

# **Dance, Audience & Society**

Visions on building sustainable relations with citizens





Camping | CND Centre national de la danse | © Marc Damage

# Contents

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Pushing a Vision**  
In conversation with EDN's president  
Laurent Meheust  
by Freek Duinhof
- 3 Social Sensitivity: Tracing paths for Audience Development**  
by Steriani Tsintziloni | Duncan Dance Research Centre
- 4 Will You Dance: Building & Nurturing Relationships in Times of Change**  
by Mirna Zagar | Croatian Institute for Movement and Dance (HIPPI)
- 5 The Place Case Study 2020: The Audience-Focus Butterfly Effect**  
by Caroline Schreiber | The Place
- 6 Connect, Think, Plan: The Media Dance Project and Involving Citizens**  
by Mara Loro | Lavanderia a Vapore
- 7 Dance Outreach for Schools: Dance Audience Development for Young Dance Audiences**  
by Uta Meyer | K3 - Zentrum für Choreographie
- 8 From Audience to Citizen Engagement: On Ownership, Inclusivity and Intergenerational Exchange**  
by Alessia Zanchetta & Greta Pieropan | Centro per la Scena Contemporanea
- 9 Why I Love my Job: A Personal Look at Working in Mediation**  
by Guillaume Guilherme | Tanzhaus Zürich
- 10 A Space of Discovery where Artists and Audiences Meet**  
by Dominique Crébassol | la Place de la Danse – CDCN Toulouse/Occitanie

1

# Introduction

## No art without audiences.

Just as dance performances and audiences are diverse, so too are the approaches taken to audience engagement varied and ever-evolving. The 45 members (and growing) of the European Dancehouse Network all have vast experience in building relationships with communities in their local, national and international contexts. Together, these members constitute a rich landscape of knowledge, experience and research. Their insights may sometimes be gained through trial and error, but the work itself is always animated by a huge drive and curiosity to develop and deepen connections. In this publication, eight members share their visions, questions, best practices and personal quests.

INTRODUCTION

4

The articles in **Dance, Audience and Society** reflect on the importance of organisational history and experience when engaging with audiences, as well as the use (or not) of physical dance houses. In the process, they share innovative strategies and new ways of thinking about audiences and how to establish meaningful relationships with them. You will find, particularly, an exploration of the shift from audience- to citizen-focused approaches, and see how this change can ripple through the entire structure of an organisation. The publication also gives useful insights into developing stronger connections with young audiences, and shares practices for creating contexts for dance outside the realm of more traditional performances and/or venues.

EDN believes that the art of dance can make a crucial contribution to the well-being of people across society. As such, **Dance, Audience and Society** supports EDN's goal of achieving a more complete and inclusive connection with local, national and international citizens – an aim that has become even more essential in these times of social distancing due to Covid-19.

We wish you an inspiring read!

**EDN's board of directors,**

**Laurent Meheust**, *President*

**Mitja Bravhar**, *Treasurer*

**Kerstin Evert**, *Secretary*

**Roberto Casarotto**, *Member*

**Catja Loepfe**, *Member*

**Suzy Blok**, *Member*



**European  
Dancehouse  
Network**

Founded on principles of trust and cooperation, the **European Dancehouse Network (EDN)** is a network of European dance houses sharing a common vision for the development of dance art across borders. Working with its 45 members, the network aims to secure a sustainable future for the dance sector and to make diverse forms of dance more relevant and essential within society.

[www.ednetwork.eu](http://www.ednetwork.eu)



Interview

# Pushing a Vision

Dramaturge Freek Duinhof in conversation  
with EDN's president Laurent Meheust

# Interview

## How would you describe EDN's vision of audience development?

Simply put, the audience is necessary for dance. If you want to communicate something, you need someone to talk with. Audiences can and should be defined in different ways, and each definition requires a different approach. EDN's individual member organisations have each developed their own perspectives and working methods around audience development based on their own specific situations and contexts. Some organisations focus primarily on inviting people to performances within the dance house, others work more with specific communities at outside locations. Viewing the audience as more than a collection of predefined groups offers new ways to look at dance houses as well.

A dance house is a physical space created by a public mandate. It's a space where people come together. Ideally, this public space is a shared place, where things are negotiated and built. This conception of a dance house opens up the possibility of creating communities, meaning that we do not separate the artist, the professional and the audience member into different entities, but that they are all part of a 'society'. And in a society, everyone is part of and contributes to something common. So, as dance organisations, we are not just here to give but are part of a society in which we need to work together.

Dancing Museums | Lucy Suggate | © Oscar Ortega



## Is this why in the Ateliers the word "audience" often gets replaced by "citizen"?

Yes. When does a person become an audience member? Only when they buy a ticket? Or are other definitions possible? Seeing a dance house as a public space also means taking responsibility on a societal level. So, it makes sense to talk about citizenship – of the audience as well as the artists and the people working in the dance house. All dance houses work around citizenship in varying contexts, and each of them is trying to find ways to activate something in relation to the citizens around it.

As a network, EDN does not act in direct collaboration with the audience, but we facilitate the sharing, development and strengthening of tools to support our members in developing their relations with citizens in their own surroundings. So, collectively, we work together to build knowledge and practices that each member can implement in their local context. For some citizens, visiting venues or viewing performances is not a normal practice because of their social or financial situation. So, you need to invest in that relationship in different ways. Who do you want to communicate with, how and why? The question of the audience is always political, always.



Atelier Dance For Young Audiences | © Anja Beutler

### What is the vision for the network?

We moved our office to Brussels some time ago in order to also participate on a European political level. Art in general and dance in particular can contribute to our social well-being and can offer alternative perspectives on the world we are living in. On a European level, we need to be more efficient in advocating for dance. As a network, we have the means to push a vision politically; for example, of a diverse Europe. That's why the dance sector must be represented in Brussels.

Europe is a large political structure and you have to fight for your visibility and for recognition of your value. That's why it is vital to extend EDN – with a current focus on the west and south of Europe – to the whole of Europe, to identify the ecosystems in each part of Europe, and to expand the knowledge in the network. That is also connected to citizenship. We are all part of a big system, and we need to accept our responsibility to act.

**Freek Duinhof is an independent Dutch dramaturge working with creators who are active in dance and physical and interdisciplinary theatre, as well as opera. He guides young creators in their artistic growth and helps them develop their plans for the future. He also writes essays and articles on spectatorship and identity.**



Duncan Dance Research Center  
Athens, Greece

# **Social sensitivity: Tracing Paths for Audience Development**

**Steriani Tsintziloni**



***“I cherish projects which weave temporary communities – bringing together artists, amateurs and community members at a specific moment in time – infusing the sense of connection, of relatedness, of belonging to a common life. Artists who work in these contexts at the Duncan Dance Research Center often take advantage of the properties, features and objects provided by the site and the building, deviating from and readjusting their original plans, consciously or intuitively taking the risk of following new paths, which they then only deepen, and come to a greater understanding of, during the process.”***

**Penelope Iliaskou,**  
Artistic Director of the Duncan Dance Research Center

Being based at the house and ‘temple of dance’ which **Isadora** and **Raymond Duncan** built when they first arrived in **Vyronas**, an Athens suburb, in 1903 is a powerful context for an institution. Situated on the top of a hill in a suburb of Athens the Duncan Dance Research Center is modelled on the palace of **Mycenae**. Its structure is a simple rectangle with a central patio encircled by small rooms, each of which was originally devoted to a hand-craft like weaving, sandals making, pottery and printing.

Surrounded by a garden and a spacious courtyard with a view of the sea, the Center establishes an ongoing dialogue between the indoors and the outdoors. Consequently, the core of its development as a contemporary dance research and residency centre was formed by an intriguing idea: to conceive its identity, role and practices within a process of constant reshaping, in interdependence with the site’s history, architecture and locality, and in relation to the changing needs of the dance community.

As a porous, ever-changing organism, the Center uses its building as an ‘affordance’ (with all the connotations that word implies) for its institutional identity and practices. Introduced by the psychologist **James Gibson**, the term ‘affordance’ refers to that which an environment can offer to an animal, and implies a mutual complementarity between the two.

In other words, the context boosts and frames the Center's possibilities for action without determining its potential. Thus, the Center actively contributes and intervenes in the artistic, educational, social, and everyday fabric of Vyronas and Athens. Thinking of an institution as a porous organism shifts its bureaucratic rigidity toward a human scale. People are at the centre of such thinking, and audience development by implication, emerging not from a managerial, quantitative approach but from individuals with needs, problems and desires.

This philosophy of porosity is also reflected in the notion of temporary communities expressed in Penelope Iliaskou's quote above. For the **Duncan Center**, activities and actions are not only events organised by professionals and presented to the public. They are occasions for bringing people together within a specific context, in order to offer them a meaningful experience and touch people's lives in the long term. Every activity is an invitation, an embrace, and a challenge from all parties involved, resonant with the many identities of this place through the years: it has been a house, a workshop/laboratory, a shelter, a 'temple', an eating place, a dance space, and a theatre. When put together, these multiple facets create a palimpsest which marks the articulation and orientation of the Center's policy.

Since its very first initiatives, audience development through participation has been strongly implicated in the Center's philosophy. One example was the large, intergenerational community project, led by **Luca Silvestrini**, which in 2007 gathered a group of 70 non-professional members from the local community.



Hertopia | Carol Brown | © Fotis Traganoudakis

Building partnerships not only with the Municipality and local schools but also with national and international arts organisations, foundations, networks and artists, the Center offers a range of activities: dance classes for adults, children and special groups, school visits to the Center, theoretical and practical workshops for dance students and dance professionals, interdisciplinary projects, open presentations and discussions, educational programmes and more. With a focus on young audiences and the question of how to enrich their appreciation of dance, the Center has produced a Greek translation of the animated guide **Planet Dance** (originally produced by London venue **The Place**) which it regularly screens to schoolchildren during their visits to the Center.

Distilling the range of activities undertaken over the years, some pivotal ideas arise and outline a perspective on best practice:



### 1. Working inside and outside

As a metaphor for space and as a philosophy for unbounded action, the notions of 'inside' and 'outside' refer to a constant dialogue between indoor activities (presentations, dance classes, workshops) and outdoor events (performances, community projects). This spectrum allows site-specific projects and actions in the public space where the activities are imbued with or reflect the social and political context.

### Example:

Amid the economic crisis in 2013, the Slovenian choreographer **Jurij Konjar** and members of the **Bread and Puppet Theater** were invited by the Center to present daily actions in several public spaces in Athens for fifteen days. The public locations themselves were selected for their symbolic value in the crisis: **Victoria Square**, a space full of newly arrived refugees sleeping on the streets, and **Syntagma** (the square in front of the Parliament), a site charged by police presence and surveillance. Alongside these were sites like **Varnava Square** which reflected local neighbourhoods and everyday life.

Every intervention was designed with the support and involvement of local artists and citizens. They helped construct giant puppets and provided information and tips about the sites and the best ways to organise the daily actions. Inhabitants of each area became – like the sources in an ethnographic research study – both informants and facilitators. Meals for the company were the responsibility of local families, and public actions were accompanied by the everyday, symbolic 'ritual' of making bread, prepared with the help of local people and baked in the local bakery. Occupying the ground between community building, activism and site-specific work this project wove a sense of connectivity and belonging that was tangible for all those involved.

## 2. Creating spaces in-between

The Center acts as a place capable of creating new in-between spaces between professional research and inspiration, sociality and care, discussion and practice. Community members who attend classes witness or participate in the creative process, and take part in the artistic work and presentations, bringing in their own experiences, knowledge and capabilities, interacting and sharing with the artists while forming their own voice.

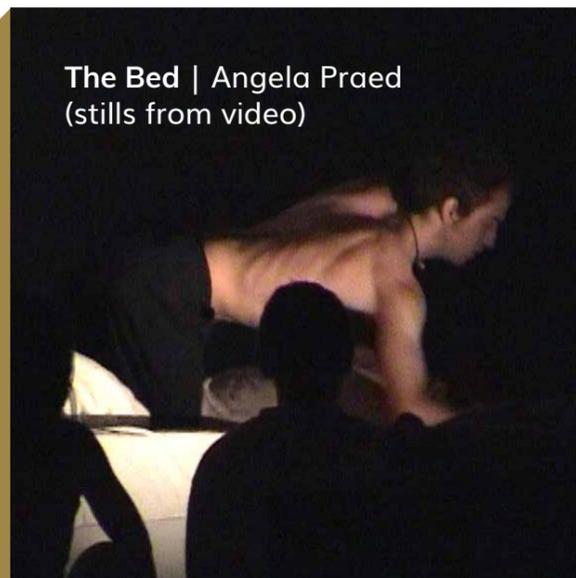
### Example:

**Zoom In!** was a two-year project (2018–2019) investigating notions of craft and the micro scale. Led by Greek artists and artisans, it was a constellation of various projects designed for and engaging with different groups of people: artists, school children, older adults, and the general public. Perhaps it can be best described as a series of laboratories for sharing methodologies, knowledge and questions. In pairs, artists and artisans worked among themselves to explore the question of craft before creating a frame for an open public event. This two-day EDN Atelier was organised with the participation of international artists, theorists and other visitors. Based on knowledge sharing, participation and care, it was a performative, participatory experience that ended by opening to the audience and the international context.

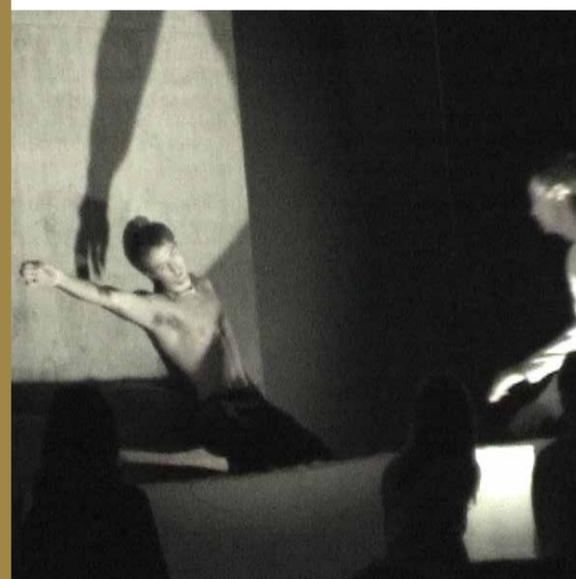


### 3. Active spectator

As a space of encounter between artistic research and creation, the Center aims at nurturing both the professional field and everyday life. Care is taken to devise projects which, through interaction and sharing with the audience, give proper value to contemporary performance art creations and deepen audiences' appreciation of them.



The Bed | Angela Praed  
(stills from video)



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#### Example:

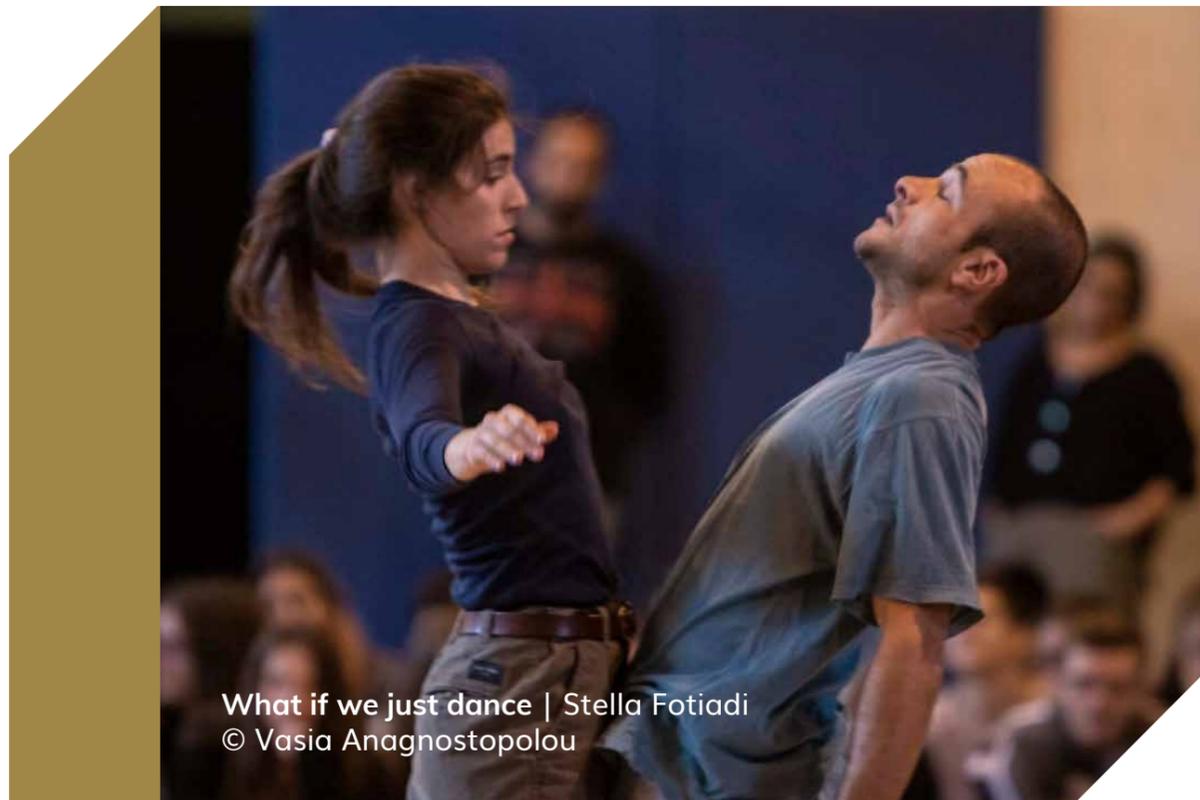
'**The Bed**', an all-night dance event by British choreographer Angela Praed, was presented in the Center's main hall in 2010. It invited audience members to bring their own pillows and sleeping bags in order to share the experience of seeing a performance and of being together all night long, talking, dancing, sleeping and, finally, having breakfast together. This dance installation was part of a bigger project on intimacy, private space, memory and the body. Although the event started as a performance, it couldn't have been developed without the participants' involvement and the "existence of a sea of sleeping bodies".

As an unusual invitation for the community and public, **The Bed** shifted the conditions of performance to create something engaging and symbiotic. It offered a context for intimacy and welcomed embodied, sleepy, dreamy, but fully present and active individuals, altering their perspective on attending a performance and the limits of participation.

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These examples not only deepened the engagement of the audience but also reached more people by addressing different target groups. The next step, already in process, is the active participation of audience groups in planning and leading specific projects, as part of efforts to nurture a new sense of citizenship and collaborative decision-making.

Overall, the philosophy of the Center aims to nourish interdisciplinarity and the sensibility for and between artists and audience. By enriching and supporting such thinking, the goal is to effect a structural shift in perceptions of dance by bringing about a renewed mechanism for participation with long-lasting effects.



What if we just dance | Stella Fotiadi  
© Vasia Anagnostopoulou



Zoom In Atelier | Androniki Marathaki & Giannis Zois  
© Alekos & Christos Bourelias

**Steriani Tsintziloni** (PhD, Roehampton University) is a dance researcher, lecturer and curator based in Athens, Greece. She lectures on dance history and collaborates as a dramaturge and advisor in various independent dance projects and committees, and publishes nationally and internationally on dance.

The **Duncan Dance Research Centre** in Athens, Greece, acts as an international residency centre for experimental and research projects; an education space; a meeting point of the professional and academic dance community; a forum for exchange between practice, theory and research; a platform for interaction with the local community.

[duncandancecenter.org](http://duncandancecenter.org)

HIPP  
Zagreb, Croatia

# **Will You Dance: Building & Nurturing Relationships in Times of Change**

**Mirna Zagar**

HIPP – the Croatian Institute for Movement and Dance (Hrvatski institut za pokret i ples) has existed for over 30 years and currently supports independent dance productions through the platform of its Dance Week Festival. In 2009, our efforts to secure a home for dance saw the opening of Zagreb Dance Centre, a venue which produced over 200 events per year, engaging thousands of citizens through workshops, classes, various creative practices, lectures, and, of course, performances.

This concept of a home for dance was destroyed when the dance centre was taken over by the local government and given to a municipal theatre. HIPP was expelled. Since then, we've continued working on the development of contemporary dance and audience development – but without a physical touchstone.



Migrant Bodies I © Valentina Toth

### From communism to market-based

Ever since HIPP was founded, we have strived to provide a global context for the Croatian dance field. In doing so, we have faced numerous challenges to the development of sustainable relationships with artists as well as audiences. Communism, the war, and the transition to a capitalist system, with all the political, economic, societal and cultural shifts that came with it, have left a deep imprint on our society and altered the role and position of the arts, especially the contemporary arts.

During communist times, there was a finely woven network in place to distribute tickets and ensure access for audiences, and culture itself was reasonably well-funded. Despite an implicit censorship, we were able to work relatively independently with free (though limited) access to public places to show work. All that changed rapidly when many state-run organisations were privatised (many of them going bankrupt): arts education was reduced in favour of the new religious studies, and arts organisations were asked to be more market-driven.

Coming from this sheltered position during communism, when there was a well-oiled machine that advocated for universal access to culture, the arts abruptly shifted into a market economy in which the government expressed a profound misunderstanding of and disregard for the role of the independent cultural sector. Anti-arts forces are still evident today, with independent artists facing funding cuts of up to 29% in 2020 (50% in 2019) in an already underfunded and deeply unappreciated sector.

## The spread of the dance virus

Throughout its existence, HIPP has always focused on engaging audiences and on spreading the 'dance virus' to every part of society. From a very early stage, we developed online as well as offline encounters with audiences, expanded work with regional artists, invested in efforts to generate support from our local community, and invited artists and citizens to collectively engage in physical practices. Our whole philosophy was based on the quality of relationships. We built practices around disabled arts, resulting in three national contemporary dance companies that today engage with disabled dancers; expanded our work to vulnerable communities through the European projects **Migrant Bodies** and **Migrant Bodies Moving Borders**; and created a bridge to rural centres for which we commissioned nationally acknowledged artists to work with non-dancers. These activities underlined the impact contemporary dance can have on individual lives, complementing tradition (rather than opposing it) and contributing to social well-being (as well as the economy).

But although many contemporary dance performances provoked interest and enthusiasm from a wide range of citizens, our efforts to increase audience engagement also caused anxiety in part of the dance sector. While we were in the process of building a community, some felt excluded. To this day, many still consider audience development to be social work which takes focus and support away from art and the artists. In hindsight, we set out on uncharted waters and might not have been sensitive enough to the fact that our actions could be considered provocative. We rushed into this



Migrant Bodies I © Valentina Toth

new territory and expected others to run alongside us. This has made us realise how important it is, when working to expose different audiences to dance at an early stage, to also engage artists in the practice of community dance and audience development, and to advocate for these as authentic and valuable artistic practices that result in valid artistic outcomes.

### Nurturing relationships

We were and still are driven by three principles regarding audience development: **building relationships, gaining new participants** (audiences), and **increasing loyalty** (increasing participation/attendance among existing audiences). Audience engagement is not a transactional relationship but rather one that takes time to build and comes in many forms, just like any other relationship we establish in our lifetimes. There is no guarantee of success. You need to put effort into building trust in order to establish a foundation that can be reinforced over time. Our efforts to work inclusively and make dance available for all people have contributed to a sustainable dance audience across Croatia. Our success in marketing is directly linked to our success with outreach, and word of mouth has proved to be more effective in the development and engagement of audiences than our investments in other forms of promotion.

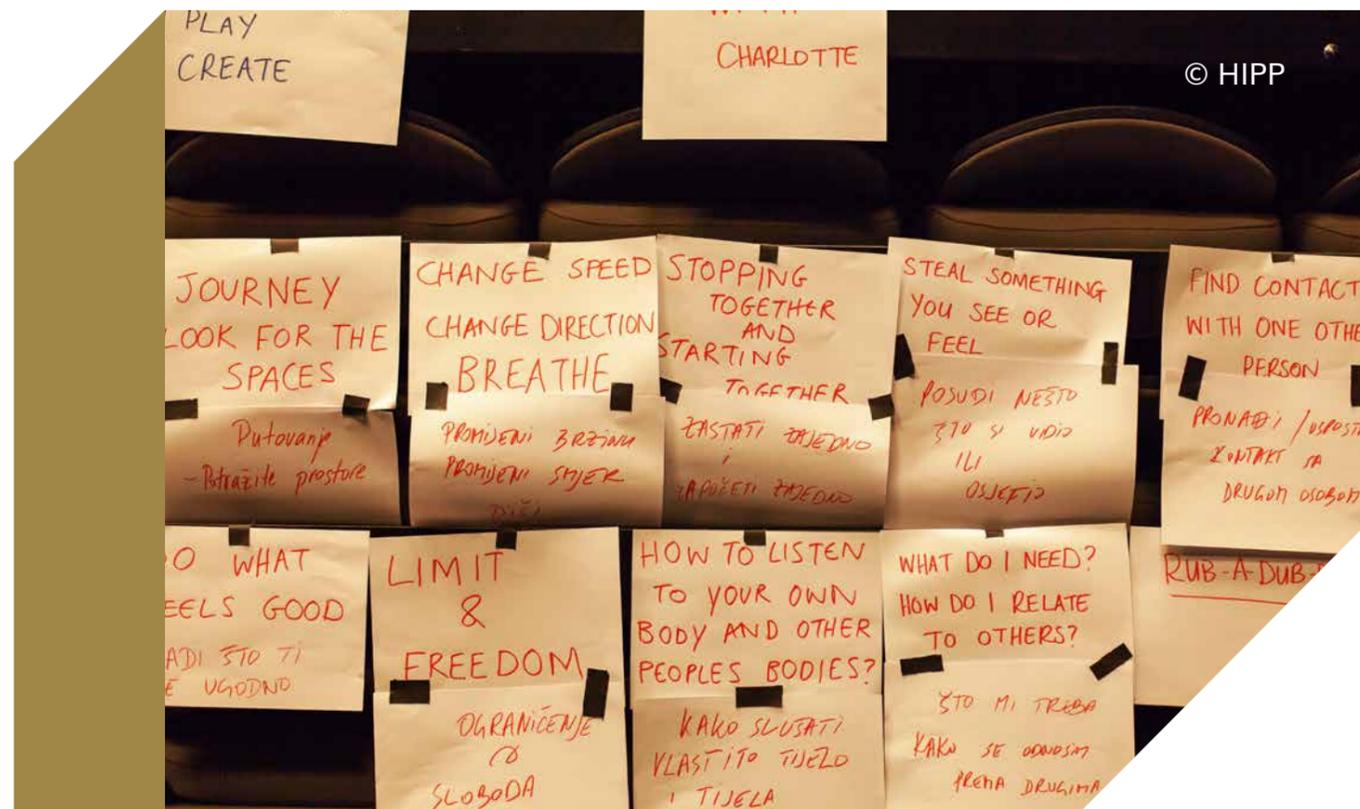
In the last few years, we haven't had a home in which to welcome our audiences. This challenged us to rethink how we could keep engaging with citizens (a question that has become very relevant for everyone during the Covid-19 pandemic).

We returned to the core question we have always asked ourselves: what does it mean to create a space for establishing relationships? Many inhabitants of Croatia live heavily politicised lives and face huge economic insecurity; interest in the arts is not a given. It must be nurtured. This nurturing needs to come from the sector itself. But as the sector is scattered, and subject to continuing cuts, it's not so easy to maintain sustainable investment in audiences. With this in mind, we also focus on expanding partnerships with educators and institutions both in and outside of dance, seeking to generate fresh enthusiasm by bringing new people into the field.



Our annual **Dance Week Festival** is a celebration of new and existing relationships. Despite our lack of a venue, we keep in touch with our close-knit dance family, made-up of the many citizens affected by our work, and of course other dance enthusiasts. The last three years have provided some comfort and inspiration. Audiences have kept coming to our occasional activities, and our deep investment in personal connections has paid off: the audience has stayed loyal to our organisation, our work, and the individual dance artists. We have found that our work is meaningful and helps keep dance in the public eye. Covid-19 has sharpened the questions of how dance will unfold in the future. (How) will we dance? How will we engage with others and gain support for our discipline? What are the possibilities of the digital sphere?

**I consider audience development a genuine part of artistic practice. Audience development is a continuous journey, and one that only becomes visible over time. It is not the job of a single entity but the responsibility of all those engaging in the dance field. I truly believe that we need to ask and respond to the questions: Who do we dance for? Why do we dance? Only then can we tell our story and start sharing it.**



**Mirna Zagar** founded HIPP as well as the Zagreb Dance Centre and the international Dance Week Festival. She is a strong advocate for contemporary dance in Croatia and has been working in Europe, the USA, New Zealand, Asia and Canada, where she was instrumental to the development of the Scotiabank Dance Centre in Vancouver.

**HIPP, the Croatian Institute for Movement and Dance,** supports the development of contemporary dance practice in Croatia through a range of different initiatives. With numerous pan-European collaborations and EU-funded projects, it has paved the way for the multiplication and decentralisation of contemporary dance practices in Croatia.

[danceincroatia.com](http://danceincroatia.com)

The Place  
London, United Kingdom

# **The Place Case Study 2020: The Audience-Focus Butterfly Effect**

**Caroline Schreiber**



© The Place

This is a story familiar to many arts organisations: a story of how small incremental shifts can, over time, lead to bigger changes. It describes how thinking differently about audiences can contribute to breaking down siloes, leading to a more cohesive organisational culture and starting a kind of butterfly effect that makes the venue more audience-focused.

This story is not the full story; it glosses over some important details to focus on the subject of interest. I write it today from my own point of view, and from my own observations over the past eight years at The Place.

## Context

The Place is a 300-seat dance theatre in London. Home to the **London Contemporary Dance School**, it also hosts an extensive artist development programme, classes and courses for adults and children, and a pre-vocational training programme. It is often described as an 'ecology of dance' due to its many different facets, offers, and, consequently, audiences. By nature, The Place operates in different sectors and is therefore prone to siloed working, perhaps more so than traditional cultural organisations (such as museums or regular theatres).

## Early but momentous shifts

When I started as Marketing Manager in November 2012 I was handed a report by the consultancy **Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM)** based on a segmentation model (new to me) looking not at demographics or frequency of attendance but instead at behavioural metrics. It suggested we started thinking about what motivated our audience to come to our events, what made them tick, rather than whether they had attended before or where they lived.

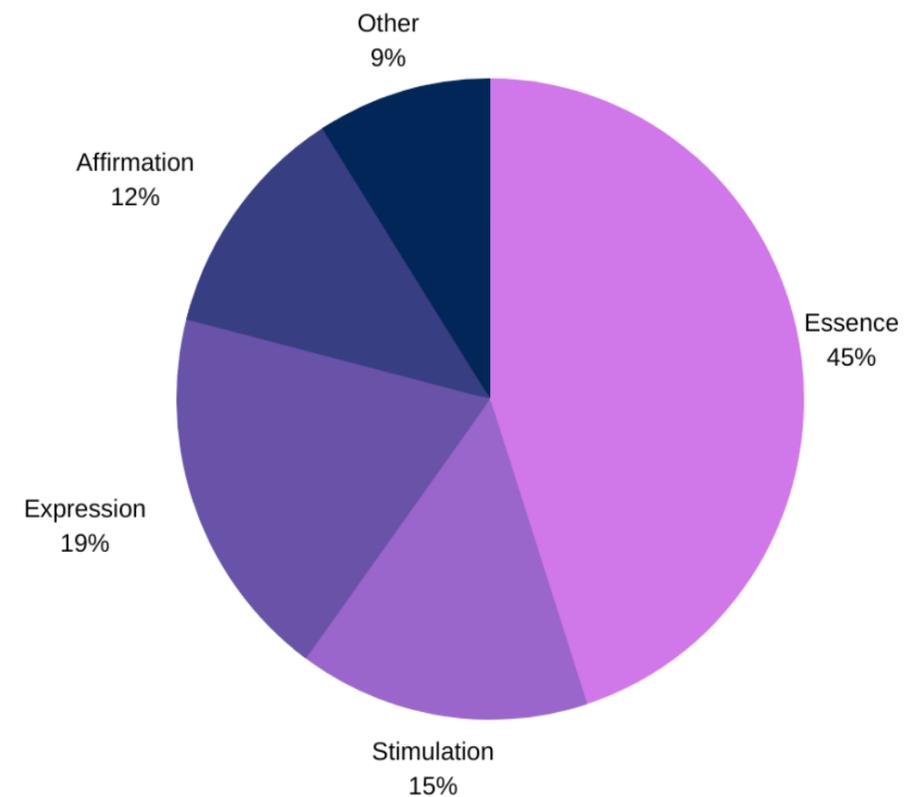


The report set a clear direction of travel: our audience was dominated by one segment termed 'Essence' in the MHM model. 'Essence' people are motivated by their own sense of taste and judgment when attending cultural events. In other words, they are resistant to marketing and sales. This segment also represented 45% of our audience in 2012, well above the London average of 19%. There was no room for growth in that category, so the recommendation was to **stop marketing to them**.

The other 3 MHM target segments were: 'Expression', 'Stimulation' and 'Affirmation' (each with their own characteristics)—where there was (then) space for growth. The recommendation was to **focus on them instead**.

We started to think about what our three growth segments wanted from us, why they would want to attend, what atmosphere they valued, how they wanted to be communicated with, etc. We focused on:

- **Expression's** need for deeper engagement and a sense of community
- **Stimulation's** attraction to more playful and risk-taking narratives
- **Affirmation's** need to know what they are getting themselves into



Audience Segmentation, 2012

The aim was to diversify our audience (getting it as close as possible to 25% per segment) whilst increasing our audience numbers. This gave us the foundation for a long-term audience development plan, giving the organisation a strategic focus and reducing the risk of getting derailed by individually pursued initiatives or projects. This clear direction of travel has been an important shift in our approach to audiences.

### Teams coming together

The work leading up to the report involved workshops and discussions within The Place's different teams to lay the groundwork for buy-in across the organisation and make everyone more open to being serious and enthusiastic about audience development.

By the time we were handed the report and a clear direction of travel, we were primed to adopt it. Marketing, front of house / box office, and production teams started working symbiotically, agreeing on strategies, or sometimes disagreeing but on the basis of intelligent, purposeful arguments rather than instincts and experience. Those conversations were backed by a system we all understood and debated in a common language.

Looking back, some of the undoubtable strengths of this segmentation system is that it is instinctively coherent (i.e. it just makes sense) and that it offers a comprehensive vocabulary that we seamlessly adopted across the board. We would often say things like 'This show is soooo Expression, let's build a workshop around it' or 'Essence would be interested in the process. Can we commission an article for the programme?' The development of a common language has been an important second shift.



© The Place

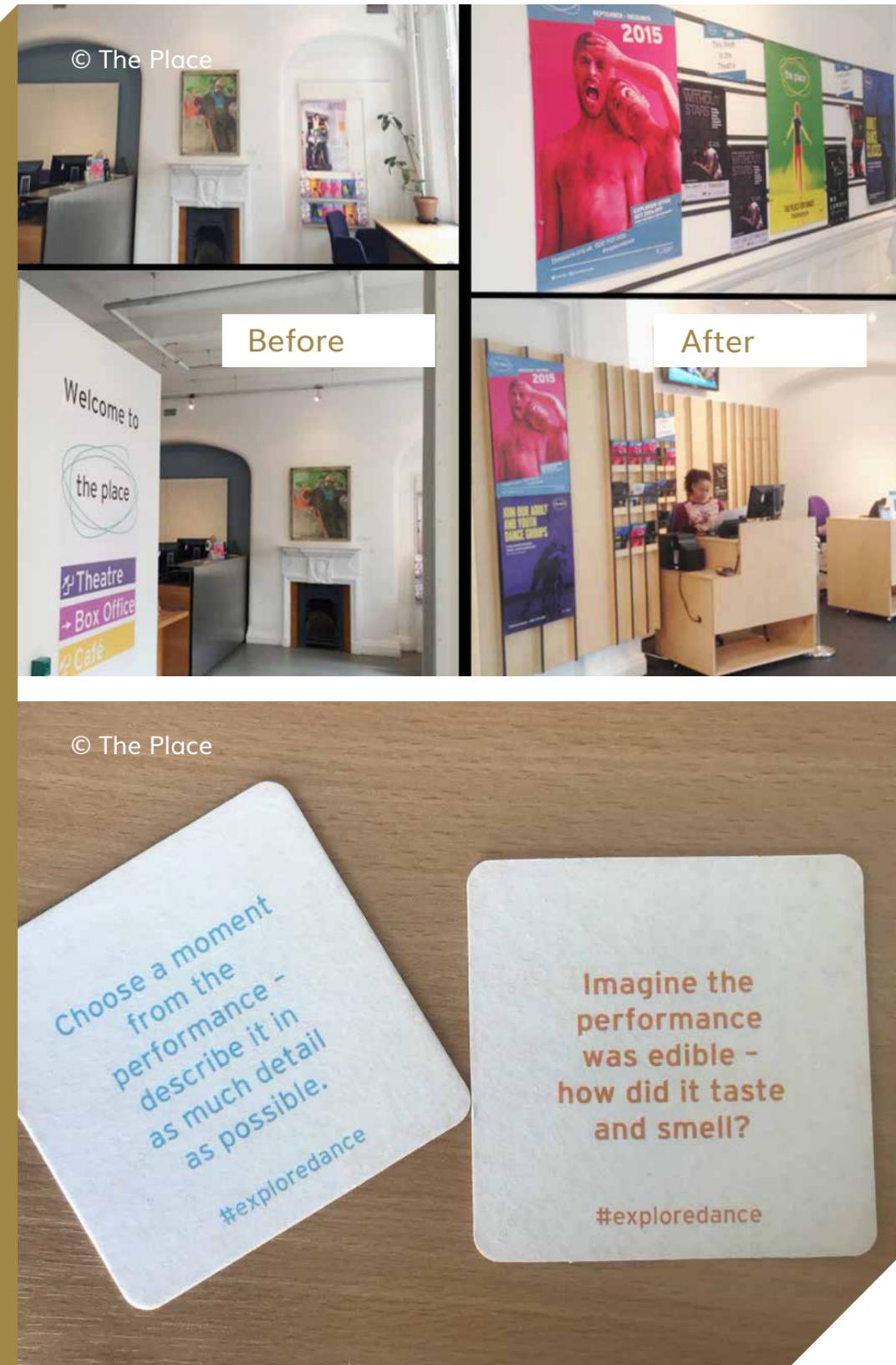


Why Dance I © Camilla Greenwell

## Tangible changes

Focusing on our growth segments with a clear direction of travel and a framework and willingness to work together led to initiatives including (but not limited to):

- **Spectator School:** a new branded programme of contextual events including post-show talks, workshops, articles, exhibitions and more. (Expression's willingness to participate and delve deeper.)
- **Refurbishment** of the box office area making Wi-Fi available, and the space more accessible and more flexible (Stimulation's fondness for socialising as part of their cultural attendance and Affirmation's need for clear access and environments)
- Creation of **'conversation beer mats'** (Expression's enjoyment of sharing ideas)
- **Photobooths** or **Instagram 'frames'** at 'stimulation' events (Stimulation's high social media engagement)
- **Feedback walls** (Expression)
- **Buzzfeed-style quizzes** (Stimulation)
- **Removing extensive credits and biographical information from our literature** (Affirmation sometimes feeling isolated by unfamiliar references)
- **Ticket offer narrative change** to encourage people to take 'a risk on us' : 'we'll pay for half of your second ticket' (Stimulation).



Beyond deepening engagement, appealing to new audiences, and creating communities, the multiplication of these initiatives also established a culture of collaboration and a shared excitement for audience development within all departments of the organisation. It provided a framework for strategic creativity and innovation and established a concern for audiences across teams.

It was symptomatic of three further shifts:

- Support and confidence from senior staff
- Permission to experiment (including permission to take measured risks)
- Creative licence to innovate

### **Expected and Unexpected outcomes**

Coupled with innovative programming, these initiatives also attracted more audiences (an over 16% increase in four years) and diversified our segment split (31% Essence). Audience development became everyone's job and started gaining much more importance and visibility in high level strategic plans, including Arts Council England National Portfolio applications, Business Plans, board reports, etc.

What I didn't expect, however, was that these conversations would also have an impact on artists.

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I remember discussing copy vocabulary with choreographer **Vera Tussing**, arguing that our target segment would find some of the more cerebral terms isolating and off-putting. Looking back on it, she remembers: ***“When you are early in your career, these discussions can create feelings of limitation because you, as an artist, are still learning to bridge the gap between what you set out to do and what your work ends up being for people. So those conversations can be difficult, but they do tell you something. These are growing pains that ultimately play an instrumental part in your journey.”***

Choreographer **Eva Recacha** also recognises the value of those early conversations: ***“Young artists often don't have producers or wider teams to help them think strategically about audience engagement. Discussing the strategic thinking with venues helps us understand that we are part of many different journeys: our personal artistic journey, the journey of the institution, a particular work's journey, the journey of the audience engaging with you, your work, and the institution, and the journey of the art form, and that they all are interconnected.”***

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## Laying foundations

Let's go back to a shift in the culture of working across teams and this obsession with understanding our audience's behaviour. By 2017, and under new leadership, collaboration and breaking down siloed thinking had become a priority. I would like to think that the shifts that happened in the theatre teams laid some of the foundations for this organisational cultural change. I recognised this approach in two examples:

A welcomed and highly efficient new system of cross-organisational meetings and of group structures looking at themes (audience and artists, education and widening access, operations) rather than areas of activity. Each group is led by a series of strategic priorities and workplans and has feedback and monitoring at its heart.

A willingness to embrace a repositioning process looking for an organisation-wide purpose, leading to the new unifying vision of 'a world with more dance'.



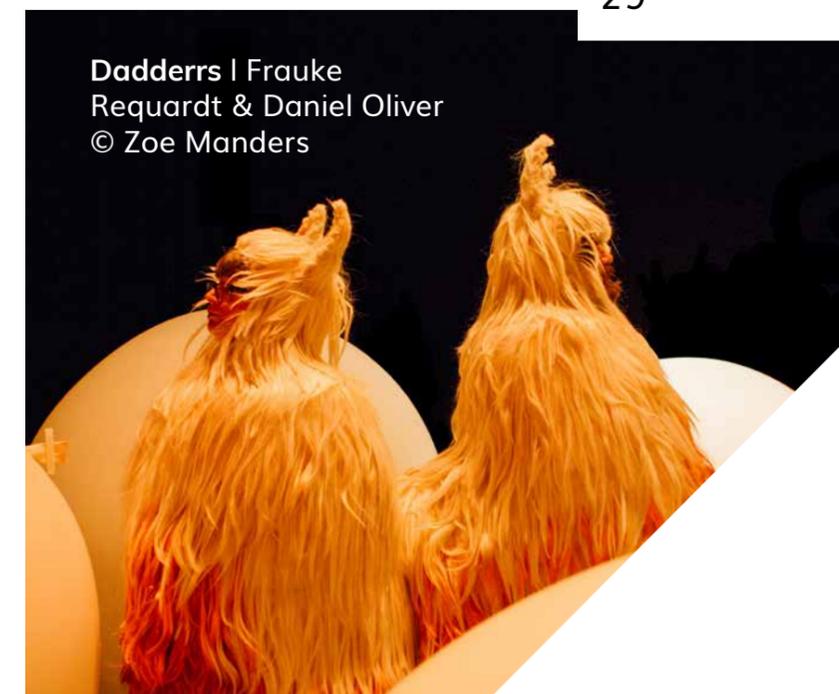
Saju Hari | © Rocio Chacon



© Camilla Greenwell



Festival of Korean Dance | © Kunu Kim



Dadders | Frauke Requardt & Daniel Oliver  
© Zoe Manders

### Where to go from here?

With some success, there is still a lot to be done but I am hopeful. The pitfalls to becoming truly audience-focused at **The Place** are many and varied, but they differ across the organisation, and my instinct is that the collaborative structure will continue to help learning permeate across groups. When multiple teams start thinking about what audiences truly need from us and embrace a set of ideas, it triggers really interesting and unforeseen conversations and creative initiatives, and starts a process of cultural change that ripples further than expected and evolves the organisation for the better. **If we continue to learn from each other and remain obsessed with understanding our audience's needs, we may be on to something good.**



© The Place

**Caroline Schreiber** is Director of Communications at *The Place*, leading on audience development and digital strategies, branding and all internal and external communications. By finding common ground and motivations of teams, artists and audiences, Caroline's aim is to contribute to bringing more culture to more people.

**The Place** is a pioneering dance organisation, committed to transforming lives through dance education, uplifting and challenging theatre experiences, and creative opportunities for professionals and local communities by pursuing its vision of 'a world with more dance'.

[theplace.org.uk](http://theplace.org.uk)

Lavanderia a Vapore  
Turin, Italy

# **Connect, Think, Plan: The Media Dance Project and Involving Citizens**

**Mara Loro**



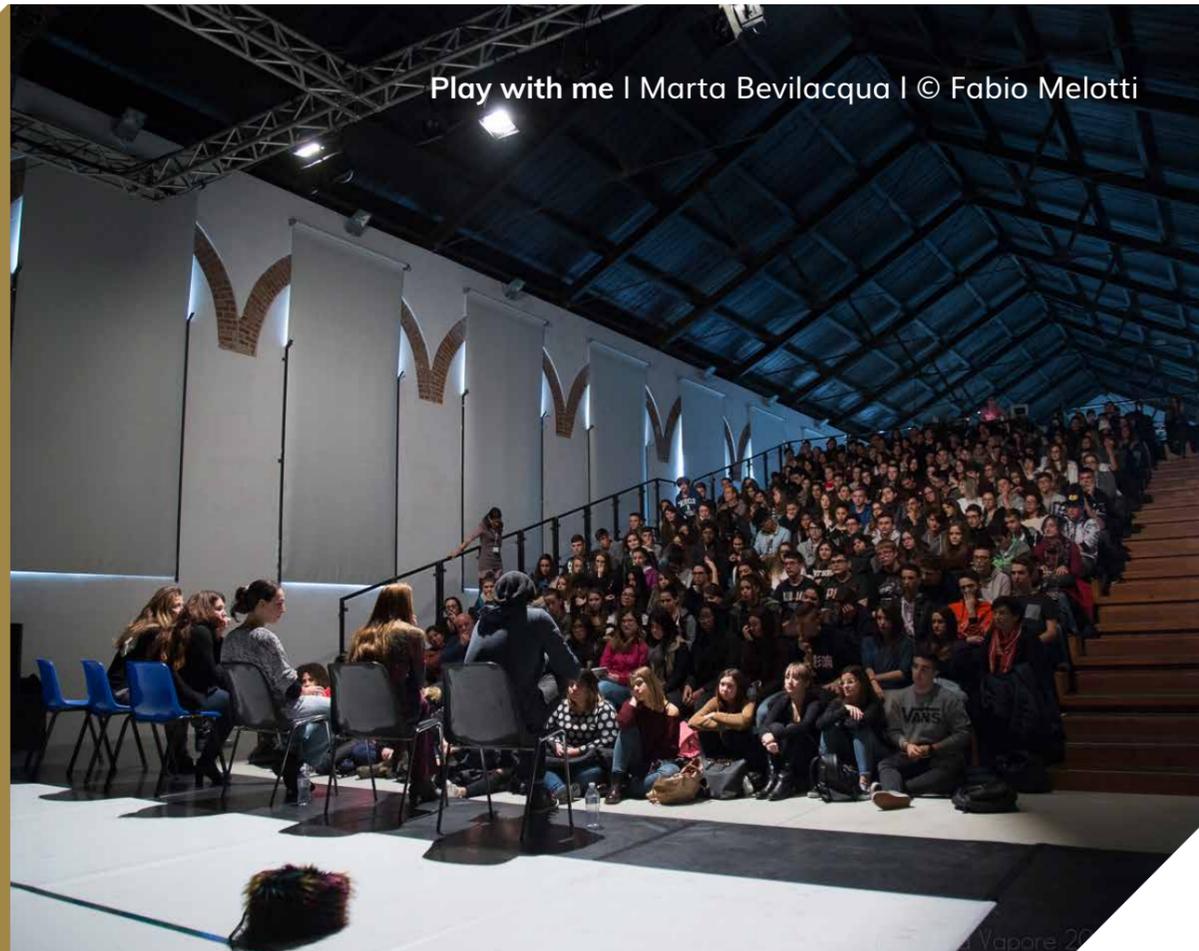
© Lavanderia a Vapore

### How to be relevant?

Within the wide-reaching reflections taking place at Lavanderia a Vapore, one question has become especially relevant during our pandemic downtime: If theatres are closed, where does, or where can, the language of performance live? It is a question that has always been there, though hidden, and the ways the cultural world has started to respond to it have been many and various. Some have opted for an online presence, while others reopen their premises or find themselves seizing new opportunities that have appeared out of nowhere. Whatever the approach, the underlying issue is how cultural venues can escape marginalisation and become more relevant to contemporary society.

Tackling this challenge means reflecting on the specific contexts in which we, as dance organisations, embed our projects, as well as the audiences we address. Back in 2016, **Lavanderia a Vapore** started to implement a multi-layered strategy which has since come to influence our whole way of working and of supporting artistic creation. It sees the central idea of 'relevance' turned through different perspectives within a single project: artistic relevance, political relevance, relevance to education, health, social structures, and so forth. This approach reveals the multi-layered potential of each artistic project. A prime example is **Lavanderia a Vapore's Media Dance** project, a multidisciplinary initiative developed for secondary schools that draws on philosophy, dance, literature and cinema, and that is built around a special performance created for the specific context.

At its core, **Media Dance** offers teachers educational tools and practical support. Each iteration of the project focuses on a contemporary social issue relevant to the lives of students (such as gender diversity, eating habits, beauty standards, family relationships, climate change) and includes – apart from a viewing of the performance – introductory meetings with a group of philosophers, and debates and workshops with artists which begin from the young people's own thoughts and experiences and lead them deeper into the topic. Thanks to collaboration with other cultural institutions who deal with the same issues in other settings, teachers and students are able to continue this process of reflection in other ways: class readings, screenings of films, visits to historical archives, or artistic workshops. For educators, the project creates an opportunity to take on subjects they usually couldn't address due to lack of time, space, tools or methods.



*“At first, I was a bit unsure of the project, thinking it was boring. But, as time went on, I became interested. At the beginning I said “What does it have to do with my school?”. But I was wrong. As a student, I think it’s nice to learn something new, even if I didn’t think so at the beginning.”*

- participating student

### Shared Sense

Over the years, we have organised evaluation meetings where we ask teachers what value theatre and dance has for their school. The many teachers who have engaged in this dialogue become ‘cultural translators’, helping us to interpret the value of the projects and artistic/cultural processes we host, as well as to support, co-develop and adapt **Media Dance’s** topics and methods. We’ve also extended this method of creating a shared sense through art to other contexts. To create links between the art world and society at large, we connect, for example, to entrepreneurs or doctors in business and healthcare. Many of us live in siloed social networks which hardly ever cross one another, and this method gives us a practical way to establish new relationships and build common spaces to imagine new concepts of communality. Thanks to this approach, and in dialogue with these cultural translators, we are able to pinpoint how our artistic proposals are relevant within specific contexts.

### Collective Intelligence

Through the centre’s audience engagement projects, within which we have been able to hear many different voices and their needs, **Lavanderia a Vapore** has also had to face this concept of relevance in organisational and political terms. This has brought about a shift in the organisation, setting off an ongoing individual and collective reflection on the concept of power that has meant rethinking our way of working and supporting artistic creation.

Some of our approaches to programming, planning and creation were dropped in order to design meaningful alternatives for the communities we've been working with. In practice, this means that every project that happens at **Lavanderia** is chosen for its ability to enter into dialogue with a specific context on the basis of a shared interest. Between dialogue with citizens and exchanges with artists, shared lines of interest emerge and lead to the rediscovery of a common understanding. In this process, uncertainty (an omnipresent condition in the current pandemic) is a given. However, this commitment to dialogue opens the way to a collective sensibility that can bring about a shared change of direction. This synergy, the shared body of knowledge and imagination that can arise from a group, is what philosopher Pierre Lévy defined in the 90s as 'collective intelligence'. Collective intelligence has become an important concept for **Lavanderia**, and we have even begun to organise around a group structure that echoes it in name: the **TCIs**, or *Temporary Collective Identities*.

TCIs are interdisciplinary groups consisting of cultural operators, artists and citizens who come together to imagine the forms and structures of projects by founding them on shared interests and goals. TCIs exist on the 'border' of the organisation, blurring its boundaries. If we use cellular biology as an organisational metaphor, a TCI represents the membrane of an institution, allowing a constant exchange between the internal and external environment.

RE:ROSAS | Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker & fABULEUS | © Fabio Melotti



34

For **Lavanderia a Vapore**, the TCIs are an effective orientation tool for programming a season or an artistic residency in a way that reflects the needs of a specific context. Put simply, they show us the relevance of different topics and formats. The implementation of TCIs has led to a paradigm shift in the way we go about our artistic and cultural programming. In fact, it has changed our entire direction: it is not so much about programming, thinking and connecting, but connecting, thinking and then programming.

Every year, within the framework of the **Media Dance** project, a TCI working group of artists, cultural operators, teachers, students and educators meets to think together, advising on the themes and formats for the following season at **Lavanderia**, as well as designing new experimental projects that bring innovative educational tools to teachers.



OpenLav 2020 | Isabella Legato | © Fabio Melotti

At the most recent meeting, important topics like human evaluation, internal politics, peer relationships, mental health, human trafficking, love in all its forms, the prison system, and sports were all proposed by the students, while for teachers it was important to talk about self-knowledge, disability and bullying, drug addiction, the physical transition from child to adult, and the concept of democracy.

**Lavanderia** addresses these complex topics in its artistic programming, at the same time working with artists, teachers and philosophers to develop models for work that can deepen their exploration and discussion. With this approach, 41% of the young people who first entered **Lavanderia a Vapore** in the 2018/2019 season considered it "a place of discovery and knowledge" and 58% as "an effective tool to reflect on contemporary social issues".

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*"The theatre performance on diversity was very beautiful. I should begin by saying that I never go to the theatre because I am not passionate about it, but that show touched me so deeply and generated many reflections. I recommend that anyone who wants to live a new experience be part of this project."*

- participating student

### New habits of cultural consumption

As an organisation, **Lavanderia** is still evolving, and our aim is to extend our methodology to other sociocultural contexts. New interlocutors and cultural translators are sought out, and with them new strategies to reach people in their everyday lives. By combining the artistic with social, ethical and other perspectives, our goal is to remain alive to all the ways a project can be relevant within a specific context. But if being relevant means becoming part of everyday life, we have to organise actions and activities outside our theatre in order to establish new habits of cultural consumption. The experience we are living through – a pandemic that has closed so many theatres – is leading us in this direction. To do it, we need time: time to generate trust, to think together, but also to reason around a new concept of theatre that sees it as a place for producing, reconsidering and transmitting knowledge. In short, a place which helps society to understand and to live in the modern world.

**At this point in time, we perhaps need to pursue the importance of re-acquiring relevancy.**



Fuori dal Coro | Jacopo Jenna | © Fabio Melotti

36

Since 2001 **Mara Loro** has been taking an interdisciplinary approach to investigating the identity of institutions in relation to their surroundings. She leads the Innovation and Research department of the *Fondazione Piemonte dal Vivo*, has taught audience engagement at the *University of Turin*, and is co-founder of *Itinerari Paralleli*, a cultural organisation operating in the field of territorial regeneration.

**Lavanderia a Vapore** is a dance residency centre in Piedmont (Northern Italy). Performances, artistic residencies, training programmes and multidisciplinary projects breathe life into the various spaces of what was once the laundry of Italy's biggest psychiatric hospital. *Lavanderia a Vapore* is an experimental venue which has gained international recognition for its innovative audience engagement policies.

[lavanderiavapore.eu](http://lavanderiavapore.eu)

K3 Zentrum für Choreographie  
Hamburg, Germany

# **Dance Outreach for Schools: Dance Audience Development for Young Dance Audiences**

**Uta Meyer**

Two shopping trolleys filled with headphones are wheeled onto the stage. Dancers hand them out to the audience and offer instructions on how to use them. A recorded voice recounts the memories associated with the strange items which the audience passed as they made their way into the theatre: it wasn't just some random ice cream melting in a cup, it was the banana coconut ice cream that the class ate when they skipped school together.

This is how the dance performance **xoxo** by choreographer **Sebastian Matthias** begins. Daring in its form, **xoxo** unfolds a catalogue of physical sensations, memories and gestures revolving around physical proximity and intimacy. The show is aimed at young people over the age of 14.

Intimacy is a subject that is too often considered taboo for this age group due to its potentially sexual connotations. In **xoxo** the headphones provide a way for each young audience member to create a safe space for themselves as they sit in a crowd of their peers. The viewer can freely choose whether and when to listen to the text, to follow along with the songs, or just focus on the movement. The young people can retreat into their own headspace, sway to the music, and actively engage in the visual dialogue on stage, as every decision to listen or not listen to the recordings requires physical action on their part to put the headphones on or take them off.



**xoxo** | Sebastian Matthias | © Thies Rätzke

## Giving a voice to a young audience

The choreography was created in November 2019 as part of **explore dance – Network Dance for Young Audience** which is a collaborative project between **fabrik moves Potsdam**, **Fokus Tanz – Tanz und Schule e.V. München**, and **K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg**, and is aimed at developing a sustainable platform for the production of contemporary dance performances for young audiences across Germany. Against the backdrop of a long tradition of spoken theatre, contemporary dance in Germany struggles to be recognised as an equal partner in the performing arts. The preference for theatre is steeped in traditional cultural policies and reflected prominently in the cultural offer for children and young people in which the reception of dance has barely featured.

But how do we create the foundation to establish dance in the daily routine of the young target audience beyond social media dance challenges and groovy GIFs?

In recent years, cultural education in Germany has witnessed the emergence of various high-quality dance outreach programmes which seek to actively engage students. In turn, this has led to a growing demand for professional contemporary dance pieces for a young audience; however, in most German cities, these are almost non-existent. For this reason, **explore dance** has made it its mission to close this gap by inviting choreographers to create new pieces addressing a young audience. Together with the participating artists, we as dance institutions, are getting to know this new target group, explore its needs and topics, and use outreach and participation formats to find out at whom the productions are aimed.



It should be noted that we don't reach out to the audience directly, in most cases, contact takes place via teachers and parents. They are the disseminators of the art form, and yet communicating and reaching out to them requires a different approach than with the actual target group. Due to the lack of experience with contemporary dance in schools, exchange with the disseminators must start with raising awareness of this particular genre.



xoxo | Sebastian Matthias | © Thies Rätzke

### Collecting one's own experiences

**Xoxo** creates a safe environment for topics that often lie hidden out of sight – such as lust, consent or sharing feelings. In dance, the medium of the body is a screen onto which an individual can project their own experiences. In the course of developing the production, the difference between talking to teachers 'about' a young audience versus experiencing the performance 'with' a young audience became very apparent.

The rehearsals for **xoxo** began with a roundtable for the teachers in which the choreographer introduced the concept of the production and asked how the topics of sexuality and intimacy are handled in schools today.

Soon, the discussion revealed a dissonance between the relevance of the topic on the one hand, and the apprehensiveness on the part of teachers on the other, who doubted the young audience would be receptive to abstract, choreographed presentations of the topic.

However, contrary to the teachers' expectations, several trips to rehearsals, with over 90 young people in attendance, proved that teenagers have an open mind when it comes to dance as a medium, that they don't harbour any preconceptions, and that they have no issue with being receptive to choreographed material. Regardless of whether or not they liked the subject matter, their feedback suggests that attending rehearsals was a special experience for them.

Most of the students had never encountered this type of presentation before. Perhaps this is why they were able to readily accept that dance can as much explore contemporary topics as theatre – or even with greater intensity in some cases. Exchanging directly with the young participants supported the creative team in its research and the development of material. The feedback provided by the young people put them in the role of dramaturgs as they informed us, for instance, that at their age physical closeness is not limited solely to love interests, but also includes friends and parents, and does not necessarily carry sexual connotations.

This respectful interaction and dialogue between the target group and the dancers of **explore dance** could not have been more perfect. Above all, it became clear that this close exchange was only possible because of the experiences the young people had had through the performance.

What does contemporary dance evoke in a young audience? Through different forms of participation, it takes the target group through a process of emancipation that ultimately makes them experts in their own lives. By having this experience outside of the school setting, in which learning is often about correct and incorrect answers, they are empowered to create, and to trust, their own space for experiences. As a mostly non-verbal form of expression, dance can also work through the body and its sensations to convey and evoke material more directly than with words.

### Implementing dance in schools

If we want students to develop new perspectives beyond conventional education, we need to work closely with teachers to bring their classrooms to dance performances. That's no easy task, as schools have to plan well in advance. For the independent scene, and for production houses that don't normally have a fixed repertoire and cast, this means that it's particularly important to awaken the interest of teachers in the art form itself rather than a specific performance. Unlike music, art, literature and theatre, dance is not enshrined in the German school system, let alone featured in teacher training. Feedback suggests that teachers struggle when it comes to applying the familiar tools for analysing theatre to contemporary dance: How do I 'read' motion? How do I approach the piece if there's no supporting narrative?



xoxo | Sebastian Matthias | © Thies Rätzke



As part of **explore dance**, strategies and formats are being developed to raise the profile of contemporary dance among teachers. We offer courses on how to approach dance from artistic, practical and didactic perspectives in the hope that dance will find its place in the school structure (for instance, within theatre classes). The programme has been well received and a steady stream of new collaborations has emerged from these encounters. It's encouraging that those teachers who are involved in dance struggle less with physical contact, and become allies in supporting our efforts to promote contemporary dance among their colleagues.

It can be tricky to figure out how to integrate dance into learning processes in schools. The mission of our dance outreach is to give a voice to the young people who often receive too little attention in our adult minds. With explore dance we, as a network, wish to create spaces in which children and young people can articulate issues that they would otherwise struggle to express.

**Let our call to the future be to spread this insight through our dance institutions, in symbiosis with teachers.**

**Uta Meyer** studied Cultural Studies and Aesthetic Practice with a focus on Theatre at the *University of Hildesheim*, and Physical Performance at the *University of Exeter*. Since 2016 she has been working at K3 – Zentrum für Choreographie | Tanzplan Hamburg in the areas of project coordination and communication. In the summer of 2019, she took over as project manager of explore dance in Hamburg.

**K3 – Zentrum für Choreographie | Tanzplan Hamburg** at Kampnagel is a centre for expertise in the fields of contemporary dance and choreography, artistic research, and dance outreach. With its strong ties to the local, national and international dance scenes, K3 makes a significant contribution to increasing the visibility of dance and strengthening the standing of the art form.

[k3-hamburg.de](http://k3-hamburg.de)

[explore-dance.de](http://explore-dance.de)

Centro per la Scena Contemporanea  
Bassano del Grappa, Italy

# **From Audience to Citizen Engagement: on Ownership, Inclusivity and Intergenerational Exchange**

**Alessia Zanchetta & Greta Pieropan**

Ever since its foundation in 2007, the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea (CSC) dance house in Bassano del Grappa has placed its main focus on building relationships with various audiences. In a time when ‘audience development’ was not yet part of the discourse in the Italian cultural system, CSC questioned how to reach citizens who had no access to contemporary dance due to their age, or as a result of cultural or economic factors.

The first step CSC took in order to become more accessible was the reorganisation of its residency programme, which sees national and international artists invited to Bassano del Grappa to work on creating a performance. It was decided that artists in residence would stay for a minimum of eight days, and that they would open up their research to the local community through a workshop and a sharing, provided for the audience completely free of charge. An essential part of the approach has been to include artists of different backgrounds and aesthetics in the programme and to put on a range of projects to interest different communities. One of the benefits is that when a former artist in residence returns to present their performance at our summer festival, **B.Motion**, an initial relationship with the audience has already been established.

Building on these first steps, CSC then began to encourage the active involvement of specific communities in the creative process – for example, by inviting input during rehearsals, or by having the artist in residence work with local professional and amateur dancers. This involvement led to a deeper connection with and understanding of contemporary dance. We started targeting communities we wanted to connect with and tailoring the way we invited them to participate. This targeting process was undertaken collectively by the centre’s artistic direction and the communications department.

B.Motion | ©: Tommy Ilai





Looking both at the map of potential audiences and at the core of CSC's identity, it became clear that we needed to establish relationships with young people to nourish future audiences, as well as to build connections with those who are normally not included in dance-related activities, or those who face obstacles to going out (such as people living with Parkinson's). We aimed to be as inclusive as we could, involving new citizens as well as those who had perhaps lived in Bassano del Grappa for years without our getting to know them.

In order to actually meet these different communities, we moved out of our theatre and brought various activities to the **City Museum**. Located in the Bassano del Grappa's main square, the museum is recognisable as a cultural hub while also being well-used as a public space. For many participants, putting our activities in this setting changed the way they perceived the art of dance as well as themselves: they were no longer audiences, they were citizens, in a public space, living its artistic possibilities, embodying and becoming witness to artistic practices. Dance changed from an art form for an exclusive in-crowd to something which anyone could bump into at any time, and in which they could involve themselves in many different ways. This shift has changed the way we, at **CSC**, engage with communities and initiate participation in public space.

**CSC** has intensified its activities in promoting cultural diversity by inviting artists from different cultural and social backgrounds to bring their performances, artistic approaches and research to the city. These artists often become role models for

those citizens who are not Italian. They implement shifting perspectives and create alternative definitions of beauty and excellence and enrich the cultural offers of our dance house.

So far, **CSC** has established a number of projects for different citizens: children, teenagers, students and teachers of local high schools, older people, people living with Parkinson's and their family members, cancer survivors, visually impaired people, dance amateurs, dance teachers, and local artists. All of them take part in special events such as International Dance Day (29th April) and National Parkinson's Day (29th November), and events related to European projects.

Creating and developing relationships with citizens takes time, and requires a long-term approach to planning and programming that takes the focus away from immediate results. Underneath it all is a fundamental shift away from simply inviting people to events and towards developing a relationship and ongoing dialogue with citizens.

Time is always fundamental in this work, and doubly so in the case of a project like **Mini B.Motion**, which aims to capture the literal process of growing up. The project, taking place each summer, addresses children aged 8-13, all of whom have some experience of dance, and lets them take dance classes, attend performances, and join a feedback lab with artists and dance bloggers. It then evolves into **LIFT**, a project for teenagers which, running February to November, introduces them to different artistic practices and offers various professional development activities.



Dance Well I © CSC Archive

The project has allowed **CSC** to strengthen links with local dance schools, and with schools in general, and to connect with families, involving them in attending performances and raising awareness about the importance of young dancers watching performances, as well as the critical role of ongoing training and networking.

CSC's work with elderly communities has also developed through dance practice. The project **Dance Well – movement research for Parkinson's** was born in 2013 with the aim of using contemporary dance to include people with Parkinson's disease in the artistic and social life of their territories. The classes, run by professional dance teachers, are held twice a week at the **City Museum**, open to all and free of charge. During the pandemic the project was initially adapted into a series of audio classes, then, when we were able to come together again, was moved to the botanical garden in the city centre, to keep a sense of being in a meaningful civic space. Seeing that a shared physical practice was a strong tool for connecting different people and different communities, we also invited refugees and migrants to join the classes and included them in the European project **Migrant Bodies – Moving Borders**. Through the project, two of the local refugees became certified **Dance Well** teachers.

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*“Working with a choreographer in the Dance Well classes brings new awareness, new inputs, and the feeling that you can always turn a practice into an artistic performance”*

*“Dance Well pushes me beyond my limits, and has given me the chance to make new friends”*

Dance Well dancer quotes

Dance Well | © Tommy Ilai





CENTRO PAR LA SCENA CONTEMPORANEA

Dance Well | © Tommy Ilai

The need to involve more communities led us to create an **Audience Club** for a group of city centre shop owners within the project **Scoprifestival** (literally: 'Discover the festival'). Developed through a series of meetings, the initiative was founded on the basis of listening to the needs and questions of participants. In the event, our shop owners proved curious about how a festival works, how an artist develops a new piece, and, most importantly, the different ways of connecting to contemporary dance work. Their involvement led them to attend performances during the **B.Motion Festival**, to meet artists, and to discover how staff work behind the scenes. Awareness of the complex world that lies behind each performance convinced them to become ambassadors for the festival, telling their customers and friends about it. It increased their sense of ownership and their pride in the event, and they became aware that **B.Motion** is not a one-off festival but a project that continually involves different local communities and occupies different – and ordinarily inaccessible for audience – spaces in the city all year round. This deeper knowledge made them feel that the festival is owned by the city.

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***“I never felt like an audience member, but as a participant: feeling more involved made me more confident in talking about the festival”***

***“The meetings with the artists before the performances made me discover aspects of the work that I could never have imagined existed”***

***“Getting to know the work behind the scenes made me co-responsible for the festival success”***

Scoprifestival participant quotes



Fidelity Project | Freddie Opoku-Adaie &amp; Frauke Requardt | © Giancarlo Ceccon

**Taking time, engaging in active listening, opening to different artistic languages and practices, foregrounding care and shared spaces – these are some of the basic ingredients for our citizen engagement. How to then mix them is a journey of collective experimentation, with new discoveries every time.**

**Alessia Zanchetta** and **Greta Pieropan** are part of the CSC staff, taking care of the communications, press, PR and promotion of the CSC activities as well as the *B.Motion Festival* events. As a team, their focus is on audience engagement and new narratives for performing arts.

**CSC - Centro per la Scena Contemporanea** is dedicated to the development of the culture of contemporary dance, and it is part of the Municipality of *Bassano del Grappa*, a public body in northeast Italy. It was the first Italian member of the *EDN*.

[operaestate.it/it/csc-centro-scena-contemporanea](https://operaestate.it/it/csc-centro-scena-contemporanea)

Tanzhaus Zürich  
Zürich, Switzerland

# **Why I Love my Job: A Personal Look at Working in Mediation**

**Guillaume Guilherme**



Cooltur | © Tanzhaus Zürich

In 2016, Tanzhaus Zürich saw a growing need to broaden its communications, to create a warm atmosphere that would encourage sharing and exchange, and to focus more on physical interaction. Audience engagement within this 'third place' would not be about explaining choreographies, but rather about making people curious and increasing their appetite for contemporary dance.

### My job

When I started working as a mediator at **Tanzhaus Zürich** in 2016, I was given a lot of freedom to initiate different offers of mediation. Very soon, it became necessary to start responding to various requests, such as a school that wanted to have 200 children dancing on one and the same morning. The city's association of cultural mediators (**Kulturvermittlung Zürich**) approached me immediately to take part in its children's activity weeks and then to set up a series of workshops for seniors. Of course, it was also a question of proposing activities related to **Tanzhaus Zürich's** programming and its residencies. This led to public discussions with the artists, movement introductions before the main performances, a programme in the form of a game that is distributed to spectators, interactive backstage tours and thematic workshops. Since 2017, there are also dance workshops in a transitional refugee centre. Since we inaugurated our new building in September 2019, I regularly have the opportunity to show visitors its spectacular architecture through guided tours. The offer of mediation was therefore created organically to meet the needs of the public or management.

## My role

As a host, I represent the institution that is **Tanzhaus Zürich**. We may have a spirit of openness, welcoming new initiatives and valuing the spirit of sharing, but in a way we are also 'heavy'.

The institution has its weight, perhaps because of the way it operates, and I feel entrusted with its responsibility. I communicate on behalf of the institution. Being a professional does not require disengagement, but does call for a certain restraint (an important capacity for any organiser).

Among participants, I am also often seen as someone who knows how to dance. In that sense, I am regarded as a holder of knowledge, but I prefer to think of it as experience – because knowledge is limitless, whereas experience is personal and an accumulation of actions, decisions, learning over time. A real compost heap!

When leading workshops and facilitating debates, I'm trying to stimulate exchange, keep to the schedule, get people to commit to sharing. I like the quotation from **Joseph Jacotot**, a famous 19th century pedagogue, who said that, **"We learn only by ourselves, and what we learn, we learn from others, and it is in this truth that we raise ourselves together."**

In short, being a mediator at **Tanzhaus Zürich** means opening not only the front door, but also your arms. One resident even called me a 'top-notch art concierge', and now that's what I call myself.



© Alain Appel



### **My practice**

In my practical workshops, I treat every encounter as a new departure. Each session is a fresh constellation of people, experiences, specific needs, curiosities and fears, discomforts and different pleasures. Most of the time, the challenge is to start dancing as a group. I therefore think of my invitations to move as, I have to admit, a kind of 'gentle manipulation'.

From experience, I see that it always takes time for the participants to arrive, to settle, and to take others into consideration. I then work carefully to create an environment of trust.

Often Billie Holiday is playing softly in the corner when people come in. The way I speak, stand, move or touch the participants is a mixture of calculation and spontaneity. I lead people with very simple things like shaking hands (before COVID-19) and saying their name, then with this contact I take them to something new: using their body differently than in their daily life. Ultimately, I love how people arrive physically stiff and gradually surpass themselves, daring to make more expansive movements, to touch strangers, to loosen up with the music.

### **What I must confess**

I must admit that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That is to say that my methods must remain flexible, because if I always start my workshops by wanting to do well, I can make mistakes and sometimes things can go wrong. I don't have any special training for assisting disabled people, for example, and things are very different from one person to another. In politicised contexts, or in contact with minorities, naive behaviour and words can hurt, and I feel that I still have a lot to learn from the complexity of today's debates on topics such as inclusive culture, postcolonialism, or ecofeminism. I start from the premise that one can take the first step toward others sincerely, that one is allowed to make mistakes, that one can remain frank, and that there is space for different opinions. And that it is okay to be shocked or surprised or moved, for example when collaborating with a deaf person, seeing a naked transgender body for the first time, or dancing to Kurdish folk music in the rain.

## What I like

Working with audiences, I am fascinated by the democratic dimension of the encounters which I attempt to stimulate through the body. Thanks to its universality and evocative potential, a sensation can be translated into an observation and vice versa. The dancing body is a social body. My workshops take place on a very modest scale, but the experiences are sometimes unique and transformative. The fact that a group is formed for the purpose of dancing together means that the discovery of an unknown world is shared – a world that can even reveal new abilities. From a marketing point of view, one can rejoice when 'the customer experience' makes people return in order to consume again, but from the social perspective increasingly valued by cultural institutions, **Tanzhaus Zürich** is a place of diversity, protection and experimental living.

**I hope, then, that mediation remains a lever for concrete action in 'audience development' strategies due to its ability to bring people together and emancipate them. And I hope that its impact, though impossible to measure, lies in meaningful social progress. That is why I love my job: because it values the vulnerability of the first step, the same way it takes courage to admit to yourself that you are in love.**



Cooltur | © Tanzhaus Zürich

**Guillaume Guilherme** lives and works in Zürich. After training as a contemporary dancer, he became a cultural mediator at the *Tanzhaus Zürich*. He is also President of the *Swiss Dance Awards* of the Federal Office of Culture and President of *Premio*, the National Performing Arts Incentive Award.

Founded in 1996, **Tanzhaus Zürich** is one of the most important centres for contemporary choreography and performance in Switzerland. It supports local choreographers, organises national and international residences, dance classes for professionals, amateurs and children.

La Place de la Danse - CDCN  
Toulouse / Occitanie, France

# **A Space of Discovery where Artists and Audiences Meet**

**Dominique Crébassol**



**Cultural and artistic mediation seeks to connect people with works and artists. Mediation is, therefore, not an aim in itself. Rather, its goal is to open a space in which people and works meet: it's about taking a step to the side together to share a new experience, stimulating the desire to learn, to practice, or to attend performances.**

Since its foundation in 1995, **La Place de la Danse – CDCN Toulouse / Occitanie** has been working to democratise choreographic art and culture. Every year, it designs a 'mediation plan', shaped alongside the season's artists and performances. Open to all audiences, this cultural programme aims to introduce new spectators to dance, to foster knowledge of the field and its works, and to build the audience's sensitivity to different works and artistic approaches, past and present, and their receptivity to the questions that arise from them.

This cultural programme is aimed at diverse audiences, whether they are intimately familiar with dance or hardly know it: culture or art lovers, dancers and not; students and schoolchildren, from primary to higher education; young people in priority education networks; inhabitants of rural areas without access to cultural facilities; people living in closed or semi-open environments (hospitals, prisons, retirement homes); and internet users. For **La Place de la Danse**, it is essential to break down the building's walls and to take dance to the people outside. That's why the centre organises activities in schools, universities, neighbourhood associations, health care facilities and justice institutions, as well as inviting audiences to discover the venue, meet artists in residence, and attend performances.

**La Place de la Danse** is attentive to the need to adapt its outreach methods to each of these audiences. As such, it works in partnership with other choreographic, educational or cultural facilities to design and develop new tools and original methodologies. Most of these combine knowledge and practice, choreographic creation and cultural attitudes, amateur and professional dancers.

In all its work, the centre focuses on creation, on the diversity of participants, on exchange, and on playful ways of raising the awareness of dance in order to encourage encounters with this rich and vital artistic field.

## New tools for artistic and cultural education

### “Dances en kit”

As part of its efforts to reach audiences unfamiliar with dance as an art form, **La Place de la Danse** decided to conceive, design and produce special tools that mediators could use in their work. Supported and extended by **L'Association des Centres de développement chorégraphique nationaux**, France's network of choreographic centres, **Dances en kit** gathers a growing collection of tools – six to date – which provide an interactive and playful entry to dance and choreographic culture for a broad audience, particularly children and young people in schools. These flexible learning tools adapt their format depending on the subject at hand, and can be combined to create custom programmes tailored to the target audience.

[laplacedeladanse.com/accompagner-les-publics/dances-en-kit](http://laplacedeladanse.com/accompagner-les-publics/dances-en-kit)



### • Presentations with video

Featuring video excerpts of landmark works, **La Danse en 10 dates** (1896-1992) presents ten key moments in the history of dance in the 20th century by concentrating on ten striking figures. Occasionally pausing the video to interact with the audience, the mediator connects the videos to a larger, social, political and artistic story, as well as to the specifics of dance technique. For instance, the **Lumière brothers'** film of **Loïe Fuller's Serpentine Dance** is linked to the context of the late 19th / early 20th century: the modernity of its abstract gestures; the object dance; the use of the recently invented electricity, which made it possible to create the special effects on stage; the film itself, enabled by the invention of cinema; and many other aspects connecting to the artistic currents and scientific advances of the time.

In a similar vein, **Une Histoire de la danse contemporaine en 10 titres** ('A History of Contemporary Dance in 10 Works') journeys into the universe of ten choreographers, from **Merce Cunningham** to **Pina Bausch** and **Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker**, exploring the diversity of contemporary aesthetics and physical techniques.



Le Tour... | Ana Pi | video stills

- **A danced conference**

Designed by François Chaignaud, Cecilia Bengolea and Ana Pi, **Le Tour du monde des danses urbaines en dix villes** ('Around the World of Urban Dance in Ten Cities') is a conference presented by the dancer Ana Pi. Speaking and dancing in front of a screen onto which images of cities and dances are projected, she wanders the streets from Los Angeles to Angola and from Kingston to New York, discovering krumping, dancehall, voguing and other styles.

[numeridanse.tv/en/dance-videotheque/le-tour-du-monde-des-danses-urbaines-en-dix-villes](http://numeridanse.tv/en/dance-videotheque/le-tour-du-monde-des-danses-urbaines-en-dix-villes)

- **Free-access websites**

Developed with the **National Audiovisual Institute**, "**Dances sans visa**" (*Dances without visa*) presents dances, such as the tango, the haka or the coupé-décalé, which have circulated around the world thanks to migration.

[fresques.ina.fr/dances-sans-visa/](http://fresques.ina.fr/dances-sans-visa/)

In partnership with **Numéridanse**, the "**Data danse**" digital platform invites users to journey through fundamental ideas in the practice and history of dance, and even lets them slip into the shoes of a dance critic. Users can take their own path or follow a guided route.

[data-danse.numeridanse.tv](http://data-danse.numeridanse.tv)



Application to dance | still from the video

- **A smartphone application**

"**Application à danser**" (*Application to Dance*) encourages users to get moving. Equipped with smartphones and headphones, they are guided to alter and reinvent everyday gestures within an individual or collective choreography.

[vimeo.com/294750318](https://vimeo.com/294750318)

## Choreographic creations for a story set in the present

La Place de la Danse supports, and even encourages, the creation of choreographic works and activities where the production process includes a strong educational or cultural dimension. In these projects, target audiences are guided to become dancers by participating both in a creation process and any eventual performances. These creations can be structured around specific shows, periods, styles or dance techniques (contemporary or not). Dancers also benefit from practical workshops and various mediation activities.

- **Le Sucre du Printemps** (*The Sugar of Spring*) and **Ladies First**: two creations by **Marion Muzac** created with a group of teenagers.



Le Sucre du Printemps | Marion Muzac | photos: Pierre Ricci



Dancer, choreographer and pedagogue, **Marion Muzac** co-signed with the visual artist **Rachel Garcia**, **Le Sucre du printemps** (*The Sugar of Spring*, 2010) bringing together a group of thirty young people (aged 12 to 20), to collectively create their own version of Stravinsky and Nijinsky's legendary **The Rite of Spring**. Several versions of the production were staged in Toulouse, Düsseldorf, Paris and Ramallah.

[dailymotion.com/video/xrdm16](https://dailymotion.com/video/xrdm16)

Ladies First! | Marion Muzac | still from video



In a series of workshops, the project **Ladies First!** (2016) saw sixty teenage girls from all over France exposed to the passion and commitment of some of the pioneering women of 20th century dance, from **Isadora Duncan** to **Josephine Baker**. The workshops culminated in a show in which twenty young girls paid a song and dance tribute to these figures of female emancipation.

[vimeo.com/170493650](https://vimeo.com/170493650)

- **MinEvent: des enfants dansent** (Children dancing) (for **Merce Cunningham**)

2019 marked the centenary of the birth of the choreographer **Merce Cunningham**. Following a series of workshops with **Dylan Crossman**, a dancer with **Merce Cunningham Company**, schoolchildren performed excerpts from performances based on the American choreographer's compositional principles. This event was accompanied by an exhibition of costumes and dance videos created by students.

[laplacedeladanse.com/minevent](http://laplacedeladanse.com/minevent)

- **Laboratoire Super Wonder All Styles: des danses s'échangent** (Super Wonder All Styles Laboratory: dances are exchanged).

At the initiative of choreographer **Marta Izquierdo Muñoz**, the *Super Wonder All Styles Laboratory* transposes the device of hip hop and krumping battles to all types of dance. The workshops, which bring together fans of jazz, urban dance, flamenco, contemporary dance, etc., spark the desire to dance and fire the imaginations of the participants by guiding them through a process of showing, copying and exchanging dance moves and energies. The final *Grand Battle All Style* invites audience members, from the youngest to the oldest, to participate in a joyful gathering that taps into the power and pleasure of movement.

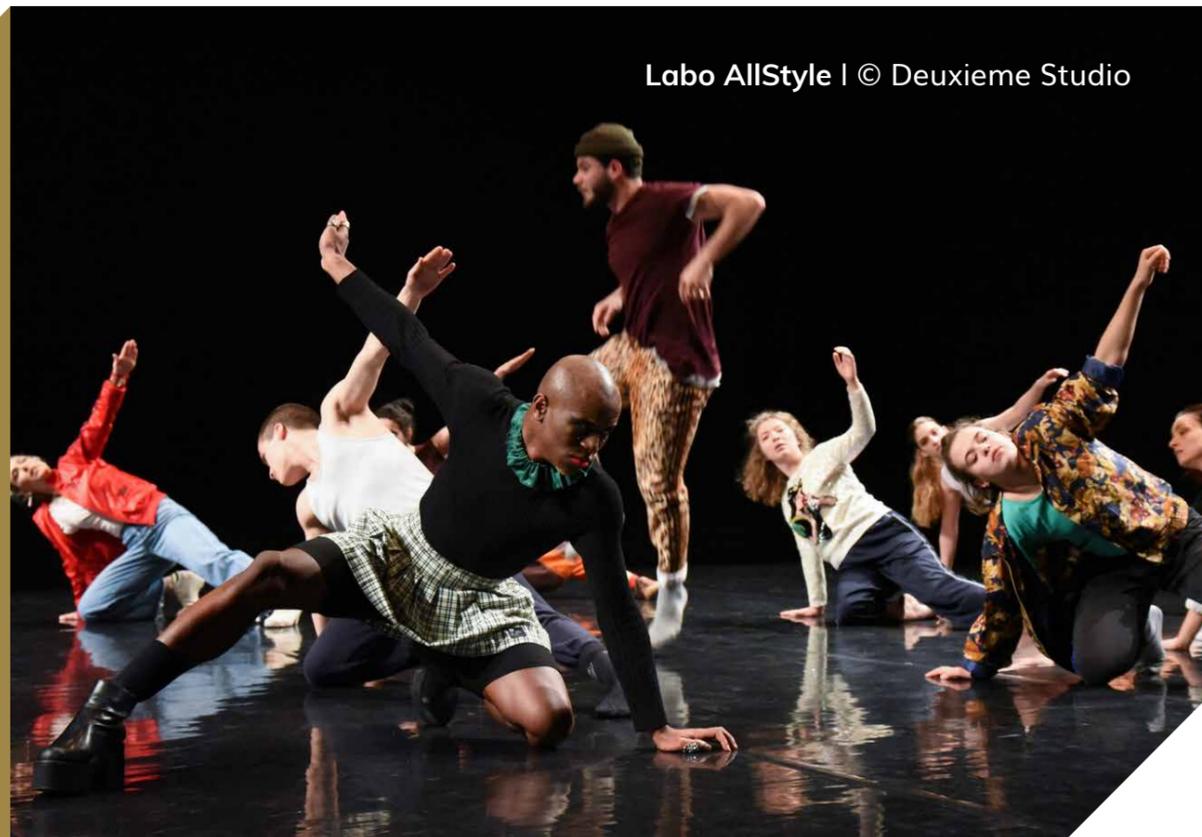
[vimeo.com/422395736](https://vimeo.com/422395736)

Super Wonder... | Marion Muzac | still from video



Creative and committed, the cultural activity of **La Place de la Danse – CDCN Toulouse / Occitanie** is based on a simple and unwavering conviction: that dance is for everyone, at every stage of life. Listening to and moving the body opens the horizon for self-discovery and for the discovery of others, for exchange and mutual respect, for critical reflection and questioning.

Dance can also provide tools to combat rigid social structures and dissolve the barriers erected between us. Therefore, when the cultural and educational policy of **La Place de la Danse – CDCN Toulouse/ Occitanie** works towards promoting dance, it does so in the hope that society and our lives will be driven by the values that inhere in the art form, among them self-reliance and solidarity, inventiveness and sharing.



Labo AllStyle | © Deuxieme Studio



**Dominique Crébassol** is a journalist specialising in dance and culture. She works at *La Place de la Danse – CDCN Toulouse / Occitanie* as a speaker and trainer via the professional training initiative *Extensions*, and is co-editor of the book *Vingt ans de danse au CDC Toulouse / Midi-Pyrénées* ('Twenty Years of Dance at CDC Toulouse / Midi-Pyrénées').

Supported by the French government, the City of Toulouse and the Occitanie Region, **La Place de la Danse – CDCN Toulouse / Occitanie** strives to support artists and audiences in order to develop choreographic creation and culture. By inventing, at the time of its opening in 1995, a new model of equipment for dance in France, the *CDCN Toulouse / Occitanie* paved the way for the creation of a national label which now includes 13 organisations distributed throughout France.

[laplacedeladanse.com](http://laplacedeladanse.com)



The Nature of the Beast | Arianna Marcoulides | © Dance House Lemosos

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Editor: **Annette van Zwoll**

Writers: **Freek Duinhof**

**Steriani Tsintziloni**

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## Team

Interim network manager: **Pia Krämer**

Production manager: **Gaja Lužnik**

Communication manager: **Marie Fol**

Administrative support: **Mery De Lorenzi**

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