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Fit for the Future



# Dance Mobility in Times of Fracture

Experiencing the Framework of Fragility

This 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. For further information, please contact [info@ednetwork.eu](mailto:info@ednetwork.eu)

**Title** Dance Mobility in Times of Fracture: Experiencing the Framework of Fragility

**Text** Milica Ilic

**Data collection, statistics and editing** John Ellingsworth (On the Move)

**Coordination** Yohann Floch (EDN), Marie Le Sourd (On the Move)

**Data collection for the 'Fit for the future' research** Kathy Lawson, Arne de Vliet (BECCA Europe)

**Pictures** La Veronal, Sonoma © Anna Fàbrega

**Graphic design** Marine Hadjès-Glatard

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**To quote this publication** Ilic M., Dance Mobility in Times of Fracture: Experiencing the Framework of Fragility. EDN, September 2021, [www.ednetwork.eu](http://www.ednetwork.eu)

**About the author** Milica Ilic is a cultural worker specialised in transnational cooperation, particularly in contemporary performing arts. She has been part of numerous international cooperations, training sessions, and research and evaluation projects in the field of culture. She is currently International Adviser at Onda, French office for contemporary performing arts circulation. She coordinates the RESHAPE project, a collaborative, bottom-up research process that proposes instruments for transition towards an alternative, fairer, and unified arts ecosystem across Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. She previously worked as Communication and Administration Manager at IETM international network for contemporary performing arts, Administrator of On The Move cultural mobility network, Project Manager at the University of Arts in Belgrade and developed various cultural projects in the city of Belgrade.

### With the support of



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



Dachverband Tanz  
Deutschland

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



# Dance Mobility in Times of Fracture

## FOREWORD

The mobility of European artists and culture professionals is a topic that has been written about and investigated for many years. As a result, it has long been known that information can be difficult to access, and that support schemes and opportunities are unevenly distributed within our sector at both European and international levels. Covid-19 and the lockdowns, curfews and closed borders that have come with it have deeply impacted international cultural mobility, with most on-site cultural activities shut down. New forms of transnational cultural project have taken place online but offer only a very partial replacement for what existed before the pandemic. Nonetheless, we have seen many forms of virtual cultural mobility arise, and felt the need to study more precisely the changing nature of working practices and mobility flows in the European dance field.

In the last year, most dance artists and professionals haven't been able to train, get inspiration, work, study or be mobile. The impact on their careers has been unprecedented. Most transnational projects have been cancelled or postponed, contributing to a general disruption of the value chain.

Within and beyond the European Dance Network (EDN) membership, there have been many debates on the value of international mobility and physical encounters, as well as on digital practices – their limitations and challenges alongside their joys and opportunities. Several artistic statements and policy papers have insisted on a more value-driven cultural mobility that takes into account ethics, environmental sustainability, and inclusion. While acknowledging that cultural mobility has suffered from a wide range of problems in the past – ranging from unequal access to funding to unnecessary administrative burdens – several voices have observed that 'virtual mobility' could open new pathways and answer pressing needs in relation to issues such as diversity, inclusion, access, and the need for more balanced power relations. Is the digital shift providing all that it seems to promise?

As part of its 'Fit for the Future' series of publications, EDN commissioned this piece from the cultural mobility information network On the Move and its team of researchers Milica Ilic, Marie Le Sourd and John Ellingsworth. The aim has been to collect some of the existing evidence, giving an overview of European dance mobility before the crisis, as well as to investigate the latest trends and needs through an analysis of current activity. This initial research then allows us to formulate recommendations for decision makers and dance stakeholders.

We hope you enjoy reading!

Yohann Floch, Secretary General (Feb - July 2021)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a radical break for the dance sector, particularly regarding mobility. It has accelerated processes of transformation that had already been set in motion by ecological, political, technological and social changes. It has raised awareness of a number of burning issues, such as the shift to digital work, our relationship to the environment, and the ecological crisis. It put a stop to many of the usual working methods of those in the dance sector, urging rethinking and transformation. It has deepened the precarity of artists, adding more urgency to questions of fair practice, solidarity, and the status of artists.

Written at a time when the crisis is still obstructing professional dance practice in Europe as well as globally, this study looks at dance mobility from two perspectives, putting side by side the state of play of dance mobility before and after this radical break. It sums up where mobility has led the dance sector prior to the Covid-19 crisis and tries to put forward some first ideas and trends emerging from this singular moment.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, mobility was essential for much of the dance sector: it was a method by which networks were built and reinforced on a long-term basis, and by which opportunities for co-production and touring were discovered. It provided opportunities for artists and professionals to access further resources, extend the reach of their work, and build new skills.

Underlying this, however, were a number of problems. For those artists and professionals with access to opportunities, there was a pressure to be mobile (or 'hypermobile') to an extent that could have a negative impact on their quality of life. For others, based in areas with fewer support schemes or with limited access to information, there was an isolation that stemmed from being locked out of this system for making work and finding connections. Adding to these individual concerns, the ethics and legitimacy of frequent mobility as a mode of work was increasingly being called into question by ecological, political and social concerns.

Since the pandemic, much has changed and yet much has stayed the same.

On the one hand, the crisis has accelerated a large-scale shift towards digital work. Familiar programmes such as residencies and training schemes have in large part gone online, and artists have experimented with new ways to collaborate at distance. Some organisations have also started to work with hybrid approaches, combining online and on-site activities as a way of keeping their activities adaptable. Frequently changing regulations, and an uncertain outlook, have forced

organisers to be flexible – both for their own benefit and for the freelancers they work with.

On the other hand, old inequalities remain. Opportunities in the dance field, as in the art world more generally, continue to be heavily slanted towards Western and Northern Europe, still address individuals over groups and collectives, and give little real consideration of either hypermobility or the isolation of dance actors.

Taking this situation into account, this paper concludes with a set of recommendations. In brief, these recommendations are:

- **Formulate positive policies to support and diversify mobility, responding both to the growing needs of artists and to the sector's economic model.** These policies should work on both national/regional and EU levels.
- **In forming policy, recognise the growing precarity of artists under current systems.** Fair working conditions and fair remuneration practices are essential to a truly positive impact.
- **Nurture a culture and policy of solidarity, based on shared responsibility for the sector at large, not just for one's own immediate environment.** Solidarity, as a concept infused not only in support schemes but also in organisational practices, is an essential element to overcoming radical inequalities in access to mobility.
- **Develop appropriate and realistic support schemes that are aware of regional/local economic, social and political characteristics, and that bear in mind the precarious working conditions of artists.** To be socially responsible, support schemes need to take into account their impact on local communities, the environment, and quality of life.
- **Involve artists in rethinking and reimagining models, methods and schemes.** Artists have personal experience and knowledge, and the capacity for creative thinking. They are the experts on innovation and the sector can benefit from this.
- **Encourage and support further experimentation with alternative organisational and financial models.** Organisations that have aligned their organisational practices and methods with their ethos and values are precious examples that should be followed, documented and made visible.

- **Give artists and art workers opportunities to engage in self-initiated mobility of the 'go and see' variety** – opportunities to follow specific interests, curiosities and intuitions.
- **Support ongoing experiments around new, alternative, hybrid and blended schemes and models.** Support is particularly needed to ensure that these schemes embrace sustainability and green policy measures.
- **Support further research to better understand the specific mobility needs and challenges of the dance field.**

We hope that these recommendations can lay the groundwork for a more inclusive approach to policymaking in which the new forms that have emerged during the pandemic – on the initiative of both policymakers/funders and artists themselves – can be further explored. The result will be a stronger dance sector for everyone.