

EDN

European
Dance Development
Network

ADVOCATING FOR DANCE

Insights from the
2025 Webinar Series



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Translating Dance: From Artistic Expression to Policy Action

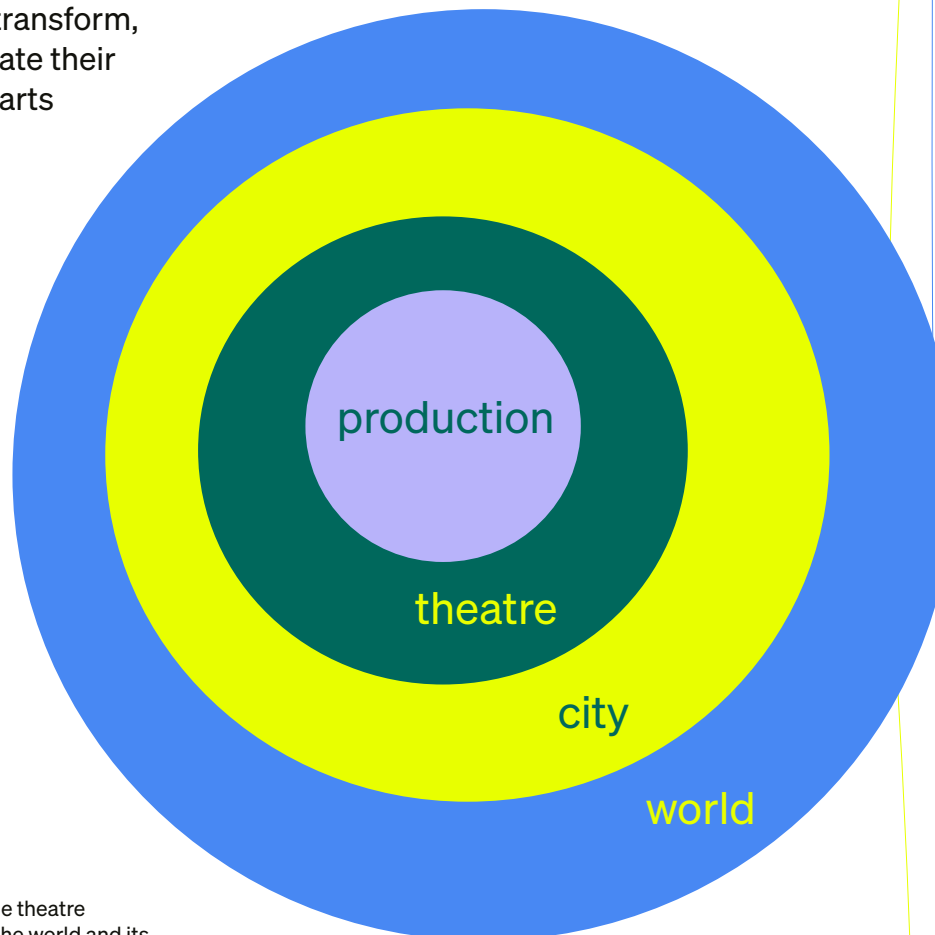
*Key takeaways from EDN Webinar #1
7 April 2025*

Speakers: **Carlotta Scioldo & Maxime Ollivier**
Moderator: **Greta Pieropan**

Start With A Story

***“Advocating is about framing: creating narratives, identifying concerns, interests and values.”** Carlotta Scioldo*

Storytelling is such a crucial skill. In institutional settings, it takes shape in the form of campaigns, legislative and administrative actions. But advocacy also occurs through **curatorial programming**. This is where artistic practices are given the space to transform, scale up, and translate their impact beyond the arts and across wider areas of society.



Van Kerkhoven, Marianne, 'The theatre is in the city and the city is in the world and its walls are of skin', State of the Union, Theater festival 1994

Advocacy Conveys Through The Body

Language is inscribed, written and co-written in our choreographed bodies. From WTO protests to Black Lives Matter, the body speaks before words do. Every gesture can carry resistance, identity, and memory. Dance, then, is not only an artform but also a **tool of disobedience and imagination**.

Joy As A Strategy

“When advocating through dance, we try to share urgency in the most joyful way possible, so people want to join us.” Maxime Ollivier

Joy is not escapism. It’s an **outreach strategy**, a way of making activism inviting rather than exhausting. Instead of mobilising through fear, activism mobilises through desire, humour, and play.

The Tensions We Navigate

- **Time vs. Creation:** Policy calendars run fast; artistic creation takes time. Finding common ground is challenging.
- **Radicality vs. Institutionalisation:** Cultural institutions can amplify voices, but they are rarely empowered to present or develop radical art.
- **Language Gaps:** Artists, activists, and policymakers often don’t share the same vocabulary. Translation is ongoing work.

“We are always asking: is it radical enough? Did we manage to reach beyond our usual audience?” Maxime Ollivier

What Sustains Us

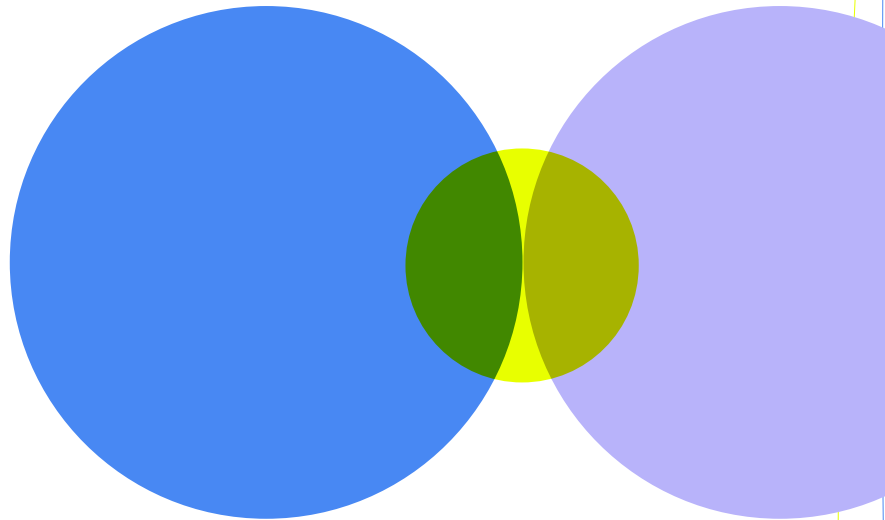
“Trying to work towards what we want and not against what there is.”

Carlotta Scioldo

- **Networks:** They aggregate knowledge, visibility, and legitimacy.
- **Care inside collectives:** Fighting oppression not only outside but within.
- **Small changes:** Even modest shifts can ripple into wider transformation.
- **Joy and reliance:** Not carrying the weight alone.

Towards Convergence

Sustainable transformation happens when grassroots movements and institutional power meet, creating space for community voices to inform policy decisions. This is the art of advocacy: ensuring the voices of dancers, communities, and their networks reach the ears of policymakers.



Closing Thought

Instead of recommendations, the webinar left us with a **question to carry forward:**

*When have you witnessed positive change thanks to collective action?
Were you there?*

Advocacy starts with memory, with our bodies, and within our communities. And it takes trust to believe that small gestures can lead to greater change.

Formats of Action: Collaborative Strategies for Dance Advocacy

EDN Webinar #2
9 April 2025

Speakers: **Luísa Saraiva & Roberto Casarotto**
Moderator: **Greta Pieropan**

It's Not the Artist, It's the System

***"Most mental health struggles in dance come from systemic failure, not from artists themselves."** Luísa Saraiva*

- An overwhelming majority of dance artists are freelancers → their conditions remain precarious and isolating.
- Education programmes do not equip performing artists for real-life challenges, such as conflict management, nomadism, or project leadership.
- Anxiety and burnout need to be recognised as **structural neglect**.

From Projects to Ecosystems

***"Change is inevitable. Growth is optional."** Roberto Casarotto*

- The Dance Well project shows how **dance practice in communities** remains deeply artistic while socially transformative.
- Naming the practice artistic and keeping it artistic is valuable in terms of addressing what **meanings** we bring into society when we want to engage people with dance.
- Short projects fade while **ecosystems endure**. Artists, citizens, and institutions carry the responsibility to connect and learn from each other.
- We can build new audiences, develop new knowledge, new vocabularies, and find new ways to share what is invisible. Co-creation lies in **co-ownership** and **shared responsibility**.

Bring Out the Invisible

***“Let’s cut the mystery. There should be no mystery in understanding what we do together.”** Luísa Saraiva*

- Artistic practice requires a new language and a **clearer vocabulary**; project leaders need to be able to articulate their work effectively.
- When **articulated**, artistic research is just as valid as scientific research or a policy framework.
- Community voices are the strongest storytellers.

***“When people who have never danced before find motivation to leave their homes, connect with others, combat isolation and pain, and dance together twice a week – that’s the most powerful story to share with policymakers.”** Roberto Casarotto*

Care As Collective Infrastructure

- Care points to what we want to build, not just what we want to work against: communities that can thrive together, where peer-to-peer exchange and collective reflection can generate **agency, solidarity, and resilience**.
- A dance artist's **daily culture of support** means noticing each other's limits, making space for vulnerability, and cultivating trust.
- A culture of care ripples outward; timely alliances with policymakers or scientists grow stronger when rooted **in a shared human experience**, rather than a transactional exchange.
- Care is **infrastructure**: the ground where creativity and collaboration can build new meanings and new ways of sharing what is invisible.

Imagine Other Ways

The way we work now is not sustainable. But together, we can imagine other ways, where:

dance institutions are equipped to adequately support
artistic careers with radical hospitality

funding merges artistic and community practices instead
of separating them

studio work, choreographic practice and embodied knowledge are
recognised as critical skills

citizens' experience with dance drives policy change



Closing Thought

Advocacy is not about defending a fragile artform. It's about re-designing systems around dance with togetherness, responsibility, care, and imagination.

Data-Driven Advocacy – Showcasing the Impact of Dance

Key takeaways from EDN Webinar #3
11 April 2025

Speakers: **Luiza Moroz & Amy Fee**
Moderator: **Greta Pieropan**

Why Dance Needs Its Own Data Language

Unlike industries with stable infrastructures, independent dance is often **fragmented, project-based, and a guest in other people's houses.**

- This makes the sector **invisible in national statistics** and overlooked in public support.
- When data exists, it's usually **owned by venues**, not choreographer.

“Most choreographers don't even own the relationship to their audiences. Sometimes they don't even get the number of people who saw their work.” Amy Fee

Core challenge: Without ownership of data, dance risks being erased in policy conversations.

Performative Arguments

“Dance may lack hard data, but it has something other sectors don't have: the ability to embody its arguments.” Luiza Moroz

Numbers matter, but dance advocacy becomes powerful when **statistics, stories, and embodied practices** meet.

Fragmentation Or Diversity?

Independent dance is **diverse in form, practice, and community**. However, in policy terms, that diversity is often misinterpreted as **fragmentation**, undermining calls for infrastructure support.

“Our qualitative stories often get treated as individual exceptions, not systematic evidence.” Amy Fee

Luiza Moroz gives a few tips:

- Aggregate where possible – use shared frameworks to showcase the entire sector.
- Celebrate differences – frame diversity as resilience and innovation.
- Narrate networks – demonstrate how small projects create ecosystems rather than respond to hierarchies.

Owning the Numbers: Empowerment Through Data

Danscentrum Sverige’s digital tool shows what happens when artists reclaim their own evidence. Choreographers log in productions, audiences, contracts, venues and touring. Data is secure, exportable, and sorted by region, funder, or project. For the first time, artists can say, **“This is our reach, these are our audiences.”**

Data collection tools can:

- Minimise admin burden.
- Return ownership of data to creators.
- Allow comparison across years → proof of impact and cuts.

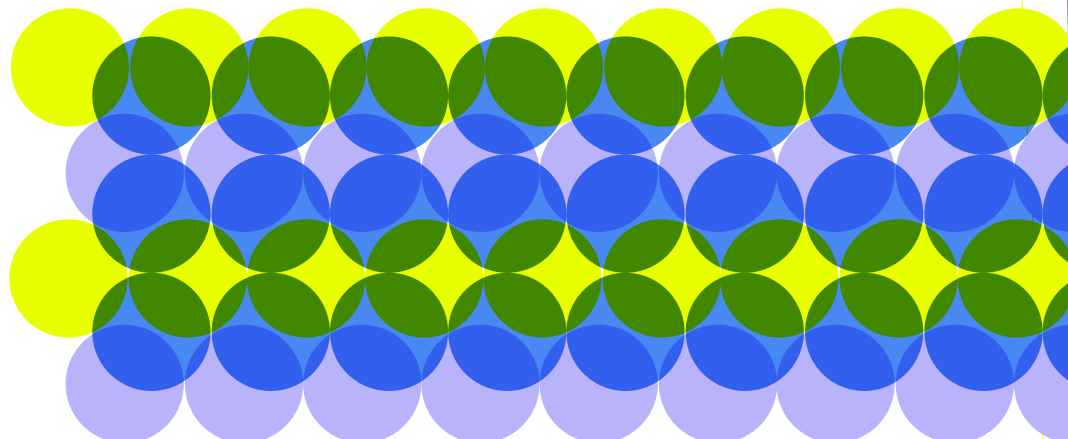
Creative Uses of Data in Dance

Dance advocacy doesn't always need new statistics. Often, the most powerful insights come from **looking differently at what already exists**. Luiza Moroz gives a few tips:

- **Geographies of access:** Map where dance performances happen and where they don't. Use heatmaps to show which communities are underserved.
- **Digital participation:** Track social media trends or digital dance classes as evidence of how dance engages young people and the general public.
- **Cultural memory:** Reinterpret archives or collections (e.g. public inventories, festival histories) to reveal overlooked narratives in dance and cultural justice.
- **Economic arguments:** When speaking to policymakers, highlight multipliers and returns on investment, social and cultural benefits, but always **pair numbers with the values dance embodies**, such as care, imagination, cohesion, and democracy.

A Dance-Inspired Framework for Advocacy

- **Take steps to** define indicators (audiences, employment, youth access).
- **Creatively** repurpose existing data (Eurostat).
- **Look for patterns** to form unconventional arguments and draw unexpected comparisons.
- **Perform** your arguments in a participatory embodied experience.



From Evidence to Imagination

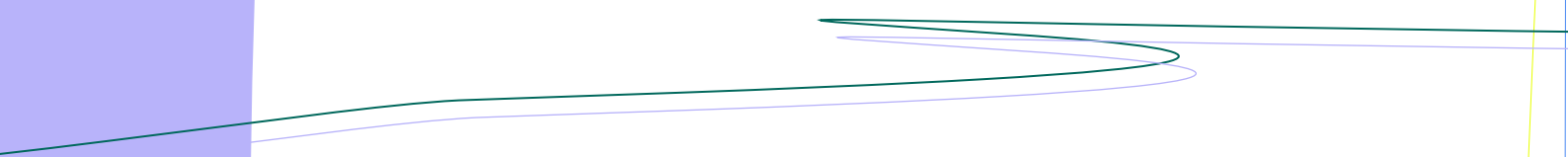
Dance advocacy is not only about proving worth with numbers. It's about showing that diversity is strength, performativity is power, and data ownership is visibility.

“Current policies are very calculated – there is no place for imagination. That’s where culture steps in.” Luiza Moroz

Takeaway: Use data to anchor, but let dance speak for itself.

Closing Thought

Across these three conversations, a clear thread emerged: advocacy in dance is not only about defending a vulnerable sector, but about expanding its horizons. From the body as testimony to actions that give visibility, from collective joy to systemic redesign, dance offers ways of imagining and practising politics that are participatory, relational, and deeply human. What begins as artistic expression evolves into policy action when communities, institutions, and policymakers discover new ways to move together.



About this Document

This report summarises EDN's webinar series "Advocating for Dance" (April 2025), which provided a platform for artists, cultural professionals, and policymakers to explore how dance can shape public policy. We are grateful to all the speakers, guests, and moderator Greta Pieropan for their insights and engagement.

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