

## Online Conference Transcript

This is a transcript of the online conference [How Can We Move? Creating Equitable Spaces in Contemporary Dance](#), organized and hosted by EDN – European Dance Development Network on 22 November 2023.

EDN's online conference was an occasion to connect with colleagues, artists and peers working in the contemporary dance sector in Europe in an [engaging programme](#) of participatory movement practices, conversation sessions, presentations, and keynotes by forward-looking representatives working towards a more equitable future of contemporary dance.

This transcript includes hyperlinks to the references provided by speakers, including project and professional websites.

### Opening Words

By EDN Co-Presidents:

Kerstin Evert, artistic director, [K3 Tanzplan Hamburg](#) (Germany)

Laurent Meheust, director, [Le Gymnase CDCN](#) (France)

Kerstin Evert:

Good morning, everyone. A warm welcome to EDN's - European Dance Development Network's annual conference. My name is Kerstin Evert, and together with my colleague, EDN co-president Laurent Meheust, I'm very happy that, as co-presidents, we have the opportunity to open this conference today on behalf of EDN.

This year's title is How Can We Move? Creating Equitable Spaces in Contemporary Dance. The conference takes place in the frame of the EDN project EDNext, co-funded by the European Union. EDN's topic for the activities in '23 is equity. Especially because it is about this important topic of equity, which is closely related to equality and fairness and implies that nobody is discriminated against for whatever reason, it is important for us to briefly address the current situation.

As a network, EDN stands for openness and encounters without prejudice, and positions itself clearly against any form of discrimination for whatever reason, be it on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, social or ethnic background, ableism, or any other reason.

We currently experience a time that is challenging on many levels and will remain so for the foreseeable future. This makes it all the more important to work together to create a future worth living in, that opens up good living conditions for everyone.

It is always important to look at the overall context, to consider different positions, to negotiate them democratically with each other, and, above all, not to go in for populist simplifications but to endure the complexity of the interrelationships and to find solutions together.

In these daily challenges, dance as an art form can support us as people who work in this field but also all people who experience dance by watching or by practicing. This is because the great potential of dance lies, among other things, in its body-based knowledge and the associated soft skills that can be learned through the practice of dance.

In dance, people from the most diverse backgrounds and nationalities work together. For sure, people, no matter how professional they are, come into a work situation, the rehearsal space, or the stage with their private and professional concerns, their fears, previous experiences, attitudes, reservations, and the physical and health conditions, as well as the enthusiasm, joy, commitment, and their skills, knowledge, and potentials.

But dancers have to rely on each other physically and, at the same time, need to have trust in the other dancers so that they will be able to engage in the movement and space and time together with respect to each other and without physically or mentally hurting each other.

So coming back to the topic of soft skills, on the basis of five case studies, the Erasmus+ EU co-funded [Empowering Dance](#) project could show that soft skill learning actually takes place in dance practices. These soft skills include, to name just a few: teamwork, conflict resolution, stress management, taking care of others, empathy, critical thinking, and, last but not least, dealing with uncertainty and complexity.

Dance as an art form and as a practice can, therefore, have a highly positive effect on how people live together. It is, therefore, important that dance professionals and dance institutions are self-confident with their skills and knowledge so that they can contribute to all people treating each other with more respect and openness.

That's why I'm very happy to share a recent statement from Norwegian choreographer and artist with a background in conflict resolution, Mia Habib. Via Monica Gillette, who will also talk later today and from whom I know about this statement, Mia gave me the permission to quote what she said recently in the frame of a festival in Norway.

So I quote Mia now: "I invite you, who are connected with European art institutions, to start a hard, painful, and almost impossible work of opening your houses to people and communities who are turning into enemies and to ask how to continue to live together, how to host what feels impossible, how to house pain, how to facilitate soft meetings." And with these words by Mia Habib, I would like to hand over to my dear colleague Laurent.

Laurent Meheust:

Thank you, Kerstin. Inspired by the shifting landscapes in contemporary dance, EDN has moved, and our network has expanded its focus and changed its name from European Dancehouse Network to European Dance Development Network. We represent different kinds of organisations, 48 in 27 European countries, contributing to the development of contemporary dance in Europe.

Not all of them are building-based. Our goals are to build relationships, to recognise active contribution, to be a meeting place for coalition and alliances between different kinds of associations representing diverse realities and perspectives in the field.

We accompany the sector's transformation and support striving for more equitable and diverse spaces for dance. This is EDN in a shared movement towards more sustainable working conditions in the dance field and a more diverse, accessible, and equitable dance ecosystem, a meeting time and place for the interdependent, where centres turn to hubs, houses to spaces.

EDN is one of the six partners of Perform Europe. In its second open call to be launched next week, on 1st of December, Perform Europe will support inclusive, diverse, and green touring projects, submitted by applicants from the 40 Creative Europe countries.

This morning, we are going to dedicate time and mental space to equity. We want to open spaces, illuminate areas of shadows, face our obstacles or breaks. Why? Especially because benefiting from public support, it is our duty to return to the whole society, not in an issue of inclusion but of representation, representation of the existing.

We have no lessons to teach. It's not about being the best student in the class, but just to be lucid and therefore to learn from others. And for this conference, we decided not to engage one single moderator. Instead, we want to make moderation a joint task, bringing in many voices.

Kerstin and I, as co-presidents of EDN, we would like to especially thank our host of this year's activities: Dance Ireland and Dance Limerick, La Briqueterie, Dansateliers Rotterdam, and ICK Amsterdam, Lavanderia a Vapore, and also all contributors and speakers on this online conference, the researcher of the publication, Alexandra Baybutt, the EDN office team, very precious: Eva Broberg, Gaja Lužnik, Christoph Bovermann, and Gebra Serra i Bosch, and European Union for co-founding EDNext. So time to jump in.

## Opening Moves

Movement practice by [Tobi Balogun](#), multidisciplinary movement artist (Ireland)

Louise Costelloe:

I'm Louise Costelloe, the programme producer at [Dance Ireland](#). Together with our colleagues in Dance Limerick, we hosted the [EDN Atelier Dancing on the Edge: Peripheral Practices](#) last February, where Tobi Balogun shared a longer session and an introduction to his bounce practice, which we've just had a flavour of. You'll see more of and move with Tobi at the end of

this conference. It was a privilege for us to start this year of inquiry around the issues of equity. And I'm delighted to now introduce speaker Aminata Cairo.

### Keynote Speech "Holding Space"

By [Aminata Cairo](#), anthropologist, psychologist, educator, storyteller, "love- worker"  
(Netherlands/USA)

Aminata Cairo:

(Singing). The song says, "Stick your ear out because there's a story burning inside that's just burning and waiting to get out." So I'm going to talk to you a little bit about storytelling and my approach when it comes to creating spaces of inclusion. I'm going to share my screen with you here.

So, to start with, my name is Aminata Cairo. I am a mother. I'm a daughter. I am a sister. I'm an anthropologist. I'm a dancer. And I always start with those things because even though you might see me as one person, there's so many stories that contribute to who I am, just like everybody else. We are the container of all these stories we are representing at any given time.

And so my background is anthropology, and anthropology is the story of people. And so the approach that I use as I traverse this Earth is to look at how does the story work? And in any given place, situation, organisation, once you understand how the story works, then you can decide, "How am I going to navigate it? How am I going to infiltrate it? How am I going to shake it loose?" But you have to understand how the story works.

And another reason I use stories is because how we organise our mind, how we organise our world is also through stories. So the way we engage, the way we understand, the way we make sense of the world is through stories. And so when it comes to this idea of creating inclusive spaces for us to live together, what kind of stories do we hold onto for dear life? What kind of stories do we have for each other? What kind of stories do we have about ourselves that you should not touch? What stories should we honour and respect, and what stories should we learn to let go of? And so, again, what I find is when I use the concept of stories, it makes it easier for people to join me and to understand what I'm talking about.

So when you ask 10 people about, "What is diversity and inclusion?" you're going to get 10 different stories. I'm going to share mine with you. And mine starts with this drawing here, which is the drawing by my oldest son, my oldest son who is an animator, comic book artist. And a number of years ago, I took him to college, arts institute in the US.

And as you can see, he has a great passion for "There should be wider images for girls," that's one of his things. So I always start with this drawing. So a number of years ago, this is my firstborn, my baby, I took him to college. You know, US, big country, 10 to 12 hours in the car, like ... On the one hand, you're happy and excited. On the other hand, there's all kinds of stuff going through you as I'm taking my baby to this place to leave him behind.

And then we got there. But, you know, artists, we're a little different, right? So when we got there, the whole city is taken over by this arts institute. So it was like, "It's going to be okay. This is a good thing. You're with your people, go do your thing. He's going to be just fine."

So two, three days, we are at this arts institute. We are in the city. And by the third day, they bring you into this basketball arena, very American. So all these students and their parents, and there's a sound show on and the lights ... "You're one of us", T-shirts being thrown in the audience ... like a sports event. Very American. And at some point, they go, "All African American students, stand up. All Latino students, stand up. Asian students, stand up. Native American, international, stand up. Look at how diverse we are."

Now, I'm from the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, they would never do that, but in the US, oh yes, very demonstrative, "Look at how diverse we are." And indeed, it was very diverse. So we say our goodbyes. And about three weeks later, he calls me, and he says, "Ma, guess what? I have arts history. We're skipping African art history, we're skipping Asian art history, we're skipping Oceanic art history. The only thing we're going to study is European art history."

Now, this is the number one arts institute in the United States. So it's very cute that you call out all this diversity. That's nice. That's cute. But when it comes to which story is going to be told, which story is valid... And I look at it this way. When we're talking about the term diversity, diversity means that we have a wealth of stories to begin with. That's what diversity means.

But what we had here is that out of this wealth of stories, there's a story that rises. There's a, "Well, of course we're going to tell this story." That story then becomes valid, that's the story that's important. Of course, this is the go-to story, what I refer to as the dominant story.

And what happens to those other stories that are less than, silenced, overlooked? "Oh, if we have some time left over," et cetera. And so what we have then, again, out of this range, this wealth of stories, there's a story that's dominant and then other which automatically, unfortunately, means less than, et cetera.

So when it comes to diversity and inclusion, for me, the challenge for me is we're dealing with these inequities, and we know about it. How do we connect, and how do we treat all the stories that are out there as valid? That's the challenge.

So I use the terminology dominant and the other, and I use that on purpose. And there's two reasons. You hear a lot, for instance, about white privilege and about whiteness. Nothing wrong with that. There's a valid theory. And sometimes this is about whiteness and people of colour, but sometimes it's about men versus women. Sometimes it's about women versus men. Sometimes it's about adults versus children. Sometimes it's, "I'm from the city, you're from the rural area." Sometimes it's from the LGB versus the T. Sometimes it's, "I work on the fourth floor, you work on the first floor."

All that to say all of us are in the position of dominance sometimes, and all of us are in the position of the other depending on the situation, depending on the context. That's one of the reasons that I use this language. Another reason I use this language, you also hear the terminology "the oppressor versus the oppressed." That's personally not language that I use

because it gives the impression that we are separated from each other. And in my approach, our starting point is always that it's about us. It's never about them or those people. There's only us.

Some of us always have the right to speak. Some of us always go first. Some of us are overlooked. But in the end, it's still about us and how we relate to each other and how we have learned how to relate to each other and how we maintain those relationships. So that's the work.

And so when it comes to this particular example; so my son doesn't get to hear about African art history, but it's not just about that. None of the other students don't get to hear about it either, right? So we have learned certain things about this dominant and the other position.

So, again, my goal is, how do we treat all these stories as valid? And there's nobody who's going to say that that's not a good idea. Of course we want all stories to be treated as valid. Everybody wants that. However, this did not happen overnight. This took hundreds of years for us to get to this place. And so there's all kinds of mechanisms that have contributed to this, and there's all kinds of mechanisms that maintain this. So the moment you try to do this ... stuff starts to happen, and we're right back where we started, right?

And so one of the main mechanisms is language. I just mentioned white privilege. And again, white privilege is a very valid theory that helps us understand. But I've also seen the mention of white privilege used as a weapon to shut people up. So when somebody's trying to have that conversation, when somebody's trying to make the connection, "Yeah, well, you have white privilege." "Oh ... nevermind," and we're right back to where we started. And the conversation is over.

Or somebody who's down here who's being used to being overlooked and silenced and was finally brave enough, "Let me tell you what that's like." "Well, you're such a victim." "Okay ... nevermind." Conversation is over, and we're back to where we started. And there's a new one. Actually, it's not a new one, but one that we hear more lately, and that is, "Well, you just can't say anything anymore." I don't know if you've heard that one, right?

And so, again, when you're used to speaking all the time, when you're used to having the floor and the right to speak, and all of a sudden now, there's counter noise, "Well, you just can't say anything anymore," and they're out of the conversation. So pay attention how we use language to maintain the divide between dominant and the other.

Another aspect is just our cultural patterns. What kinds of behaviours do we reward? What kinds of behaviours do we punish? Those who speak up and who speak out, we reward that kind of behaviour. The person who's quiet and sits in the corner, "I don't know, I'm not so sure about that one." It might be that that person is shy. It might be that they need more time. But there's certain things that have come into how we relate to certain things, how we label certain things, and that contributes to this dominant and the other division.

Gezellig. Gezellig is my favourite Dutch word. For those Dutch people among us, they know. So gezellig is this Dutch concept. Gezellig means comfortable, cosy, and we like for things to be

comfortable and cosy. When you come to the Netherlands, there's coffee, there's tea, there's cookies, and it better be gezellig, right?

And so, talking about discrimination, exclusion, "Oh man, that's not gezellig. It was so gezellig, now you bring this up. Ah." And you get punished for that. You don't get invited to the tea, coffee, and the cookies anymore because you broke up the gezelligheid. So gezellig is very important.

And I like gezellig too, but the problem is if I want to discuss this, if I want to break through these patterns, it's not gezellig, so then I better be quiet. That's how powerful of a mechanism it is. That's how we use it. We call it a levelling mechanism. "Ugh. It was gezellig, you broke it up, you no longer get to play." That's how powerful it is. And we start to censor ourself, "I want to bring it up, ah, but if I do, not gezellig, so let me be quiet." All right?

And so, again, this took us hundreds of years to get here, and we're at a very interesting place now where at least there's awareness of these inequities and the fact that we relate to each other in this way. But what we see now there's this awareness, and it's all really, really sensitive. It's really sensitive.

The way we got here is what I call... It's not what I call it, it's through conditioning. And what that means is that you learn about these things and all of a sudden, it has become your normal. You're not even aware. "Well, I didn't know. I didn't see." Exactly, because that's how conditioning work. You learn by picking up stuff. "This is just how we've always done it." And before you know it, we're in these patterns. Before you know it, you've learned things about being here, you've learned things about being here, and we maintain it with each other.

And so it's because of the conditioning that we don't see, and, in addition to that, we don't like for things to not be gezellig, so we just kind of maintain this, and we keep it moving. And so what we see then is that we are in a very interesting period, and I call it like puberty. So, all of a sudden, it's really sensitive, and it's particularly our young people who are taking the lead, who are protesting, who are speaking out, saying, "Unacceptable. We want things to change." And the way they do it, it's not always gezellig, not always in a very nice, pleasant way. So it's like this, right?

So we have this confrontation, "Ah. But I didn't know." I know you didn't know because that's because of the conditioning. And then, people down here like, "I don't care that you didn't know. I'm going to cancel you because you should know." So that's the period where we are now. It's really sensitive.

And so the challenge is if we understand this, how we relate to each other, can we be sensitive to not just disposition the other position, but can we also be sensitive to being in this dominant position? Because we know, again, can we, through conditioning, "I know you were not aware, but things might have to change. But can we be sensitive to what that will do to both of us?"

I want to say a little bit about vulnerability versus fragility. Part of this dynamic that we have, in particular when it comes to this position of the dominance... And let me clarify something because a lot of times dominance is linked to authority and is seen as something negative.

Being in a dominant position does not have to mean that it's a negative position. It can be about leadership, it can be about talent, it can be about responsibility, right?

One of the most egalitarian people in the world are hunter-gatherers. And when they go hunting, you follow the one with the most talent. It's not that we're all equal, and we walk around in a circle. When I'm lost in the woods, if you're really good at trail seeking, please, by all means, lead the way and get me out of here.

So being in a dominant position does not necessarily have to be something negative. But what you see when it comes to vulnerability, it is a really vulnerable position to be in. When you're used to always having the floor, when you're used to that, your story always goes first. When this person is asked to wait or to make room, then this person is a lot more vulnerable. "What do you mean I don't get to speak first? What do you mean I don't get to go?" And that's usually when you hear, "Well, I can't say anything anymore." That's usually from the dominant position, right?

So when we're talking about being vulnerable, it's so great to be vulnerable, but a lot of times we confuse vulnerability with fragility. And I got to fragility by studying actually earthquake studies. And a measure of fragility is the point at which things will fall apart. They have all kinds of calculations. And a lot of times, we act as if we're really fragile, but really we are vulnerable.

And the difference is this. You hear a lot of people say, "Well, I don't feel safe," so they don't participate. What they're saying is, "It's not gezellig," which is different. "It might feel uncomfortable to me." Are you really not safe? Do you really think that you cannot handle things? You can handle things, but it might be uncomfortable. Again, because once we start looking at these voices and stories that are overlooked, it might be uncomfortable. But again, when we're so used to, "I want to be comfortable all the time," there's a certain privilege. So we have to become clear about, are we vulnerable, which is fine, or are we fragile? And my feeling, my take is we're not as fragile as we think we are. We can handle more than we think we can. All right?

And the last one, when it comes to safety and risk, we have a certain awareness now that we have these inequities, we are aware that this is a position of power and privilege and there's nothing wrong with that, but it's about, how do you use that power and privilege?

But what we see now is like, "You know what? You're absolutely right. These stories were not here. You're welcome to come. Please come. We want to have you. Now adapt to us 100%." And then we wonder why people come and they leave within the year, or we wonder why they come and they leave screaming. We wonder why people don't even come in.

Because there is a lack of trust. "I know I can participate as long as I learn everything about how it works up here, and anything that makes me unique, I should leave behind," as opposed to, "If we're going to invite these new and other stories that we've overlooked, what we should do is interweave our story so we can expand what we have." But unfortunately, that's not what we do.

So if you want to create these spaces, we have to keep in mind that people don't feel safe, that people don't trust us, and that's because of a certain history. And so we have to work first on,



what kind of relationships do we build so that people will feel safe enough to contribute, to participate? How are we going to interweave our stories to create these spaces?

I want to say a little bit about theory. Too fast. A little bit about theory. And the first one is indigenous knowledge. I'm an anthropologist, and I use indigenous knowledge, and there's a lot I can say about that, but given time, there's two things I want to say about it.

Number one, from an indigenous perspective, we are connected to anything and everybody at any given moment in time. And so that's why, in this work, it is always about us. Our starting point is always us. And the second thing is, when it comes to the knowledge that's out there, it's not something that you can go and get and claim. The idea is the knowledge is already out there. It is between us, it is among us, but it's about, "How do I stand in relationships to it, and how am I going to be a steward of knowledge, as opposed to an owner of knowledge?" It's a different approach when it comes to knowledge.

Another one that I use in terms of a theoretical lens is the blues aesthetic. The blues is about the lament. The blues is about the (singing). That's the blues. So the blues is about ... that it is painful and that it's okay, which is very different from, "Oh, it's not gezellig, so I'm out." The blues says, "No, no, no, I know it's not gezellig. Come on, bring it. Bring it, and be brutally honest about it, the fact that it hurts, the fact that it's painful. That's fine."

But it's not just about the complaints. It's about you have to go through the hard stuff in order to end up at the good stuff. That's what the blues is about. So when it comes to creating these spaces, when it comes to these inequities, when it comes to the hurt, yeah, I know it sucks, I know it hurts, but we got to go through it anyway if we want to end up under good stuff, if we want to go there.

Another aspect of the blues that we also have in jazz is there comes a moment... They call it the moment to shine. There comes a moment where you have to improvise, when you have to do something, when you have to deliver something, even when you don't know what to do. Now, again, if our starting point is, "I'm connected to anything and everything," that means, "I have a resource. All I have to do is trust that that's what I'm connected to, and something will come, something will flow."

The important thing is that you take the first step. Don't worry about step two. Something will come. You have to trust, surrender, and go for it, again, which is very different from the academic world that I come from, "What are the 10 best practices? And when I understand those practices, then I will act." That's not how this work. When I work with people, when I work with life, I might not know what to do, but you got to do something. You got to improvise. And improvising is not about making stuff up, but it's about being open to what you're connected to, to the flow and so that stuff can happen. I'm talking to dancers, so I know that you know what I'm talking about.

And the third theoretical lens that I use is holy hip hop. Now, this was a music movement that came in the early 2000s out of LA, a lot of economic and social upheaval, police brutality, financial problems, but also natural disasters, earthquakes and stuff.

And so here you had this music genre, this rap music that came out of religion, out of Christianity, Islam, Rastafarianism. Whereas regular rap talked about, "This is how hard my life is," this rap talked about, "There's room for me to be reborn. I'm going to take the broken pieces, and I can create a new story." That's what that rap was about.

Now, if you weren't paying attention and just focused on the style, it sounded just like gangster rap. But what they were talking about is, again, "Out of the broken pieces, I can be reborn. I can be renewed." So, because of the style, when they were trying to go to church, church people were like, "Oh, no, no, no, there's no room for you here. I don't think so." Because of what they were talking about, when they would go to the regular rappers, "Oh, no, no, no, no, I don't know what you're talking about, but there's no room for you here."

So here you have these people who say, "I have a story, a story that matters. We can always create a new story, but we don't belong anywhere. It doesn't matter because my story matters anyway." So what they would do, they'd become mobile. So they would hire a place over here for a night. They would hire a place. So every night they might be somewhere else and find a space and create their own space. So, "Even though when you might not want to see me and hear me, I'm here and I matter, and I will be on the move."

And so I use these three as a theoretical lens. It helps me in my approach, how I think about things. When you lose faith, like, "Ah, no, no, there's room for a new story. We got to sing the blues sometimes," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

So when it comes to, how do we change the story or rather how do we expand the story, again, our starting point is always, "It is about us. What kind of relationships do we have? And do people feel safe enough to change the story? Who is always talking? Who is always listening? Who is silenced? Who is being silenced?" Right?

And so when we're thinking about expanding the story, we have to think of multiple ways for people to participate in the story. Or do we say, "You can participate if you speak in the way that I speak, if you move in the way that I move," right? "As long as I understand it, then you can participate."

Are we willing to expand how we think about it? You might not be able to speak, but you can dance, you can sing. There have to be multiple ways for you to participate. The person that's quiet in the back has something to say. How do we make sure that we make room for all these different ways of participating and contributing to this story that we want to expand and interweave?

How do we let go of some of the stories that we so dearly hold onto, knowing that it is sensitive, knowing that it might not be gezellig if we do so, but some of the stories we might have to let go of, right? And again, how do we facilitate people to participate? And again, this idea, how do we trust and surrender, starting from this point, you're connected to anything and everything. So you have all these resources at your exposure at any given moment, but you have to trust and you have to let go and start letting that flow.

So what is our role, for those of us who are involved? Be what you would like to see. And with that, I mean do not underestimate those who are watching you. Do not underestimate those who are listening to you. A lot of times, we want to have all the answers, and then we act. It's not about that. It's about, how do you treat people? How do you show up? How are you present? How do you hold space? That's what people will get turned onto. When they know they can trust you, when they know, "With this person I feel seen or heard," then that's when things start to move.

So, again, creating that safe space, identifying, understanding and disrupting these mechanisms. What are the things, the mechanisms that maintain these things? And once you identify them, how can we infiltrate? How can we shake them loose and doing it in a sensitive way? Because you can shake stuff up, and then things are broken, but that's not the goal. Our goal is always, how do we connect, and how do we include? Supporting and facilitate people, that speaks for itself. And again, this whole idea of trust and surrender.

And so what do we need to tell a different story? What do we need to expand the story? And I have a lot more things, but for now, I'm going to narrow it down to three because I know you can remember three things. Again, our starting point is always that it's about us. It is always about us. It's never about them or those. That our starting point is always about us.

And then there are three things I want you to remember, care, courage, and humility. When do we do this work, it is important that you come from a place of caring, that you come from a place of compassion, "I have no idea what to do, but I care, and I'm here. And I'll be here tomorrow, and I'll be here next week again. I have no idea what to say. I don't have the right answers, but I care, and I'm here." It's important that we start from there because that's what turns people on.

You also hear a lot about self-care and self-care in the sense that if we do this work, if we start creating these spaces for people to feel safe that they can participate, you are going to hear stuff. People will come to you. And it will do stuff to you. Do not underestimate what it will do to you, right?

We live in a time now, I don't know about you, but all of a sudden, "So-and-so is out with burnout. This person is out with burnout. That person is out with burnout." Burnout is not a normal thing. Burnout is not a normal thing. But we have come to the point, "Let me do this extra little bit of work. Let me stay up a little later. Let me work a little bit harder," because that's what we get rewarded for.

And we push ourselves so hard that people disappear. And they don't disappear for a week, but for three months, six months. So it is important that we start listening to these bodies that we have because your body will tell you, "You need to rest. You need to drink some water. You need to sleep. You need to stop." And we don't because, again, we get rewarded. We have a reward system that will push you to work a little longer, to stay up a little later.

So how do I bring all of myself to do this work? So not just intellectually, because it's not intellectual work, but how do I use my whole body, all my senses? When the door is open and people start coming... Let me make sure I'm not running out of time. But when I was a professor, word got out. I'm also a therapist, so word got out, "This is the person you can talk to." I had the

students of colour, international students, the LGBT, women over 40, army veterans who would line up outside my office, "We've heard. Can we talk to you?"

And it was wonderful, and I'm honoured. And luckily, I'm trained to do so, but when that happens, it does stuff to you. So how do I make sure that I stay healthy so that I can show up tomorrow and do it again? Because these spaces we want to create, we'd like for people to participate. Well, we want to participate in a healthy way. So, again, start listening to the message that you get. "I need to create some space. I need some sun on my face. I need to take a walk. I need to not answer my phone," whatever it is. Courage.

If we want to start having these conversations, if we want to connect, if I'm going to speak up, it might not be gezellig, am I going to speak up anyway? That requires some courage. I might be the only one, people might not be happy with what I have to say, am I going to speak up anyway? And so it is really important that when we are courageous that it is linked to wisdom. Because you can be very courageous and kick in the door and then the door slams right in your face. That's not the goal. So I'm going to speak up, I'm going to be courageous. But how am I going to speak up? When am I going to speak up? Who am I going to speak to? So I have to be courageous, but you have to be strategic. So again, don't just go off, but be smart about it. Be strategic about it. Let me cool off first, let me take a walk and then I will have the conversation. Let me find the right person. Whatever it is you have to do.

When you make the courageous act, what is going to be the consequence and are you willing to take the consequence when it comes? That's really important. Last one is humility. Humility in the sense that when we do this work, you're going to say stupid things, you're going to make stupid mistakes, you're going to do dumb things. Other people are going to make stupid mistakes, they're going to do dumb things, they're going to say dumb things. So part of this work is that you have to learn how to forgive people and that's not always fun. And you have to learn how to forgive yourself. Because now we're at a period like, "What? You said, what? Ah, cancel. You disagree for me? What? Cancel. You said something 20 years ago and I found it on social media. Cancel." That's what we are now. So we have to learn how to forgive. People make mistakes, it happens. You will make mistakes. I make mistakes.

One little short story. I've been doing work with the transgender community. And as an anthropologist, I'd gotten engaged with a transgender community and we linked with a children's librarian because we were looking at there are no stories for children in transgender families. So we engaged with the community. Based on that, we collected data and we wrote six stories for children in transgender communities. Lovely project. My friend who was a theatre professor said, "Oh, we can do something with that." So she created a reader's theatre performance. I moved from the US back to the Netherlands, picked it up again. I worked with this youth LGBT group and we were performing these stories again. During the rehearsal, one young person came to me and said, "You keep gendering me and that hurts." My friends that I was used to were from male to female or female to male, I was not used to non-binary people. So I kept gendering this person, that was painful.

And so your first reaction is like, "But I didn't mean to and I'm so sorry," but that was about my drama. So I just had to shut up and listen and suck it up. "Not gezellig because you screwed up," but I had to listen and be present. And I listened to this person who was courageous to address this with me. And then I said, "You know what? You're absolutely right. I apologise. I cannot promise that I will never do it again, but I promise that I will do my best to work on this and that I will use a different pronoun and I will do my best." And after I did that, then I still wanted to go and chastise myself and go, "Here you are Ms. Ally, you think you're all that, but you screwed up, dah, dah, dah." And it was still about my drama and I just said to forgive myself, "Okay, you screwed it up. Welcome to the human race. You're not all that. You thought you were perfect, I guess you're not. Get over it because it's not about you, it's about these people in front of you."

And so dear people, that's the work. You try something, you show up, you create the space. I messed up. I'm trying again because I care. And I wish it was like a 10 steps easy. But this is the work. And so we have the gift that we have to do embodied work, so we have the gift that we can bring all of ourselves. So I want to challenge you and encourage you to get in tune with what we have with this gift to create these spaces where people can be comfortable enough and that can start in weaving our stories to create different stories with each other. And with that, I will bring it to a close and want to thank you also not just for hosting me, but for organising this conference and hope I have given you a little bit to think about and to take with you. Thank you very much.

Participatory Reflection "What does this have to do with me?"

By Monica Gillette, dance dramaturg and facilitator (Germany)

Elisabetta Bisaro:

Thank you, Dr. Aminata Cairo, for your contribution. I'm Elisabetta Bisaro and I work at [La Briqueterie](#) as the Head of International Development and Programme Assistant. In March we organised and hosted the [EDN Atelier, Equity in Dance: What Challenges](#). And my role here is simply to introduce you to dance dramaturg and facilitator Monica Gillette, with whom we've worked on many European projects like [Empowering Dance](#) or [Dancing Museums](#) to name just a few. And we both believe that the collaborative benefits and discoveries that come out of them reveal more equitable approaches because they tend to generate non-hierarchical working environments where you just have to encounter and embrace differences and challenge the way we work as we go along. In March, Monica proposed a participative reflection which was entitled What Does This Have to do With Me? And here, she's going to offer us a digital version of it.

Monica Gillette:

Thanks, Elisabetta. This is normally something that I do in physical space and take at least 30 minutes for, but we're going to do a digital version in less than 10 minutes, setting my clock now. So I'm going to say a series of yes or no questions and you simply have to respond. So this is a

chance to also listen to the many different stories you have inside of you and to which ones you might want to say yes to or no to today. And of course, there's always an in-between, there's a spectrum. These questions are related to identity, resources, privileges and access. These questions were developed out of a lot of personal conversations I've had with many colleagues. It's not a test, it's not about being right or wrong. It might be impossible to answer sometimes and you might need more information to be able to answer the questions. Just let that feed you about where you need to get more information.

So if we can go back to grid view, that would be great because we're going to need to see each other. You can also just, if you have to switch to gallery view, which I had to do just now, it's upper right corner. So let's just practice together for a second. When you want to say yes to a question, you're just going to cover the camera. Okay? So you move towards the camera if you want to say yes to a question, exactly, you can cover it in whatever way you want, with a hand, an object. You can move really, really close. We're all creative here. Find your way to say yes by moving in. To say no, you move out of the frame. So this is a chance to also move a bit while we're sitting in our chairs. You move out of the frame when you want to say no. Or if you want, you can just cross, do like this, cross your chest. It's a chance to bring a little movement into our bodies while we respond. So here we go:

- There are enough resources available to have an equitable dance field.
- In my local context, there are enough resources to have equitable and fair conditions.
- In my local context, people in leadership roles reflect my community.
- Sometimes I feel very uncomfortable talking about equity or fairness.
- I face physical barriers in my work environment.
- I face discrimination because of my cultural identity.
- I can easily cross most borders with the passport I hold.
- I have lost work because I could not get a visa to travel.
- Inequity is related to privilege.
- I have privilege because of where I was born.
- I have privilege because of my gender.
- I have privilege because of my physical ability.
- I have privilege because of the colour of my skin.
- I have a direct impact on the access of others.
- Do you have a way to define what excellence means to you, meaning how do you define high quality?
- Often programmers or jury members speak about excellence as a guideline in their programming, is this a fair way to programme and curate?

- Is equity more important than declaring excellence in programming or in a selection process?
- Can they coexist?
- Contracts and fees should be transparent and made public.
- I often work for free.
- When I work for free, I have trouble paying my rent and daily expenses.
- If I become sick or injured, I can take time off work and still be paid.
- Additional costs that come with parenting should be the sole responsibility of the parents.
- Travel costs and childcare expenses incurred by a working parent should be shared by the organisation inviting them.
- When collaborating internationally, fees should be set according to the host country no matter where it is.
- To create more equitable environments, more support should be given to arts professionals coming from the east of Europe.
- To create more equitable environments, more support should be given to arts professionals coming from the global south.
- Pay should increase with age and experience.
- People over 60 should step down from positions of power to allow for change.
- I feel responsibility in the choices I make due to my identity.
- I feel responsibility in the choices I make due to my identity.
- I feel a lot of pressure because of that identity.
- I wish I didn't need to always represent my identity and could have freedom to create and collaborate without it being a topic.
- To contribute to a fair space, I should give my pronouns when introducing myself.
- Acknowledging differences in our identities and life experiences is a step forward in creating equity.

So this was a little reflective exercise to bring up to the surface some of these challenging questions. Also, to feel them in our body where they come up. Sometimes it makes us tight and nervous to have to answer something publicly and we also often have to get a lot more information to answer some of these questions. So just for the last 30 seconds, if you can place a hand wherever you felt that in your body, just to be able to breathe into it for a second. If you felt it in your chest, your belly, your head, your heart, wherever it is. And just take a few breaths there. And if you want you can also tap it a little bit, give it a little energy, a little vibration or you can also give it just a gentle rub. Just to notice, as Aminata said, listen to your bodies when it makes you quake, when it makes you nervous, when it screams, when it says listen to me.

So thank you very much for participating in this little choreography of responses. I'd now like to hand over the word to Barbara Stacher and Monica Urian, policy officers at the European Commission for a presentation of their work followed by a Q&A. And if you have these questions already, you can already drop your questions in the chat box if you've already prepared some questions for them. And thank you all very, very much.

### Q&A "Access to Culture / Access to Health"

By Barbara Stacher & Monica Urian, policy officers at the European Commission (Belgium)

Barbara Stacher:

So thank you very much for welcoming us here today from the European Commission, me and my colleague, Monica Urian, we're going to present to you some developments from the European Union side. So just to start to say that the European Union's work concerning culture and cultural policy, where does it come from and who decides about it? It's all in the [EU work plan for culture](#), which is renewed every five years. It's also the ministries of culture coming together from the different EU member states. And as you can see here, there are the different priorities, which of course also relate to what you are doing in the dance network. One of them is concerns artists working conditions, which is often a huge problem and which during COVID has become even more apparent. So also many member states are now working on artists statutes and other possibilities to support artists more.

So just to say that there have been a lot of studies, also from the commission, from the parliament, from civil society's dialogue. So for example, some of you participated or the networks on performing arts also participated in these discussions about two years ago. There was a member states expert group that also discussed artists working conditions, the social systems where artists are covered, what should be improved during two years. You can read their [recommendations in this link](#). And things happened. So in the meantime, the European Parliament, yesterday actually, adopted a legislative initiative report, meaning that he's asking the parliament, he or she or they are asking actually the European Union to do legislation to help artists' working conditions in particular. So this is done by an EU framework for the social and professional situations of artists and workers in the culture and creative sectors which was adopted yesterday. You can read all about it.

Another development is the presidency, I mean the Spanish presidency and the Council of Ministers of Culture, they're also debating artists' working conditions the day after tomorrow actually when they meet. And in the meantime, we have also, based on the information of the member states, we have done a platform on artists' working conditions, which was launched only last week. So that's also fresh from the press. It's hosted on [Creatives Unite, which you can access here](#). It's a platform where you can share different actions and activities in different sectors. You can also contribute yourself via a contribute button.



And what I wanted to tell you is exactly that now there are three tools here. The [So You Need Money tool](#), that's always useful if you wonder how to finance a residency programme or how to participate in currently open funding opportunities, not only EU but also in member states, regional, local, private. That's when you press So You Need Money. Then there's also help on [intellectual property rights](#) in different EU countries. And the third one, that's the very new one, it's called, [This is How We Work](#). And it's exactly about working conditions. So I mean it's not for you individually to look up how you can be better covered, but it is more kind of an advocacy tool. So if you want to argue and make the case of why it is important, what happened in other countries, and you can actually compare countries there and use it as an advocacy tool. I pass over to my colleague Monica.

Monica Urian:

Thank you, Barbara. And good morning, everyone. Well first of all, I would like to credit the photo that our presentation started with to Hanna Kushnirenko, who is not only a wonderful dancer and choreographer, but also photographer. And in preparing this presentation, I was very inspired by two of her photos taken in the context of the [Dance Well Project](#) and I thought this represented very well the spirit of this conference. So thank you Hanna. In terms of the access to health, access to culture, the connection between the culture, policy and health policy, this is a very important topic at the moment, but also a very difficult one. So of course in the work that we do on mainstreaming culture in all other policy fields in the EU, this is our role in the country policy unit. Health is the last, it's a newcomer, which means that we started a little bit from close to zero.

Of course, there are references both to culture and health in EU treaties, to some extent in the SDGs, even if the health and wellbeing objective is very clear and the culture one is a bit transparent across the different SDGs. There are references in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and then of course in our culture policy documents. But I encourage you in the field of dance, and because you are some sort of a lighthouse in how people across the world in your field are going to tackle your type of priorities and how you think about certain subjects, you can inspire this change to link more the dance sector and the health and wellbeing sector. And I know that you already do because last year we prepared a conference for our previous commissioner, Mariya Gabriel, in the European Parliament together with the head of the Cult committee.

And in the end, was one of the projects selected to be part of our brochure showcasing funding in the Creative Europe Programme, Erasmus Plus, Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, European Capitals of Culture and so on. And I know that you have this very strong reference to wellbeing, mainly I think of dance, dance artists and dance professionals. I encourage you to go beyond and to think also about the importance of dance for your audiences, for society, for communities. And to refer to the wonderful speech by Aminata about safe spaces. I think I have never experienced such a safe space and so much care, courage and humility as I did in the workshops organised by dancers and choreographers, particularly in Bassano and in La Briqueterie. So yes, the power of dance at individual and community level. I took this other

photo from a 9,000-year-old Indian rock art painting. And I think for us it's something that is very obvious, but we have to make sure we send this message to policy makers and to funders and to also integrate a little bit how we think about this in our data.

Maybe you heard about this proprietary action called [Culture for Health](#). This was our flagship project in the last two years with which we really started to push this agenda forward both in terms of research, in terms of mapping, in terms of policy recommendations. And if you go to this website, there is a mapping worldwide covering all sectors. And I just did a research this morning, if you search by dance, you get 140 projects that somehow are dedicated to dance or include dance in their description. So I think it's very inspiring, but of course it can be much more. Apart from the proprietary action for which I encourage you to go and look at the report, we have a comprehensive scientific report also about the data existed and also the pilot projects, six pilot projects, and this mapping I was talking about, we were also working in parallel in the [Voices of Culture](#), our structured dialogue with the civil society. And we chose this topic of youth mental health and culture because this is really one of the strongest urgencies, if you want, that we have.

But we also worked with the [World Health Organisation](#) in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, but also to other refugee crisis across the world to produce this call for action to really recognise that arts and creative activities have a very important role to play in supporting the mental health wellbeing of forcibly displaced people. So you see mental health is somehow our focus. Of course it's not the only one. But for your information, maybe you saw the publishing of this communication in June from the commission side, which is called the [Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health](#). There you have very strong figures about how the COVID pandemic amplified a mental health pandemic, which already existed before COVID-19, but now it's getting stronger and stronger and really has a role to play there in terms of use, in terms of the adult population, elderly and so on.

And the data exists, it's just a question of mainstreaming this data into official discourse and using this data as much as you want or you need in order to make your case. Also with stories, because yes, stories are important from dominant and marginalised voices alike. So if you are interested more about this, I won't go into detail, but we have this WHO model which explains to policymakers how arts activities have impact on psychological, behavioural, social level. And then if you talk to the health sector in particular, you can use this in the conversation with them, a vocabulary which they understand, which is prevention of ill health, treatment of disease, promotion of healthy behaviours and management of disease. And in all of these areas, culture and the arts have a role to play.

The policy recommendations are also sort of linked to your work. These are the policy recommendations from Culture for Health. And for example, knowledge and awareness building are very important and they can be supported by the sector. And training and peer learning schemes are very, very necessary. So we hope in the future to be able to kind of contribute also through funding to these initiatives. But let's also think together on how we can do that right now as well through your work.

And then just briefly, going to the next one. Yes, of course, these are things that I think you all know, if you need arguments when talking to local, regional or national authorities or to therapists. In the communication on mental health, as I just mentioned, for example, social prescribing is now a very big trend. And it is mentioned, by the way, it's the very first time when we had culture mentioned in a health document at the EU level. And I think it was about six or seven times. So I think this is a great victory. And social prescribing, particularly cultural based social prescribing, is now something that we want to work on in the future.

And just to go to the next slide, this is for example, we have data even on what kind of art forms have what kind of outcome. And of course dance and movement are very much there, fostering social engagement and physical functioning. And then if we think about Creative Europe, these are some examples from Creative Europe, of course European Dance Development Network is there. Also, a few cooperation projects, the only one linked to dance that I know of at least, Dance Well is there. I hope the dance sector will have more proposals in this area.

Barbara Stacher:

Just to continue to finalise our presentation, just to say that for you as a dance network, of course there's a lot of funding programmes on the EU level also under the different funding programmes, Creative Europe, but also other programmes. [Culture moves Europe](#), that's a relatively new programme. You can apply until the 31st of May for individual artists. So if you want to move with your dance company to another country, do some performances, you can apply for that. Then also [Perform Europe](#), that's a new call. So there will be cascading grants. So grants to small organisations. There will be an info session coming up very soon, on the 1st of December. And the grants scheme will be open until March. So you can look, it's a kind of small scale grants, could be interesting for some of you.

And also the [Creative Europe Cross Sectoral Strand](#), it's looking for performing arts because basically that is how to link performing arts to the audiovisual sectors and greening practices or other topics. So please have a look. In general, how to find EU funding. There's the [CulturEU funding guide](#), so you can find all kinds of different information. And if you're formulating a project, no need to go to a consultant and pay money, you can actually be helped by the different desks. For example, in each country, there is a [Creative Europe desk](#) who can help you. Thank you very much.

Monica Urian:

Can I just have a very short remark regarding the representation of contemporary dance? I think your network has an essential role to play and this is the role of networks in Creative Europe to bring forward the sector's voice to us because it's very difficult for us to be in contact with all the dance organisations or all the heritage organisations at the national, local, regional level. So we are really counting on you to bring the knowledge and the concerns and the comments on what we do to us, to Brussels or whenever we can, of course we love to travel. It's not as easy as it used to be. But so this dialogue is, for us, very important.

## Lecture “What Makes a Good Ally”

By Stefania Di Paolo, research scholar, disability activist and cultural curator (Italy)

Chiara Organtini:

I'm Chiara Organtini, I'm a curator and project manager at [Lavanderia a Vapore](#) in Collegno. That is one of the members who hosted [EDN Carte Blanche Exchange](#) in May. The title was What Makes You Disabled? And it was connecting the access and disability with the theme of equity. I'm happy to introduce now a research scholar, disability activist and cultural curator, Stefania Di Paolo, who shared her thoughts on our activity and now with us in her lecture with the title, What Makes a Good Ally? We're here and eager to listen to you, Stefania.

Stefania Di Paolo:

Thank you, Chiara. Thank you everyone for being here today, and thank you EDN for having me today. It's such a pleasure. I will introduce myself visually first. I am a white woman in my thirties. I have long brown hair, green eyes, and a pair of glasses. I am sitting in my living room with a big painting on a white wall behind me. I have an invisible disability, and I use my positionality to make the disability community heard and seen within public spaces. Today I will talk about the intricate, fascinating and nuanced hardship of forging audiences to promote structural change. Both dance institutions and disabled artists and professionals today are changing the way they engage with access and disability in dance. More and more institutions aim to challenge norms, biases and systemic barriers and publicly position themselves as allies to the disabled community in the struggle to foster equity. On the other side, many disabled artists and professionals are understanding the value of shaping meaningful audiences with organisations and institutions.

Allies, in fact, research shows, play an essential function and efforts to eliminate inequalities. However, because the label ally has raised in popularity and is often misplaced, it faces the risk of losing its effectiveness and meaning. What is an ally and what are the implications of becoming an ally to the disability rights movement within the dance space? These are the two questions that I will try to answer today. Allyship is not something you do, it's much more something you are. An ally is an identity, a state of being. A definition of ally is someone from a dominant group, which is a very flexible, a contingent dimension, who consciously commits to disrupting and ending cycles of injustice. An ally is not just the member of a majority group, they're also likely to hold a level of power and authority within a certain structure. In the arts, for example.

Therefore, the process of becoming an ally involves a progressive acknowledgement of one owns privileged position. This interrogation of one owns privileges is a fundamental step for engaging in activities aligned with allyship. Of course, not everyone takes on the ally level for the same reasons. Scholarship has looked at the broad range of motives behind the formation of alliances with minorities highlighting the difference between good allies, the ones who

generally care and make efforts for the cause they're advocating for, and performative allyship. By performative allyship, I mean visible, easy to do, costless actions that often do not challenge the status quo and are motivated primarily by the desire to gain some personal benefits. What makes a good ally to the disability right movement in the dance arena? Dance institutions that are centering their practices around access have been implementing a set of strategies that can be identified as examples of good allyship.

The first and most visible domain where an organisation can practice their allyship is artistic programming. The very act of curating and presenting performances takes on a profound political dimension by scrutinising the artistic programming that institutions can actively challenge tradition paradigms and cultivate a space where a disability-led transformation is not just encouraged but expected. Within a European context, where in many countries today disabled people are still perceived as passive recipients of assistance, supporting art produced by disabled artists is key to challenge negative attitudes towards disability. Only a small percentage of theatres and dance institutions today in Europe have awareness of work produced by disabled artists. Where you do have knowledge, they tend to present only one or few performances a year. Therefore, institutions that want to support disabled artists can commit to present a dance produced by disabled artists on a regular basis as fully integrated to their artistic programmes rather than just as a separate or occasional event.

Moving away from a tokenistic approach ensures the artists with disabilities that they are not relegated to peripheries. And thus, this is a key strategy to practice good allyship. By selecting and contextualising performances that showcase disability-led choreography, institutions can educate their audiences and themselves prompting critical reflection and share discussion on disability politics fostering a more informed and empathetic community. Organisations can also set a precedent for the broader arts community. They can challenge other institutions to follow suit and contribute to culture shift in which disability-led transformation becomes the new standard. Another key aspect connected to artistic programming is the artist education and development. Knowledge is out there. Theory and practice-based research has been already produced internationally in regards to inclusive dance practices. However, inclusive dance programmes in dance are quite rare, and disabled individuals are more likely to be offered community-based workshops. These experiences hold a great social potential, but they are still occasional. They do not offer an immediate pathway to professionalism.

Therefore, committing to creating more and permanent opportunities for inclusive dance education means nurturing allyship with future generations of disabled artists. Giving space to disabled choreographers and dancers and performers imply a range of steps that can include dedicated calls to disabled artists, assessing stage accessibility and digital accessibility, exploring terminology when describing work produced by disabled artists. More importantly, constantly interrogating how traditional structures for artistic development like art residencies and international touring, for example, may work for disabled artists. Although there is no time today to delve into each of these aspects, the core of the matter is embracing access creatively as a critical lens to question how we do things, who participate in these processes and how we can nurture a truly accessible and diverse space. Embracing an inclusive agenda includes also

centering disabled audiences at the heart of artistic programming. Research shows that when access measures are taken, they're often occasional. They lack strategic vision and result in a poor offer for disabled audiences.

In addition, organisations face the challenge of engaging with audiences that have been historically ignored. Therefore, they can show a level of mistrust towards cultural institutions. From the side of the organisations, these tend to be overly confident about their level of accessibility. Or on the other side of the spectrum, when they get deeper knowledge about access, it's easy for them to feel overwhelmed and demotivated. One question I got often asked is, "How can I make performances accessible to all?" We need to be clear, there is no such a thing as a performance accessible to all. Expecting all experiences to be always accessible at all times is not a disabled standpoint. It's what a non-disabled person experiences when they see a performance. Disabled people are very well aware that some experiences aren't accessible. That some are more accessible than others. That what is not a barrier today might become a barrier tomorrow, and what is an access feature to some might be a barrier to others.

The issue with this non-disabled fantasy of a performance accessible to all is that it can discourage action. The right question might be instead, how can I effectively communicate the actual level of accessibility of my artistic programme, and what can I do to improve it? Key to this question is relieving the disabled person from the burden of finding out by themselves if a performance, a workshop or a dance class is accessible. This entails avoiding the distress, the waste of time, money and energy, the fatigue implied in the experience of a barrier. Therefore, the first step for a genuine ally is becoming accountable for the unequal distribution of access by declaring which experiences are actually accessible for whom, and what level of access disabled people can expect while participating in these experiences. This is vital not only because by sharing the current state of access, organisation can shift the responsibility of making art accessible from disabled individuals to society.

But because to assess the level of accessibility, organisations must actively engage in multiple, consistent and meaningful conversations with disabled experts and disabled communities seeking their feedback and constant guidance. In essence, recognising your current level of accessibility is the initial step towards improving accessibility and letting go of the guilt for not being fully inclusive. The second step is approaching accessible performances not as a service to deliver, but as a creative force that can produce new aesthetics and innovate the performing arts. In this arena, becoming an ally means moving away from a product-focused mentality to embrace a process-oriented approach where disabled artists and disabled communities are protagonists of research-based and participatory actions. Another step in the direction of forging genuine allyship with disabled artists and professionals is lobbying with other organisations that are embracing access centre agendas. Learning from those organisations that are ahead in this journey, working with them. While you are learning, becoming a catalyst for change locally by engaging and networking with other organisations that might be interested in becoming more accessible or that can help you in the process.

These three aspects are key to pressure change, especially in terms of policymaking. Of course there are side effects of lobbying. Positive pressures given by European fundings and agendas

are extremely positive if they're used genuinely and wisely. But if organisations embrace access lightly, it can have negative effects on the disabled communities that they're hoping to support. It is vital that you assess your motivations. Ask yourself and your staff, "How much interested are we in this topic? What does implementing accessibility actually means for the people involved?" Becoming a good ally is hard work that implies openness to change and nurturing consistent, critical grassroots-based engagements with access. It implies failures and attempts. Sometimes it requires to do less. Being aware that disabled artists typically hold little power of negotiation while facing all the challenges of an artist's life. Disabled professionals are often the only disabled person in the room.

They're called leaders of change but have limited access to decision. They're asked to voice their claims and be active about it after centuries of oppression. Therefore, to make structural change happen, genuine allies and disabled artists together should take the mutual decision to rebalance access to power. Allies should be open to give some power away and explore together with disabled individuals alternative modes of co-leadership. As Rachele Borghi, a trans feminist scholar writes, "We must create empowering alliances aimed at strengthening the various political entities involved capable of recognising and taking on the risks that relationships entail. In these alliances and coalitions, those of us who start from positions of privilege must be able to remain silent and if necessary step back to widen the space for listening and increase our chances of not perpetuating oppression." Thank you so much. Now we'll handle the conversation to Francesca Cortese, audience and accessibility manager at Spazio Kor in Italy for a presentation of good practice, a part of accessibility for cultural spaces. Thank you so much for listening.

### Good Practice "A Path of Accessibility for Cultural Spaces"

By Francesca Cortese, audience and accessibility manager (Italy)

Francesca Cortese:

Thank you, Stefania. Thank you a lot. I'm very happy to be here with you and thanks to EDN for having me here. I share with you a short presentation about our story and our space. This will be not a lesson about how we try and we work, but just a presentation of our experience of failure and attempts and steps we try to propose in order to make our season and our space more accessible. This is [Spazio Kor](#). As you can see, it's a former church converted into theatre and cultural space. It's a very non-traditional cultural space in the north of Italy in a city called Asti, which is quite a rural area of the North. Spazio Kor as a project born in 2016 and in the pandemic period, we have the privilege to meet Chiara Bersani artist and Giulia Traversi as her project manager and start talking with them about accessibility, about artistic space for people with disability.

In 2021 we decided to collaborate with them to create a season which can try to be more accessible. We start from 2021 Spazio Kor to work to try an innovative path in the local and regional area of Italy about accessibility on performing arts and to audiences with physical,

sensory and neurodivergent disability. This project would take place thanks to the collaboration of an association of workers and artists with disability in Italy, called AI.Di.Qua Artists that helped us during the process in those years, and also thanks to the partnership with Lavanderia a Vapore. This practice starts from the idea that truly and open accessible space must reduce and whenever possible eliminate any barrier, visible or invisible. It means for us to build a new vision that was inclusive and egalitarian, not just of the cultural experience, but also of the socialisation within the wider community.

We feel this role as a civic space in a little city to promote and increase a process of aggregation integration, but also of mutual knowledge between people. We start with working on content in 2021, thanks to the possibility to have a space that is already accessible. We are very lucky because our space is accessible to people in wheelchair and also for an artist with physical disabilities. We have the space and the possibility to make it concrete. We start with the content. Working for the first two years to understand what it really meant to us to develop an integrated system, an integrated approach on accessibility, both from the point of view of the internal organisation of the work. Training staff, working with different people and organisation of our area. But also, from the point of view of the dialogue and interaction we propose to our guest artists.

To date, we have a total of 11 performances that have been made accessible during the season and one short international summer festival. 21 artists were involved in action or solution on accessibility. We have 26 actions or solutions that were proposed about that. An important thing is that despite other very interesting process and practice in Italy Spazio Kor focus the work on creating tailored solutions for performance and works that were not born accessible. It means that we don't work mainly on production, but we work with artists who want to make their performance accessible. Trying to find the best solution. Obviously, this is possible thanks to AI.Di.Qua and the work that our consulate does every day with us and thanks to a model composed of different steps. A sum up could be we start collecting material about the performance. Obviously video of the performance, but also script. Also, information about light design, colour, contents, the process of the artistic creation.

Then we do an analysis about the possibility of making them accessible, so we try to understand if and how and for whom we are working. Then obviously there is a series of meetings and co-planning action with the guest artist and also the AI.Di.qua consonant. That brings us to experimentation. In the first two years we do experimentation and test on performance, so the practical part of the work. It helps us to collect feedback from different audiences with different disabilities to reprogram and redesign the complete experience. That is the steps we use, and so we tried in this years a lot of tools, a lot of devices, a lot of solution and action.

For example, we try pressure meeting in sign language. Sign language interpreters on stage with artists about also video that translates sound and setting for deaf people. You can see here a photo gallery about that. Another thing we try to do when possible is to have a live poetic audio description of the performances. But also use for example, tactile map, organised touch tour to discover the scenic composition on stage for blind or visually impaired people. Also, we



tried introductory kit in simplified language, stage map to recognise the different scenic elements on stage. But also pressure introductory meeting to address themes or process of the show for neurodivergent spectators. We are now about to launch our new season called Music Non Stop. It'll be an important moment for us because it'll be the first season in which both performances and workshops will be accessible.

It's the time to put into practice what we experienced in the first two years, but also it's a starting point for us to create a welcoming and accessible place for the communities that now lead the space and lead our season. We talk about content, but obviously, it's very important to also think about the space, the venue, so the context. We decided to work especially on the foyer, in order to highlight function and different areas that can help the usability of the space. Spazio Kor worked to create a modular space and arrangement of furniture that could be without obstacles for those who use wheelchairs. But also an important thing for us is to imagine accessibility as a complete approach to different steps. So, from the fruition of the performance, but also from the welcoming part and the last part and the fellow part of the experience.

We guarantee a reserved seat in the first and second rows for the enjoyment of the performance, especially for people with sensory disabilities. Then we work on the foyer because it's the access point of the theatre. It's very important to redesign it to be more open, accessible and available to different people. We call this project Spazio con diviso, which means shared space. It was realised with the aim of transforming the space with a view to inclusiveness, openness and accessibility. Thanks to our modular space with adjustable tables, which can be assembled and disassembled, you can see different perspectives, different layouts. This could be a great solution because it helps us to work with different needs and necessity. For example, we use it as co-working station, conference table for team building experience. But also the space was used for activity with children or people of different ages.

It could be an extension of the space dedicated to the ticket office with an adjustable table, and that makes it accessible to people in wheelchairs. This is the second step. Another important thing about the space is that in 2022 we decided to create our recognisable area where the accessibility action took place. It was very important because had a lot of spectators with disabilities, but also caregivers, to find a dedicated and safe place quickly where all the activities were organised. The third and very complex step for us is the one of language. We started thinking about that in 2023, so this year. We realised that accessibility also means easy access to the necessary information, so we decided to do a choice of clearer and simpler languages to talk about the season and the many side actions that Spazio Kor carries out during the season, talking to publics with different needs and requests. This year for the first time, each scheduled event will include accessibility information.

It'll be possible thanks to a system of icon and legend, here you can see an example, that were developed by Elia Covolan of Ai.Di.Qua Artists to facilitate immediate understanding of the services or the action that we are able to guarantee. The last thing is that we put attention also on the usability of the website. We check that the website was accessible also for different audiences, and we have improved in this month some digital accessibility. It's a work in progress, and it comes with different experiences, attempts and mistakes.

I want to say that for a cultural organisation it is very difficult sometimes to start with the accessibility process. And the most important thing is to know that it's okay to make mistakes, it's okay to make changes and redesign the way we try to make our space and our experience more accessible. But I think the most important thing is just to always be very open to the feedback of our audiences and the feedback from the artists and to be prepared to redesign and rediscover all the processes step by step and time after time.

### Conversation "Access, Care & Curatorial Practices"

With Francesca Cortese, Stefania Di Paolo, Chiara Organtini, curator and project creator (Italy)

Stefania Di Paolo:

Thank you so much. It was so precious. All right, so I will be moderating this session where Francesca and Chiara Organtini, who already presented herself before are going to talk about access and care and how practices of access and care can rethink and reorganise dance institutions. So I kind of feel like we need just a few seconds to breathe in and to take in all this powerful information and experiences that we have shared today. So if Chiara and Francesca are okay, I would just give us 30 seconds to breathe and prepare ourselves for the next session. And just take some time for you to relax, move your body if you need to. Perhaps just tackle a question or a word or something that you've taken from this first part of the morning. I'm going to do it as well.

All right, I think we are ready now. So I would like to start off with a book that came to my mind when Christoph asked me to have this conversation with you, Chiara and Francesca, this book is called *Performing Institutions: Contested Sites and Structures of Care*. It's by Lindelof and Janssen, two amazing female scholars. It's been published very recently. What's interesting about this book is that it looks at cultural institutions as sites of contestation and explores a set of practices of care that can reticulate how institutions perform and achieve, more importantly, institutional transformation.

And one of the things that the writers say in the book is that at any time an institution, an organisation, a company, whatever it might be, has the potential to emphasise or de-emphasise some social values and ethical practices that a majority of people, which again, the idea of majority is always contingent, but a majority of people agree upon. And by doing so, they can directly or indirectly enact inclusionary or exclusionary mechanisms. And I found it very interesting because I think that's truly the connection between the concept of care and the concept of access in particular. So I would like to start with you Chiara, given this context of cultural transformation that we all are aiming for to create more equitable. I would like to know from your perspective, based on your work at Lavanderia a Vapore in particular, what does it take? This is a question that we shared before. What does it take to transform an attempt into a practice that is of course focused on care? So what's the value of an attempt in this context?

Chiara Organtini:

So thank you Stefania for the presentation before for this question, but also for being with us during the Carte Blanche that we organised. Because I think that's exactly the place in the example where I can start from to answer this question. Actually this question came up after a conversation because we were saying, okay, but how to define a practice that is based on care and accessibility? And my point is exactly that we are far from a practice because a practice is something that its named, it's a protocol. While here, we're still in the attempt phase. So we're still looking for, we're still training ourselves and trying to, and I think the very simple and first response I can give to this question is that the matter to turn an attempt into a practice is to start. So not to wait for the structural conditions to be perfect.

And then we have a protocol and some values and a way to do formulas to become and be perfectly accessible, but to start practicing and to repeat and fail and also to redefine what in a ableist point of view value is. I think that's the main core. So it is value, valuable and successful when the output is positive or based on huge numbers or impactful or fancy or visible. So again, I think it's about refining the notions we normally apply to cultural values during the carte blanche exchange, for instance, since the beginning we decided not to design or plan the event ourself as stuff, but as Francesca was mentioning before, we directly involved the collective [Al.Di.Qua Artists](#). So it's a group of artists, researchers, curators with disability, different kinds of disability to understand from them and with them how things should be arranged before, how space, time and content should be delivered.

So really making sure that we step back from position, power, decision making, controlling power role and just put ourself into the game. It was about sharing the leadership and giving space for other leaderships to take over. So I would say that the repetition is something that is needed, but also the dismantling of assumptions and soft and hard skills that we had. And it's a lot about reviewing our own boundaries towards what is already known and also to make sure you have a trajectory long enough to repeat. So to have a sustainable time, not to pretend one shot is done so there is no shortcut, but to make sure you can have a sustainable trajectory that allows you to seed and harvest the results and the real transformation in a long time. But also the networking as you mentioned, and the possibility to become an advocate and an ally by stopping to compete with other organisations that try to do so or do so and becoming an ecosystem that can sustain these spaces for others to emerge.

And I'm maybe quoting a very specific event and small episodes that happened during that Carte Blanche; among the most beautiful, impactful moments I can quote and almost emotional, I think something stays with me as I learn to be reminded when at the beginning of this first day learning the practices from Stop Gap company, we entered the practice of writing an access agreement, naming what people present in the room needed to feel safe and be well. And we try to arrange this rewriting with the staff and people we have been working before with a very slow pace because this is also something we learn when coming to caring and creating a condition for ourselves. And then on the spot, the participant group was a mix of people with disability and without. And when it came to the condition that everyone needed to access a space, especially from people without disability expectation were misplaced as needs.

So we had a cheesy, dreamy desire, such as “a possibility to express” our “learning from the other” or “unicorns”. And then we were also faced with very concrete and practical needs. And at the end of the circle we also had a very confrontational moment that was quite enlightening apart from the emotional weight that then needed to be handled. But at that point I think it was important for all the people in the room to acknowledge the privilege because not understanding the vocabulary came from not having an embodied perspective of something which does not necessarily have to be the case because otherwise it means we cannot speak about the experiences we don't have in our body. But that moment taught us the needs to embrace a multiplicity of perspectives when you curate an event as the responsibility of an institution. And Stefania was there and she also facilitated an emotional digestion. So I'm very thankful for Al.Di.Qua, Stefania and this space to tell the story that I hope will give our colleagues and peers an encouragement to not dismiss and to not stop failing.

Stefania Di Paolo:

Yeah, thank you Chiara. Because embracing failure, embracing time also to reflect after a failure happened is so crucial. And being open to stay in that emotion, the discomfort that many of the people talked about this morning is exactly there. Staying in the discomfort of not knowing, staying in the discomfort of not having the answers, staying in the strong comfort of failing sometimes and having that humility to be able to learn all together from a mistake, from a failure. I think one thing that I remember about that event that you were mentioning at the beginning of Carte Blanche is that for a disabled person, a need is not an option, it is a must. It is something that without it you don't have access to an experience.

And I think that the threshold of the difference between an option and an actual need is so important to keep in mind, especially because which needs are primary and which needs are secondary – that's contextual. Self-care in this culture of hyper productivity is not considered a primary need when in fact it is. So I would like now to just very quickly hand over, Francesca, just because I think you've given us such important information about how you do things practically at your space. But I would like you to give us just a very quick example because we have only a minute left about a failure that has given you precious information to learn from.

Francesca Cortese:

Okay, I'll try. At the beginning, as you said before, we start with the approach that we want it all, we want it soon. And we think that accessibility, no longer means accessibility for all or nothing. So at first we tried to make every single performer accessible to different audiences. For example, we tried to translate in sign language also the sound settings sound inspiration that artists try before the performance. But thanks to some feedback moment with the deaf spectators, we understood that sometimes our wish of accessibility could be a not so easy solution and could be intimidating for public that are not used to different languages. So we learned that accessible doesn't mean enjoyable and that for us it was important to understand that aspect to remind us that the most important thing is the care and time we give to the relationship with our audiences to grow.

So we learned that and well, our aim now is really making the performance not just accessible, but also enjoyable to audiences who are usually excluded from those practices. And well, it's not easy, but we now try to project from the ideas that not all shows can be made accessible and that care is a theme that must take into account many points of view. So on one hand the audience that wants to see new languages or types of performing, but also, the spectators with disabilities who desire to see accessible work sometimes with more traditional languages or types of performance. And we try to combine all of these, it's not easy, but we try to keep a balance between curatorial and accessibility practices together to guarantee at least one complete experiential path for each target. It means that we try to programme a series of appointments during the season for different audiences in order to offer them different experiences and they can choose what they like and what they don't.

Stefania Di Paolo:

So thank you Francesca and thank you Chiara for this little session together. If you, from the audience have any questions, we'll be very happy, I think I can speak for Chiara and Francesca, to answer your questions in the chat and now I will hand over the conversation to the next speaker.

Participatory Practice "Thinking/Feeling Through: From Equity to ..."

By Joy Mariama Smith, performance/installation/movement artist, activist, facilitator, curator, researcher, dramaturg and architectural designer (Netherlands)

Lisa Reinheimer:

Thank you so much. Hi everyone, my name is Lisa Reinheimer, I'm the director of Dansateliers in Rotterdam. Just want to say a huge thank you to all the contributors, always here to listen and to participate. Just wanted to extend that last May we co-organised an atelier together with ICK Dance Amsterdam, which was called the at the [Body of Skill and Opportunity: Equity Through Embodied Practices](#). And I'm very happy to introduce to you the multi-talented performance and installation artist, Joy Mariama Smith. Complimentary through their artistic practice, Joy is also an activist facilitator, a curator, a researcher, a dramaturg, a DJ, and an architectural designer and they were a contributor to our atelier and collaborated with Connor Schumacher. And today Joy will share a virtual participatory practice, which is called Thinking/Feeling through from Equity to Joy.

Joy Mariama Smith:

Okay, great. So the first thing is I sort of lost my voice, so maybe turn your volume up. I had a really acute allergic reaction yesterday to something I ate and this is a result. I'm also setting a timer and I'm going to move through a structure first, just for fun, I want to place a link in the chat that everyone can see. It's just a recording of this dialogue around diversity, inclusion and equity. So you can copy that and listen to it later. So for this practice, that will be 10 minutes

only, participate as you feel comfortable. So I also would like to invite you to change to gallery view and to first if it's possible to see everyone, if you can have your camera on, if you feel open, just for me to see. We're already doing the practice though, you can breathe and relax.

Just having a look and again, do what you feel is comfortable for you to do. The second thing that I would like to do, which is a temporary thing, and I'll also put it in a group chat, if you can change your name to the word "here". Again, it'll reorganise the names if you can do it. I will also do it so you can see what I mean.

It's fine to participate without doing this, but you can see what happens when you do it. Okay, so the parts that's participatory is just turning your camera and microphone on or off based on the statements that I'm going to make. And if you feel uncomfortable, that's okay. We've had a lot of conversations around equity and discomfort, so that's fine. We're welcome to sitting in discomfort. It's not going to be too long. I think the first thing is if you're a white, cis-gendered man or woman to turn your camera off and your microphone off, you might see something happening already.

Thank you for that. Okay, if you are, let's see who I can see now. If you're not white or cisgender and your camera is still off, I would love for you to turn your camera on so I can see you because it would help me to feel supported. If it's possible, I see some more people. If you are also living with a disability that is visible or not visible, including mental, I would like to invite you to turn your camera on, if it's possible, that would help me feel supported because I live with a disability that is not always visible and I just want to make sure we're here.

If you are owning property specifically in the northwest part of Europe or the United States, I would like to invite you to turn your camera off if you own property. Similarly, if you have vacations that are paid, I would like you to turn your camera off. If you are underemployed or underpaid or underrepresented at your workplace, inviting you to turn your camera on. Okay, I see you. We're about slightly more than halfway I think from here. I just want to take a moment to invite you to sort of scroll through who is visible right now and who's not visible.

And for the people that are visible, I would invite you to turn your microphones on. You don't have to say anything, it's just a practice. I like to have ambient sound because you are the people that I really want to talk to. I want to check in with you and see how you're doing. And also you can write in the chat about, we're talking about concepts and words that are often overused without actually taking action around what that means. And what I just did is a way to take an action to make visible people that might be underrepresented and to be like, hey, we're actually here and we're contributing to the workforce, the culture, the cultural sector as artists and professionals.

We have lives. We have feelings. We have needs, yes to fragility and vulnerability, but also the idea that maybe we're doing more work and the work that we might be doing might not be getting recognised or funded or resourced. And that needs to be not just talked about. So I'm going to invite people with mics on and cameras on if they have any popcorn thoughts if they are thinking about an action because it's about doing thinking and feeling and then following

through. So the ellipsis in the title of my little presentation is open. Somebody must have an idea of what can be done.

You can write it in the chat or you can just say something or just say “Hi”. I just want to say thank you for being here. I really feel supported to be able to see people with intersections that cross my own. That's the one thing. Often I'm in spaces where I'm not reflected, so it's really nice.

Anyone thinking anything? Okay. I'm sure you are thinking. Thanks, here person. I would like to reshuffle because it's the 60 seconds left. Just so you know, you can change your name back if you want or keep it ambiguous. I do that to sort of play with what happens when we neutralise. Neutralise by not having our position or name, identify also to release from gender something like this as well, or things that can be, if you're a funding body and look at people's last names. Sometimes it influences what the funding is available to, that's a reality. So you can change back, you can be back in relation with your camera as you were before. And we're going to move on to the next thing. That has been my 10 minutes. Thank you.

EDN Research Publication Presentation “5 comments on responsibilities, methods and hopes”

By [Alexandra Baybutt](#), postdoctoral researcher, somatic movement educator and artist (UK)

Eva Broberg:

Thank you Joy for sharing your practice with us. I'm Eva Broberg, the network manager of EDN, and I'm now happy to introduce Dr. Alexandra Baybutt. Alexandra has been following all our EDN activities this year and conducting research on equity in working conditions in dance. So thank you for all your work, Alexandra. I'm looking forward to hearing your five comments on responsibilities, methods, and hopes now. Thank you.

Alexandra Baybutt:

Thank you Eva. I'm going to share my screen. So my name is Alexandra Baybutt, and as Eva just said, I've been following the work of the EDN this year and this toolkit's really in relationship to the research publication I created. So please [open the document](#) and scroll through to page four, which is the contents page, and take a moment to look at the contents page and then put in the chat the number of the page that you would go to if you were to carry on reading, please.

Thank you. I can see some numbers appearing. So it's not a novel that you must read through from the start to the end. It was really written with the intention that you might begin anywhere and read what immediately calls you and read intuitively taking your own route through it. I took the opportunity with this research to continue arguing, as I and others have elsewhere, that dance, however named, as a sector, a field, an industry, is an ecology of practices that you and I are part of because we are here and others were and are there. I insist upon dance as an ecology of practices to recognise the interrelatedness of and contingencies between artists,

publics, audiences, writers, cultural workers, policymakers, and so on. This ecology has many histories forming existing working conditions and mediating equities or inequalities. To emphasise the interconnectedness of dance as an ecology, admits the vulnerability and fragility that these connections may strengthen as well as weaken, but it is also to hope for more equitable regenerative futures for working conditions that build upon what is already happening.

So this publication was written in the spirit of affirming what EDN members and independent artists and their peers and colleagues already do. It's not necessarily about changing all your values and aims, but reviewing how existing ones function. There is so much effective work happening in dance spaces and contexts on a day-to-day basis to improve access to dance as an ecology and care towards one another. My intent was that this publication elevates some of what is already happening, and often happening quietly away from the hyper-confident performative declarations that insist upon change whilst keeping things the same. And because of this, often imperceptible everyday work, independent artists and cultural workers and organisations are not always aware of what each other does and how, I wanted to explore different perspectives and positions to argue for interconnection and the need to take seriously how all parts of the ecology impact upon each other. It's a process as many of the conference speakers today reinforce.

For me, it has been inspiring and challenging to be in the position of doing this research and following the work of EDN. I drew from many voices, several who've already spoken in today's conference and who are here as audience members. And it was inspiring to find the many ways of doing things and different ways of doing things and evaluating why we do things. And I also drew upon many challenging conversations with independent artists. So when I would mention to my peers and friends what I was working on, many would seize the opportunity to tell me of inequalities they experienced. And my responsibility was to translate private individual experiences into digestible form, respecting privacy, not pointing fingers, but acknowledging the tension and reflecting on what could be done differently in the future to prevent such occurrences again.

As part of gathering the examples and stories and questions, a repeated refrain was the need for time and resources to become more equitable. Although spontaneous actions and last minute quick thinking can be successful and necessary, the researchers illuminated the need to extend preparation and evaluation phases. The resources for individual and institutional reflection in the last part of section one from page 27 insist upon taking time as well as reflexive tools. This document offers arguments for how to make the case to funders and policymakers for more resources, for the time and expertise to prepare and evaluate on qualitative as well as quantitative terms.

I wanted to make the publication more as a living document, a living resource rather than a report so it doesn't get filed away with a sense of completion like we fix the problem. Instead, equity in working conditions in dance is an ongoing concern and process and practice, and the document is full of links and guidance that might not be immediately relevant to you, but they will be to somebody else. And so as the chat shows, not everyone chose the same page number that they would start from. I hope aspects of it will become meaningful over time when



you're thinking about working with a new artist, finding collaborators, discussing how you recruit new staff members or thinking about your publics.

When I first moved to London more than 20 years ago, I used a paper, A to Z. That's what this image is about. The iconic map book of every street and my A to Z became uniquely mine as I wrote on it and added post-it notes when I was planning my routes for where I went for work and for play. And I like to think of this EDN publication as something that you might add to with your own ideas and notes and arguments of where your thinking and practice went. So maybe in 20 year's time, we all have this version of this document that is uniquely ours. The A to Z is this printed document that feels like a relic of the analogue city navigation. But I thought about it in relationship to this research because it is also iterative, something updated, something to be added to as new routes and roads appear. And plus, we are all somewhere, which is one of the subtitles in the book. And so I'm speaking to you from London, so I might as well acknowledge that.

I hope you'll keep scrolling through and using this document, even though it is of its moment and will already have parts that need rewriting and updating. It was written to be argued with. But like the A to Z, it is part of ongoing developments in how information and ways of moving are shared, discarded and renewed. It is a contribution to the endeavour to keep on reflecting, taking action to make working conditions in dance as an ecology more equitable. To begin again, to begin anywhere.

Thank you very much to everyone whose work and actions informed me and especially to Stefania, Louise, Gebra Eva, Christoph, Lucrezia and Gaja. Thank you.

Dance Film "CRNI TITO - Blaž Tito addressing the Parliament of Ghosts"

By [Christian Guerematchi](#), choreographer and performer (Netherlands)

Suzy Blok:

Thank you so much Alexandra, and thank you for all the research that you did this past year. The publication sounds very good and I would like to start reading it right away.

Alexandra Baybutt:

Thank you.

Suzy Blok:

Many pages to start reading. I couldn't really decide, maybe the tools. So thank you, Alexandra.

My name is Suzy Blok. I'm the head of [ICK Artist Space](#), which is the talent development department for artists at ICK Amsterdam. And I would like to introduce to you choreographer

and performer Christian Guerematchi, who was also co-creator of the EDN Atelier, which we hosted at ICK Amsterdam, together with Dansateliers called [The Body of Skill and Opportunity: Equity Through Embodied Practices](#).

### Artists' Perspectives "Equity as Motivation & Content"

With Alexandra Baybutt, Monica Gillette (moderator), Christian Guerematchi & Joy Mariama Smith

Monica Gillette:

Thank you, Chris, for this film. We're going to dive into some conversation. So if Chris and Joy and Alexandra are going to be joining me. And I'm just going to wait for Joy for a minute. I heard that Joy needs to leave at one, is that correct?

Joy Mariama Smith:

No, I moved my meeting back. Thanks.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you very much. Because we're running over, we are going to try to shorten up this conversation a little bit, but the headline for this conversation is equity as motivation and content. And I'm really curious to hear, especially from Joy and Chris as we've experienced a practice and seen a film, how you let that motivation move you, how you listen to that motivation to know how to let it play out and where to take action, whether that's facilitation or designing spaces or policy or lobbying or making a work. This is a moment to hear how you let that motivation guide you. So I'm going to take, first I'm going to start with Joy in case you do need to slip out, get to that meeting. Is there a particular response you have already to that question? Because we kind of already pre-talked about this a little bit. If not, I already have two others I'm curious about, but I first hear if there's a particular way you want to respond to that motivation question.

Joy Mariama Smith:

Yeah, so what I think, just to say it in a different way, you're asking what motivates me to create or take action around providing a certain type of space or a certain environment that's related to equity. This movement. Is that right?

Monica Gillette:

And how.

Joy Mariama Smith:

And how. So I start with myself. I centre myself and what my needs are as a member of a lot of communities that are underrepresented. I start with a labour of love by trying to invite and facilitate practices that I can invite those people in to practice with me. And a lot of times it's not funded or I don't have financial support, but I do it anyway and I do it consistently so that when people realise that they need a space or oh, I'm not sure if I have this identity or if this space is for me, but I provide access to that space and I name certain things and I don't tell people who they are, I let them choose if they're aligned with the descriptions and then we gather and we see what's possible. So that's a quick course. It takes years and years and years and years, but that's a quick and dirty response by starting with myself and my needs and seeing if maybe other people might need them, because I'm certainly underrepresented.

Monica Gillette:

Can I ask you about two specific practices you've developed? Practices of consent, this is one I'd like to hear more about as well as I understand there's a festival that you designed, called Colour Block. If you could speak about both of the those, please.

Joy Mariama Smith:

Sure. I also want to throw in one more practice because I think it's relevant because we're talking about accountability and what prohibits people's stories from... What prohibits certain types of behaviour that lead us towards an equitable lived practice. And that third thing is the shame research lab. But the consent practice is... I started researching consent as a performer and I realised that I wanted to have conversations with people who understood that power and gender sexuality also have to do with how people understand and navigate through consent and that it's dynamic. And once that understanding is realised, then it also facilitates more equitable spaces by understanding, oh, this person has more power than I do. So even a yes to a certain thing is different, it was already said before, to move towards complexity, but to not simplify and homogenise people's experience.

Colour Block, which I've been curating and facilitating, hosting, teaching, teaching and more for over a decade in the German countryside, was a practice I needed when I moved to Europe. I was like, "I need to find artists of colour that are European so that I can understand being Black in a European context." And then I actually was like, "Well, I have my own personal experience of being Black in a European context. I need to hear other voices and people of colour," which is a complex term and I don't define that for the person, and also is mixed. So there can be white people to talk about, to understand, hey, my actions affect these people or to talk about these differences and be uncomfortable together.

And the shame research lab I've been doing for about six years, which is a space that centres queer performance, but also unravels shame also in relation to power and looks at how it prohibits accountability and that creates an opening to be able to talk about things that are uncomfortable.

Monica Gillette:

Can you just say a little bit more about how you facilitate the shame research lab?

Joy Mariama Smith:

Oh, sure. I start just an arc over a period of time. I start with individual or autonomous research. I name that we're all researching together. So while I'm facilitating, I try to make the gap closed, more closed, between the participants and myself where I'm participating in the research. And then we move from autonomous or solo research into group research and we really start with things like projection and identity. So working and talking through assumptions, naming power dynamics, talking about intimacy and communication, and then working with objects and movement.

An example is what's the difference between having a conversation about shame when you're in physical contact with someone that's supportive or what's the difference between trying to keep eye contact or talking across from someone versus talking next to someone? What does that do to an embodied positionality?

And then we do group work and we end with a cypher. So we end in a celebratory movement practice because there's more than one side to shame. But the idea is that if you dismantle the power of shame, which is usually being put on by someone else or a dominant culture, that you can engage in a liberatory and transformative practice and create more space for other possibilities.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you. I feel like there's also so much internalised shame as well. And this is a workshop I think I'd really love to take. So I'm going to peruse your website when it's next happening.

Joy Mariama Smith:

Yeah, absolutely.

Monica Gillette:

And Chris, I'd like to turn to you now and to pose the same entry point of this place of motivation; equity as motivation and content. Of course, we just saw your film, there's a lot we can already take in from this, but I'd like to hear how you design that pathway for yourself and what's important to you around it.

Christian Guerematchi:

Yes, thank you for having me. And do you hear me well?

Monica Gillette:

Yes.

Christian Guerematchi:

Great. I'd like to feed off actually what Joy was saying, her interest also in meeting people of colour here in Europe. I am from Slovenia, from Eastern Europe, and I had the same desire coming to the West to really experience a sense of community and maybe some more understanding of where I'm coming from. So I was very much inspired by the Dutch debate around race and the fight against the Black Pete, which was very heavily fought. So in that context, I actually made a decision that I would like to participate with my own art or with what I do, and that is art, so that the conversation just keeps going or actually adding other points of perspective.

So that was kind of my main motivation to start and artistic research into the codes of the Black body as I call them, and the Black European identity. And for that, I pretty quickly realised that I do need to have collaborations that are sustainable, but that are also on the same page. And from my own experience, I noticed that people of colour in dance themselves need to be spotlighted. Because many times, like I said, from my own experience, we are within one situation where our identities are kind of semi-accepted or semi-represented. So I really wanted to go down that path to give a fuller picture of what we got to say, how we collaborate with each other, and where we actually want to go with each other than being told how we come over to other people or how we come across on stage or stuff like this. So I wanted to make this discussion around our own identity coming from us and then being shared with the world.

Monica Gillette:

Chris, it's mentioned in the film, but I was wondering if you could share with us more about the non-aligned movement, or please say exactly how you want to say it.

Christian Guerematchi:

Yes, the non-aligned movement... actually I started this project because in the Netherlands, I was very exotic coming from Slovenia. I had to explain a lot of socialist point of views that are not very common in the West. And with that, I was also looked upon a little bit as weird or where does this come from? So I did dig back to where I come from, which is a history of decolonization, a history of fighting imperialism, which was the ideology of Yugoslavia where I was born, and Slovenia was part of that, and also part of this foreign policy of peaceful coexistence.

So these are very big words. These are very, very important topics that actually got lost in history. So I wanted to, on the one hand, explain where I'm coming from and what the difference is in histories, but I also wanted to show that in a way, things are coming back and the situation of having to choose where you to align, that's the idea. Having to choose your alignment is actually not necessary. That we can and should exist between those extremes that are out there.

And I personally took it a little bit broader than just history. So I put in identity, colour, sexuality, and also actually a movement. So even in the movement itself, I was researching some kind of

non-coded or non-aligned codes of movement. So I was working multi-layered, which I always do, and that's how, through that non-aligned movement, I also came to Ghana where I made this film in order to give another perspective of that history, which is treated and remembered in ex-Yugoslavia very differently than for example in Africa. But at the same time, it has the same values, it has the same desires, and it goes against a certain capitalistic view of people in general, let's say.

Monica Gillette:

When I read a bit about non-aligned status of countries, countries that don't have an alignment with a block of other countries, let's say, to try to simply explain it on this national level. And then the way you just explained it on this notion that you don't actually need to align. I find this a strong complement or option inside of a very polarised moment right now in many ways. So I'm curious also to hear how you're describing how it's translated into the body. How would you describe this in the body as something that you practice?

Christian Guerematchi:

Yes. Well, it is a practice of finding movement, looking for movement. So in that sense, I don't think it's so different from other movement explorations, but it has a certain charge. So it inspires me to really coin it that there are different codes that exist either within your body because of your upbringing or some kind of lineage from where you come from, but also learned codes that we, especially as dancers, are trained to embody and continue to distribute, let's say. And that's where I put the question marks of what are we actually doing? Why are we choosing certain codes? And also a little bit examining African-isms. These are certain codes or ideas being put on Black bodies. And then my question would be how to use this, which are they? Because also in pop culture actually everything gets mixed and even in let's say ballet and contemporary dance - what we know from pop culture just enters and a lot of things are being appropriated without further thought. So I wanted to just give more of a thought to what we're actually doing with those codes.

Monica Gillette:

Great. Thanks. Alexandra, I'm going to come to you in a second, but Joy, I wanted to know if you wanted to respond to anything that Chris said, if there's something you want to key off of or link into there.

Joy Mariama Smith:

Absolutely. But there's not enough time.

Monica Gillette:

Okay. Honest answer. I wish I could go for it, but I'm going to turn now to Alexandra. We said before we entered this conversation that as you would listen to what they're describing and

talking about, you would maybe relate some of it the research that you've been doing for the last year. I know that's a hard one. If you want to change what we said, how we would approach it, you're welcome. If there's anything you want to pull out that you heard that needs a little bit of resonance on a larger level in relation to the research, that would be great.

Alexandra Baybutt:

And thinking about the section in the document that I wrote about naming and not naming and the complexities of naming place and space in this European space that has a socialist history, that has the change of land and names and the nuttiness of that is resonating for me a lot. Hearing both Joy and Chris reflect on equity as motivation. And I'm reminded of a moment in the Atelier in Paris where there were these conversations around do's and don'ts for practices, what to do and what not to do. And then these big pieces of paper that are still rolled up under my desk, one of them had a new column inserted called "the don't know column". So the importance of the not knowing in these debates and the flexibility around the names that we choose because maybe we change them and maybe somebody else uses a different one. And being open to the not knowing and the unlearning of how things are named with the potential for their transformation, really. So I'm thinking about those things. Thank you very much.

Monica Gillette:

Thank you for that. Unfortunately, we're going to have to wrap up and move on. I'm sorry that we had to kind of shorten this up, but thank you, Chris, Joy and Alexandra for taking the time and sharing your practice with us. Now I'm going to pass it over to Kristin de Groot, independent consultant, fundraiser writer and confidential counsellor, and we're going to hear from Kristin some ending words. So thank you very much.

## Ending Words

By Kristin de Groot, independent consultant, fundraiser/writer and confidential counsellor (Netherlands)

Kristin de Groot:

Thank you. Thank you very much. How can I put ending words after so many words that were shared? And I think maybe it's good to take a moment all together to close our eyes and be silent for a little bit and be thankful for the access that we've had to so much knowledge, insights, thinkers, movers, activists, and artists. Thank you for the insights that were given on the spot by Monica and Joy. Thank you. I think it's a privilege to be here, to have heard all these stories and to realise how strong storytelling helps us to learn and eventually not unlearn.

I'm going to try to formulate some ending words, and I will use words that were shared today by the speakers and interweaving our stories. That's important in our attempt to create more equitable spaces in contemporary dance. What does it really require? The pursuit of inclusion.

How do we expand the story? How do we interweave all of our stories? It is about us. It takes care, courage, humility, and it is okay to not know.

And Alexandra, with your permission, I would like to read a little bit of your report, and I would highly recommend all of you to read the report, start wherever, but it's a very rich document with many insights and practical tools for reflection, for practice, and great examples.

*Staying with the not knowing, increasing knowledge, developing sensitivity, and the sensibility for reflection is an ongoing process. It is useful to also linger in not knowing as a precondition for self-understanding, being wrong and changing course for discovery, humility, maybe joy.*

Thank you, Alexandra.

How can we be a good ally? What are our motivations to become one? It is not something you do, it is something you are. How do we give space to stories that are not so dominant? Do it on a regular basis. Don't make it a one-timer so that stories can eventually be interweaved. Embrace access and realise that a need is not an option. It is a must. Don't think that you can do everything everywhere, all at once. Give time and care to building relationships to understand what needs to be done and changed. Embrace failure. Stay in the discomfort. Stay in the not knowing. Stay in not having the answers. Yes to vulnerability and fragility. Learn how to forgive yourself. Learn how to forgive people. Be accountable for the unequal division of resources. How can we align our movement to more equitable spaces in contemporary dance? Let's further interweave our stories with care and courage. Keep on moving. Thank you very much.