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Network

THE FUTURE IS IN MOTION

Key Takeaways from
EDN's Advocacy Event



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On **5 December 2025**, the European Dance Development Network's online conference, [Advocating for Dance: The Future is in Motion](#), brought together nearly 200 contemporary dance professionals, artists, sector representatives, and public officials from across Europe and beyond. The event served as a dynamic platform for dialogue on strengthening the role of dance in society, advocating for cultural policy reform, and exploring how more equitable support structures and sustainable working conditions can help the dance ecosystem thrive.

The conference was co-curated and moderated by **Bertha Bermúdez**, EDN board member and co-director of Dantzaz – Dantzagunea.

Dance as Essential Infrastructure for Europe

In their opening speech, EDN Co-Presidents **Laurent Meheust** (Le Gymnase CDCN) and **Louise Costelloe** (Dance Ireland) urged collective action to secure the future of dance in Europe. They highlighted the sector's paradox: dance is vital to society, fostering health, community, education, and democratic space, yet remains underfunded and overlooked in public policy. With dance artists and professionals struggling to sustain their careers, they called for structural change, equitable investment, improved data collection, and recognition of dance as a democratic and social pillar. Through EDN's [Why We Speak Dance campaign](#), participants were invited to engage with strategies ensuring that dance remains visible, valued, and supported across Europe.

Culture Compass and the Future of Dance in Europe

Normunds Popens, Deputy Director General of the European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, highlighted the urgent need to recognise culture and dance as essential. In his opening address, he emphasised the significance of the new [Culture Compass](#), the EU's first strategic framework placing culture at the centre of all policy. He stressed dance's broad societal value, from health to integration, and outlined EU efforts to improve artists' working conditions through the upcoming [Artist Charter](#). With the future [AgoraEU programme for culture](#), intergenerational initiatives, and stronger international cooperation, he called for unified action to ensure culture and dance remain visible, supported, and transformative across Europe.

Towards Fairer Conditions for Independent Performing Artists

Ulrike Kuner, General Manager of the European Association of Independent Performing Arts and Austria's Association for Independent Performing Arts, highlighted the sector's extreme precarity and short career spans. She described how the [Austrian Fairness Codex](#) emerged after COVID-19 to expose unreliable contracts and insufficient social protection of the artists. Developed collaboratively with ministries and regions, it sets four core values: respect, transparency, diversity, and sustainability, and requires funding applicants to demonstrate fair practices. Measures now include consultations on working conditions in national theatres and practical tools such as a [Fairness Catalogue](#). At the European level, EAIPA advocates for aligning the upcoming Artist Charter with these principles and recognising shared responsibility across the cultural supply chain.

Bridging Artistic Practice and Advocacy Through Reinventing Institutions

Boris Charmatz, French dance artist, choreographer, and creator of experimental projects, reflected on how cultural policy influenced his understanding of dance as a medium for social voice and inclusion. He described *Bocal*, a self-invented school where students became their own teachers, challenging traditional education and showing that artistic practice can be created with anyone. He also recounted the creation of *Musée de la Danse*, an experimental museum that reimaged archives, public space, and institutional roles by placing the dancer at the centre. Across his work, Charmatz emphasises horizontality, community engagement, and the power of dance in public space to inspire social change.

Honouring South-African Advocate for Protest Dance Culture

Marianne Feder (Maison de la Danse) commemorated **Buru Mohlabane**, who was to join the EDN event but tragically passed away in a car accident. A dancer, choreographer, co-director of Via Katlehong, and a key activist for Pantsula culture, he dedicated his life to sharing this powerful protest dance across Europe and beyond. He was preparing to establish a Pantsula Academy in Katlehong, strengthening its community roots. Many at EDN remember his recent workshop in Lyon, where his energy and generosity left a deep impression. His work embodied the very spirit of local advocacy, and his legacy continues to inspire.

The Future is in Motion **Only When All Bodies Can Move**

Viktorija Ilioska, choreographer and programme coordinator at Lokomotiva – Centre for New Initiatives in Arts & Culture in Skopje, presented the [Macedonian Choreographic Platform](#), created to support choreography in the absence of national structures. She highlighted the persistent, self-propelled work needed to build ecosystems from scarcity. The platform rotates responsibility, fosters visibility, and treats choreography as a critical practice. By turning limited resources into relational, communal methodologies, it opens the possibility for survival, equity, and imagination. Ilioska stressed that the future of dance cannot depend on who is most resilient to exhaustion. We cannot speak about the future of dance if the only ones who survive are those who already have access to space, stability, visibility, financial safety, and institutional legitimacy. She highlighted solidarity, shared responsibility, and collective movement as essential for overcoming the hierarchies of the past.

Artistic Ecosystems in Rural Areas

Idoia Zabaleta, choreographer, biologist, and co-director of [Azala](#), presented the rural creation space in Álava, Basque Country, founded in 2008. Combining dance, transdisciplinary arts, and community life, Azala integrates studios, residencies, and the surrounding territory as active artistic agents. Operating with limited resources, it self-finances half its budget while fostering experimentation, mentoring, and collaboration. Zabaleta emphasised the interplay of imagination, infrastructure, and sustainability, highlighting the impact of cultural policy over the recent decades, the constraints of funding systems, and the need for long-term support. Azala exemplifies how artistic ecosystems can flourish in marginal spaces through relational practice, temporal experimentation, and connection to both community and environment.

Art, Resistance, and the Power **of Artistic Agency**

Renowned Swedish choreographer **Efva Lilja** reflected on a lifetime shaped by resistance and the struggle to claim space for dance arts. She described how performing in public spaces and initiating direct encounters with politicians have become forms of artistic advocacy. Lilja stressed the need to distinguish art from culture, to insist on the relevance of dance in society, and to empower artistic communities through solidarity and clarity of purpose. She shared her personal strategies: manifestos, exercises, joyful acts of disruption, as tools for courage and dialogue. Above all, she affirmed that artists must keep making art, taking risks, and speaking up.

Data as a Tool for Dance Advocacy

Amy Fee, General Manager of Danscentrum Sweden, outlined practical ways dance organisations can use existing data to strengthen advocacy. She emphasised identifying primary and secondary stakeholders, tailoring communication to their needs, and using clear evidence to demonstrate dance's societal impact. Presenting Danscentrum Sweden's statistics tool, which gathers performance, audience, and employment data, she showed how sector-wide information can support dialogue with funders, officials, presenters, and partners. Fee encouraged organisations to focus on manageable data sets, choose information strategically, and recognise the value already contained in routine administrative reporting. Using data differently, she argued, can open new conversations and strengthen the dance sector's visibility and stability.

Collective Insights from the Breakout Room Discussions

Across the breakout discussions, participants co-created "recipes" for a more inclusive, participatory, and sustainable future for dance. Many emphasised **process over product**, echoing Efva's call to value artistic making as data and knowledge. Core ingredients included **collectivity, humanity, care, risk-taking, continuity, resilience, and activism**, alongside practical tools such as dance-in-education, participatory spaces, visibility, sustainable structures, and democratised access.

Groups proposed presenting dance in **non-traditional spaces**, strengthening **dialogue between artists, institutions, and politicians**, and fostering **clear, inclusive language** that connects dance to society. Collaboration, shared resources, slow and attentive **process-based work**, and **new leadership** capable of bridging stakeholders were recurring themes.

Participants stressed the need to **keep doors open**, support one another, and protect fragile ecosystems while reimagining structures to support them. The envisioned future emerges when dance inhabits **everyday spaces**, welcomes **diverse voices**, and acts as a catalyst for **social connection**, critical pedagogy, and shared responsibility.

About this Document

This report is brought to you by Embodied Transformations, EDN's EU-funded network project. It connects contemporary dance professionals, organisations, and communities across Europe to foster a transformative and interdependent dance ecosystem.

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Written by: Gaja Lužnik, EDN Editorial Manager

Layout design: Anna Busdiecker

Contact: info@ednetwork.eu | www.ednetwork.eu

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