more accessible and inclusive; it is about reshaping dance itself, by reclaiming it as a space of **freedom**, **relevance** and **belonging**. Dance Well does not integrate bodies into existing structures, it redefines the structure itself. It proposes a future where dance is something to be lived, not to be learned. It is not a technique to be perfected but a language that grows with those who practice it. It is not something separate from life, but deeply embedded in it. This is why Dance Well cannot be left behind. Our research suggests that once you have danced this way and felt movement emerge from presence rather than prescription, once you have let go of expectations and found something truer on the other side, there is no turning back. Dance Well, in conclusion, is not just a practice but a new way of seeing, listening and moving through the world. It is a slow revolution, but one that is already rewriting the possibilities of dance. It is not just about giving more people access to dance, it is about giving dance back to the world.

For the Organisations: Becoming Agents of Social and Artistic Revolution

Dance Well does not merely add another project to a cultural organisation's agenda; it reshapes the way institutions think, operate, and define their role in contemporary society. It forces a reckoning with the question: what kind of cultural institutions do we want to be?

For a long time, dance organisations have been structured around production-driven models, where success is measured in outputs - performances delivered, audience numbers, levels of funding secured. Dance Well challenges this logic, by shifting the focus towards **process over product**, **depth over reach**, **relationality over shows**. It asks organisations to move beyond efficiency and reconsider what it means to create something of value. *Can an institution transition from merely presenting work to*

actively *shaping artistic and social ecosystems*, by fostering dance as a practice embedded in communities rather than confined to a stage? Can a dance organisation embrace the idea that excellence is not a static benchmark but an evolving, participatory process? These are not easy questions, and Dance Well does not provide easy answers. Instead, it reveals tensions between tradition and transformation, old structures and emerging possibilities, those who hold onto established ways of working and those who see the need for radical change.

Within this slow but fundamental shift, the role of the dance organisation itself is being redefined. Institutions are no longer simply curators of artistic production: they can become laboratories for new models of authorship, inclusion, and engagement. Leadership is no longer about gatekeeping but about making space - real space - for new voices, new bodies, new ways of practicing dance. Organisations that have truly embraced Dance Well have rethought governance, opened up decision-making processes, and restructured hierarchies to reflect the values of co-creation that the practice embodies. This is not just about inviting different people into the institution; it is about reshaping the institution itself, from how resources are allocated to how artistic work is valued and supported.

This transformation is not without friction. Dance Well has brought to the surface generational and institutional divides, making clear where structures resist change and where individuals push forward despite them. This shift aligns with a broader European conversation about the role of cultural institutions in a rapidly changing world. There is a growing recognition that the arts must not only be accessible but should be actively reimagined as tools for social transformation. Dance Well places itself at the centre of this discourse, proving that dance is not an isolated artistic practice but a vital force in shaping more **inclusive and equitable cultural landscapes**.

But the most radical transformation Dance Well offers is not just institutional, it is aesthetic. It challenges the traditional performance-based model of dance institutions, dismantling the deeply ingrained hierarchies between those who create and those who participate, between professional and non-professional, between trained and untrained. It asserts that dance is not just something to be performed but something to be lived, that belongs to everyone. In doing so, it does not simply advocate for

inclusion within existing structures; it creates the conditions for a new way of thinking about dance.

Once an organisation has experienced this shift, it cannot go back. It cannot unsee the ways in which conventional institutions exclude people. It cannot return to a model that prioritises efficiency over meaning. Dance Well changes the ways in which institutions function and imagine their futures.

Beyond Measurement, Toward Meaning

As researchers, we often find ourselves caught between the need for evaluation and the resistance to reduce complex cultural experiences to numbers. *How do you measure the feeling of belonging? How do you quantify the shift in self-perception that occurs when someone sees themselves as a dancer for the first time?*

Dance Well does not just leave behind data; one of its key legacies is people who move differently in the world, and who engage with themselves and with others in new ways. Its impact is not just something we record, it is something we live.



Methodology

What Does Our Evaluation Focus on and How Do We Interpret Impact?

Our contribution to the project and the broader research team focus on impact evaluation as a dynamic and reflective tool to capture change and transformation; it does not just aim to measure impacts, but rather it seeks to understand how change occurs.

Dance Well's evaluation is, therefore, a tool for reflection, adaptation, and transformation.

Furthermore, our approach to impact evaluation is grounded in the Theory of Change¹, which provides the overarching framework guiding our work. This model allows us to map the connections between inputs, activities, and changes, emphasising a **transformative process** rather than static results.

Within this framework, we distinguish two intertwined dimensions of evaluation:

- **structured, outcome-driven evaluation**, which ensures accountability and captures measurable changes. This aspect of our work aligns with more traditional impact assessment approaches, seeking to track shifts in participation, engagement, and perceived benefits over time;
- **the participatory and evolutionary dimension**, which operates within an arts-based and co-creative approach. This acknowledges that artistic practices do not merely generate measurable outputs but contribute to a larger ecology of meaning-making, social change, and relational transformations.

¹The Theory of Change (ToC) is a strategic framework used to map the relationship between a project's inputs, activities, and expected outcomes. Unlike traditional evaluation models that focus only on final results, ToC emphasises the transformative process: how and why change happens over time. It helps identify key assumptions, causal linkages, and intermediate steps leading to long-term impact. By making these connections explicit, ToC supports adaptive learning, strategic decision-making, and more effective impact assessment, ensuring that evaluation is not just a retrospective judgment but an integral part of the change process.

To interpret impact, we integrate three key levels of analysis:

- **strategic and learning dimension**: impact evaluation is a tool for ongoing learning, not just an accountability mechanism. It allows us to refine methods, adapt strategies, and foster meaningful transformations over time;
- **desire for change**: our evaluation is shaped by Dance Well's intentionality to generate and drive change, creating conditions that foster agency, expanded perceptions, and shifting relational dynamics;
- **relevance of artistic value to drive impacts**: we seek to develop an evaluation framework sensitive to the specific value generated by artistic practices - an aspect often overlooked in impact studies. By embedding embodiment, aesthetics, and artistic agency into our framework, we ensure that evaluation does not strip art of its transformative and sensorial dimensions. Our chosen approach avoids the risk of evaluation reducing artistic practices to instrumental functions. Our aim is to highlight the generative and expansive role of dance practices in fostering community cohesion and shifting institutional approaches to accessibility, participation, and authorship in the arts.

Our conceptualisation of impact is informed by theories of participatory evaluation and cultural democracy (Matarasso, 1997), which emphasise the co-creation of knowledge. We also draw from ethnographic studies, recognising that deep engagement enhances our ability to track both visible and intangible changes over time.

By adopting this layered, intentional, and reflexive perspective, our evaluation of Dance Well moves beyond documentation and becomes an active space of inquiry, an interface between artistic practice and strategic change.

How Do We Approach Evaluation?

The evaluation of Dance Well is not a separate or external process - it is **purposefully integrated** from the outset, designed alongside project planning to align with the project's objectives of transformative change.

Our approach is **multidisciplinary** and embraces multiple methodological perspectives to fully grasp the complexity of the project's impacts:

- **quantitative approach:** we incorporate measurement and monitoring tools to track the project's implementation and evolution, ensuring consistency and comparability of outputs over time.
- **qualitative approach:** through focus groups, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, we explore outcomes that numbers alone cannot capture - perceptions, emotions, and shifts in artistic and social engagement.

Our evaluation framework is **context-sensitive**, tailor-designed to respect the cultural and organisational specificities of each locality. Our approach to evaluation balances commonalities and unique elements across different Dance Well locations, allowing for both localised specificity and broader cross-site learning.

Moreover, we were required to be flexible and responsive to ensure that data collection methods - be they interviews, focus groups, or quantitative tools - were sensitive to the lived realities of those involved (e.g. the use of paper questionnaires was difficult).

This sensitivity informs our methodology and research ambitions, particularly how research activities are conducted and how results are interpreted.

What's Special About Dance Well's Evaluation?

Emotional Dimension and Commitment to Principles

A distinctive trait of our evaluation is its **deep ethical** and **emotional grounding**. Dance Well's commitment to dignity, inclusion, and co-creation is reflected in our research

design, where each researcher's role is tailored to balance engagement and critical distance. This approach ensures:

- compensatory measures by distributing roles strategically to maintain a dual research perspective and different levels of involvement. One researcher was embedded within the artistic process, engaging in auto-ethnographic involvement to capture insights from within, while another maintained an external perspective, thus ensuring coherence, accountability, and critical reflection;
- a research process that acknowledges **subjectivity** and **embodiment**, embracing the reality that our bodies, emotions, and values shape the way we collect and interpret data.

Building a Shared Language

Our evaluation was born from the dialogue between stakeholders, trying to foster mutual understanding and refine artistic and social practices through:

- **collaborative storytelling**, where participants, teachers, and researchers are called to contribute to creating a collective narrative;
- **methodological sensitivity**, which does not just mean adapting research ambitions but concretely shaping the language we use and our research posture, that are reflected in the methodological tools we deploy;
- a dynamic approach that recognises how physical practice influences research practice, whether it means *joining a class, moving together with participants, or even removing our shoes* to better understand the embodied experience of the participants themselves.

Our evaluation framework does not merely aim to measure Dance Well's impacts; it becomes a space of active inquiry and transformation. By integrating emotional awareness, participatory co-creation, and adaptive methodologies, we ensure that our research is not just about documenting change - it is part of the change itself. Evaluation becomes a process of shared meaning-making, where movement, research, and impact merge into a continuous flow of learning and evolution.

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The background of the page features a large, abstract, organic shape in a vibrant blue color, which appears to be a stylized representation of a human figure or a dynamic pose. To the left of this blue shape, there is a smaller, more complex shape in a bright red color, also appearing to be a stylized figure or pose. The overall composition is dynamic and artistic, with the shapes overlapping and creating a sense of movement.

Positioning Dance Within Health Care Systems

Reflections From Dance Well And Tools for
Dialogical Art-Based Collaborations

Ilaria Foroni
Fabrizio Panozzo

Introduction

In the last decade, the idea of integrating artistic practices into healthcare has gained increasing recognition, with dance, music, theatre, and visual arts widely acknowledged for their positive impact on physical, cognitive, and emotional wellbeing. However, beyond this growing interest - often dubbed as “cultural welfare” the structural and institutional realities of embedding artistic practices within healthcare systems remain deeply complex. While policy discourses increasingly advocate for holistic, patient-centred care, the practical implementation of such approaches is constrained by bureaucratic, epistemological, and professional tensions. These tensions become particularly evident when research explores in greater depth the relationship between dance and health, where artistic practice is frequently expected to adapt to biomedical paradigms of evidence and accountability—a demand that risks compromising the creative, relational, and processual nature of artistic practice.

This chapter draws on research conducted within the Dance Well European Project, which investigates how dance practices are translated and contextualised across varied institutional and cultural settings. Through ethnographically inspired qualitative research, we have examined the diverse strategies adopted by partner organisations in integrating Dance Well, the stakeholders involved in its promotion and the ways in which organisational needs shape its value. This research is based on 50 semi-structured interviews with dancers, artistic directors and healthcare professionals involved in the project, as well as on-site fieldwork in each of the partner organisations across Europe.

Between August 2023 and August 2024, research visits were conducted across six partner organisations, each lasting an average of 8,5 days. These visits allowed for direct observations of Dance Well sessions, informal interactions with staff and participants, and analysis of

local institutional dynamics. This comparative, multi-sited approach has made it possible to identify patterns of institutional engagement, differences in how Dance Well is positioned within local health and social care networks, and the role of key cultural and healthcare stakeholders in shaping its implementation.

A participatory research approach was adopted, ensuring that local case studies were observed and actively explored through dialogue with the communities involved. The methodology combined content analysis of interviews and field notes with survey data, which was collected at the beginning and end of the project to assess the extent to which Dance Well served as a bridge between the dance sector and the healthcare system in different local contexts. This comparative research has led to the identification of **five key macro-categories** that influence the adaptation of Dance Well across different settings:

1. The legacy of the European project – whether and how the project fosters sustainable, long-term change beyond its initial funding period.
2. Prior projects in health and care – the extent to which each partner had existing collaborations with healthcare institutions before implementing Dance Well.
3. The availability of artistic venues – the role of physical spaces, such as museums and cultural centres, in shaping the artistic and social dimensions of the practice.
4. The recognition of contemporary dance – how local cultural policies and artistic networks influence institutional acceptance of the practice.
5. Presence of Interpersonal relationships - the role of individuals able to navigate sectoral boundaries through personal connections and foster cross-sector collaborations.

This empirical foundation provides the basis for a broader discussion on the institutional, epistemic, and professional challenges of integrating dance into healthcare. One of the central tensions that this research highlights is the question of accountability. As observed across the partner organisations of the Dance Well project, conventional evaluative frameworks often fail to accommodate the lived, embodied, and relational dimensions of dance,



instead prioritising quantifiable indicators of impact. This chapter builds on concepts of narrative medicine, socialising accountability, and hybrid professionalism to propose alternative models of evaluation and governance that allow dance to coexist with, rather than be absorbed by, healthcare structures. Rather than treating dance as a clinical intervention, we explore how narrative-based, reflexive, and participatory forms of accountability can better capture its processual and communal nature.

Building on the understanding gained through an ethnographic engagement with the realities of institutional collaboration observed in Dance Well, this chapter offers a Toolkit for Collaboration, offering a practical framework for artists, healthcare professionals, and policymakers. This toolkit is designed not as a prescriptive model but as an adaptable set of tools that offers strategies for negotiation, institutional adaptation, and cross-sectoral engagement. It provides concrete mechanisms for facilitating mutual understanding between dance and health, proposing flexible evaluative frameworks, and creating the conditions for artistic integrity to be preserved within healthcare settings. By proposing a deeper reflection on accountability, evidence, and professional boundaries, our research with the Dance Well project invites us to move beyond rigid institutional constraints in order to make sure that dance retains its artistic and social integrity while contributing meaningfully to healthcare provision.

1.

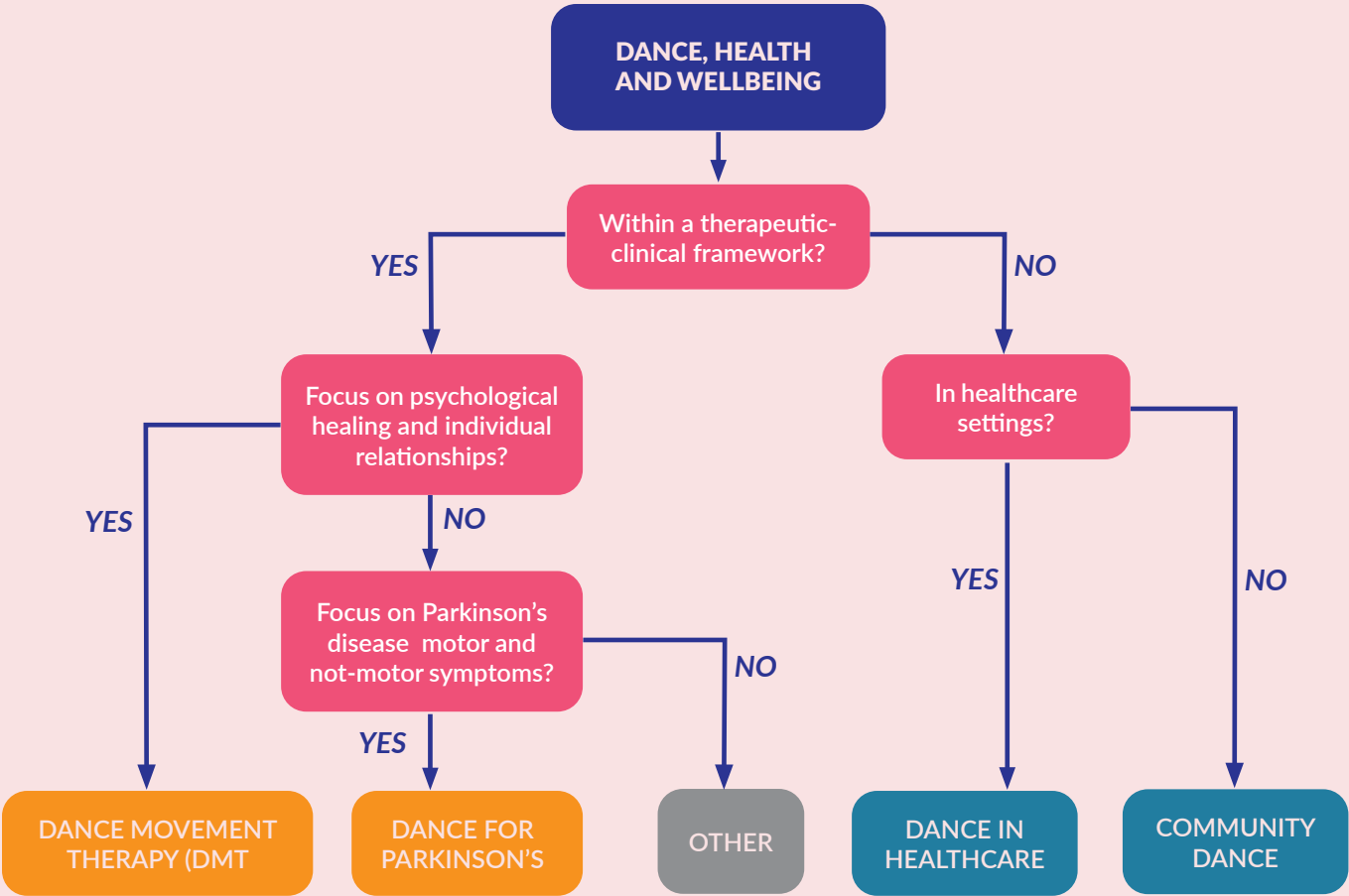
Setting the Stage:

Dance, Health and Wellbeing

How is dance integrated and institutionalised within the healthcare system? What are the possible interpretations, and how is it valued?

In the effort to present preconditions for facilitating dialogue between the dance sector and the health and social systems, the first part of the research presents a framework to illustrate the current landscape of cross-sectoral collaboration and fertilisation possibilities between dance language and healthcare.

We created a table and diagram to visualise and map the significant movements, practices, and conceptualisations that have led to the recognition of dance in health and care realms since the 1940s.



This mapping process aims to enhance our understanding of how dance is perceived by the healthcare system today, particularly in terms of disease prevention, therapy, and treatment. Secondly, the framework is designed to be helpful in comprehending Dance Well practice and its institutionalisation possibilities considering today's scenario.

Four main domains of application of dance aimed at promoting health and wellbeing are identified:

1. **Dance as Therapy**, primarily represented by the Dance and Movement Therapy recognised method;
2. **Dance in Healthcare**, which is part of the broader Arts in Healthcare Movement;
3. **Community Dance**, which addresses - explicitly or implicitly - the social determinants of wellbeing;
4. **Dance for Parkinson's**, where dance practices are specifically designed for individuals living with Parkinson's Disease.

Feature	Dance Movement Therapy (DMT)	Dance for Parkinson's	Dance in Healthcare	Community Dance
Definition of "Dance" in the Field	Dance as a psychotherapeutic tool – Movement as a way to process emotions, trauma, and psychological challenges	Dance as neurorehabilitation and exercise – Used to improve motor and cognitive function through movement	Dance as an expressive and healing practice – Used to reduce stress, enhance resilience, and support healing	Dance as a form of social participation and artistic expression – Emphasizes creativity, inclusion, and cultural engagement
Main goal	Psychological healing , emotional processing	Improve motor function, quality of life, and wellbeing for people with PD	Enhance patient care , emotional wellbeing, and holistic healing through the arts	Inclusion, creativity, social engagement
Structure	Guided by psychological frameworks	Uses structured movement exercises based on dance techniques (e.g., ballet, modern, tango)	Can include structured or unstructured dance activities	Open , flexible, and creative
Practitioners involved	Certified Dance therapists	Trained dance teachers and movement specialists , often in collaboration with medical experts	Artists-in-residence , healthcare professionals, art therapists, creative facilitators	Dance artists , facilitators, educators
Clinical focus	Targets trauma , anxiety, neurodiversity, etc.	Targets motor symptoms (rigidity, balance, coordination) and non-motor symptoms (depression, isolation)	Supports physical and emotional healing , pain management, and stress reduction in patients and caregivers	No structured clinical interventions
Key benefits	Emotional healing , trauma processing, body-mind integration	Improved mobility, coordination, balance, cognitive function, and mood	Reduces anxiety, enhances emotional resilience, supports communication, and improves overall patient experience	Social connection , self-expression, wellbeing
Scientific Backing	Grounded in psychotherapy and neuroscience	Supported by scientific studies on movement and neuroplasticity	Supported by growing research in healthcare and neuroscience on the effects of the arts on healing	Limited formal research
Common Settings	Hospitals , therapy centers, rehabilitation clinics	Parkinson's support groups, hospitals, dance studios, community health programs	Hospitals, hospices, rehabilitation centers, mental health facilities	Community centers, schools, public spaces
Main Target Group	Individuals with mental health conditions , trauma survivors, neurodivergent populations (e.g., autism, PTSD, depression, anxiety)	People living with Parkinson's disease (PD) and their caregivers	Patients in medical settings (e.g., cancer patients, people with chronic illnesses, individuals in palliative care), caregivers, and healthcare workers	General population , marginalised communities, older adults, youth, and individuals with disabilities
Prevention & Promotion or Treatment & Management?	Mainly Treatment & Management – Used as psychotherapy for mental health conditions, trauma recovery, and emotional processing	Primarily Treatment & Management, but also Prevention – Improves mobility and mental health, reducing Parkinson's symptoms and enhancing wellbeing	Both Prevention & Promotion and Treatment & Management – Supports patients' emotional wellbeing while also being used in clinical care for symptom management	Mainly Prevention & Promotion – Enhances wellbeing, social inclusion, and quality of life
Type of Scientific evidence	Level 1b–2: Mostly quasi-experimental studies and some RCTs (randomised controlled trials), along with systematic reviews supporting efficacy	Level 1a–1b: RCTs and meta-analyses show strong evidence for benefits on motor and cognitive function	Level 2–3: Quasi-experimental and case studies , some meta-analyses in arts & health research	Level 3–4: Mostly case studies, qualitative research , and expert opinions
Most Common Healthcare Professionals Involved	Psychologists , psychiatrists, occupational therapists, neurologists	Neurologists , physiotherapists, movement disorder specialists, rehabilitation therapists	Doctors , nurses, palliative care specialists, psychologists, therapists, rehabilitation specialists	Few healthcare professionals involved , but sometimes partnered with social workers and educators
Prevailing Assessment Models	Biopsychosocial and psychodynamic – Focus on mental health, trauma, and emotional processing	Biomechanical and biopsychosocial – Evaluates motor improvements (gait, balance, flexibility) along with wellbeing and quality of life	Biopsychosocial and holistic – Looks at emotional, social, and physical wellbeing	Sociocultural and participatory – Measures impact in terms of community engagement and social belonging

In this examination, we aim to clarify what we mean by “dance” in each context, distinguishing between categories that can sometimes appear blurred. In our final analysis, as summarised in the following table, we considered several transversal variables, including the main goals of the movement, the professionals involved, the setting, the clinical focus, the scientific backing, the target group, the type of scientific evidence and the prevailing assessment models.

Furthermore, we adopted the distinction between Prevention and Promotion and Treatment and Management, as offered by the WHO Scoping Review titled “*What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being?*” (Fancourt et al., 2019) along with the standards of evidence-based medical practice (Sackett et al., 2000) to better understand the differences between the four domains.

What emerges clearly from this comparison is that the artistic aspect of dance within the healthcare context is underreported and undervalued. Although several studies are beginning to demonstrate the significant impact of the aesthetic dimension of artistic interventions (Yoeli et al., 2020; Fontanesi et al., 2021; Houston, 2019; Chappell et al., 2021), measuring art without compromising its essence remains a challenge (Putland, 2008).

Moreover, the dance styles included in the therapeutic-clinical frameworks are based on the technical repetition of codified movements. Integrating improvisation and creativity into Dance and Health protocols presents another challenge yet to be explored.

In connection with these issues, at the end of this chapter, we will focus on different measuring traditions and what “evidence” signifies in each context. Art practices, particularly dance-based interventions, present substantial obstacles regarding measurement and evidence collection, as this process risks undermining the integrity of the intervention. Despite these challenges, the domains of research and practice in arts and health are expanding. What are the concerns related to evaluation? Furthermore, why is scientific measurement crucial in determining what is valuable?

The general prioritisation of randomised control trials (RCTs) as the “gold standard” of evidence (Timmermans & Berg, 2003) has often led to the exclusion of arts in health within National Medical Systems. This has resulted in professional artists and art therapists being viewed as “lone workers” with limited access to the resources necessary for conducting RCTs. Compared to other professions, RCTs are still relatively rare in arts in health, community health, and arts therapies. Although the publication of rigorous qualitative research is on the rise, building a progressive body of knowledge that can provide a basis for future ‘evidence-based’ practice in health care and public health remains challenging (Clift, 2012).

What level of effort is needed to align artistic interventions with the medical standards of the scientific community? How legitimate is this effort?

If artists become integrated into the ethos, culture, and governance of the health sector, they may risk losing their creative integrity, effectiveness, and identity in the

requirement of being aligned with the mechanism of evidence-based practice (Reason, 2017). By changing their goals and values to fit those of the health organisations they collaborate with, dance initiatives focused on health may lose their outsider perspective, which often drives radicalism, activism, and the ability of artistic practice to challenge the existing frameworks of health services (Raw et al., 2012). At the same time, robust evidence becomes central to any effort to translate promising artistic projects into sustained work programmes through commissioning by the public sector (Clift, 2012).

With this awareness, the following section will present four key examples of integrating Dance and Health to enhance the comprehension of Dance Well practice’s innovative contributions.

1.1 Dance as Therapy

Even though throughout history, people have utilised dance as a form of healing, just from the 1940s, Dance Therapy started to be acknowledged as a formal professional field in the USA, where it began to incorporate dance as a therapeutic tool within healthcare environments (Goodill, 2016). This movement, linked to humanism, was embraced by symbolic figures such as Marian Chace and Liljan Espenak, who began working with disabled and mentally ill individuals. In particular, the establishment of dance as a therapy and profession occurred in the 1960s, starting with the American Dance Therapy Association founded by Marian Chace.

This activism was essential for the institutionalisation of the dance therapy field, which has grown globally. Dance therapists operate in most nations under the official designation of “Dance Movement Therapy” (DMT), even though worldwide, there is no real consensus regarding a universal name for the profession. Labels such as dance therapy, dance/movement therapy, and dance movement psychotherapy (DMP) are also spread.

Thus, Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) within the creative arts therapies disciplines is contemporarily recognised as a psychotherapeutic discipline that uses movement and dance to promote psychological, emotional, and physical wellbeing. As reported by the EADMT - European Association Dance Movement Therapy:

‘DMT consists in the therapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical, spiritual, and social integration of the individual. Dance, as body movement, creative expression and communication, is the core component of Dance Movement Therapy. Based on the fact that the mind, the body, the emotional state and relationships are interrelated, body movement simultaneously provides the means of assessment and the mode of intervention for dance movement therapy’
EADMT Ethical Code 2010

DMT considers dance as a non-verbal tool to express and process emotions, trauma, and psychological change, and nowadays, it is mainly used in clinical settings (hospitals, mental health centres, special education, and rehabilitation) to support individuals dealing with psychological, neurological, or physical disorders.

Since its inception, Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) has developed its distinct professional path, blending innovative theoretical frameworks with evidence-based therapeutic methods and movement assessment techniques. Recent scientific research (De Tord & Bräuninger 2015; Bräuninger, 2012; Ho et al., 2020; Esmail et al., 2020) enhances the theoretical foundation of DMT, validating the dance-movement therapeutic relationship that engages diverse,

creative processes to promote transformation and personal development.

DMT can be experienced in a group setting or through individual therapy sessions, where the therapist invites the client(s) to explore the space through simple movement exercises and playful interaction. The therapist works with the client’s embodied experiences and memories in a playful, person-centred, safe, and respectful way.

In Europe, despite the establishment of professional organisations and training programs, the recognition of these professionals remains a work in progress as the system for registering therapists with government bodies varies depending on the country.

In response to the existing heterogeneity in training, the European Association of Dance Movement Therapy (EADMT) has initiated a regulatory framework to establish the essential standards for education and training required to become a dance movement therapist in the EU. This progress can be traced back to the EADMT’s adoption of a specific European training standard at the master’s level in October 2017, which set minimum criteria for national accreditation and recognition of dance movement therapy training programs. As a result of this effort, only certified dance movement therapists who have received specialised training in psychotherapy and movement analysis are permitted to conduct DMT sessions.

This initiative aims to enhance the professionalism of DMT across various countries, fostering a connection among diverse educational backgrounds while celebrating the richness and heterogeneity of all European member states. Currently, DMT training is offered in private and university settings across the EU, including nations such as Austria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

The institutionalisation of the DMT professional field was needed to differentiate the therapy’s unique contributions from those of community arts and other arts and health initiatives (Shafr et al., 2020).

Institutionalisation was made possible even by producing recognised evidence-based research in DMT.

In this effort, it was essential to translate dance and artistic movement into something comprehensible by



an evidence-based biomedical approach. As previously mentioned, this approach primarily relies on experimental scientific methods, such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs), to evaluate the validity of the evidence even though they cannot capture the experiential, aesthetic, and artistic dimensions of dance practice.

In this sense, biomedical models have been adopted to validate the effectiveness of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) within the contemporary scientific framework. In this context, dance was recognised as a form of treatment and rehabilitation, primarily aimed at addressing specific illnesses and implemented in medical settings. Although the institutionalisation of the Dance Therapy movement was initiated historically by professional dancers and choreographers, today, Art Therapists –whether specialising in dance, visual arts, drama, or music therapy—are considered firstly mental health experts and not more artists. In this sense, during the institutionalisation process, the creative aspect of the profession was sacrificed for the sake of codification, measurability, and scientific recognition. Implementing evidence-based research was crucial for the survival and thriving of the clinical field of DMT (Bräuninger, 2012; Dunphy et al., 2021) in the worldwide healthcare systems. In particular, evidence-based quantitative research on the effectiveness of DMT has led to its recognition as a specialised profession in psychotherapy, influencing both professional and public perceptions of its scientific validity.

1.1.1. Overview of Dance and Movement Therapy in Partners' Countries

As mentioned, Dance and Movement Therapy (DMT) is recognised and integrated into healthcare systems to varying degrees across different European countries.

France

In France, Dance and Movement Therapy is not yet fully recognised as a standalone profession in the healthcare system. However, professionals and associations are making efforts to achieve formal recognition and integration.

While some practitioners may offer DMT in private settings or through specific programs, it is not widely available as a standard public health service. The reference association is the Société Française de Danse Thérapie, created in 1984 in the wake of the Higher Education

Program in Dance at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, on the initiative of its manager, Mr. Jean-Claude Serre and the dance therapists participating in its teaching. Its objective is to develop and promote dance therapy practice in France by encouraging exchanges based on different experiences and activities (training, conferences, discussion groups, and information). It is a member of the European Dance Therapy Association (EADMT).

Italy

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is officially recognised as a profession in Italy, and training programs adhere to national laws and standards. Organisations such as Art Therapy Italiana offer professional training that prepares therapists to work in various settings. Graduates can earn a diploma after completing a three-year program with 1200 hours of training. However, DMT has not yet been integrated into the Italian public health services.

The Italian Professional Association of Dance Movement Therapy (APID®) was established in 1997. To become a member of APID®, individuals must attend a recognised training school. As of 2021, APID® has 260 and 280 members and nine accredited educational institutions of DMT across Italy.

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has made significant strides in Dance Movement Therapy. The Czech Association of Dance Movement Therapy (TANTER) was established in 2002 under the patronage of ADTA (American Dance Therapy Association) and has been instrumental in supporting and connecting therapists. The association has about 50 members, and the profession is gaining recognition, with therapists working in various settings. The TANTER association is one of the founding members of EADMT, and its membership dates back to 2010. The mission of TANTER is to create and maintain an appropriate level of standards of professional competence for dance therapists.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, the National Ministry of Health officially recognised Dance Movement Therapy as a legal profession in 2020, thanks to the advocacy activity of The Lithuanian Dance Movement Therapy Association (LtDMTA), established in 2011 and which continues to develop the profession and aims to implement DMT services in

various state and non-state institutions. Since 2020, LtDMTA has also been a member of EADMT. Lietuvos šokio-judesio terapijos asociacija is continuing to develop Dance Movement Therapy as a profession, science, service and discipline to unite and coordinate the activities of its members, to represent and defend their interests.

Germany

Germany has a well-established framework for Dance and Movement Therapy. The profession is recognised, and therapists often work in clinical settings, including hospitals and rehabilitation centres. The German Dance Therapy Association, named “Berufsverband der TanztherapeutInnen Deutschlands e.V.” (BTD), was founded in 1995 in Frankfurt am Main and has played a significant role in promoting and regulating the profession. It is also one of the founding members of the European Association of Dance Movement Therapy (EADMT), established in 2007 under German law and headquartered in Munich, Germany. The Association aims to protect, represent, and promote the interests of dance therapists by developing and establishing dance therapy as a method of psychotherapy that preserves and enhances health.

1.2 Dance in Healthcare

The Arts in Healthcare movement is an interdisciplinary field incorporating artistic practices into healthcare settings to enhance healing, wellbeing, and patient care. Dance plays a crucial role in this movement, which fosters the organisation of dance residencies and activities within hospitals, hospices, and rehabilitation centres (Karkou et al., 2022).

The Dance in Healthcare movement shares therapeutic principles with DMT and Dance for PD® but applies a broader artistic approach in medical settings. It recognises the healing power of creative expression, making healthcare environments more humane, supportive, and engaging.

More generally, Arts in Healthcare provides various arts experiences by visiting artists and artists in residence, arts programming developed in partnership with community arts agencies, art collections, and art exhibits in healthcare settings.

Early forms of involvement of the arts in the healthcare system have been documented as early as the 1970s in

the USA, shortly after dance/movement therapy was standardised and established through the founding of the American Dance Therapy Association in 1966 (Brandman, 2007).

As highlighted by the Global Alliance for Arts and Health, the scope of arts in healthcare is extensive, encompassing five primary areas: creating healing physical environments in healthcare facilities, promoting community wellbeing through arts initiatives, supporting professional and family caregivers via artistic engagement, educating healthcare practitioners through the arts, and enhancing patient care through participatory arts programs.

As indicated on the University of Florida - Center for Arts in Medicine website, this type of collaboration must be distinguished by art therapy professionals, who play distinct and specialised roles in healthcare settings and undergo a formal professionalisation process (Sonke, 2015). The involvement of artists in healthcare entails the participation of professional artists from various artistic disciplines such as visual arts, music, dance, theatre, or writing to facilitate the creative process within their specific art forms in healthcare settings to create art rather than function in a clinical capacity or conducting mental health assessments.

The success of arts programs in hospitals largely relies on support from senior management, even though many staff members have a limited understanding of the arts' role in healthcare settings. This common issue likely arises from challenges in interdisciplinary dialogue due to a lack of shared language between the healthcare and arts sectors. Furthermore, artists often lack clear guidelines for engaging in this transcontextual field and generally have limited experience in hospital environments (Jensen, 2017; Daykin, 2019).

1.3 Community Dance

When discussing community dance concerning health and wellbeing, it generally refers to a broad concept that involves a participatory form of dance aimed at diverse community members. In particular, there is growing international acceptance that participation in the creative arts can enhance overall wellbeing, foster social connections, and encourage self-expression without adhering to a structured therapeutic framework (Clift, 2012; Putland, 2008).

In fact, while community dance offers significant therapeutic benefits, it differs from formal therapies like Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), prioritising collective engagement, creativity, and accessibility over formal treatment or professional performances.

The general philosophy emphasises participation over performance, focusing on creativity, collaboration, and personal expression.

Community dance activities that emphasise wellbeing are typically offered in educational, recreational, or artistic environments and are designed to address people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

This approach emphasises the significance of social determinants of health, recognising dance as an essential tool for enhancing collective and individual wellbeing while fostering mental health through cultural participation (Putland, 2008). In this direction, community dance activities adopt a biopsychosocial approach, developed

by George Engel in 1977, emphasising the significance of psychological and social factors in determining overall wellbeing (Fancourt, 2017).

Because of these, people leading the activities are not necessarily trained psychotherapists but are commonly dance teachers, movement educators, or wellness professionals.

At the same time, artists are increasingly adopting a more community-oriented approach in their work. They become socially engaged through their creative processes and collaborate with people from local and underserved communities. This involves them implementing inclusive and accessible practices, which significantly influence their professional and artistic development (EDN, 2024).

This social turn in the performing arts (Bishop, 2005; Belfiore, 2006) has also been extensively promoted by a growing awareness of the holistic approach to health, creating new job opportunities for artists in various fields.



This has encouraged professional dancers to collaborate with non-professional community members to develop their artistic work. However, sometimes, these collaborations occurred under superficial and instrumental conditions, leaving no space for the artist's poetics (Yoeli et al., 2020).

Because of this, the sometimes mandatory involvement of communities in artistic projects for the sake of wellbeing has sparked criticism from the cultural sector. They argue that in these community-based collaborations, the artistic value of the process is frequently overlooked, and the professionalism of artists is undervalued (Daykin, 2019). This is evident in particular in the 2008 WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health report, which does not include creative arts or broader cultural issues and overlooks the practices and participatory characteristics that distinguish arts and cultural activities from other forms of social engagement (Putland, 2008; Belfiore, 2006).

Instead, it is argued how the principle of “art for art’s sake” should be central, even when operating in non-artistic contexts, to uphold the artist’s creative freedom and distinguish artistic activities from mainstream healthcare or therapeutic practices (Macnaughton et al., 2005; Raw & Mantecón, 2013). This perspective asserts that the artistic aspect should be an essential or equally significant goal alongside healing or health improvement.

In fact, professional dancers working with communities adopting this principle identify themselves foremost as artists and wish to be recognised as distinct from healthcare professionals, taking pride in the absence of explicit clinical goals in their artistic practice (Stickley et al., 2018). They want to emphasise the process of doing and making, rather than being outcomes-based, and place themselves in a relationship with participants as collaborators and co-creators who already have creativity and ideas to offer rather than fitting into a hierarchical client-patient dynamic. This horizontal approach valorises what the person brings to a process, embracing the lack of standardisation and clinical goals, even if they are generally criticised for being difficult to measure.

Ideological resistance to individualised biomedical models of health and evidence-based practice is central to this perspective (Daykin, 2019), which promotes the intrinsic value of community practices and their effectiveness unbundled from the measurement mechanisms.

1.3.1 Prescribing Dance with Social Prescribing

As described in the Toolkit published in 2022 by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific, Social Prescribing connects patients to a range of non-clinical services in the community to improve their health and wellbeing. This mechanism was designed to cost-effectively enhance community health and wellbeing by decreasing demand in the health sector and utilising the existing non-clinical services.

More precisely, the WHO toolkit presents the steps required to introduce a social prescribing scheme in a local context by involving community healthcare organisations, long-term care facilities, and the community and volunteer sectors. It is based on the evidence that tackling social determinants of health, including factors like socioeconomic status, social inclusion, housing, and education, is crucial for enhancing the population’s health outcomes.

Nowadays, social prescribing is gaining traction across Europe, with various countries exploring and implementing models tailored to their specific healthcare contexts and community needs. The United Kingdom is a pioneer in this field, integrating social prescribing into its National Health Service (NHS) as part of the NHS Long-Term Plan. Other European countries, such as Ireland, Portugal, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland and Spain, have also adopted social prescribing initiatives (Morse et al., 2022).

In these countries, primary healthcare providers can refer patients to activities and communitarian services that align with their interests. These providers are identified as “like workers”, the professionals responsible for developing personalised wellness plans and guiding patients to suitable community-based services offered by the community or voluntary sectors. The key element of this service delivery is the focus on person-centredness, integration, and the ability to track the referred experience with ongoing follow-up.

The workforce that assesses individual needs and facilitates connections to non-clinical support varies by country. In many cases, existing healthcare staff—often from primary care—have been repurposed to implement social prescriptions. Social workers, allied health professionals, nurses, and volunteers take on these responsibilities in other

instances. Currently, there is no professional registration for link workers and social prescribing professionals; however, competency frameworks and training curricula are being developed in England, Wales, and the Netherlands (Morse et al., 2022).

Link workers can also prescribe artistic activities within this network of individual and group activity options. Consequently, by engaging with healthcare trusts and other local health and social care organisations, art practices such as community dance and dance programs for people with Parkinson's are possible to be referred to patients as potential complementary activities within their healthcare plans (South et al., 2008).

Although social prescribing is presented as a way to promote a more holistic approach to health care, strengthen community-based integrated care, and help demedicalise health service provision, this approach has several downsides when considering its impact on the cultural sector.

Critiques raise concerns about funding opportunities and the potential for overburdening an already under-resourced and under-financed sector (Morse et al., 2022; Fortier & Coulter, 2021).

Moreover, researchers have shown that link workers' personal involvement in various activities influences their referral patterns. This can limit patients' access to cultural activities, as link workers who are not engaged in these experiences are less likely to refer individuals to the cultural sector (Amadea Turk et al., 2024; Tierney et al., 2020; Tierney et al., 2022a; Tierney et al., 2022b; Ebrahimoghli et al., 2023).

Generally, the success of social prescribing largely depends on the presence of a link worker who possesses a strong understanding of the community development principles, and the thriving local voluntary, community, and cultural sectors. However, preliminary research indicates a general lack of interaction between link workers and the cultural sector regarding how cultural activities could support social prescribing. Specifically, link workers often perceive cultural activities as elitist and fail to view them as accessible, appropriate, adequate, affordable, and available. This perception affects their willingness to refer individuals to cultural offerings as part of social prescribing (Tierney et al., 2022a; Tierney et al., 2022b).

Tensions also exist regarding labelling these activities, categorising them more like sports and social activities than artistic endeavours. Moreover, the term "intervention" is problematic because it undermines artistic practices' fundamental, process-oriented nature, especially in Social Prescribing, where activities are typically prescribed with a formal beginning and end.

On the other hand, Social Prescribing seems to be becoming more popular as a way of moving the healthcare system toward a more holistic approach and is increasingly being reconceptualised as a resource for "personalised care" for people living with long-term medical conditions (NHS, 2019).

In conclusion, social prescribing can help patients connect with the right specialists and healthcare providers, ensuring they receive optimal care for their medical conditions. However, cultural activities, such as dance, are often not prioritised within these frameworks, leading to challenges in their funding opportunities and recognition as artistic practices.



1.4 Dance and Parkinson's: A Specific Scenario

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a progressive neurodegenerative condition that impacts motor skills, cognitive function, and emotional wellbeing, ultimately affecting overall quality of life (QOL) (Gros et al., 2024; Houston, 2019; Ventura et al., 2016; Westheimer et al., 2015). Recently, PD has been recognised as a systemic disease characterised by motor and non-motor symptoms. These symptoms arise from impaired nerve pathways in the basal ganglia due to a dopamine deficiency and the spread of pathological Lewy bodies.

But, while pharmacological and surgical interventions can partially alleviate motor symptoms of PD, addressing the cognitive and emotional challenges remains a complex issue with current treatments (Rocha et al., 2021; Fontanesi & DeSouza, 2021). This complex clinical picture has drawn significant attention from the artistic approach to health and wellbeing, participating in the devising of alternative interventions that can simultaneously address motor, cognitive, and emotional symptoms associated with PD, thereby improving daily functioning and quality of life (Gros et al., 2024; Volpe et al., 2013; Westheimer et al., 2015; Romenets, 2015).

The connections between artistry and the dopaminergic system make arts-based therapies particularly suitable for PD. In particular, arts-based interventions have been recognised to offer a holistic approach to managing contemporary various motor and non-motor symptoms of PD while also addressing self-esteem, fostering problem-solving, and enhancing overall wellbeing (Houston, 2024; Gros et al., 2024; Rocha et al., 2021; Fontanesi & DeSouza, 2021).

Dance, along with music, offers external auditory and visual cues to the brain, which are diminished when the basal ganglia are damaged (Batson et al. 2016). Most importantly, considering the gradual harm that Parkinson's inflicts on an individual's body, dancing can serve as an embodied practice for rebuilding a more affirmative connection with oneself joyfully and pleasantly.

Moreover, dance is associated with enhanced activation of movement-related areas, such as the frontoparietal

action observation network and the cortico-striatal pathways involved in posture and movements. In addition, group activities can foster a sense of belonging, self-value, and cognitive engagement, allowing persons living with PD to express themselves as creative individuals rather than patients.

The popularity of Dance for people living with Parkinson's is also backed by the clinical trials that are increasingly showing its multi-dimensional impact (Ventura et al., 2016).

First, experiments have shown that dance improves motor symptoms, particularly problems with balance and mobility, as well as overall physical fitness. Dance improves motor function by getting patients to stretch their muscles, perform steps, and maintain balance (de Natale et al., 2017; Westheimer et al., 2015; Hashimoto et al., 2015).

It is not a case if most research analyses the benefits of Dance for Parkinson's has concentrated on dance's effect on motor skills, such as walking, sitting to standing, turning, static and dynamic balance, and motor symptoms. These assessment areas operate under the assumption that dancing is primarily a physical activity; thus, exercise and potential mobility are expected to provide the most significant impact (Houston, 2011). Motor function is also easier to assess than other elements with standard verified clinical measures, such as the Timed Up and Go test and the Berg Balance Scale.

However, as already mentioned, dance may also improve cognitive functioning—including executive functioning, visuospatial cognition, working memory, action planning, and attention—because it requires connecting one movement to the next and executing complex motor plans.

On the side of emotional wellbeing and quality of life, some studies have shown that dance participants report improved moods after sharing the dance experience with others and feeling more accepted and understood. In fact, as a social activity performed with others, dance also works on emotions by encouraging the dancers to express their feelings, increasing motivation, and providing enjoyment through greater ease of movement.

These non-motor symptoms are significant to record and measure because cognitive impairment and mental symptoms such as depression and apathy have a considerable effect on daily life (Westheimer et al., 2015).

In this direction, dance works on cognitive function by requiring patients to plan and execute imagined movements, follow music and signals, remember repeated actions, and be aware of their bodies (Gros et al., 2024; Houston, 2019; Ventura et al., 2016; Westheimer et al., 2015).

The type of movements also depends on the dance style implied in the interventions. Experiments were conducted to analyse the benefits of tango, Irish dance, and Dance for PD® method, among others (Volpe et al., 2013; Westheimer et al., 2015; Romenets, 2015).

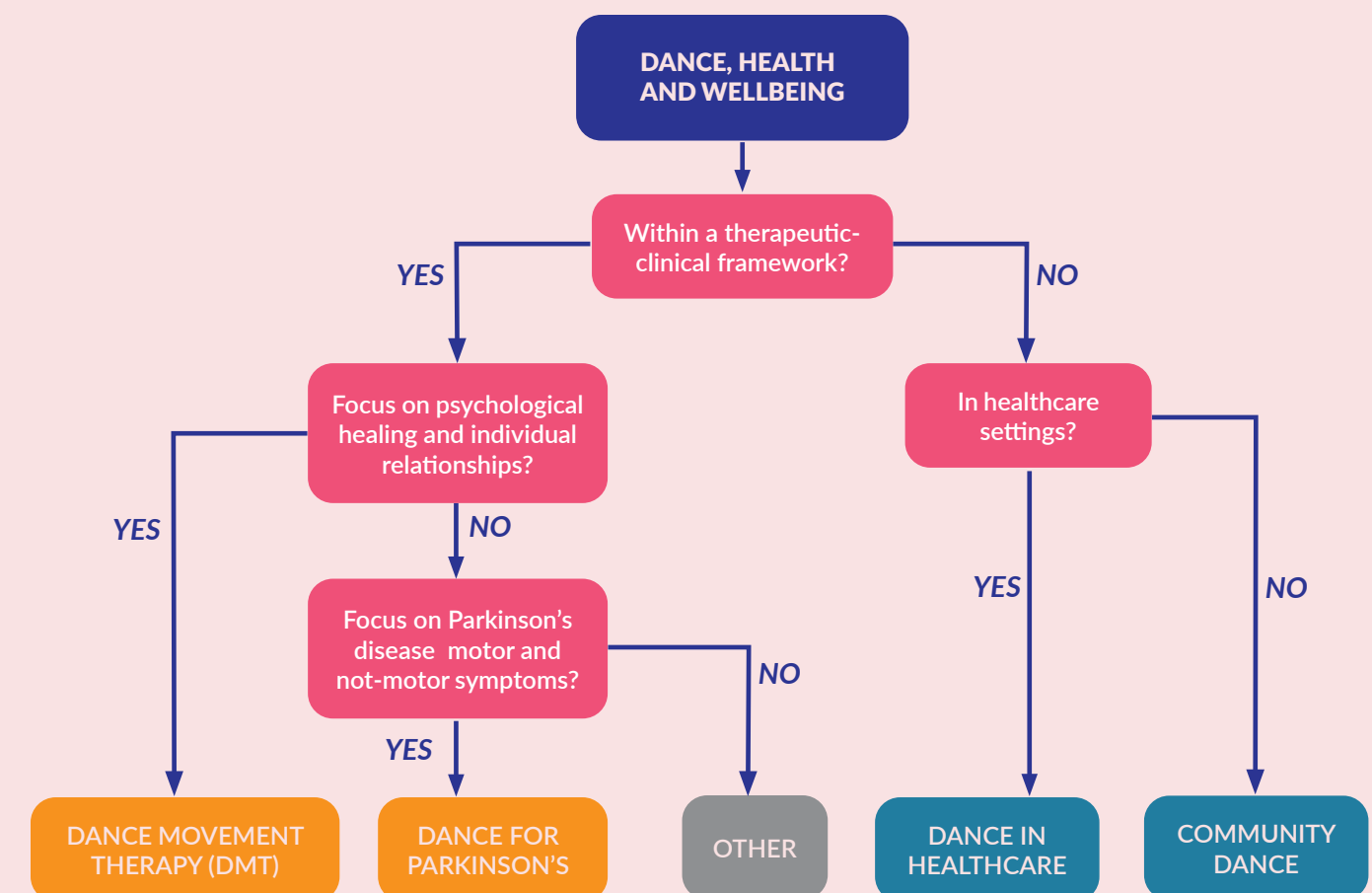
In particular, the Dance for PD® program founded by the Mark Morris Dance Group in Brooklyn, New York, 20 years ago has been fundamental in promoting the formal recognition of the benefits produced by dance for individuals living with Parkinson's, promoting diverse evidence-based experiments. Thanks to this effort, Dance for PD® is formally considered today a non-pharmacological complementary therapeutic intervention for people living with Parkinson's (Lihala et al., 2021; Moț & Almăjan-Guță, 2022; Westheimer et al., 2015).

However, studies conducted so far have had relatively small sample sizes, and only a few randomised controlled trials are available. Additionally, few studies have simultaneously examined the effects of dance on motor symptoms, cognitive function, and emotional wellbeing in a single research effort (Houston, 2011).

In summary, dance has proven to be a valuable therapeutic approach for individuals with Parkinson's disease (PD). Although it is not a traditional form of therapy, dance activities provide meaningful non-pharmaceutical interventions that prioritise a person-centred philosophy (Houston, 2024). Although these initiatives are increasingly attempting to achieve more clinical validation and recognition through trials and evidence-based experiments, they continue to foster creativity, imagination, and social interactions for their inherent value.

1.5 Wellbeing as a Gateway of Hope...

The evolution of DMT highlights a fundamental tension in contemporary healthcare systems: the apparent necessity to translate creative, embodied, and non-verbal therapeutic practices into the language of evidence-based medicine



to ensure their legitimacy. This process reflects a broader paradox within healthcare—while the very definition of health, as articulated by the World Health Organization (WHO), is ostensibly welcoming of non-formal, non-conventionally scientific approaches, the systems tasked with delivering health services often operate within rigid frameworks that prioritise quantifiable, clinical validation. The challenge is conceptual acceptance and structural and institutional readiness to embrace diverse wellbeing modalities.

The WHO defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing,” a formulation that explicitly moves beyond the biomedical model’s focus on disease and pathology. This definition inherently creates space for interventions that do not fit precisely into conventional scientific paradigms but contribute to individual and collective wellbeing. The biopsychosocial model, which emerged as an early critique of biomedical reductionism, underscores the necessity of this broader perspective by incorporating psychological and social determinants into the understanding of health (Engel, 1977). The recognition of wellbeing as an integrative, multidimensional concept

allows for practices such as dance therapy, community arts, and other embodied interventions to be considered legitimate pathways to health (Huber et al., 2011).

Critical reflections on biomedical reductionism have highlighted its tendency to fragment the human experience into isolated physiological components, often neglecting health's broader socio-cultural and psychological dimensions. The biomedical model, which has dominated Western medicine since the 19th century, is founded on Cartesian dualism, which separates the mind from the body and treats disease as a mechanical failure of biological processes (Rose, 2007). The scientific perspective has significantly contributed to the progress of medical science; however, it has progressively marginalised the complexities of human wellbeing. This is particularly apparent in cases where social, environmental, and psychological factors significantly influence health outcomes (Illich, 1975).

One of the most profound limitations of biomedical reductionism is its exclusion of social determinants of health, which have been increasingly recognised as crucial in shaping health disparities and individual wellbeing (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006). Socioeconomic status, education, employment conditions, and social support networks significantly influence health outcomes, but despite this, these factors are often treated as externalities rather than fundamental components of medical practice. The failure to integrate these broader determinants has led to what some scholars describe as a crisis of medicalisation, in which complex social and psychological issues are reframed as individual medical problems, often addressed through pharmacological or surgical interventions rather than structural changes (Conrad, 2007).

Also, the psychological and emotional dimensions of health tend to be overlooked in the biomedical discourse. The reductionist approach tends to privilege measurable physiological changes over subjective wellbeing experiences despite growing evidence that psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and social connectedness play fundamental roles in health outcomes (Antonovsky, 1987). The theory of salutogenesis has been developed as a counterpoint to the pathogenic focus of conventional medicine to direct attention to the importance of coping mechanisms and a sense of coherence in maintaining health. This alternative framework shifts attention from disease and pathology to factors that promote wellbeing and resilience. Central to this theory is the idea of “coherence”, which is further composed of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Comprehensibility refers to the perception of life as structured and predictable, manageability reflects the belief in having resources to cope with challenges, and meaningfulness involves viewing life's demands as worthy of engagement. Research has consistently demonstrated the relevance of salutogenesis in various contexts. A strong sense of coherence has been linked to better health outcomes, including reduced stress, improved mental health, and enhanced quality of life (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006). The salutogenic model has also been applied in public health, which informs interventions to foster resilience and wellbeing at individual and community levels (Mittelmark et al., 2017).

Despite this conceptual openness, the integration of such approaches into formal healthcare structures remains uneven. The history of DMT makes clearly visible how



a field rooted in artistic and embodied expression was progressively aligned with scientific paradigms to gain professional recognition. The process of institutionalisation required a translation of dance into measurable outcomes, often at the cost of its original creative and experiential essence. Such a way to become institutionalised reflects a broader trend in healthcare, where practices that originate outside of clinical medicine must be reformulated within evidence-based frameworks to be acknowledged as legitimate (Wengrower & Chaiklin, 2008; Bräuninger, 2012). Despite their limitations in capturing movement-based interventions' aesthetic and subjective dimensions, the reliance on randomised controlled trials to validate DMT illustrates the constraints imposed by dominant scientific methodologies (Dunphy et al., 2019).

Yet, if health is understood as a multidimensional state of wellbeing, then how it is achieved must also be allowed to reflect this plurality. The growing emphasis on person-centred care reinforces this argument, recognising that wellbeing is deeply contextual and cannot be reduced to standardised clinical measures alone (Mezzich et al., 2010). Artistic, cultural, and community-based interventions are particularly relevant in this regard, as they offer flexible, adaptive, and socially embedded pathways to health. Research on psychological wellbeing, for example, highlights dimensions such as autonomy, environmental mastery, and life purpose—factors often nurtured through creative engagement and social participation rather than strictly medical interventions (Ryff, 1989). However, even when they proclaim the importance of these other components of wellbeing, healthcare organisations remain constrained by structures that privilege clinical expertise and biomedical outcomes, limiting their ability to incorporate such interventions effectively.

Integrating practices such as DMT and other artistic interventions demands healthcare institutions to develop frameworks beyond clinical validation and to allow for more diverse forms of knowledge production. The process of institutionalising DMT underscores this need, as the field has had to align itself with dominant scientific paradigms to ensure its survival. Being truly committed to a more inclusive healthcare model would require reevaluating what constitutes valid knowledge in health practice and acknowledging that experiential, qualitative, and community-based forms of evidence

are equally relevant to understanding and fostering wellbeing (Huber et al., 2011). This shift would also require rediscovering professional boundaries within healthcare, moving beyond rigid distinctions between medical and non-medical expertise. The history of DMT illustrates how creative professionals were needed to reframe their work within psychotherapeutic and clinical discourse to gain institutional legitimacy. A more expansive view of health would allow for a greater diversity of professional roles within healthcare settings, recognising that wellbeing is not solely the domain of medical practitioners but is also shaped by artists, community facilitators, and cultural practitioners who contribute to holistic health systems (Kirmayer, 2012).



1.6Thwarted by Evidence-Based Medicinal Management

The institutionalisation of DMT and other artistic interventions within healthcare highlights a profound paradox at the heart of contemporary health systems. While the conceptual openness of the WHO's definition of health invites to accommodate diverse, non-conventional approaches, the structures governing healthcare delivery have increasingly been shaped by principles that constrain this very possibility. The rise of New Public Management (NPM), emphasising efficiency, standardisation, and financial accountability, has embedded managerial logics that prioritise measurable outcomes and economic rationality over more holistic and context-sensitive understandings of health. At the same time, the diffusion of evidence-based medicine has provided a seemingly neutral, scientific framework for evaluating interventions, reinforcing a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges quantifiable, protocol-driven, and statistically validated practices while marginalising those that do not conform to these standards.

Despite the explicit inclusivity of the WHO's definition—one that acknowledges the multidimensional nature of health and wellbeing—healthcare institutions have been restructured around governance models that, in practice, limit their capacity to embrace non-clinical and experiential forms of care. The institutional mechanisms that claim to ensure rational decision-making and evidence-based practice have led to the exclusion or marginalisation of artistic, cultural, and community-based interventions, not necessarily because they lack efficacy but because they do not fit within the prevailing metrics of clinical validation and financial accountability. The convergence of NPM and EBM has thus produced a system that is both formally open to diverse health interventions and structurally resistant to their meaningful integration.

New Public Management (NPM) emerged in the late 20th century as part of broader neoliberal economic reforms aimed at reshaping public administration by introducing private sector principles. Developed in response to perceived inefficiencies in bureaucratic governance, NPM sought to replace traditional, hierarchical models of public service provision with market-oriented mechanisms that emphasised competition, cost-effectiveness, and

performance-based accountability (Hood, 1991; Ferlie et al., 1996). Influenced by economic rationalism and managerialism, NPM framed public services as enterprises requiring efficiency-driven management techniques, where success was determined by measurable outputs, financial discipline, and consumer-driven service models rather than professional discretion or public value (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

This shift in healthcare was particularly important, as NPM reforms introduced performance targets, output-based funding, and competitive contracting, all of which transformed how health services were organised and evaluated (Miller & Power, 2013). Hospitals and healthcare providers were increasingly expected to function as quasi-market entities, competing for resources based on efficiency metrics rather than broader equity considerations or community wellbeing (Bevan & Hood, 2006). These managerial imperatives promoted standardisation, benchmarking, and audit cultures, reinforcing that health systems should be governed by the same principles of productivity, performance management, and financial oversight that structured corporate enterprises (Power, 1997).

The rise of Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) during this period provided an epistemic framework that aligned seamlessly with NPM's emphasis on quantification, standardisation, and economic efficiency. EBM, initially conceived as a method for improving clinical decision-making through rigorous scientific validation, became institutionalised as the dominant paradigm for assessing medical interventions (Timmermans & Berg, 2003). This shift reinforced a hierarchy of knowledge in which randomised controlled trials (RCTs), meta-analyses, and cost-effectiveness studies were privileged as the primary basis for healthcare decision-making, while qualitative, experiential, and patient-centred approaches were devalued or excluded (Black, 2001; Greenhalgh et al., 2014).

This convergence of NPM and EBM was based on a deeper ideological alignment between managerial logic and scientific rationality. NPM postulated the centrality of mechanisms to evaluate performance, justify resource allocation, and optimise service delivery. At the same time, EBM provided a means to measure and standardise healthcare practices in ways that could be subjected

to external scrutiny, audit, and financial accountability (Timmermans & Berg, 2010). The emphasis on efficiency and accountability in public sector reform reinforced the dominance of EBM, as healthcare administrators increasingly relied on cost-benefit analyses, clinical guidelines, and evidence-based protocols to legitimise funding decisions, regulate professional autonomy, and ensure compliance with performance targets (Dent, 2005; Numerato et al., 2012).

As a result, healthcare governance became increasingly characterised by a technocratic and economic orientation, where scientific evidence and financial efficiency became mutually reinforcing pillars of decision-making. The clinical authority of practitioners was gradually subordinated to protocolised medicine and managerial oversight, as adherence to best practice guidelines and standardised care pathways became key performance indicators within audit and reimbursement systems (Evetts, 2011). This shift led to the institutionalisation of top-down regulatory frameworks, which promoted compliance with efficiency-driven targets but often constrained the discretionary space required for context-sensitive, patient-centred, and holistic approaches to care (Freidson, 2001; Greenhalgh & Wieringa, 2011).

By embedding market rationalities within healthcare systems, the combination of NPM and EBM fundamentally altered how health systems operate, prioritising standardisation over complexity, measurable performance over professional judgment and financial over relational aspects of care. While these reforms were justified to improve quality, reduce inefficiencies, and make healthcare more accountable, they also narrowed the epistemic and institutional space available for non-conventional, community-based, and culturally embedded approaches to health and wellbeing.

A key feature of this transformation has indeed been the translation of medical decision-making into calculable, risk-based, and performance-oriented metrics. Healthcare providers are increasingly required to align their practices with protocolised guidelines, cost-benefit analyses, and pay-for-performance schemes, all of which prioritise treatments and interventions that can be demonstrated to yield statistically significant, replicable outcomes (Dent, 2005; Miller & Power, 2013). This has led to consolidating standardised clinical pathways to ensure predictability,

efficiency, and resource optimisation in patient care. However, these imperatives often create friction with professional judgement and patient-centred approaches, as clinicians are forced to follow pre-established protocols rather than adapting treatments to the nuanced needs of individuals (Numerato et al., 2012).

The reliance on EBM as an instrument of healthcare governance has also led to the institutionalisation of accountability regimes, in which compliance with best practice guidelines is enforced through audits, benchmarking exercises, and performance evaluations (Strathern, 2000). Hospitals, consultants, and individual practitioners are increasingly assessed based on patient outcomes and compliance with standardised protocols, reinforcing a bureaucratic culture of documentation and external oversight (Evetts, 2011). While presented to ensure quality and transparency, this audit culture has contributed to the intensification of bureaucratic labour, shifting attention away from relational aspects of care and towards administrative compliance with performance targets (Power, 1997).

Objectification, standardisation, and commodification have shaped care organisation and delivery (Timmermans & Almeling, 2009). These tendencies have been critiqued for their role in making careless personnel, increasing managerial rationality and prioritising efficiency over holistic wellbeing. However, they have also been presented as necessary for expanding and institutionalising medical knowledge, enabling the efficient replication of medical interventions (Timmermans & Berg, 2003).

Objectification, in particular, refers to the fragmentation of healthcare practice into measurable, discrete units—an approach aligned with both the EBM's emphasis on clinical trials and the NPM's focus on performance metrics. Through the lens of medical governance, objectification transforms patients into data points, risk profiles, and standardised treatment pathways, allowing for their integration into audit systems and cost-benefit analyses (Timmermans & Almeling, 2009). While this abstraction facilitates evidence-based decision-making and the consequence of “rational” resource allocation, it also generates tensions by reducing illness's individual and experiential dimensions to statistical probabilities.

At the same time, standardisation has been central in aligning clinical practice with managerial control, a development reinforced by both EBM and NPM. Standardised clinical guidelines, care pathways, and performance indicators ensure comparability, accountability, and administrative control. Still, they also constrain professional autonomy and marginalise alternative epistemologies of care, particularly those rooted in qualitative, patient-centred, or community-based interventions (Lambert, 2006). The rise of evidence-based thinking has led to the marginalisation of individual judgment, patient narratives, and contextual knowledge, all considered insufficiently “scientific” compared to quantitative trials. This logic of exclusion is epistemic and political, legitimising healthcare governance through technocratic and depersonalised means.

Perhaps the most significant transformation is the one of healthcare in a commodity aligned again with NPM’s focus on market mechanisms, competition, and cost efficiency. Commodification within healthcare extends beyond the privatisation of services; it includes the monetisation of medical knowledge, the transformation of professional expertise into managerial functions, and the increasing role of financial incentives in clinical decision-making.

EBM has become a key mechanism for governing healthcare through a managerial rationality that prioritises economic efficiency over holistic care at the intersection of these three processes. Rather than merely improving patient outcomes, the institutionalisation of EBM has helped legitimise new forms of accountability, surveillance, and financial discipline within clinical practice. In doing so, it has also facilitated the expansion of bureaucratic control, the erosion of professional discretion, and the marginalisation of alternative, non-clinical understandings of health (Ferlie & McGivern, 2013).

Healthcare has thus been converted into a performance-driven enterprise in which the legitimacy of both clinical and managerial decisions relies on their accordance with economic rationality and statistical objectivity. Medical interventions that cannot be easily quantified - whether due to their complexity, subjectivity, or reliance on social and relational dynamics - tend to be systematically marginalised within policy and funding structures (Greenhalgh et al., 2014). The emphasis on measurable indicators as the main method to assess healthcare quality and effectiveness

has resulted in a decline of alternative approaches that are sensitive to context and resist standardisation. This has reinforced a model of healthcare governance that prioritises efficiency over care, focuses on measurability rather than complexity, and values cost-effectiveness over professional judgment.



2.

Out of the “Dance, Health and Wellbeing” Box: Dance Well

After analysing the current situation regarding the integration and institutionalisation of dance in the health and wellbeing sector, as well as the contemporary significance of Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) in healthcare research and management, it is clear that the Dance Well practice is notably different from the previously discussed situation.

Dance Well functions as an artistic community practice with therapeutic benefits specifically designed for individuals living with Parkinson’s disease. This endeavour aspires to amalgamate diverse characteristics of community dance and specialised dance interventions for Parkinson’s without conforming to the constraints of biomedical health models and evidence-based paradigms.

Through this effort, Dance Well embodies the transformative power of artistic expression while actively engaging in a dialogue with the most progressive and innovative scientific communities, which have recognised Dance Well’s intrinsic value, even if it differs from traditional “Dance and Health” institutionalised approaches.

This scientific recognition was already crowned in 2019 when the World Health Organization listed Dance Well as one of the best dance practices for people with Parkinson’s disease in the scoping review “On the Role of the Arts in improving health and wellbeing.”

However, the aesthetic and experimental dimensions in Dance Well remained central and safeguarded by different artistic legitimisation tools and actions, which we will present in the following sections.

2.1 Professional Dancers

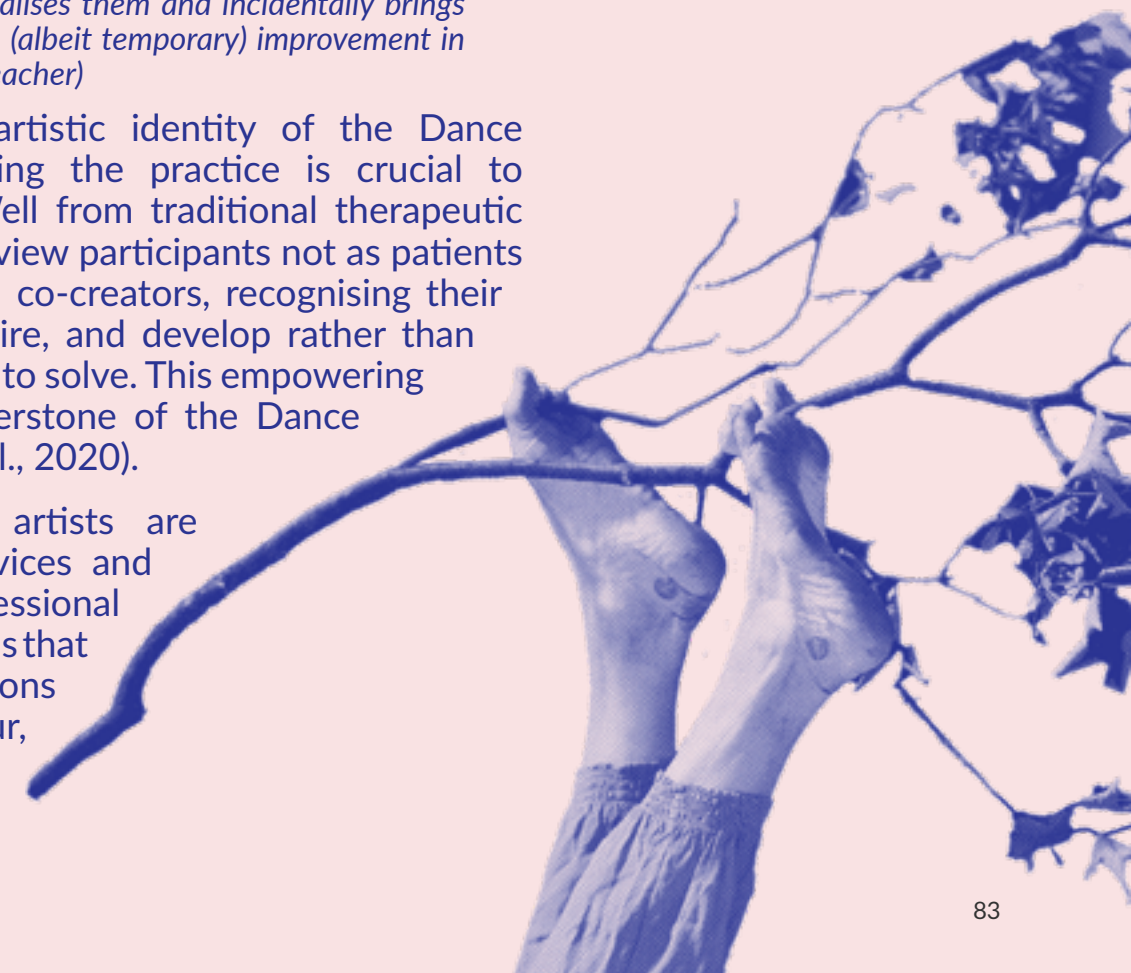
Dance Well practice is uniquely led by professional dancers who can propose various approaches, techniques, and styles through their artistic proposals. To be formally recognised as Dance Well teachers, these dancers must undergo a specific training course organised by the CSC | Comune di Bassano del Grappa. They also participate in annual meetings for updates and networking opportunities with different cultural institutions hosting Dance Well practices in their contexts.

The organisation decided to open the training course only to professional artists to preserve the artistic quality and integrity of the experience offered. In line with the philosophy of “art for art’s sake,” this approach asserts that the arts are inherently beneficial to individuals and society and are deemed therapeutically valuable simply because they are arts (APPGAHW, 2017; Macnaughton et al., 2005).

“Dance Well teachers have not to be loving or charitable; they have to be dance professionals, and that’s also what our dancers (participants) are looking for: they’re not looking for Parkinson’s experts to help them get well, they’re looking for dance experts to allow them to have an artistic experience that incidentally also socialises them and incidentally brings physical wellbeing, has an (albeit temporary) improvement in symptoms” (Dance Well teacher)

More precisely, the artistic identity of the Dance Well Teachers conducting the practice is crucial to differentiating Dance Well from traditional therapeutic sessions. These dancers view participants not as patients but as collaborators and co-creators, recognising their potential to create, inspire, and develop rather than seeing them as problems to solve. This empowering “artistic gaze” is a cornerstone of the Dance Well approach (Yoeli et al., 2020).

Thus, by definition, artists are outsiders to health services and do not conform to professional regulations or conventions that impose rigid expectations concerning behaviour, ethics, or culture (Jensen, 2019; Putland, 2008).



Their outsider status fosters the playfulness and eccentricity of their creativity. This perspective enables the distinctive insights and challenges their work can bring with a level of perspective that can be difficult to maintain while working within healthcare professional frameworks (Raw & Mantecón, 2013).

Because of this, Dance Well practice is firstly defined as an artistic practice, supporting the general assumption that “*Good health outcomes cannot be achieved without arts outcomes.*” (EDN, June 2021).

2.2 Artistic and Inspirational Settings

Another significant aspect of Dance Well practice is that it is happening in inspiring venues, such as museums, art galleries, or public parks during the summer. This artistic backdrop sets Dance Well apart from conventional therapeutic dance practices arranged in dance studios, like Dance for PD®. The museum environment, in particular, distinguishes this practice and creates a clear separation from other dance therapy programs aimed at individuals with Parkinson’s disease. This choice also enhances the artistic dimension of Dance Well, as highlighted in interviews: “*In Italy, everything inside a museum is considered an art.*”

Thus, the Dance Well initiative has evolved to fully embrace this distinctive contextualisation, with museums serving as a continual source of inspiration for its dancers. The surroundings become integral to the practice, informing movement, offering improvisation tools, and providing a beautiful setting for expression. Additionally, the possibility of spontaneous interactions with museum visitors adds another enriching layer to the experience.

By opting out of conventional spaces typically associated with specific expectations, such as dance studios or medical facilities, Dance Well has introduced a “dance activity with therapeutic effects” in an environment where such initiatives are generally not found. This approach enhances the context by incorporating symbolic and value-driven dimensions, preventing the practice from being narrowly categorised. The context may change throughout the year, introducing an element of unpredictability that further enhances the creative opportunities available to participants.

Finally, the decision to step outside the confines of traditional healthcare settings was also made to address the needs of people living with Parkinson’s disease who are seeking experiences that are not solely tied to medicalisation. Instead of focusing exclusively on treatment goals or outcomes, Dance Well engages individuals looking for artistic exploration.

2.3 Improvisation-Based Dance Practice

Dance Well is an artistic practice based on collective improvisation. It is typically performed without mirrors or specific choreography, allowing community dancers to improvise and create their movements based on verbal and visual cueing.

“Dance Well adapts to imagination and language and is accessible from an artistic and personal point of view. In Dance Well, there is no rule, no right or wrong, and only personal answers to tasks that are offered. The practice remains accessible at any time and in whatever psychophysical state you are, very simply, because you decide whether to give one hundred or fifty per cent.” (DW staff member CSC | Comune di Bassano del Grappa)

From a neurological perspective, working without structured routines or repetitive movements is essential for individuals with Parkinson’s disease. In particular, improvisation stimulates new pathways for motor learning by enabling them to respond to unexpected environmental conditions and develop new physical solutions in the moment (Batson et al., 2016). Additionally, improvisation scholar Danielle Goldman argues that it allows dancers to enter a state of “readiness,” which is fundamental for people with motor disorders.

Even though the benefits of improvisation are well-known, they are challenging to measure in a large population and through an evidence-based approach. Specifically, it would be impossible to gather detailed data on changes in individual movements (Houston 2011, 2019).

Dance Well has a general structure but allows significant room for improvisation and experimentation for both the teachers conducting the practice and the participants; this aspect is part of its constitutive identity.

2.4 Names and Terms

An essential and transformative aspect of the Dance Well practice is its deliberate use of specific names, definitions, and terminology. The organisation primarily underscores the critical distinction between Dance Well and Dance Therapy. This differentiation is frequently misconstrued, especially among stakeholders external to the Dance Well community who engage in dialogue regarding the practice.

Moreover, participants are referred to as “dancers” rather than clients (as happens in the Dance and Movement Therapy field) or patients (Jensen, 2019). This choice of terminology is intentional, as it aims to humanise individuals living with various diseases. In particular, participating in the Dance Well community signifies a departure from the conventional language associated with healthcare and scientific discourse. The phrase “*there are no patients, only dancers*” epitomises a recurring theme throughout numerous Dance Well classes, emphasising a preference among participants to transcend medicalised identities.

Additionally, Dance Well practice does not neatly fit into the intervention or method categories. Research in Narrative Medicine has demonstrated that the careful selection of vocabulary can profoundly affect individuals’ psychological and emotional healing trajectories and shape their perceptions of illness (Charon, 2022).

Consequently, it is imperative to characterise Dance Well as “an artistic practice with therapeutic effects” underlining that the therapeutic effects are not the central focus of discourse but instead treated as a side-effect of the experience. In fact, the term “therapy” may invoke connotations associated with the medical realm, which is why it is consciously eschewed. Instead, Dance Well presents an alternative vocabulary that empowers individuals to reclaim their identities as persons rather than being solely defined by their medical conditions.

2.5 Mixability and Inclusion

A significant distinction that differentiates Dance Well from other dance activities designed for therapeutic purposes is its inclusive approach, welcoming the entire community rather than solely individuals with Parkinson’s disease. In a contemporary landscape where interventions are often tailored to specific demographic groups, providing an inclusive experience for all community members represents a revolutionary effort, mainly when the initiative aims to support individuals living with Parkinson’s disease:

Many projects I follow are dedicated and exclusive to specific groups, while Dance Well is open to the public. This unique opportunity to conduct a class with a diverse group—people living with Parkinson’s, amateurs, and dancers—is truly meaningful. The chance for such varied participants to attend the workshop together, at the same time and for free, is significant. - (Briqueterie Staff Member)

Another essential feature of Dance Well is its commitment to being free of charge and accessible to all community members, including family members, elderly people, citizens, students, asylum seekers, immigrants, and dancers. As stated, “Dance Well is aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at people living with Parkinson’s,” indicating no differentiation based on health status, professional experience, or age. Consequently, all individuals are encouraged to participate.

Furthermore, ensuring accessibility is a strategic method to engage individuals who may otherwise be detached from dance. This approach fosters a gradual increase in participation and connection to the art form, aligning with audience development objectives.

In alignment with the Dance Well organisation’s emphasis on vocabulary and the humanisation of the healing experience, participants are not required to disclose their health status or any existing illnesses. This approach effectively shifts the focus away from disease, allowing participants to engage with their bodies in a manner attuned to their capabilities.

“Thanks to projects like Dance Well, people can experience a social context instead of staying at home on their own. A project like this offers two things: It allows you to express yourself on an individual level while being part of a social environment, where people respect you for what you are, and you respect the others for what they are” - (Tanec Praha staff member)

The practice of not requiring illness disclosure is a distinctive feature of Dance Well; however, it also poses challenges for conducting rigorous studies to evaluate the practice's therapeutic benefits. Research endeavours typically necessitate the identification of participants with specific health conditions and the selection of an appropriate control group that corresponds with the hypotheses and research questions of each study.

The criteria for group selection are contingent upon the nature of the trials being devised. For instance, pragmatic trials aim to assess interventions within real-life, routine practice settings, whereas explanatory trials focus on evaluating the intervention under optimal conditions (Sedgwick, 2014).

The inherent heterogeneity of the Dance Well participant group significantly complicates the feasibility of conducting such experimental studies while preserving the integrity of the overall dance experience.

2.6 Not an Intervention but a Long-Lasting Dance Practice

As previously indicated, the Dance Well initiative resists classification as a conventional artistic intervention. Instead, its value lies in its processual dimension, emphasising the experiential aspects of participation rather than predefined outcomes. Participants in the Dance Well practice are encouraged to nurture and sustain their connections with the community over time. This artistic practice is intentionally designed to be perpetually accessible to the community, devoid of specific guidelines regarding the "appropriate duration of engagement".

In contrast to typical Social Prescribing schemes, which often delineate participation in social activities for fixed periods and incorporate informal check-ins between healthcare providers and link workers biweekly or monthly, Dance Well's approach encourages a more fluid and continued participation in the artistic practice. Its impact on overall wellbeing is multifaceted and context-dependent, making it challenging to define it simply as an artistic intervention, which commonly implies a specific beginning and end.

Nevertheless, this philosophy presents again some challenges for scientific research, which typically favours

specialised applications and targeted interventions. Such a focus allows for more specific and tailored studies, a necessity when advocating for integrating dance and artistic practices within medical settings or as preventative measures against illness (Sara Houston, 2024).

Dose, duration, and adherence to the intervention are essential variables to indicate, especially for clinical trials testing pharmacological interventions. Because of this, art-based interventions are requested to conform to this paradigm, even if the greater emphasis on active participant engagement poses challenges for standardisation. For example, the degree of physical exertion during a dance practice depends on the individual's efforts. Moreover, the potential effectiveness is difficult to analyse for long-term interventions in a progressive condition like Parkinson's disease, which is associated with ongoing new challenges for individuals (Sara Houston, 2024).

"Arts are not just another form of medicine that makes you fit in a couple of years. Instead, it's a process that allows and helps people to maybe not fall ill or to live with their illness in a better way." (Briqueterie Staff Member)

In conclusion, if empiricism relies on observing outcome measures, much of the value of the arts remains unexplored because it manifests through its process. The arts have the capacity to influence individuals aesthetically and emotionally, often leading to fundamental changes in their lives that extend beyond mere artistic intervention and challenge the ability of human language to articulate. As a result, empirical methodologies of evidence-based practice likely will always struggle to acknowledge the complexity and nuances of the holistic artistic experience.



3.

Working on Cross-Sectoral:

The Case of Dance Well European Project

As members of the research team for the Creative Europe Project Dance Well (DW), we conducted ethnographically inspired qualitative research to investigate the translation and contextualisation of the Dance Well practice across the EU project’s partner organisations. This inquiry focuses on the diverse strategies dance organisations employ in implementing the DW practice, identifying key stakeholders involved in its promotion, and examining how the multifaceted value of Dance Well manifests according to specific organisational needs.

To address the research questions, 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted throughout the development of the European Project. Additionally, from August 2023 to August 2024, a research visit was carried out for each dance organisation partner, lasting an average of 8,5 days. During these visits, data was enriched through direct observations and informal interactions with staff members and dancers involved in the Dance Well project, enhancing the understanding of each cultural context.

A participatory research approach underpinned this investigation, highlighting the significance of individual local case studies, which were explored through research visits and interviews. Content analysis methodology was utilised to interpret the resulting phenomena (Nowell et al., 2017), emphasising the subjective meanings derived from interviews triangulated with the contextual information gathered during visits.

Moreover, the analysis specifically emphasised the role of the healthcare sector and its stakeholders within each contextualisation process, assessing how Dance Well served as an enabler for new collaborations and connections with the medical community. To capture this information, we submitted an initial and final survey aimed at exploring the extent to which the Dance Well project triggered a dialogue

between the dance sector and the health and social care system in the local contexts of each partner.

In the chapter’s concluding section, we provide a comparative analysis summarising the key similarities and differences in the partners’ experiences with the Dance Well contextualisation. This analysis is structured into four main categories: the legacy of the European project, the availability of artistic venues, previous initiatives in health and care, the recognition of contemporary dance, and the role of interpersonal relationships.

The tables below presents the collected data:

ONLINE PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW	
Day	Organisation
02/02/2023	CSC Centro Scena Contemporanea/ Comune di Bassano del Grappa (Roberto Casarotto, Tiziana Rigoni, Alessia Zanchetta, Greta Pieropan)
07/02/2023	K3 Tanzplan Hamburg (Kirsten Bremehr)
10/02/2023	LDIC (Gintarė Masteikaitė, Ieva Pranckūnaitė)
13/02/2023	Tanec Praha (Markéta Perroud, Katarína Ďuricová)
17/02/2023	La Briqueterie (Elisabetta Bisaro, Arina Dolgikh)
24/02/2023	Le Gymnase (Laurent Meheust, Shruti Iyer)

INTERVIEW WITH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS		
Day	Site	Professionals
02/02/2023	Fiesole (Italy)	Dr. Daniele Volpe and Dr. Monica Norcino
07/02/2023	Online	Dr. Andrea Pilotto
10/02/2023	Online	Giulia Baldassarre (physiotherapist and Dance Well teacher)

Visiting Period	Organisation	City	On-site Interviews	Other Activities
4th - 13th January 2024	La Briqueterie	Vitry-Sur-Seine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Clint Lutes- DaPoPa (Dance Well Teacher)Elisabetta Bisarro (Staff Member)Arina Dolgikh (Staff Member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">3 days Dance Well training Course (from 6/01/2024 to 8/01/2024)Participation in Dopamine Class (6/01/2024)
18th -24th February 2024	K3 Tanzplan Hamburg	Hamburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Collective Interview with Peter Sampel and Florence Rist in K3 (Staff members)Kerstin Evert (Artistic Director)Sahra Bazyar-Planke (Dance Well Teacher)Peter Sampel (Staff Member)Florence Rist (Staff Member)Fernanda Ortiz (Dance Well Teacher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Participation in Dance Well Club (19/02/2024)Participation in Dance Well Open Class (23/02/2024)

Visiting Period	Organisation	City	On-site Interviews	Other Activities
11th-22nd of March 2024	Tanec Praha	Praha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roman Zotov Mikshin (Dance Well Teacher) Yvona Kreuzmannová (Artistic Director Tanec Praha) Barbora Látalová (Dance Well Teacher) Markéta Perroud (Dance Well Coordinator) Markéta Vacovská (Dance Well Teacher) Cécile Da Costa (Dance Well Teacher) Katarina Ďuricová (Staff member) Anna Gazdíková (Staff member) Interview Kristina (staff member) Hana Polanská (Dance Well Teacher) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in Dance Well Class (12/03/2024) Participation in Dance Well class (19/03/2024)
18th -24th February 2024	K3 Tanzplan Hamburg	Hamburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective Interview with Peter Sempel and Florence Rist in K3 Tanzplan Hamburg (Staff members) Kerstin Evert (Artistic Director) Sahra Bazyar Planke (Dance Well Teacher) Peter Sempel (Staff Member) Florence Rist (Staff Member) Fernanda Ortiz (Dance Well Teacher) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in Dance Well Club (19/02/2024) Participation in Dance Well Open Class (23/02/2024)
22nd-30th of March 2024	Le Gymnase	Roubaix, Lille	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheherazade Zambrano Orozco (Dance Well Teacher) Louise Flores-Garcia (Staff member) Laurent Meheust (Artistic Director) Shruti Iyer (staff Member) Alejandro Russo (Dance Well Teacher) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in Dance Well Workshop - performance preparation/ Istitut pour la Photographie (23/03/2024) Participation in Dance Well Workshop - performance preparation /Ballet Du Nord (24/03/2024) Participating in Dance in Society Event (EDN Meeting on the theme of “well-being”) at l’Oiseau-Mouche (Roubaix) 2 days (from 28/03/2024 to 29/03/2024) Attending the Dance Well final performance (29/03/2024)
6th - 12th of may 2024	Lithuanian Dance Information Centre	Vilnius, Kaunas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erika Vizbaraitė (Dance Well Teacher) Agnietė Lisičkinaitė e Greta Grinevičiūtė (Dance Well Choreographers) Mantas Stabacinskas (Dance Well Teacher) Marius Pinigis (Dance Well Teacher) Adrian Carlo Bibiano (Dance Well Teacher) Goda Laurinavičiūtė (Dance Well Teacher) Gabija Blochina (Dance Well Teacher) Gintare Masteikaitė (Artistic Director) Ieva Pranckūnaitė (staff member) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in Dance Well Class, Čiurlionis Museum of Art (8/05/2024) Museums visits where Dance Well classes take place (9/05/2024)
17th - 20th of august 2023 22nd - 30th of august 2024	CSC - Centro per la scena contemporanea	Bassano del Grappa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mia Habib (Dance Well Choreographer) Chisato Ohno (Dance Well Choreographer) Collective Interview with Operaestate Staff Roberto Casarotto (Staff Member) Greta Pieropan (Staff member) Alessia Zanchetta (Staff member) Giovanna Garzotto (Dance Well Teacher) Rosa Scapin (Artistic Director) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partecipation in Operaestate Festival 2023 with the Dance Well community, watching the Dance Well choreographic project (form 17/08/2023 to 20/08/2023) Participation in the conference/ Event for 10 years of Dance Well (11/11/2023) Partecipation in Operaestate Festival 2024 with the Dance Well community, watching the Dance Well choreographic project (from 22/08/2024 to 30/08/2024)

3.1 Dance Well Project – Partners Overview

To Before introducing our overview analysis of each partner, it is imperative to underscore the distinct case of the CSC - Centro per la Scena Contemporanea compared to the other partners involved in the project.

Dance Well practice was inaugurated in Bassano del Grappa in 2013, and the CSC functions as the “home” where this initiative initially took shape. Accordingly, the European project within this context cannot be dissociated from the rich history of Dance Well activities that have thrived here for more than ten years.

In contrast,the implementation of Dance Well represented an innovative and unique endeavour for the other five partners in the EU project, who were invited to incorporate Dance Well into their respective contexts primarily due to this European initiative. Thus, the subsequent section will provide a comprehensive overview of both the lead partner (CSC - Centro per La Scena Contemporanea) and the five additional partners in the project (La Briqueterie CDCN; Le Gymnase CDCN; Tanec Praha; Lithuanian Dance Information Centre (LDIC); K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg – Zentrum für Choreographie) examining the challenges and opportunities encountered during the implementation of Dance Well practices in each distinct organisation.

CSC - Centro per la scena contemporanea

Leading the EU project for the CSC—Centro per la Scena Contemporanea has significantly increased Dance Well’s recognition within the leading organisation, the Municipality of Bassano del Grappa. This project has enabled the organisation to secure additional human resources for its initiatives, further solidifying Dance Well’s identity.

Additionally, the organisation was the first to take steps toward establishing a scientific community around the project, a development made possible through previous collaborations fostered over the years.

To enhance the relationship between the Dance organisation and the medical sector, they founded a Dance Well national scientific committee composed of esteemed healthcare professionals and researchers leaders in Parkinson’s studies and research. Currently, the committee

includes Dr Andrea Pilotto, University of Brescia/Ospedali Civili; Dr Monica Norcini and Dr Daniele Volpe from the Fresco Parkinson Institute Italia Onlus; and Dr Luisella Carnelli, Fondazione Fitzcarraldo. The committee aims to promote Dance Well's values and benefits to the scientific community.

Moreover, the organisation conducted a series of video interviews with healthcare professionals and scientists worldwide to raise awareness about dance's positive effects on people with Parkinson's disease. These interviews are available online and use accessible language to effectively communicate the scientific perspective on dance's benefits.

CSC organisation is also at the forefront of research, being involved by the University of Brescia (Italy) in conducting a study on Dance Well led by neurologist Dr Andrea Pilotto.

Moreover, Bassano's Dance Well has been invited to several events organised by the scientific community throughout the years. For instance, in 2023, Dance Well participated in an event organised by the South Tyrolean Health Authority and the Neurology Department of the Bolzano Provincial Hospital to celebrate National Parkinson's Day. Additionally, in 2024, they participated in the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS) annual conference. At both events, all attendees were invited to engage in the Dance Well practice, and the core principles of Dance Well—such as Mixability, Improvisation, and artistic venues—were highlighted.

Based on the interviews, the organisation found that the most effective strategy for engaging with the local healthcare system was establishing personal connections with key professionals in the field. Generally, the first step for this engagement was inviting them to join the Dance Well class.

The establishment of these contacts was motivated by various factors: to promote the Dance Well Class, develop new, future cross-sector artistic projects, and explore new evaluation protocols for dance's impact.

The CSC communication office also established a good relationship with a national TV program, *Generazione Bellezza*, which already dedicated a TV segment to the Dance Well practice in 2023.

La Briqueterie CDCN

La Briqueterie integrated Dance Well into its existing framework of wellbeing projects, building on established shared knowledge and strong relationships with the healthcare system and its professionals. The National Choreographic Development Center was already accustomed to collaborating with choreographers to investigate topics such as illness, disabilities, and the ageing body through workshops within hospitals and therapeutic, educational, and pedagogical institutes.

Thanks to these activities, collaborative relationships have been established with several healthcare organisations, including the CATTP at Paul Guiraud Hospital in Villejuif, the ITEP Le Coteau (Therapeutic, Educational, and Pedagogical Institute), the CATTP Minute Papillon at Robert Ballanger Intercommunal Hospital Center in Aulnay-sous-Bois, Paul Klee College, and students in the ULIS TFM MI (Motor Function Disorders and Disabling Diseases) program in Thiais, as well as IFSI Henri Mondor at CHU de Créteil.

Moreover, since 2018, La Briqueterie has organised the annual "Danse et Soins" Day, a regional event focused on Dance and Care. This event, held in collaboration with the services of DRAC Île-de-France, targets a diverse audience from the fields of culture and health, offering training sessions and meetings focused on designing choreographic and artistic projects in collaboration with healthcare institutions.

The training opportunities have fostered a valuable network of dedicated wellness, healthcare, and somatic arts professionals, creating a strong basis for welcoming Dance Well within La Briqueterie. On the other hand, pre-existing projects in health and wellbeing have presented challenges to establishing a distinct identity for Dance Well, which sometimes was confused with the other various activities offered.

More precisely, la Briqueterie was the only partner in the EU project that organised the Dance Well workshops in collaboration with a pre-existing association already offering a program for people living with Parkinson's disease: DaPoPa association, led by Clint Lutes.

Active since 2016 in Paris and Grenoble, DaPoPa played a crucial role in promoting Dance Well, as most of the people participating in the workshops were participants

of DaPoPa classes. This connection helped build a target community interested in engaging in the Dance Well workshop, especially at the beginning.

Consistent with this genealogy, the Dance Well workshops were named “Dopamine!” and designed similarly to the Dapopa classes.

“Initially, the core group of participants came through Clint’s organisation, DaPoPa, primarily for the DaPoPa classes. Currently, those who join generally understand the different contexts of Dance Well. However, there are instances where individuals say things like, “I come for the DaPoPa class,” “I come for the Dopamine atelier,” or “I come for dance classes.” (Briqueterie Staff Member)

Considering that both Clint Lutes and Inés Hernández were simultaneously Dance Well and DaPoPa teachers, underlining Dance Well’s distinctiveness was initially challenging.

During the project’s second phase, another vital connection with the France Parkinson Association, the largest organisation in France dedicated to supporting individuals with Parkinson’s disease, was established. Although it took over a year to build this partnership, it has enabled La Briqueterie to reach new people living with Parkinson’s. As a result, several of them have begun participating in “Dopamine!” workshops.

As part of the Dance Well project, La Briqueterie rekindled its collaboration with the MAC VAL - the contemporary art museum of Val-de-Marne in Vitry-sur-Seine, having previously worked together on the Dancing Museums EU-funded project. As a result of this partnership, the “Dopamine!” workshops had the opportunity to take place occasionally in the MAC VAL museum.

“The MAC VAL museum is always pleased to welcome us, although they don’t contribute financially to the project. The museum can, therefore, be an incentive, but what is interesting is that people love coming here to the Briqueterie. In France, we have places created for dance, and they are equally part of the cultural heritage.” (Briqueterie Staff Member)

Thus, Mac Val Museum served as a significant source of inspiration for the Dance Well classes, while most of the “Dopamine!” workshops took place at La Briqueterie, an important industrial heritage site with a rich history, having been rebuilt from the Gournay brickyard, a former factory established in 1868.

Moreover, in January (2023, 2024, 2025), as part of the European Dance Well project, La Briqueterie was the sole EU partner organising a certified professional Dance & Parkinson’s training programme for dancers, choreographers, and individuals working in the medical and social sectors. This initiative was started by Clint Lutes, who had previously offered an annual training course in this area through his DaPoPa association and proposed incorporating this training opportunity into the Dance Well project. Thus, In collaboration with the DaPoPa association, three editions of the Dance Well training course were organised, where participants were instructed on how to combine their knowledge and skills in dance with the specific needs of people living with Parkinson’s disease, understanding the symptoms, and finding a balance between educational and artistic dimensions.

“In an intensive training course, we decided to prioritise dancers; however, we also recognised the significant need for this type of offering in our area for individuals who may not be dancers but are interested in practices related to movement, touch, and the various qualities developed in a dance context.” (Briqueterie Staff Member)



Although la Briqueterie positioned itself outside the therapeutic dance world, it opened a dialogue with professionals from that field, becoming a territorial reference point in Dance and health, offering certified and recognised educational opportunities.

“It’s not surprising that professionals involved in somatic practices are drawn to the Dance Well classes. I believe this is the right fit for them, especially since there aren’t many similar workshops available in Paris. The options for this type of training are quite limited” (Briqueterie Staff Member)

In the medical sector, a collaboration was established with physiatrist Dr Denis Obert, who participated in training courses to offer specialised classes on Dance and Parkinson’s disease.

As the other UE partners also emphasised, having a personal connection with an open-minded healthcare professional, as in this case, was one of the most critical factors in promoting Dance Well and enhancing its credibility from a scientific perspective.

Regarding the future of the EU project and its financial sustainability, although there are local financial resources available to develop projects in the Dance and Health area—supported by open calls from the Region, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Education—recent funding cuts in healthcare and a shortage of medical staff in French hospitals have made the arts seem less of a priority. On a positive note, Clint Lutes expresses optimism about the potential for ongoing collaboration between DaPoPa and other projects, such as Dance Well, offering a solution for continuity to all participants currently attending the *Dopamine! Atelier*.

Le Gymnase CDCN

Unlike La Briqueterie, Le Gymnase had no prior connections or relationships with the healthcare system, and their initial attempts to establish contacts with hospitals, neurological services, and nursing homes were ineffective. This was possibly due to the fact that in France, alternative art-based therapies are not yet formally recognised or widely implemented:

“The medical sector doesn’t want to establish a connection to maintain medical privacy. Additionally, they are not interested in the project and might not inform their patients about it, as they do not consider practices like dance to be classified as therapeutic.” (Le Gymnase Staff Member)

Le Gymnase attempted to reach out to private, non-profit, and public organisations related to Parkinson’s disease, as well as personally contacting healthcare professionals to promote the practice and make them suggest DW classes to their patients. However, they did not receive much enthusiasm from this community, and even when healthcare professionals recommended the practice as their personal choice, they never attended the DW classes themselves.

However, with the passage of time and the consolidation of the project, the organisation reached new stakeholders in promoting Dance Well, such as the Café Jeune Parkinson, France Parkinson, Jeunes Parkinson Association, CCAS de Roubaix, Maison Des Aidants Feron-Vrau, Centre de santé l’espoir, Clic Riv’age, Les papillons blancs, Bureau d’inspiration partagées, and the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Roger Salengro.

To engage with them, Le Gymnase participated in special events such as a forum on Parkinson’s disease and local networks for young people with Parkinson’s.

Despite this considerable improvement, the interest remained stable over time, and these connections have not transformed into collaboration opportunities. The contact with the healthcare system ultimately served a promotional purpose, advertising the classes to patients.

On the other hand, Le Gymnase received increased interest from social workers, inviting them to participate in the Dance Well Classes and reached through word of mouth.

Consistently, Le Gymnase has strongly promoted the

social aspect of Dance Well. From the beginning, it aimed to position the Dance Well project as a tool for social empowerment through dance rather than as an artistic practice with therapeutic effects for individuals with Parkinson's disease. In this framework, Dance Well adopted a more community-oriented approach, emphasising the importance of social determinants of health.

This decision was made considering the unique situation of Roubaix, the poorest city in France, which faces significant challenges related to alcoholism and immigration.

"In Roubaix, life expectancy is eight years lower than the national average due to the impact of mining and the textile industry. This has harmed people's health. Additionally, there is a high level of alcoholism. As a result, in this specific place, people are just trying to live, and wellbeing is left as a dream concept." (Le Gymnase Staff Member)

Due to this, Le Gymnase did not want to launch a new "care project" but aimed to expand the community and foster connections with various marginalised groups.

"The aim is not to focus on specific projects related to migrants, Parkinson's disease, or alcoholism. Instead, the goal is to promote the idea of mixed abilities, where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together. In such an environment, stigmas associated with various identities or challenges are no longer stigmas." (Le Gymnase Staff Member)

In alignment with this philosophy, the classes were designed to be accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical ability or financial situation. Instead of categorising participants, all individuals, including those with Parkinson's disease, find value in being part of a collective experience.

Moreover, Dance Well workshops were organised both in Lille and Roubaix in inspiring cultural locations, such as the Institut pour la Photographie (Lille), the Ballet du Nord (Roubaix) at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille, the LaM Museum (Villeneuve d'Ascq), Bazaar St So (Lille), and the Lille Opera...

Looking at the funding perspective, La Gymnase identified the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles Hauts-de-France as a primary funding source to ensure the project's future sustainability. However, similar to the situation experienced by the Briqueterie, the significant cuts to public services in France, especially in healthcare, have had serious repercussions for Art & Health collaborations,

raising challenges for arts organisations seeking public funding for artistic projects that intersect with health initiatives.

As noted by other partners, establishing personal connections with medical professionals in alternative medicine and wellbeing practices, such as physical therapists, was considered a crucial condition for initiating collaboration with the healthcare system, especially in the presence of scarce financial resources.



Tanec Praha

Tanec Praha has successfully established strong and meaningful relationships with healthcare institutions over the years. The DW project specifically allowed them to map the institutions associated with Parkinson's disease, engage with them, and establish a solid foundation for potential future collaboration.

This achievement can largely be attributed to connections with open-minded professionals in the sector. For instance, Tanec Praha connected with MUDr. Barbora Klusoňová, a neurologist at INEP, a private clinic in the Czech Republic, as well as at the Neurological Clinic of the 3rd Faculty of Medicine at Charles University (LF UK) at the University Hospital Královské Vinohrady (FNKV). Since 2022, she has been a consultant for the Dance Well project, promoting it within healthcare institutions.

Additionally, in 2024, the Extrapyrarnidal Disease Center (EXPY) at the General University Hospital in Prague was approached for potential collaboration, appearing as a promising partner for future initiatives.

Within social institutions, Tanec Praha began collaborating with the Elderly Day Care Center Háje in February 2023. This partnership, aimed at promoting Dance Well classes, has developed into an annual collaboration to celebrate World Parkinson's Day (2023, 2024, and next April 2025). On this occasion, Tanec Praha organised special Dance Well interventions, which included an introduction to Dance Well, a class, and a discussion for the community affected by Parkinson's disease. This event was also attended by social and healthcare workers and family members of individuals with Parkinson's disease.

Since the beginning of the project, Tanec Praha has also sought to establish a connection with the Prague Parkinson Community, initially reaching out to the Parkinson's Help Association. Communication started in 2022, and a partnership was established in February 2023. They have played a crucial role in promoting the Dance Well practice to members of the Parkinson's Association, utilising their website and distributing printed materials.

Ultimately, the most effective way to build the community was through word of mouth and the personal connections of both the dedicated Dance Well dancers and the Dance Well teachers.

DW dancers were particularly effective in establishing connections with healthcare professionals and in promoting Dance Well. Notable examples include Mrs Marcela Šachová, a nurse and DW dancer with Parkinson's disease who has supported the project from the beginning. Furthermore, the existing network of Dance Well teachers was crucial in promoting Dance Well, as they have all previously worked with community dance.

Additionally, the cultural spaces that hosted the Dance Well practice throughout the project provided a final boost in promotion. Despite initial challenges in finding a partner to ensure regularity of activities, Tanec Praha successfully formed fruitful partnerships with several cultural institutions that actively collaborated in promoting the project through their social media and websites. The institutions they partnered with included KC Vozovna, an intergenerational centre that organises cultural, social, and educational events in Prague's 3rd District; National Gallery Prague and the Prague City Gallery, which was already a partner in the Dancing Museums UE-founded project.

In this promotional activity, it was emphasised how crucial it was to explain the distinction between Dance Well and a Dance Therapy Method, which posed a challenge for the organisation:

"Many people seem to consider Dance Well a therapeutic method that we learn during training and then simply apply. I found it quite challenging to explain that it's not just a methodology; rather, we are essentially dance artists in what we do." (Tanec Praha Staff Member)

For Tanec Praha, a significant concern was maintaining the artistic integrity of the project while engaging with the therapeutic world. Even from the Dance Well teachers' perspective, they reported that they needed to emphasise on various occasions that they were not therapists.

From a financial perspective, the unpredictability and inconsistency of the Ministry of Culture's funding significantly limited the organisation's planning abilities. Specifically, Tanec Prague experienced consistent reductions in funding compared to previous years, leading to various financial and liquidity challenges. In this crisis, seeking new funding opportunities became even more critical. To expand funding opportunities, interviewers emphasised the importance of activating scientific collaborations to enhance the understanding of the impact

of dance on health, particularly concerning conditions like Parkinson's disease. Establishing a preliminary dialogue and connection with healthcare professionals and research centres was considered essential. This includes organisations like the Extrapyrimalal Disease Center at the General University Hospital in Prague, which was already reached, as well as other research centres collaborating closely with Marcela Šachová, a dancer from Dance With Parkinson's, and MUDr. Barbora Klusoňová. In particular, universities were viewed as potential mediators that could provide research, resources (such as research programs), and innovative ideas to bridge the gap between the health and arts sectors. Establishing common ground, cultivating mutual respect, and integrating perspectives from both sectors were perceived as crucial steps to produce meaningful research and partnerships.

The necessity of establishing trust within the group before implementing scientific measures was also emphasised in the context of producing evidence for the project. It was noted that a strong and cohesive community is essential for conducting experiments without compromising the creative atmosphere fostered by the practice. In general, scientific evidence and collaborations were viewed as reliable tools for securing funding and institutional support for cross-sector artistic projects.

Finally, Tanec Praha also operated these years at a policy and advocacy level as a member of Vision for Dance, a cultural association that unites independent professionals and organisations working in the dance and movement arts field in the Czech Republic.

In particular, Dance Well was invited to present at two events focused on dance and wellbeing, organised by Vision for Dance in 2023 and 2024. These events include the Conference Art in Health and Health in Art (2023 in Brno) and the Symposium on Moving Towards a More Resilient and Well-being Society (2024 in Prague).

Lithuanian Dance Information Centre (LDIC)

The Lithuanian Dance Information Centre (LDIC) was unsuccessful in establishing connections with the local healthcare system, which was viewed as distant and unresponsive. Dr. Ramunė Dirvanskienė was the only medical professional they managed to contact, but this connection did not result in any new partnerships, collaborations, or agreements with health institutions and hospitals.

On the other hand, they successfully reached the Parkinson's Society of Kaunas County, which collaborates to promote the Dance Well classes within the association.

The M.K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art played a crucial role in establishing this connection as it previously collaborated with the Parkinson Association as part of the Kaunas 2022 European Capital of Culture initiative. As a result, Dance Well classes were organised within the museum's facilities until 2024, and the museum staff were already familiar with the association's members.

As a result, Dance Well was built upon the legacy of the European Capital of Culture project:

"Without the European Capital of Culture program, the process would have been more challenging. The EU project undertook five years of preparation, organising numerous programs aimed at collaborating with cultural institutions to promote openness. This involved fostering contemporary thinking and emphasising the importance of audience participation within the community. They invested significant effort into this preparation work."
(LDIC Staff Member)

Although the European Capital of Culture project funded by the EU concluded in 2022, it provided opportunities for Dance Well to flourish within the context of Kaunas as the Culture Capital project has helped familiarise the audience with specific types of research and artistic practices.

"Audience development is one of our goals, and bringing the Parkinson community onto the stage means changing the audience's mindset about how they watch performances. Additionally, we aim to welcome them as part of our audience for the dance festival." (LDIC Staff Member)

Dance Well was then recognised as an opportunity for audience development, promoting the participation of the Parkinson's community in contemporary dance events. Additionally, the Dance Well project successfully encouraged registrations in the Parkinson's Association,

leading to a noticeable increase in membership. This illustrates the program's success in bridging gaps between different community groups.

Secondly, participation in the Dance Well project provided a significant opportunity to raise awareness about contemporary dance and its various facets. The Lithuanian Dance Information Center (LDIC) embraced the Dance Well initiative to enhance the value of dance, mainly due to its social impact.

However, Dance Well's social and therapeutic impacts were always presented as secondary effects, as there was a continuous effort to defend the artistic legitimacy of the practice. Nevertheless, the LDIC organisers and dancers found this a challenging task, especially considering the Lithuanian cultural context, which may resist the idea of non-professionals engaging in dance as a form of art.

The interviews highlighted the importance of involving skilled artists in leading creative activities to uphold the

artistic value of dance. Ultimately, an emphasis was placed on finding a balance between artistic research, social work, and therapy.

From a professional development point of view, The Dance Well program was recognised by DW teachers as an occasion to enhance their scientific knowledge to better address community needs. It allowed them to develop a hybrid professional identity combining artistic and therapeutic skills while enabling continued engagement in the artistic sector outside of performance activities after achieving a certain level of artistic and professional maturity.

Considering the project's future and sustainability, LDIC applied for the Social Prescribing Programme. Although their application was rejected, they expressed interest in presenting their proposal again to secure additional funding and continue their activities in Lithuania.

Furthermore, the organisation's reliance on grants and public funding highlights the importance of external support for sustaining artistic projects. Fortunately, the Kaunas City Municipality provided financial support for the project in 2024, and there is hope that this collaboration will continue in the coming years.

Overall, funding availability was considered a crucial factor for continuing the project, together with the need to increase medical professionals' awareness of dance's benefits through dedicated research on its impact on individuals with Parkinson's disease.

K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg – Zentrum für Choreographie

Throughout the Dance Well project, K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg improved its ability to engage with health professionals and establish new connections compared to the project's beginning. They contacted a neurologist, Prof. Dr Med. Björn Hauptmann from Segeberger Kliniken was invited to participate in the Dance Well final presentation and provide insights from a medical perspective after the performance. Additionally, they started an informal exchange with the Seminar Hochschule für Künste im Sozialen Ottersberg (Art in Social Contexts, Art Therapy, B.A.).

To date, however, this connection has not resulted in new collaborations or partnerships, as these actors were primarily engaged in promoting the Dance Well classes.



Dance Well teachers generally reach the Parkinson's community through direct contact and personal networking. In particular, the Dance Well teacher Sahra Bazyar-Planke leveraged her extensive network of individuals with Parkinson's due to her profession as an occupational therapist. Overall, K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg found it challenging to connect with Parkinson's associations and personal contact was viewed as the most effective approach.

Moreover, the organisation saw the Dance Well project as an opportunity to engage with new audiences, particularly those who may not have prior connections to contemporary dance.

The K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg building serves as the central hub for the Dance Well classes, and the practice was deliberately retained within this venue rather than relocated to external spaces such as museums. This choice was primarily driven by logistical considerations and the unique advantage of K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg being integrated within the Kampnagel theatre, which hosts a diverse range of artistic programs. Additionally, the presence of artists actively engaging in their work within the K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg hall fosters an enriching artistic environment that distinguishes it from conventional dance studios.

For communication purposes, K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg was also reached out by the Pharmazeutische Zeitung, an important German-speaking newspaper in the pharmaceutical field, which featured an article about DW.

Thanks to the personal connection of the Dance Well teachers, K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg also reached the "Parkinson-Komplex-Behandlung" at the Asklepios Barmbek hospital, with which they were able to inform Parkinson's patients about the Dance Well practice.

As reported by the other Partners, also for K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg throughout the project, it was challenging to underline the distinction between Dance Well and Dance Therapy:

"In Germany, it's really strict to call something therapy; we need to be careful about it, and so I try to explain that it's a project which works with artistic skills and with artistic methods and does not like to work in a therapeutic way..." (K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg Staff Member)

Dance Movement Therapy is recognised as a professional

field in Germany, but most health insurance policies do not cover it. This highlights the challenges involved in integrating alternative therapies into conventional healthcare systems.

However, Dance Well aims to preserve and maintain its artistic integrity. In particular, when working with individuals with Parkinson's disease, K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg's challenge in promoting and communicating about Dance Well was to avoid reducing it to merely a therapeutic practice.

"When I teach Dance Well, I want participants to forget their disease while in class, and then suddenly they can do many things they normally can't do." (K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg DW teacher)

Even Sahra Bazyar-Planke expresses her desire to maintain a creative and artistic approach in her classes rather than strictly a therapeutic one. She explains:

"I try not to think as a therapist when teaching DW. If I did, the therapist would also point out the disease. It's likely that this would cause DW dancers to take a step back instead of moving forward."

Maintaining strong artistic integrity while engaging with non-professionals and communities was considered fundamental for legitimising Dance Well as an artistic practice and enhancing its positive therapeutic impact.

In connection with this, scientific studies were recognised as fundamental for gathering evidence about the impact of dance as a therapeutic tool. In Germany, where there is a strong evidence-based scientific culture, it is nearly impossible for dance to gain recognition without conducting research to support its efficacy. Overall, the perception is that proving the value of the arts through evidence-based research is essential to justify allocating funds.

In fact, similar to the situations faced by other partners, funding opportunities for culture are also steadily decreasing in Germany. Therefore, alternative legitimate tools were seen as essential to provide financial support to the sector.

Ultimately, funding availability was regarded as crucial for facilitating collaboration with the healthcare system; however, both the healthcare and cultural sectors were found to lack adequate resources and capabilities.

3.2 Comparative Analysis

The partner overview shows that all five partners involved in the Dance Well initiative faced various challenges in institutionalising the practice within their organisations. A recurring issue has been the lack of funding opportunities and financial resources, highlighting the need to adopt different strategies and legitimisation tools to emphasise dance's importance in society and the Dance Well project. For example, all partners have recognised the importance of scientific evidence in enhancing the credibility and recognition of Dance Well practice. At the same time, the interviews revealed a strong cross-party commitment to maintaining and defending the artistic integrity of the practice itself, emphasising the critical distinction between Dance Well and Dance Therapy. Other enabling factors that have had a particular impact on contextualisation and institutionalisation vary according to the background and distinctiveness of each cultural organisation and are reported in the following sections.

European project legacy

Some partners saw Dance Well as being in direct continuity with previous European projects implemented by the same organisation or in the same referral territory. In particular, the interviews revealed how Tanec Praha and La Briqueterie connected Dance Well with the earlier Creative Europe-founded project, Dancing Museum, recognising the distinctiveness and high quality achieved when working and researching within a European project framework. At the same time, both organisations leveraged the relationships previously established with museums during Dancing Museum to explore partnership possibilities for the Dance Well project.

For LDIC, Dance Well was developed in direct communication with the European Capital of Culture, which provided a fertile and receptive environment in Kaunas. The Capital of Culture project created an open-minded context essential for implementing an innovative initiative like Dance Well, enabling collaboration with stakeholders with experience in a European project mindset. In particular, the M.K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art played a crucial role in establishing the initial connection with the Parkinson Association of Kaunas, with which they had already been able to collaborate during the Kaunas 2022 European Capital of Culture initiative.

In the Dance Well project, the contextualisation process exemplified in these cases the significance of building on past collaborations and existing networks to foster artistic endeavours and continue feeding community engagement.

Previous projects in health and care

Most of the European project's partners did not have prior experience in direct collaboration with the medical sector, making Dance Well their first opportunity to explore this avenue. As organisations primarily focused on contemporary dance production, promotion, and distribution, they seized the chance to connect with the healthcare system through Dance Well. The only exception to this was La Briqueterie, which was notably distinct from its other partners, having already established projects related to dance and healthcare. This foundation allowed the Dance Well project to be integrated into a network of pre-existing relationships and collaborations with healthcare stakeholders, solidifying La Briqueterie's identity as a national reference point for health and care initiatives in contemporary dance. In this context, Dance Well supported and enhanced an ongoing process that blended seamlessly with the existing organisational landscape.

The availability of artistic venues

The role of physical spaces, such as museums and cultural centres, in shaping the artistic and social dimensions of the practice has depended on the cultural context in which Dance Well was implemented. For some, moving the DW practice into a museum or external cultural institution was essential because of the lack of a dedicated space for the DW artistic practice. In contrast, other organisations had dedicated spaces for contemporary dance, which made them less motivated to leave their venues, as these spaces were seen as culturally recognised as equally relevant and part of cultural heritage, just like museums.

Since Dance Well was also regarded as a tool for audience development, relocating "the audience" was considered disadvantageous. This was particularly true in countries like France, where it was thought unlikely that museums would provide financial support for such projects. This contrasts with other cultural contexts, such as in Italy, where museums were seen as crucial partners for providing financial support and fostering the development of artistic practices throughout the evolution of Dance Well.

The differing roles associated with museums in each context created varied governance structures around the Dance Well project and led to different types of motivational relationships with cultural spaces. For all the partners involved, museums were viewed as an invaluable source of inspiration and a potential promotional tool for engaging with audiences that are typically not reached by dance organisations. However, only some partners also perceived museums as channels for financial support and long-term collaboration opportunities.

The recognition of contemporary dance

As previously anticipated, all partner organisations involved in the DW project committed to preserving the artistic integrity of the practice, distinguishing it from Dance Therapy and other non-professional artistic activities.

However, the effort to support Dance Well's intrinsic value varied slightly across different cultural contexts, leading to different strategies for justifying and accepting an artistic practice that included non-professional community members. This variation was influenced by local cultural policies and the existing artistic networks that had already fostered such activities, as well as the broader cultural context specific to each country.

In particular, Tanec Praha and LDIC were more concerned about maintaining the artistic integrity of the project while engaging with the therapeutic world. Although Dance Well's social and therapeutic impacts have always been presented as secondary effects, in these contexts, the need to emphasise the distinction between Dance Well and Dance Therapy remained crucial, and it was more challenging to convey the idea that non-professionals and individuals with disabilities could participate in dance as a form of art.

As a result, the capacity of dance organisations and practitioners to collaborate effectively and equitably with healthcare stakeholders depended on their ability to maintain their values and legitimacy in these interactions. This was considered essential for fostering a respectful exchange of perspectives.

Presence of Interpersonal relationships

Having a personal connection with an open-minded healthcare professional was one of the most critical factors in promoting Dance Well and enhancing its credibility

from a scientific perspective. In particular, the Dance Well teachers played a vital role in advocating for the classes across various partner organisations. However, some teachers had stronger connections with their communities, while others were at the height of their professional careers and needed to travel more, making it challenging for them to establish a solid link with the DW local community.

Additionally, the same Dance Well dancers were instrumental in increasing the recognition of the practice within the medical sector, particularly because some were already doctors or had close relationships with healthcare professionals. This personal and emotional connection resulted as a significant tool in demonstrating the effectiveness of the Dance Well project.

Thus, the overview of all the partners involved in the contextualisation and institutionalisation process highlighted the key role of individuals who acted as facilitators through their skills and personal experiences. They successfully navigated sectoral boundaries, fostering new interdisciplinary dialogues and enhancing collaboration across the artistic and healthcare fields.



4.

Evidence Revised:

Towards Pluralistic Forms of Accountability

4.1 Quantification and the Illusions of Evidence

The drive for visibility through quantification is one of the key features of shaping healthcare and public administration in general. Numbers, metrics, and performance indicators have spread everywhere to make complex systems understandable and to allow for comparison, control, and accountability. Yet the logic of quantification - in its being not neutral - is deeply entangled with power, ideology, and the politics of knowledge. While promising transparency, it simultaneously obscures, simplifies, and disciplines, constructing a world that privileges what can be measured over what cannot (Espeland & Stevens, 2008).

At its core, quantification is a method of abstraction that reduces complex, multi-dimensional phenomena into numerical representations in order for them to be easily manipulated, compared, and acted upon. This process provides the illusion of transparency, suggesting that numbers offer an objective and unbiased reflection of reality (Miller & Rose, 1990). In organisations, performance metrics are deployed to assess efficiency, productivity, and success, creating a sense of control over what would otherwise appear as unstructured or chaotic processes. Governments use statistical indicators to evaluate economic growth, social progress, and institutional effectiveness, and in doing so, they generate an image of governance rooted in rationality and calculability (Power, 1997).

Yet, the pursuit of visibility through numbers often leads to a paradox: in making certain aspects of reality visible, it simultaneously renders others invisible. What is measured gains prominence, while what cannot be easily quantified is sidelined or dismissed (Mau, 2019). This creates a form of epistemic narrowing, where numerical representations

become not just indicators of reality but reality itself. In public policy, for example, economic indicators like GDP become the dominant measure of national wellbeing, eclipsing more qualitative aspects of social progress such as community cohesion, environmental sustainability, or subjective wellbeing (Stiglitz et al., 2009).

A central critique of quantification is its tendency to produce what has been termed “invented accuracy”—the creation of precise-seeming numerical values in domains where precision is illusory (Power, 2004). When complex, ambiguous, and fluid realities are forced into rigid numerical frameworks, the resulting data often conceal more than they reveal. Rankings and league tables, so common in healthcare systems, impose artificial boundaries, giving the impression of definitive knowledge while masking the underlying uncertainties, assumptions, and contextual variations that shape the production of numbers (Espeland & Sauder, 2007).

This phenomenon is evident in the proliferation of performance management systems in organisations. Key performance indicators (KPIs), efficiency scores, and financial ratios claim to provide objective assessments of effectiveness, but they often reduce multi-faceted activities to simplistic, measurable outputs (Levay, 2020).

Beyond its epistemic effects, quantification operates as a mechanism of discipline and control. The act of measuring not only records but also structures behaviour, as individuals and institutions adjust their actions to align with numerical targets and benchmarks (Porter, 1995). This process is particularly visible in the diffusion of “audit cultures,” in which employees, professionals, and organisations internalise performance metrics, shaping their conduct in line with the demands of quantitative accountability (Strathern, 2000).

The widespread adoption of quantification in governance and management has contributed to what some scholars describe as “metric-driven subjectivity,” in which individuals come to see themselves through the lens of measurement (Espeland & Stevens, 2008). From productivity scores in the workplace to social media analytics, numerical assessments shape how people perceive their own worth and success. This activates a circle where visibility is the source of validation but, in becoming so, generates anxiety as individuals strive to meet predefined quantitative expectations (Merry, 2016).

Furthermore, the disciplinary effects of quantification extend beyond individual behaviour to institutional and structural arrangements. Organisations end up placing more importance on what is measured, leading to the distribution of resources and attention towards achieving high scores on key indicators. This can result in “goal displacement,” where pursuing metrics replaces pursuing substantive objectives (Bevan & Hood, 2006). In bureaucratic systems, for example, focusing on measurable outcomes in public service delivery can lead to strategic gaming, where agencies manipulate numbers to meet targets without necessarily improving service quality (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). In research and academia, emphasising publication metrics can drive scholars to prioritise high-impact journal publications over slower, more deliberative intellectual engagement (Burrows, 2012).

4.2 Trust in Numbers and Quantification as a Political Act

Even when it is presented as a neutral, technical exercise, quantification can be seen as inherently political. Power dynamics, institutional interests, and ideological commitments shape the decision of what to measure, how to measure it, and how to interpret results (Miller & O’Leary, 1987). The construction of evidence is never merely a matter of objective description but involves choices about inclusion, exclusion, and prioritisation. What is counted and ignored reflects broader societal values and power distributions (Rose, 1999).

The politics of quantification also play out in how numbers are mobilised in public discourse. Statistics have become used as rhetorical devices to justify policies, allocate resources, and make decisions more legitimate (Miller & Rose, 1990). The authority of numbers gives credibility to claims that might otherwise be less easy to justify, creating a sense of inevitability around certain courses of action.

The capacity of numbers to be so attractive is not accidental but rooted in the historical and institutional processes that come to celebrate quantification as the ultimate symbol of objectivity, neutrality, and legitimacy. The appeal of quantification is to be found in its ability to make decision-making seem less biased and personal, remove subjective judgment, and offer an apparent impartial basis for governance (Porter, 1995). However, this

preference for numerical objectivity is full of consequences because it transforms the way authority is exercised, the knowledge is legitimised, and institutions justify their decisions. It fundamentally reshapes the relationship between expertise, accountability, and public trust.

The trust placed in “evident numbers” often arises not from their technical accuracy - as often this is not the case - but from their image of impartiality. Quantitative evidence is frequently valued precisely because it presents itself as liberated from human bias, political influence, or individual discretion. In contrast to subjective judgment or feelings, which are always open to contestation, numerical representations promise a form of knowledge that is universally verifiable and independent of personal authority. This has made them particularly attractive in settings where decisions such as health care need to be justified to a broad and diverse audience.

Yet, this very detachment from subjective interpretation and lived experiences creates a paradox. The very mechanisms that seek to ensure neutrality—tests, algorithms, and statistical models—introduce new forms of discretion and judgment, but in disguised ways. Decisions about what to measure, how to classify data, and how to interpret results remain deeply subjective, yet they are embedded within technical and bureaucratic systems that make them appear neutral (Porter, 1995). By shifting the locus of judgment from individuals to abstract systems of evidence creation, quantification can actually obscure the social and ethical dimensions of decision-making rather than eliminate them.

The demand for numerical objectivity is not evenly distributed across all governance and knowledge production domains. Certain areas of public intervention - those that are more subject to public scrutiny or democratic accountability - have to deal with pressures to justify decisions through numbers. This dynamic is particularly evident in public service settings, where quantification is often used to protect decision-makers from accusations of arbitrariness or partiality. The more a decision is visible and open to debate, the greater the reliance on numerical justification. This has led to the proliferation of performance indicators, cost-effectiveness analyses, and algorithmic decision-making systems in areas such as healthcare. These mechanisms provide an image of neutrality, but they

also function as a strategy for managing political risk rather than as a true reflection of empirical reality.

The institutionalisation of trust in numbers has significant social consequences, particularly in terms of governance, professional autonomy, and public trust. When numbers become the dominant means of justification, they restructure authority by privileging those who produce and manipulate numerical data over those who rely on experiential, narrative, or tacit forms of knowledge. This shift can be seen in the way bureaucratic and financial expertise has increasingly displaced professional judgment in fields such as medicine, law, and education.

For example, in clinical settings, decisions about resource allocation are increasingly made not by doctors exercising their professional expertise but by administrators working within numerical frameworks of cost-effectiveness and performance metrics (Porter, 1995). This transformation helps to strengthen a technocratic form of governance in which decisions are justified not by moral or philosophical reasoning but by reference to numerical thresholds and rankings.

Moreover, while quantification is often presented as a way to increase trust in institutions, it can also have the opposite effect. When people recognise that numerical assessments do not align with their lived experiences—whether in the form of manipulated unemployment figures, misleading school rankings, or inadequate patient care metrics—trust in the very institutions that deploy these numbers can erode (Porter, 1995). This paradox highlights the double-edged nature of numerical authority: while numbers can bolster legitimacy, they can also produce cynicism and disengagement when their limitations become apparent.

4.3 Reflexive Measurement and the Reconfiguration of Accountability

While critiques outlined above have extensively documented the limitations of transparency-based accountability and the distortions caused by an overreliance on numerical indicators, the challenge now is to outline pathways towards more reflexive and contextually grounded forms of measurement. Rather than abandoning calculative practices altogether, what is needed is an approach that reconfigures them in ways that enhance their responsiveness to complex social realities.

The challenge is to create accountability frameworks that are capable of sustaining pluralistic engagements with evidence rather than seeking to impose a singular, ostensibly objective regime of measurement. The proposals that have been made for accountability-based accounting, dialogical accountability, and intelligent accountability offer viable pathways for reconfiguring measurement in ways more responsive to organisational life's complexities.

These more inclusive approaches are based on the choice to move beyond the reductive assumptions of traditional ways of measuring to prefer practices that foreground deliberation, contestability, and pluralism in the construction of accountability. This shift requires acknowledging that numbers are not neutral reflections of organisational reality but socially constructed artefacts that encode certain assumptions and interests (Roberts, 1991). In these approaches, measurement is not eliminated



but understood as a process of constructive engagement, where numerical representations are actively contested, negotiated, and revised to align with the values and priorities of diverse stakeholders. Accountability can be understood beyond the lens of hierarchical control and compliance by distinguishing between individualising forms of accountability, which produce a sense of self as isolated and solitary, and socialising forms of accountability, which emphasise the interdependence of self and others (Roberts, 1991). This insight provides a foundational basis for developing more reflexive and dialogical approaches to measurement and accountability. Roberts' concept of socialising accountability is centred on the idea that accountability can be structured in ways that confirm and clarify the self through recognition of one's impact on others. This form of accountability is inherently relational, rooted in communicative action, mutual recognition, and interdependence rather than in surveillance and control. In contrast, hierarchical accountability, as enabled by conventional calculative practices, produces an individualised sense of self that is preoccupied with visibility, comparison, and compliance with externally imposed standards. The big challenge in this line of reasoning is to move beyond this dichotomy and to cultivate calculative practices that promote forms of accountability that are more reflective, relational, and socially embedded (Roberts, 1991).

A shift towards reflexive measurement necessitates a fundamental reconsideration of what counts as legitimate evidence in decision-making processes. Conventional calculative practices tend to rely on standardised indicators that create an illusion of comparability across contexts, yet this process often leads to the exclusion of localised, experiential, and non-quantifiable forms of knowledge (Roberts, 2009). Alternative measurement practices must, therefore, incorporate mechanisms that allow for greater interpretive flexibility, recognising that numerical representations are always partial and contingent. One suggestion that is possible to follow also in our case is the development of accountability-based accounting, which prioritises the needs and perspectives of affected constituencies rather than beginning with pre-defined accounting conventions (Dillard & Vinnari, 2019). This approach recognises that accountability must emerge from the mediation between different views, even through discussion and confrontation, rather than from a static

framework imposed from above.

The introduction of more dialogical forms of accountability offers a further means of recalibrating the role of measurement. Dialogical accountability approaches propose to look at calculative practices within broader deliberative structures, allowing diverse actors to engage in collective sense-making rather than merely responding to pre-existing indicators (Roberts, 2003). This perspective offers constructive criticism of the assumption that accountability is a matter of individualised compliance with external standards, conceiving it instead as a social practice in which measurement itself is subject to scrutiny and revision. In this view, calculative practices must be structured in ways that facilitate mutual responsiveness rather than functioning as instruments of hierarchical control.

One promising development in this regard is the concept of agonistic accountability, which builds on theories of democratic pluralism to suggest that accountability should be structured around the recognition of conflict and contestation rather than the pursuit of consensus (Vinnari & Dillard, 2016). In contrast to transparency regimes that promote the idea that we can achieve a singular, authoritative account of organisational performance, agonistic accountability frameworks acknowledge the multiplicity of perspectives that shape accountability relationships. This model positions calculative practices as tools for mediating between competing claims rather than as mechanisms for enforcing uniformity.

The implementation of such an approach would require institutional mechanisms that allow for the co-existence of multiple, overlapping forms of measurement. Rather than striving for a single, universally applicable metric, accountability-based accounting suggests the need for heterogeneous evaluative frameworks that are adaptable to different contexts and stakeholder concerns (Dillard & Vinnari, 2019). If we imagine implementing this in our context, it might be talking of the creation of alternative reporting mechanisms that allow Dance Well communities to articulate their own priorities and concerns rather than simply reacting to predefined indicators. These participatory accountability models can be one example of how calculative practices can be restructured to foster community engagement rather than technocratic oversight.

The integration of intelligent accountability within measurement systems further highlights the need for a more situated and relational approach to quantification (Roberts, 2009). This perspective offers a radical alternative to the belief that accountability can be fully achieved through transparency alone. Instead, adopting measurement practices is embedded within reciprocal relationships of trust and dialogue. Intelligent accountability imagines conditions in which the use of numbers can be done in ways that allow for substantive engagement rather than merely formal compliance, ensuring that the process of being held to account contributes to organisational learning and adaptation rather than defensive self-justification.

To concretise such a model, measurement systems must be designed in order to facilitate critical reflection rather than merely dictating what the result should be. This requires a move away from rigid, target-driven performance

metrics towards forms of evaluation that accommodate interpretive complexity. One possibility is the imagination of narrative-based accounting, which seeks to complement quantitative measures with qualitative accounts that provide a richer contextual understanding (Dillard & Vinnari, 2019). By allowing organisations to develop and propose their own sense-making processes rather than simply having to behave in accordance with externally imposed standards, narrative-based accounting can help recalibrate the relationship between measurement and accountability.



5.

A Toolkit for Dialogical Art-Based Collaborations

5.1 Narrative Medicine and the Reconfiguration of Accountability

The reconceptualisation of accountability through socialising, dialogical, and intelligent approaches calls for expanding evidence-based practices beyond their traditional reliance on numerical abstraction and managerial control. The integration of narrative medicine into the broader discourse on accountability, we believe, has the potential to enrich how organisations— particularly those in healthcare — construct, assess, and respond to complex realities. Narrative medicine, emphasising subjectivity, relationality, and the interpretive dimensions of knowledge, provides conceptual and practical resources for developing alternative accountability frameworks that foreground the experiential, contingent, and meaning-laden dimensions of professional practice and institutional governance.

Research in narrative medicine demonstrates that meaningful engagement with illness, care, and institutional practice cannot be captured solely through numerical representation (Charon, 2001). Narrative-based methodologies advocate for moving away from measurement towards interpretation in the belief that understanding human experience requires attentiveness to stories, lived experiences, and subjectivities that conventional calculative practices systematically exclude (Kleinman, 1988).

This cognitive transformation is particularly relevant for accountability because it sheds new light on the limitations of transparency as a way of governing. In contrast to numerical accounts, which strive for clarity and universality, narrative accounts foreground ambiguity, context, and complexity. The process of telling, listening, and interpreting stories offers a more profound occasion

to make sense of organisational realities than traditional performance metrics. It allows for dialogical accountability that is more in line with human experience and social interdependence (Frank, 1995).

One of the core contributions of narrative medicine is its emphasis on relationality and the ethics of recognition. Where conventional accountability frameworks tend to individualise responsibility and reinforce hierarchical relationships, narrative accountability offers a more socialising model in which actors are called to account through shared meaning-making rather than imposed visibility (Roberts, 1991).

In clinical contexts, for example, narrative medicine has demonstrated that illness cannot be fully understood through standardised biomedical classifications alone (Hunter, 1991). The practice of listening to patients' stories— what Charon (2001) describes as “attentive listening” and “close reading”—provides a model for accountability that is fundamentally dialogical and interactive rather than rigidly metric-driven. This suggests that accountability practices in healthcare could benefit from a more narratively informed approach, in which the experiences of professionals, patients, and stakeholders are made central to processes of evaluation and governance.

The integration of narrative into accountability systems necessitates a broader rethinking of what constitutes valid evidence in governance and decision-making. The model of narrative-based medicine has already advanced this argument within healthcare, where narrative evidence-based medicine has been proposed as an alternative to the rigid hierarchies of standardised, evidence-based practice (Charon & Wyer, 2008). This shift does not reject the value of clinical trials or statistical evidence but supplements it with qualitative, experience-based accounts that capture dimensions of care that numerical models overlook (Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1999).

Applying this perspective to healthcare accountability suggests that narrative-based reporting frameworks could counterbalance conventional, evidence-based models. When dealing with the arts, instead of relying on formal indicators, healthcare organisations could adopt narrative-based accountability reports, where clinicians and healthcare stakeholders provide reflective accounts of their work, ethical dilemmas, and relational engagements. Such

an approach would allow for greater complexity, ethical reflexivity, and inclusivity in accountability mechanisms, shifting the emphasis from compliance-driven ideas of evidence.

5.2 The Hybridisation of Healthcare Professions

Blending narrative-based approaches into accountability frameworks has a number of important implications for healthcare professionals, particularly in building their relationship with art-based approaches. A narrative-based approach to accountability offers a means of recalibrating professional governance by reorienting measurement practices towards meaning, ethical reflection, and collective sense-making, providing more situated, context-sensitive, and socially embedded ways of understanding performance and responsibility in healthcare systems. It must be recognised that introducing narrative accountability demands a shift towards an approach that acknowledges the lived experiences of professionals and patients, reconfiguring accountability as a dialogical and ethical process rather than a mechanism of surveillance and control.



For clinical managers, this requires rethinking how performance is evaluated, how organisational learning occurs, and how professional engagement with accountability processes can be improved. Instead of relying solely on retrospective performance data, narrative-based accountability encourages prospective and interpretive forms of assessment. This involves engaging professionals in structured storytelling, reflective practice, and dialogical evaluation, ensuring that accountability mechanisms support learning, adaptation, and ethical deliberation rather than simply enforcing compliance.

A narrative-based approach to accountability reintroducing subjectivity, interpretation, and professional judgment into managerial decision-making. Rather than reducing clinical practice to quantifiable targets, managers are asked to incorporate qualitative narratives from professionals and patients into evaluation processes, creating a more responsive and adaptive form of institutional governance. This shift does not reject quantitative data but complements it with textual, experience-based accounts that provide richer insights into the realities of care delivery.

The integration of narrative-based accountability into healthcare governance is not simply a shift in how professionals are held to account— it is a transformation of what it means to be a professional within contemporary healthcare systems. By embedding socialising, dialogical, and intelligent accountability within evaluative frameworks, we suggest giving professionals a new and higher tole, pushing beyond conventional distinctions between clinical expertise, managerial oversight, and financial accountability. The transformation we are advocating signals a broader process of hybridisation within healthcare professions, where traditional boundaries between roles must be accepted as increasingly fluid, and new forms of professional identity emerge.

Hybrid professionalism has long been recognised as a response to the institutional complexity of modern healthcare, where professionals must navigate the demands of clinical care, bureaucratic control, and economic efficiency (Noordegraaf, 2015). However, the introduction of narrative-based accountability extends this hybridisation beyond a mere structural necessity, reframing it as an active professional practice. We are proposing to contest and somehow rethink the rigid separation between medical knowledge and organisational governance. Narrative

accountability encourages professionals to operate at the intersection of multiple logics, engaging in interpretation, ethical reasoning, and institutional mediation (McGivern et al., 2015).

There are, of course, significant implications for professional identity and institutional culture. For instance, clinicians, rather than passive subjects of managerial oversight in narrative-based accountability, become interpretive agents responsible for making sense of complex patient cases, ethical dilemmas, and organisational constraints. The combination of narrative reflection, participatory evaluation, and case-based deliberation push towards the constitution of a hybrid professional mindset, where expertise is not confined to clinical knowledge but extends to organisational negotiation, ethical engagement, and institutional learning.

For healthcare institutions, especially when they want to genuinely encounter the arts, this calls for new governance mechanisms that supplement traditional performance indicators. Instead of relying solely on numerical targets and compliance measures, we are suggesting here that accountability frameworks should integrate narrative-based peer evaluations, structured reflective practices, and participatory governance models that allow professionals to articulate, justify, and negotiate their decisions within a shared institutional space. It must be clarified that this transition does not diminish the role of measurement but rather reorients it, ensuring that quantitative assessments are complemented by interpretive, context-sensitive forms of accountability.

Rather than resisting hybridisation as an erosion of professional autonomy, narrative-based accountability embraces it as an evolution of professionalism itself. In an era where healthcare is increasingly governed by competing logics of care, efficiency, and evidence-based practice, hybrid professionals must be equipped not only with clinical and managerial skills but also with the capacity to navigate complexity through dialogue, reflection, and ethical reasoning. Narrative accountability provides the framework for this new professional orientation, embedding hybridisation not as an institutional constraint but as a defining characteristic of contemporary healthcare professionalism.

5.3 Practical Approaches to Embedding Dance in Healthcare

One of the key messages of this publication is that the challenge of integrating dance and the arts into healthcare systems is not simply a matter of demonstrating impact. We must devote greater attention to redesigning institutional structures, accountability frameworks, and professional identities to facilitate meaningful collaboration. The tensions between artistic freedom, medical evidence, and bureaucratic governance will not be resolved through minor adjustments but require a fundamental rethinking of how healthcare values, supports, and assesses non-clinical interventions.

We conclude this chapter with a proposal for a Toolkit for Collaboration that attempts to provide concrete strategies for overcoming these barriers, providing healthcare professionals, managers, and artists with the means to work together rather than in parallel. We believe that with the promotion of shared frameworks, pluralistic



evidence models, institutional support structures, and adaptive accountability mechanisms, it is possible to create healthcare systems that fully embrace the arts not as an adjunct but as an integral component of care.

The primary challenge at the heart of this chapter has been the organisational and bureaucratic barriers that hinder the full acceptance and integration of artistic practices—particularly dance—within healthcare provision. While a substantial body of research has demonstrated the positive impacts of the arts on health, these discussions often overlook the structural, institutional, and professional tensions that arise when attempting to embed artistic approaches within medical systems. The question of evidence has emerged as a central point of discussion reflecting deeper epistemological and governance-related conflicts. If the integration of dance and the arts into healthcare is to move beyond pilot projects and isolated interventions, a more structured approach is needed. We need to foster dialogue, mutual understanding and shared accountability between artistic and medical communities.

This concluding section proposes a Toolkit for Collaboration, designed as a practical guide for both medical professionals and artists seeking to work together in healthcare settings. We propose a translation of the insights developed throughout this publication into tangible mechanisms for engagement. In so doing, this toolkit aims to bridge the divide between biomedical paradigms and arts-based approaches, fostering institutional legitimacy, professional collaboration, and sustainable integration.

Establishing a Shared Framework for Collaboration

Our research has identified as one of the primary obstacles to the integration of artistic practices into healthcare the lack of a shared language and framework between artists and medical professionals. Dancers, choreographers, and other artists often operate within an aesthetic and process-driven paradigm, valuing creativity, improvisation, and embodied experience, whereas healthcare operates within a standardised, outcome-driven framework, where interventions are expected to be evidence-based, replicable, and measurable.

If we're serious about facilitating effective collaboration, both professional communities need to develop an interest

in the construction of a conceptual bridge that enables them to articulate their respective objectives while fostering a space for negotiation and mutual recognition. This framework should include:

- **Common definitions and language:** Establishing agreed-upon terminology to prevent misunderstandings. For instance, clarifying the distinction between therapeutic interventions and artistic practices with therapeutic effects can help avoid tensions around professional roles.
- **Defined roles and responsibilities:** Outlining the respective contributions of dancers, medical practitioners, and healthcare administrators to ensure that artistic integrity is preserved while respecting medical protocols.
- **Ethical and professional guidelines:** Elaborating a common ethical ground based on the acknowledgement of the autonomy and professionalism of both medical and artistic practitioners. These considerations should guarantee that artists are not expected to conform to clinical models they do not align with.

Developing a Reflexive and Pluralistic Approach to Evidence

The question of evidence has been a major point of tension in the discussion of arts in healthcare. Traditional biomedical frameworks demand quantifiable, standardised outcomes, while arts-based interventions often emphasise process-oriented, experiential, and relational impacts. This epistemological fracture has surfaced as problematic in our research because it creates barriers to legitimacy, preventing artistic practices from being fully embraced within institutional healthcare settings.

We suggest that a reflexive and pluralistic approach to evidence must be adopted—one that recognises the validity of both quantitative and qualitative forms of assessment. This approach should:

- **Expand the range of acceptable evidence:** While clinical trials and standardised assessments remain valuable, healthcare institutions should also incorporate narrative, case-based, and participatory research methods that capture the embodied and social dimensions of artistic engagement.

- **Encourage co-designed evaluative practices:** Artists and medical professionals should collaboratively develop evaluation criteria that balance the priorities of both fields. For instance, rather than measuring only physical improvements, assessments could also include psychosocial, relational, and creative impacts.
- **Promote longitudinal and process-based research:** Recognising that the effects of dance and artistic engagement may unfold over time and through relational dynamics, rather than yielding immediate, quantifiable results.

Institutional Mechanisms for Sustainable Integration

One aspect that is evident from our research is that if arts-based practices truly wish to be fully institutionalised into healthcare systems, they must move beyond experimental initiatives and become more embedded within frameworks of healthcare delivery. This requires:

- **Incorporating dance and the arts into social prescribing models:** Many healthcare systems already adopt these types of prescriptions to supplement non-medical interventions in patient care. Dance and movement-based practices should be formally recognised within these frameworks, ensuring they are not merely temporary or supplementary but structurally supported within healthcare provision.
- **Establishing formal partnerships between cultural and healthcare institutions:** Creating jointly governed initiatives where medical and artistic professionals work collaboratively, ensuring sustainable funding, professional recognition, and long-term institutional investment.
- **Ensuring professional development and training:** Equipping healthcare providers and artists with the skills needed to navigate hybrid professional environments appears necessary. This could include workshops on narrative-based accountability, embodied knowledge, and relational care.



Accountability and Governance for Artistic Practices in Healthcare

Accountability is a critical issue in integrating the arts into healthcare. Conventional accountability models tend to be individualising and compliance-driven, whereas arts-based engagement thrives on collective participation and relational meaning-making. A socialising model of accountability—informed by narrative medicine, intelligent accountability, and hybrid professionalism—offers a way forward.

To operationalise this should be promoted:

- **Narrative-based reporting mechanisms:** Instead of relying only on quantitative indicators, healthcare institutions wishing to include the arts should incorporate qualitative storytelling methods where practitioners, artists, and patients articulate their experiences, challenges, and transformations.
- **Dialogical evaluation forums:** Establish spaces where artists and medical professionals can reflect on their work, share insights, and collectively assess the value of artistic interventions.
- **Hybrid accountability frameworks:** Recognising that artistic professionals in healthcare settings operate at the intersection of clinical, managerial, and artistic logics, requiring accountability models that acknowledge their hybrid professional identities.

The proposed toolkit for collaboration is a direct response to the varied realities we encountered through our research in Dance Well, where the integration of dance into healthcare settings exists in different stages of acceptance and institutionalisation. Rather than a set of prescriptions, this toolkit is to be read as a set of resources that facilitates mutual understanding, institutional adaptation, and professional dialogue between dancers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers. It recognises that the relationship between the arts and healthcare is not uniform; in some contexts, dance is already embedded within social prescribing and community health frameworks, while in others, it remains an experimental or peripheral practice, struggling for legitimacy.

Providing practical mechanisms for engagement, the toolkit proposed a framework for navigating the complexity of interdisciplinary collaborations, ensuring the balance between artistic integrity and the demands of governance and accountability regulation of healthcare institutions. Crucially, it acknowledges that collaboration requires more than evidence of impact—it necessitates a transformation in institutional culture, professional roles, and evaluative practices.

The Dance Well project exemplifies this transformation—not by adapting to conventional healthcare models but by redefining what care itself can be. Dance’s nature as an embodied and participatory practice invites critical reflection on the reductive logics of prescription and intervention, demonstrating that artistic engagement can foster wellbeing without being instrumentalised or necessarily subordinated to clinical priorities.

The toolkit for collaboration reflects this vision, offering structured yet adaptable pathways for establishing long-term, sustainable partnerships between the arts and healthcare. Our research affirms that the success of such collaborations depends not only on proving the effectiveness of dance in health settings but on cultivating institutional environments that value and sustain artistic engagement as an essential dimension of care.

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This work is dedicated to the idea that dance is for everyone, and movement is a space of possibility, connection, and change.

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Monica Gillette is a dance dramaturg, facilitator and Co-Artistic Director of the Tanztriennale in Hamburg in 2026. As a dramaturg she accompanied several European funded projects – Migrant Bodies - Moving Borders (2017-2019), Empowering Dance (2018-2023) and Dancing Museums - The Democracy of Beings (2020-2021), Dance Well (2022-2025) and Aerowaves' Moving Borders Project (2023-2025). She is a dramaturg and transformation coach at Tanzhaus Zürich and researcher for EDN - European Dance Development Network, resulting in the 2024 publication titled Practices of Care and Wellbeing in Contemporary Dance: Evidence from the Field. In the context of Dance Well, Gillette has led dance classes, offered workshops in teacher training programs, facilitated knowledge exchange sessions and accompanied the project as a dramaturg for several years. Her own journey with dance and Parkinson's began in 2014 with Mia Habib and the project Brain Dance and continued with Yasmeen Godder as Co-Artistic Director of the project Störung/Hafra'ah, bringing together people living with Parkinson's, professional dancers and scientists to collaboratively research movement and for which they won the Shimon Peres Prize in 2017.

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Roberto Casarotto is the Co-director of Aerowaves, the European Platform for Dance promoting cross-border mobility of the work of emerging dance artists and several capacity building programmes for emerging choreographers, writers, curators and podcasters. Until 2022 he collaborated with CSC and Operaestate Festival in Bassano del Grappa, curating dance programmes and developing international projects, supported by the EU Creative Europe, Erasmus + and other Programmes. For the Municipality of Bassano del Grappa, and its citizens, he developed Dance Well – Movement research for Parkinson and has been coordinating its national and international growth until 2025. He is the author of the book Nigel Charnock published in 2009 by L'Epos. In 2015-18 he was Artistic Director of Balletto di Roma. Prior to working for dance organisations, Roberto was a contemporary dancer.

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Greta Pieropan has been working for festivals, dancehouse and dance artists since 2014, and collaborating with international colleagues in different European and extra-European projects dedicated to dance practices. Alongside her work in communication and writing, she also developed her practice as a dance dramaturg, to which she refers as being a “professional shapeshifter”: bringing the dramaturgical posture into the work with the artists, the facilitation of encounters with the different audiences and communities, co-creating and developing projects for communities and writing as a way of giving words to creative processes and document them. She is currently (2022 - June 2025) working as a communication manager for the Dance Well project. She is part of the EDN board of directors and partner of the Aerowaves network, and tries to bring her dramaturgical practice to these new roles, trying to always be a bridge between artists and institutions, artists and audiences. She strongly believes that dance can change lives because she has experienced it firsthand. The connection between dance and wellbeing, and the positive impact of dance in everyday life has been part of her research too, with a special attention to mental health in high-school environments.

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Sara Houston is Professor of Dance and Community Engagement at University of Roehampton in London. Her pioneering research has been in examining the experience of people dancing with Parkinson's and for this she won a BUPA Foundation Prize in 2011. Her monograph Dancing with Parkinson's was published in 2019 by Intellect Books. Working closely with English National Ballet's Dance for Parkinson's group (2010-2015), she has also engaged with Parkinson's Dance groups around the world, and is asked regularly to give talks and workshops internationally. Professor Houston works regularly with Dance Well and guest teaches on its teacher training course, and has acted as research mentor for the Jockey Club Dance Well in Hong Kong. She was a partner on Empowering Dance - The Soft Skills Teaching and Learning Approach (2020-2023).

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Luisella Carnelli has a PhD in Theory and History of Theatre and a Master in Entrepreneurship of Performing Arts. Since 2005 she works as senior researcher and consultant at Fondazione Fitzcarraldo and at the Cultural Observatory of Piedmont. She carries out studies and researches designed to investigate the crucial aspects of creativity, production, organization, evaluation, consumption of culture, management of cultural organizations and co-creative processes focused on active participation. She specially deals with the analysis of cultural behaviours and cultural project evaluation, with a primary focus on the added value that cultural participation (both active and receptive) and creative and artistic practices can generate in terms of individual and social well-being. She is involved as researcher and trainer in EU Projects related to participatory/co-creative practices studying the impacts on artists, organisations and communities involved (ADESTE project, CONNECT, BeSpectACTive! 1+2, Dancing Museums, Empowering Dance - Developing Soft Skills, Adeste+, Empowering Dance – The Soft Skills Teaching and Learning Approach, Dance Well).

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Ilaria Foroni is currently a PhD student in Management at Ca' Foscari University in Venice and a researcher at the "aiku- Arte, Impresa, Cultura". Cultural policies and the live productions are among her main areas of interest. In particular, her doctoral research investigates possible interactions between performing arts and public policies, considering the multidimensional value of cultural production and the evolution of artistic professionalism. Her academic background is characterized by interdisciplinarity, with a bachelor's degree in Economics and a subsequent master's degree in Economics and Management of Arts and Cultural Activities. Alongside her studies, Ilaria has always cultivated her passion for dance, first studying at Spaziodanza Padova and currently in Venice at the Centro di Ricerca Teatrale (CTR).

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