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Dance Development
Network

ADVOCATING FOR DANCE

Taking Action
to Defend Dance

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The EDN Atelier “Advocating for dance – Taking Action to Defend Dance” took place in Lyon (France) on 19–20 November 2025, hosted by two EDN members: Maison de la danse and CND Centre national de la danse. The two organisations joined forces to offer artists and professionals from the choreographic sector a time and space to better understand and analyse the levels and means of action to advocate in the field of dance, addressing questions of cooperation, funding models, and sharing perspectives on cultural policies across Europe and beyond.

This Atelier was programmed within the framework of the *Embodied Transformations* project led by the EDN network, which closely addresses the topic of advocacy, with the aim of empowering the sector to connect the dots, enlarge its discourse, and amplify its advocacy efforts. The programme of the Atelier was built by the co-organisers, driven by the same goals: bridging stakeholders within the dance sector, sharing experiences and building common grounds to broaden the resonance of our shared values.



Diverse speakers and facilitators invited participants to engage in activities that connected both minds and bodies.

Luiza Moroz, Head of Policy at **Culture Action Europe Network**, introduced the topic of advocacy. She defined key terms, from activism to lobbying, and also helped us map the various actions that can be taken to raise the voice of our sector, providing concrete examples and actively engaging participants in getting to grips with the topic of advocacy.

Anne Décoret-Ahiha, anthropologist of dance, engaged the participants in a game to get to know who's who, inviting us to introduce ourselves and listen to each other in a playful way, followed by a *Pantsula* dance workshop by South African choreographer **Buru Isaac Mohlabane**, co-director of Katlehong Dance Company. Though a hands-on body practice, Buru gave participants the opportunity to explore the rich history, unique techniques, and social impact of this South African protest dance form. This was a great introduction to the show *tamUjUntU* presented that same evening at Maison de la danse by Via Katlehong & Paulo Azevedo.



After a first day of encounters, participants gathered for a second day with a programme built around alternating reflective and embodied sessions. Participants engaged in smaller group discussions and peer exchanges to address more specific topics such as cultural policy & advocacy tools, but also to look at inspiring initiatives through the lens of the *Perform Europe* programme, introduced by **Joris Janssens (IDEA Consult)**, who led a dedicated workshop entitled: *Reimagining Touring in Practice: using Perform Europe's learning to design inclusive and green touring projects*. He gave participants some time to explore and better understand the four strategies underpinning the *Perform Europe* programme: artistic, ecological, community, and organisational. Ideas were then shared among groups to discuss future actions within our global and individual contexts.

Participants also opened up future perspectives and imagined scenarios by reading and interpreting tarot cards, answering questions such as:

- How to build common grounds and support claims for artistic freedom and social justice thanks to choreographic practices?
- How to build resilience through collaboration?
- How to rethink funding models?

These internal discussions led participants to clearly identify their potential scope of influence, precisely pinpoint the issues and problems to solve, and map the ecosystem, while also setting up strategies and methodologies within a concrete time frame.





Drawing a conclusion after the two days of Atelier, Luiza Moroz saw what she named: **“The dance sector in the making”**, raising the need to clearly identify and define our sector, its specific needs and peculiarities, in order to be more visible and enhance its recognition by policy makers.

As we build our case towards them, we need to know which language to use and to speak from a collective, unified position. Becoming aware of our agency, we have to look for our own definitions, and identify the specific limitations, hierarchies and inequalities within our sector. To that extent, it is crucial to take into account our differences and the discrepancies across the social, economic, and political contexts in which stakeholders in our sector find themselves in Europe and beyond. Then, the inevitable question is: how do we deal with these inequalities?

To answer, we have to look at our values. If we want to be supportive and collaborative, there are ways to do so. Solidarity can be an answer, meaning that stronger players in the sector should support smaller players. Of course, there is a lack of resources at the macro level, and the dance sector is not as recognised as we would all like it to be. Still, we can look at opportunities on the table and be inspired by initiatives conducted elsewhere, which one can seize according to a specific context.

Advocacy can be quite technical and professional, but this does not mean that we should all be involved at the same level. Therefore, as we work together on our self-identification as a dance sector, the time is right to ask ourselves: what is my role vis-à-vis this advocacy approach? What are the priorities of our organisation, or my priority as an artist, aligned with advocacy? Do I want to lead? Do I have the resources and the capacity to do so? Do I want to co-lead and participate? Do I want to watch? According to Luiza Moroz, who listened to and observed the participants, these two days were about stimulating and encouraging ourselves to understand where we are positioned on this map of the advocacy ecosystem.



Closely linked to the advocacy issue, the Atelier also created a platform to share our concerns about the protection of artistic freedom, an urgent topic that could serve as a basis for common advocacy actions. At each level, we can already try to focus on artistic freedom, infringements, or at least set up monitoring to evaluate one's situation regarding artistic freedom at risk. Quoting Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Luiza Moroz invited us all, while remaining visionary, to think concretely about how we can achieve the goals we have set.

Over 50 participants attended this EDN Atelier at Maison de la danse and CND in Lyon, coming from Lyon and its area, from other regions in France, and from abroad. This large panel of participants helped us build a broad and strong overview of various advocacy actions possible in different political backgrounds. This led the whole group to reflect on how we can collectively raise a loud, transnational voice to make a difference and advocate for better recognition of the sector's needs and values.



We are deeply saddened by the sudden passing of Buru Isaac Mohlabane, co-director of Via Katlehong Dance Company, who led a Pantsula dance workshop at the Atelier.

A key figure in South African dance, Buru championed Pantsula, gumboot, and step, sharing the heritage of protest dances with young people in Katlehong and beyond. Buru was preparing to establish a Pantsula Academy, a school dedicated to passing on the rich heritage of Pantsula culture.

Buru will be remembered for his immense joy and exceptional generosity, his sense of sharing and gathering, his conviction that dance can lead us towards change, and his willingness to reach out to others through dance. Our thoughts are with his family, colleagues, and all who collaborated with him.

About this Document

This report summarises the EDN Atelier: “Advocating for dance – Taking Action to Defend Dance”, hosted by Maison de la danse and CND Centre national de la danse in Lyon, France, on 19–20 November 2025.

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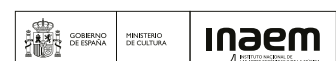
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