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Fit for the Future

Dance and Well-being

Executive Summary

FOREWORD

The European Dance Network (EDN) initiated the #DanceAndWellBeing campaign from November 2020 to February 2021 as a response to the many restrictions during Covid-19 and the disastrous impact of the virus on people's lives. Through this campaign, EDN started to collect sectoral data on the contribution of dance to good health and well-being and identified key resources focusing on the role of the arts in addressing the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goal.

Through the many activities co-organised with its members, EDN has acted to address the essential role of dance in our societies as well as to highlight artistic practices and sectoral needs, envisioning a renewed dance ecosystem after a period of crisis. The past year, and the grassroots initiatives it has spurred across Europe, have reinforced our belief in the role of dance in maintaining our physical and mental well-being. The global pandemic, its management by authorities across Europe, and the concrete impacts on health and mental/physical well-being made clear the necessity of investigating this topic. Looking at the value-driven approaches becoming predominant across Europe, in the network as well as in the dance ecosystem at large, we see that artists and dance professionals' practices are increasingly shaped by the notion of 'care'. Moreover, stakeholders, including policymakers, have an increasing awareness of the potential contribution of the arts and culture sector to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

As part of its 'Fit for the Future' series of publications, and thanks to the support of DEN Kennisinstituut cultuur & digitalisering and Dachverband Tanz Deutschland, EDN commissioned researcher Jordi Baltà Portolés (Trànsit Projectes) to collect some of the existing evidence in this area, alongside testimonials from artists, in order to present a typology of practices and formulate recommendations for public authorities and the dance sector.

We wish you an inspiring read!

Yohann Floch
Secretary General

This is an executive summary of 'Dance and Well-being, review of evidence and policy perspectives'. The publication is part of the 'Fit for the Future' series of research papers commissioned by the European Dance Network (EDN). We wish to thank our members for their key contribution as well as our collaborators. The full paper is available on EDN website: www.ednetwork.eu

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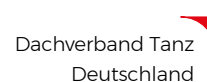


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The relationship between the arts, health and well-being has gained increasing attention in recent years, as attested to by the substantial number of projects, programmes, research initiatives and publications, as well as some policies and strategies. More specifically, there is extensive evidence of how dance and movement may be conducive to better individual and collective health and well-being. Indeed, at the heart of dance lies a concern with the body and its expressive abilities, an in-depth understanding of the balance required between physical and mental health, and how body expression and movement may be conducive to well-being, as well as an implicit acknowledgement of the need to care for one's own and others' bodies. These ideas are reinforced today by the centrality of health, well-being and care in all our societies following the Covid-19 pandemic, which serves as a backdrop to this report.

Exploring the relation between dance and health comprehensively involves considering how dance may contribute to better health and well-being, what strategies could be put in place in this respect, and what tensions could arise in this context. It also requires paying attention to the health and well-being of dancers, choreographers and other professionals in the field, including how working conditions and related pressures affect mental health.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, between November 2020 and February 2021 the European Dance Network (EDN) organised the #DanceAndWellBeing campaign, a programme of online dance classes facilitated by artists associated with EDN members. The campaign built on the increasing awareness that artists and dance professionals' practices are shaped by the notion of 'care' and a set of transversal factors and values, including equality, accessibility, diversity and well-being. The present report continues that reflection, aiming to collect some of the evidence existing in this area and some testimonials from artists, to present a typology of practices, and to formulate recommendations for public authorities and the dance sector. It also aims to establish connections between work in this area and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Among the most significant contributions to the debate on the arts, health and well-being in recent years is the scoping review published by the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2019, which analysed over 900 publications published since 2000. It suggested that arts-based health interventions are uniquely

placed to address the full complexity of the challenges that being healthy and well are increasingly recognised to present. The scoping review established many connections between dance and health, in areas including improvements in mental health, subjective well-being, the reduction of cognitive decline, improvements in patients with degenerative neurological disorders, and contributions to health communication.

Those findings echo evidence emerging from the ground in many individual projects. Furthermore, across Europe there is an increasing number of initiatives that connect dance, health and well-being. This remains, however, an imbalanced landscape, with most examples coming from only a few countries, where a good combination of projects fostering access and practice of dance on the ground, supporting strategies and policies, and good mechanisms in research, knowledge-sharing, mutual care and capacity-building, lead to a well-balanced 'ecosystem' of measures. The report presents some illustrative examples, including some which have emerged in the context of the Covid-19 crisis, as well as identifying defining elements of good quality criteria.

Existing literature suggests that, in projects connecting the arts and health, good health outcomes cannot be achieved without arts outcomes being achieved. Among the factors that may enable successful arts and health interventions are the use of context-specific methods, the engagement of skilled artists or artistic organisations, suitable venues and settings, and the involvement of context-specific partner health organisations. Work in this area should also ideally involve long-term approaches, a consideration of the health and well-being of dance professionals, and learning opportunities.

The report suggests that work on dance and health can contribute to the achievement of some of the targets included in the SDGs. In particular, targets 3.3 (which deals with communicable diseases), 3.4 (promotion of mental health and well-being), 3.5 (prevention and treatment of substance abuse), 10.2 (social, economic and political inclusion of everyone), and 11.7 (universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible spaces, including for vulnerable people). Individual and collective engagement in dance, which can contribute to better health and well-being, and the integration of dance in health communication campaigns, are the two main ways in which the connection can be established.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With a view to strengthening the common ground between dance, health and well-being, exploring the contribution that dance may make to health and well-being, improving the consideration of health and well-being aspects within the dance sector, the following measures and actions are recommended.

Recommendations to all stakeholders

- * Given the increasing evidence about the connections existing between dance, health and well-being, as well as, more broadly, between the arts, health and well-being, more attention should be paid to the development of policies and programmes in these areas, as well as accompanying research and evaluation, knowledge-transfer and networking initiatives.
- * Support for arts and health should recognise that connections in this area are complex and multidirectional. Despite acknowledging their potential positive effects, the arts should not be interpreted primarily as a resource for the improvement of health and well-being, but rather as connected to essential forms of expression and movement, as well as the exercise of the human right to take part in cultural life.
- * While public authorities are encouraged to consider the importance of work in the field of arts and health, they should also recognise that many arts projects will not necessarily want to address these issues, and provide sufficient space for this.
- * Increasing attention to the connections between the arts, health and well-being should also involve a concern with the health and well-being of artists and arts professionals, including the physical and mental health and well-being of dancers, choreographers and other agents in the field of dance.
- * The connections between the arts, health, well-being and the achievement of the SDGs (particularly targets 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 10.2 and 11.7) deserve particular attention.

Recommendations to EU institutions

- * EU institutions should take into account, in their respective areas of competence, the transversal role of culture in the achievement of the SDGs, and promote it in the relevant international forums, including the UN.
- * EU institutions, in their respective areas of competence, should increase attention to the health and well-being of culture professionals, including the impact of Covid-19 on physical and mental well-being, and what measures could be adopted to address this.
- * The European Commission should include a cultural dimension in policies and funding programmes related to health and well-being.
- * Support for initiatives connecting the arts, health and well-being, and related training activities, could also be embedded in European Commission programmes in other areas, including Creative Europe, Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe.
- * The Council of Ministers should consider the connections between dance, health and well-being and involve representatives of the dance sector in its work related to culture, social cohesion and well-being.
- * In their participation in the Council of Ministers and OMC working groups, Member States should share knowledge about good practices as well as about the obstacles and difficulties found in strengthening work around culture, health and well-being.
- * The European Parliament should foster discussion and policy development on the consideration of access to culture and cultural participation in approaches to health and well-being, with a view to strengthening the consideration of cultural aspects in European approaches to health and well-being.
- * The European Commission and Member States should work together to foster research in areas related to dance, health and well-being, including by promoting the exchange of methodologies and results, the establishment of common approaches and the implementation of joint research projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to national, regional and local authorities

- * National, regional and local authorities, in their respective areas of competence, should take measures to foster access to and participation in dance for everyone, as an exercise of the right to take part in cultural life, as well as a contribution to health and well-being.
- * National, regional and local authorities should take into account, in their respective areas of competence, the transversal role of culture in the achievement of the SDGs, including it in relevant strategies and policies.
- * In countries, regions and cities where projects connecting dance, health and well-being have only been occasional, public authorities should discuss with stakeholders in these fields on the potential of exploring and supporting joint projects.
- * In countries, regions and cities where significant experience exists in connecting dance, health and well-being, attention could be paid to scaling up small-scale initiatives, where relevant, evaluating projects, and ensuring that results of existing research are integrated in project design and implementation.
- * National, regional and local authorities, in their respective areas of competence, should take into account the implications of cultural policies and funding arrangements in the health and well-being of cultural professionals, and take measures accordingly.
- * National, regional and local authorities, in their respective areas of competence, should foster transversal approaches between policies in culture, health and well-being, paying particular attention to the connections between dance, health and well-being, through working groups, joint strategies and other mechanisms.
- * National, regional and local authorities, in their respective areas of competence, should include opportunities to engage in dance in the context of existing or new social prescription schemes, and evaluate the results.
- * National, regional and local authorities, in their respective areas of competence, should establish research programmes, or support those existing, to consider the connections between culture, including dance, health and well-being. Where possible, this should involve adopting health research methodologies or combining different methodologies, with a view to increasing recognition and comparability.

Recommendations to the dance field

- * Stakeholders in the dance field should identify opportunities to develop projects that connect dance, health and well-being, either online (as in #DanceAndWellBeing) or offline.
- * Dance stakeholders should continue to foster a reflection on the implications of care in the context of dance, and how this can be connected to broader social discussions around care.
- * The dance field at large should continue to exchange methodologies and examples of projects connecting dance, health and well-being.
- * EDN and its members could partner with European cultural organisations outside the sector in the promotion of projects that explore the intersections between culture, health, well-being and care, including both the impacts of culture in terms of health and well-being and the implications of considering health, well-being and care within cultural organisations and in the work of cultural professionals.
- * Dance stakeholders could explore opportunities to work with health organisations and public authorities in the design and implementation of projects connecting dance, health and well-being.
- * Dance organisations should consider ways to evaluate their work in terms of health, well-being and care, and find ways to disseminate results in order to improve methodologies, as well as to raise awareness of and advocate for the existing connections.