


DANCING HERITAGES: CO-CREATING EVENTS OF PRACTICE

Handbook

 Dance - ICH



Co-funded by
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Dancing Heritages: Co-creating Events of Practice – Handbook

Edited by: Anja Serec Hodžar, Tone Erlien Myrvold, Mieke Witkamp,
Debora Plouy

Design and layout: Darja Klančar, www.darkadesign.si

Proofreading: Theresa Jill Buckland

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INTRODUCTION

Tone Erlien Myrvold

Anja Serec Hodžar

Mieke Witkamp



Over the course of the project *Dance as ICH: New models of facilitating participatory dance events (Dance-ICH)*, we have journeyed across Europe — from Norway and Belgium to Slovenia, Romania, Hungary, Greece, — engaging with a rich diversity of dance traditions, communities, and practices. This initiative has not only brought together cultural heritage institutions, researchers, and artists, but most importantly, it has fostered deep collaborations with communities, inviting them to become co-creators in the safeguarding process.

At the heart of our work is a **paradigm shift**: moving from viewing intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH) as something to be demonstrated, to something to be **lived, shared, and co-created**. We have explored how museums and cultural institutions can serve as active facilitators — **not just presenters** — of living traditions. By transforming these institutions into **meeting places**, they become spaces of participation, inclusion, and empowerment, where traditional knowledge is transmitted through embodied learning, involvement, and dialogue.

The local and regional experiments in this handbook, show how **active participation fosters a stronger sense of ownership over tradition**. This ownership is essential to the sustainable transmission of ICH, especially in contemporary societies facing cultural, social, and financial challenges.

Rather than building from scratch, we have demonstrated how existing networks, venues, and relationships can be **activated and reimagined** to sustain dance as a vital and vibrant part of community life. We've observed a common thread: when institutions listen, co-create, and empower, cultural practices thrive.

The project has also advanced our understanding of **sustainable safeguarding models** for ICH. We have tested and documented participatory approaches that are both locally adaptable and globally relevant. Our toolbox — including a handbook, guidelines, exhibitions, and a transnational network — aim to **equip**

professionals, policymakers, and communities with practical tools for future initiatives.

This work directly supports several **Sustainable Development Goals**:

SDG 4: Quality education through heritage learning,

SDG 10: Social and political inclusion,

SDG 11: Stronger, more resilient communities through culture,

SDG 17: Effective partnerships across sectors and borders.

By placing **dance participation at the centre** — not as a spectacle, but as a **shared practice** — we not only ensure its transmission, but also build bridges between generations, disciplines, and social groups. The methodologies developed emphasize **bottom-up engagement, co-ownership, and cultural brokering**, in line with the principles of the 2003 UNESCO Convention.

We introduce a new concept. *Events of practice exhibition*. This concept explores how to use the local communities' dance concepts, viewpoints and participation to disseminate living dance heritage and make it relevant to the museum audience.

It is the sum of co-created exhibition elements, curated dance events, *events of practice (dance)* and the dialogue between the exhibited elements, the dancing and the dancers.

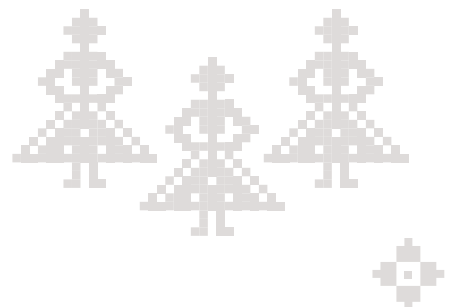
The *events of practice exhibition* concept is the combination of and connection between the dance content and elements exhibited, curated dance events, events of practice, the dance community, the audience and the museum professional. These are the pieces of the puzzle that must be intentionally aligned to achieve the sustainable goal of supporting safeguarding of dancing in a museum space. The *events of practice exhibition* concept has through its six exhibitions and case studies that you can read about in this handbook

helped the dance communities in various ways to continue their practices by finding new opportunities for both transmission and raising awareness.

In this toolbox we discuss and draw six different paintings of why and how museums and cultural heritage institutions should play a part in future sustainable structures for safeguarding dance as living heritage.

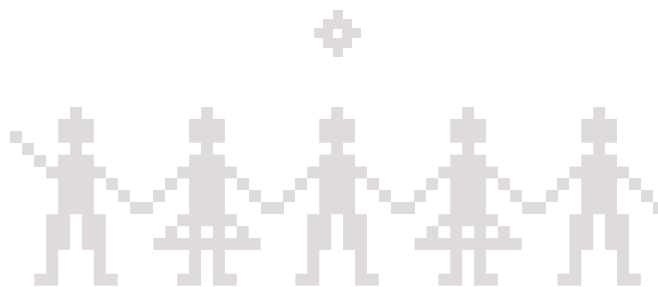
This sustainable structure called *events of practice exhibition* should therefore encompass more than the events themselves. Firstly, these events should be recurrent and embedded in a permanent space. Secondly, they should entail a facilitator in the role of a supporter, in line with the principles for adaptive management to ensure long-term viability, and recognition of value. A cultural institution and its living heritage facilitators can help the dance community by promoting and incorporating their practices into an organizational system, without interfering with the execution of the intangible heritage practices itself. For future and continuing research, it will be obviously important to research these methods over time, in different contexts, and to question the distribution of roles in co-creative processes and the sustainable structures when it comes to funding and resources.

The individual case studies are presented in separate chapters, organised according to the core activity of each project partner – ranging from classical museums to open-air museums, research institutes and



universities. To ensure clarity and comparability, each chapter follows the same structure. The subchapters are: Introduction; Our community; Methodology; Outcomes, solutions, audience; Reflections, challenges, benefits for all involved. Through the project activities, we have found that there are different understandings of individual terms among experts and researchers. Therefore, five key terms are listed for each case study, explaining how they are understood by those who have dealt with the individual case study. These terms are **co-creation, facilitator, participatory, transmission** and **community**. We chose to present these different interpretations because, even though we work in the same cultural field and within a European context, words still carry different meanings across our five countries. This reflects linguistic, cultural, and institutional differences. Rather than forcing a single definition, we see this diversity as enriching and essential for meaningful European collaboration.

We invite you to reflect on these models, challenge them, expand them – and take them further. We are not only discussing dance. We are discussing how **communities and institutions can collaborate to build a sustainable future** for our shared, living cultural heritage.



NORWAY

Tone Erlien Myrvold



Introduction

Two Norwegian project partners cooperate in this case study, both located in Trondheim, Norway.

The Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance (hereafter Sff), as accredited UNESCO NGO for the 2003 ICH convention, shall promote, safeguard and transmit Norwegian traditional music and dance as an expression of cultural identity with unique qualities. The other partner, the national music museums, part of The Museums of Southern Trøndelag (hereafter MiST), is one of Norway's largest cultural institutions. Rockheim – museum for popular music, and Ringve Music Museum have been assigned a national responsibility for documenting and communicating the Norwegian musical heritage across a broad spectrum of genres. This includes responsibility for Norwegian music history and musical instruments, as well as for the management and dissemination of Norway's tangible, intangible and digital musical cultural heritage.

Through its 50-year experience in community involvement, Sff has developed a methodological ideology to include the practitioners of ICH in transmission of dance knowledge, development of safeguarding concepts, networking, and co-creation of a folk dance and folk music archive and its dissemination.

Rockheim and Ringve, as part of MiST, work extensively with school programmes and serve a broad range of public events every year. The museums value the happiness and laughter they see in their dancing audience and how different styles of music relate to body movements and dance styles. Dance is a natural part of music, and vice versa. Therefore, dance as living heritage has taken place at the museums for a long time.

Our target group is the dance community in Trondheim that still practise, through dancing and playing traditional instruments, the common dance party dance repertoire from our region. Local dance parties in Trondheim and the

Photo 1. Event of practice
exhibition "Gammel Groove".
Rockheim Museum,
Trondheim, Norway, 2024.
Photo: Jana Pavlova.



area around have been a natural meeting place for a century. Supporting the needs for these communities to reach out to new practitioners and audience is an important objective for this project, resulting in sustainable *events of practice exhibitions* that can continue as meeting places for transmission of dancing as living heritage.

Our community

In Norway dance heritage communities are very small in their local communities, but are often part of a wider regional community. Our community is a combination of different groups and dance genres, but they fall under the label *Trøndersk gammaldans*.

These dance communities in Trondheim and the surrounding area practise a combination of traditional folk dances such as waltz, reinlender (schottis), mazurka, polka, the village dance from our region: pols, and the Norwegian forms of swing dance, foxtrot, slow, and one step; dances that people have danced over the last centuries and still dance today. In our participant group we count members from 15 different organizations, and several single enthusiasts that play an important role for the traditional dance and music practices in the present.

These dances, folk dances and swing, continue to be practiced today in dance groups that rehears informally once a week. The dance communities express that the present situation with few good, informal, intergenerational meeting arenas for dance parties is a common challenge. Dance parties, both informal and advertised parties, have for decades been an arena mostly for the elder



generations and with an outspoken lack of relevant meeting places for dancing among the younger generations.

In the exhibition our community is promoted by intergenerational dance parties, and it shows special attention towards children and youths. This is often encouraging for recruiting new members to the heritage communities. Both Ringve/Rockheim and Sff have experienced that the younger age groups are splendid target groups for inclusion, representativeness and diversity. In addition, students and young adults are also in need for meeting places for inclusion and belonging after the corona pandemic.

Methodology

The two Norwegian partners in this project aimed to cooperate to implement a focus project that includes a fieldwork period followed by a co-creative process with the dance community in Trondheim. The chosen dance community consists of all groups, individuals and musical bands and voluntary associations within the genres of *gammeldans* and *swing*.

After a digital survey was sent to our chosen dance community in Trondheim, a total of 15 dance groups and musical bands were included in our two-month fieldwork and six-month long co-creational work with the community. Through four larger meetings at the museums and transparent sharing of findings and results from interviews and group work, we had the opportunity to discuss and vote around three important topics. These were: 1. Who are you and your organization? 2. How can we help you? and 3. Let's dream together. Consequently, the attendees exchanged ideas and shared their experience to develop more ideas for the fieldwork and co-creative process over the following months.

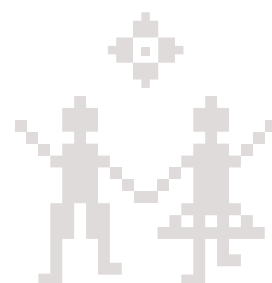
All meetings were followed by dance parties for everyone to join, free of charge, and with live music

and popular bands playing, gathering many hundreds of dancers, both young and old. Documentation of both fieldwork, co-creative meetings and dancing assembled rich and fruitful material to be used for exhibition, research and transmission.

Photo 2. Meeting with dance instructors. Rockheim Museum, Trondheim, Norway, 2024. Photo: Jana Pavlova.



Photo 3. Dance course. Rockheim Museum, Trondheim, Norway, 2024. Photo: Jana Pavlova.



Outcomes, solutions, audience

During the fieldwork and co-creative process with the community, there were some common issues and goals identified:

1. The need for arenas/meeting places for dancing across the different community groups.
2. A dance house in Trondheim that makes arrangements for dancing easier for all dance communities.
3. Good instructors and more educated instructors.
4. Good music, both live and digital for teaching.
5. The community wants to recruit and grow in numbers.
6. Work to improve the structures for more music and dance in schools and cultural schools (for children after school hours), through cooperation with the voluntary community.
7. How to improve the economy in the voluntary communities and benefit the good synergies with institutional cooperation?
8. How to arrange events for visibility and popularity, visibility in marketing and knowledge and awareness raising for the general public?

Photo 4. School tour.
Nypvang skole, Trondheim,
Norway, 2025.
Photo: Nypvang skole.



Photo 5. *Event of practice exhibition.*
 "Ungdommelig dansefest".
 Rockheim Museum,
 Trondheim, Norway, 2024.
 Photo: Celina Gallo.



With these as starting points, co-owned suggestions with the dance and music community were made. These key initiatives were implemented by establishing a coordination platform, organizing large-scale dance events with notable musicians, and creating long-term meeting places with live music and mixed dance styles that eventually will lead into a community-based dance house in Trondheim. The project also emphasizes education, with dance and music workshops for teachers, students, and community organizations. Plans include school tours with young instructors, school dance packages, and training for student instructors.

We aimed for a well-planned implementation through shared ownership for the outcomes and results, where the community leaders are heard before and during the planning and implementation of the measures concerning the key initiatives. This resulted in three large dance weekends at Rockheim, including seminars, dance parties with top dance musicians, dance instructor courses, and courses in dancing for teachers and kindergarten teachers. We have carried out school tours, become involved in marketing traditional dance and music during the World Championship in Nordic genres (Skiing), and represented the wishes and needs of the community in meetings with cultural institutions, politicians and scientific networks regionally. This has shown how the concept of *events of practice exhibition* in the Norwegian context takes shape by combining the knowledge dissemination for both the general audience, students and pupils and the dance community enthusiasts, with arranging for dance arenas/meeting places. The latter creates greater awareness raising, showing how traditional music and dance is an important field of social sustainability both for older and younger generations where the general public could connect music and dance to overall wellbeing and recreation.



Reflections, challenges, benefits for all involved

Through this project we came to know a large community made by folk dancers, swing dancers, and musicians of both genres. Facilitating common meeting places for this diverse community has been well received and has created many good synergies within the communities as a result.

We evaluate our process as well conducted in terms of learning about the communities' expectations and needs for safeguarding their dancing and dance party arenas. Through fieldwork and the co-creative process, the Norwegian research group gained valuable insight and came to know the field, in order to better scaffold the project further in line with the wishes, dreams, and concerns of the community.

Although the process of co-creation of measures to be implemented in Trondheim was new to most of the communities, we did not experience lack of interest in participation in the project. We are pleased with the community's engagement; people participated actively in this rather open process during which we aimed to let all the ideas have a chance, without predicting the possible results from the beginning.

In this regard, the role of the partner institutions was kept hidden from the communities until the second meeting where we revealed some expectations in order to lay down the ground for the rest of the project. Due to the openness of the process, we received feedback as well in terms of conflicting roles, elements of competition, unclear aims and goals of the project. Nevertheless, we managed to expand and improve how we offer resources for dance communities of intangible cultural heritage and open a line of dialogue between the community and the institutions. This has nourished the purpose of this case study to cooperate thoroughly and on a long-term basis with dance enthusiasts and the dance community.

The result of our fieldwork and facilitation process was a list of measures to be implemented in Trondheim. This list was a mix of the needs and wishes of the communities, and the ideas and recourses at the Ringve and Rockheim museums and the Sff in terms of our roles and structures as national cultural heritage institutions. The process of making the list was co-creational and had a strong perspective from relevant current cultural politics in order to raise awareness of challenges faced in today's contemporary society, and specially with other actors in the city, including the project partners.

Through this long bottom-up process with the community at the centre, the community has gained tools to better recognize and overcome the challenges of transmitting local dance knowledge today. On the other hand, we as institutions have gained valuable insight and knowledge about creating and leading sustainable facilitation models of co-creating safeguarding strategies with the heritage communities of dancing as living heritage.





Co-creation: defines a partnership by which both parties define their need and goals at a project's inception and work together towards fulfilling them. Communities should have more power than in a regular participatory project, but both institution and communities' goals should be achieved, and the finished outcome of the collaboration is to be co-owned by the community and institution.



Facilitator: is a neutral person that helps a group of people understand their common objectives and assists them to plan and to achieve their objectives. The facilitator is not in a position of authority nor imparting knowledge which they alone hold. They are, instead, putting in place structures and processes which will assist the group in communicating their own ideas.



Participatory: allowing people to take part in or become involved in an activity. An approach or method in which practices, processes, or events are developed collaboratively with the participants themselves—particularly with tradition-bearers and practitioners of ICH. It implies that participants are not merely contributors, but co-creators with real influence over decisions, content, and implementation. It is a bottom-up process rooted in equal dialogue, mutual learning, and shared ownership, with institutions acting as facilitators or supporters rather than directors.



Transmission: measures to ensure that embodied elements of the ICH continuously evolve, from manifestation to manifestation and while being transmitted from person to person and from generation to generation.



Community: 'people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations' (Council of Europe, 2005). This heritage community does not necessarily conform to local or ethnic communities, but rather to a so-called 'community of practice'. Beyond the heritage that they share, members of such a heritage community of practice do not necessarily know each other or share any other practices or interests. In other words, a heritage community consists of anyone who is in some way or form connected to the ICH practice in question. For music and dance practices, this includes musicians, dancers, and audiences but also other related people such as event organisers, costume makers, local community members, friends, and families.

SLOVENIA / SLOVENE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

Adela Pukl

Anja Jerin



Introduction

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM in the following) performs its duties as the national Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and ensures the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) in Slovenia. As part of its work, it constantly cooperates with the bearers of the intangible cultural heritage in the field, whose activities in the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage are presented in the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Part of the register also includes folkdance heritage, which is still alive and has active bearers who take care of its development and transmission.

Various dances form the dance tradition of Slovenia. Nowadays, most Slovenian folk dances are only performed during performances by folkdance ensembles, while two dances, the *sotiš* and the *šamarjanka*, are still alive. The *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* were inscribed in the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021. Both dances are couple dances, spontaneously danced on various occasions e.g., at parties, family gatherings, weddings, junior proms, proms, and festivals. The region that has preserved these dances the longest is Prekmurje (a region in the extreme north-eastern part of Slovenia), where these two dances represent an important identity marker for the local population.

Many dancers also dance as members of folkdance ensembles, where different generations, from the youngest to the oldest, create different choreographies. These represent their creativity and their connection to tradition simultaneously. Folkdance ensembles play a significant role in transferring knowledge and raising awareness of the presence of dance tradition in Prekmurje.

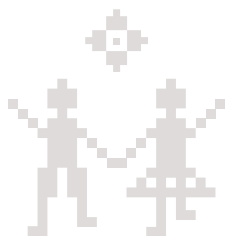
Photo 1: Filming
pedagogical film in a
studio for an exhibition
Dance - Europe's living
heritage in motion,
Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2024.
Photo: Adela Pukl.



Our community

The dance community is represented by boys and girls, men and women of all ages, who dance together spontaneously at various celebrations and parties and as part of performances by folkdance ensembles. Some of its members dance as professionals; for most of them dancing in a folkdance ensemble represents a leisure activity.

The first folkdance ensemble in Beltinci was founded in 1938. Nowadays, several of them operate in this area, and their members are drawn together by friendship and persistence, as well as the desire to learn about and safeguard traditional folkdances, songs, customs, traditions, and games from the Prekmurje region. The music, an important element in dancing, is provided by different musicians: sometimes the dancers are accompanied by only an accordion player, at other times by an entire musical ensemble.



At the exhibition, the dance heritage as seen and perceived by the dance community from the local area was also presented through video material. Representatives of this community are mostly dance teachers who pass on their knowledge, to the youngest in elementary school as well as to high school students and adults. They use various teaching methods, which they adapt to the different age groups. A very important transfer of such knowledge also occurs within families.

Methodology

The dance community that lent us a hand in the process of staging the exhibition and accompanying events at SEM actively works to safeguard the heritage that is still alive and passed on from one generation to the next. At our meetings with the bearers, we discussed dance traditions, knowledge transfer, their practice, the importance of heritage safeguarding for the local community, and the role of dance in their lives in general. In the course of our discussions with representatives of heritage bearers (Cultural Association “Marko” Beltinci) it became clear that they were looking forward to participating in the project and were excited about presenting their local heritage in a different context. Together, we planned the filming schedule and shot video materials for the exhibition (presentational, educational, and documentary films).

Mutual trust and respect that we developed as we were preparing the materials for the exhibition resulted in an exhibition with which both bearers and museum curators identify.



Photo 2: Museum visitors can learn to dance the *sotiš* dance through an interactive presentation, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2025.
Photo: Adela Pukl.



Outcomes, solutions, audience

The exhibition presented the dance heritage of Prekmurje – the *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* dances – in a new context: the museum. This – the musealization of dance as intangible cultural heritage – turned out to be our biggest challenge.

Museums are institutions that do not close when dancers go to school or to work, and consequently dancers cannot always be there when museums are open. Museum visitors should therefore also be offered a programme that on the one hand presents a dance itself, and on the other brings heritage closer to people through their personal experience. This led us to organize virtual interactive workshops for those learning the basic steps of both selected dances. Putting them on film was a challenge for all involved, from dancers and curators to the camera operator and others.

The dance couple dancing were amateur dancers who have been dancing since they were little. Filming was difficult for them, because they are not used to thinking about steps and moves, which come to them instinctively, without consciously thinking about them. We, on the other hand, expected them to break down the dance variants into individual parts. More

than anything, the filming required good preparation (preliminary meetings and a test shooting), a script, and alignment of goals.

The most important aspect for us was to allow the bearers to present their heritage in the museum context the way they see and understand it. We left it up to them to decide which musician they wanted to accompany them (an accordionist), they decided what tempo they wanted, and they chose to have the dance filmed dancing to live music.

During the entire process we always bore in mind the wishes of the dance community and prepared contents that will stay on display at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum after the project ends. These interactive exhibits, which disseminate the knowledge of dance (intangible) heritage, are a huge contribution to the museum. In the words of the dance community members: *“We are very proud to have had the opportunity to collaborate with the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in creating this exhibition and dance events. It was an honour for our association to have been able to present to the broader public our dedication to the safeguarding of cultural heritage, as well as a special kind of challenge as we tried to come up with a way of presenting our folklore in a different, more contemporary way.”*

An important part of the exhibition were also 5 events of practice exhibition: for children, students, adults and professionals. At these events held at the museum, the participants learned how to dance *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* which were taught by the dance community. The members of the dance community adapted the dance lessons according to the participants' prior knowledge, their age, and the number of attendees at the event. We all learned something new and had fun doing it.



Photo 3: Events of practice exhibition in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2025.
Photo: Anja Jerin.



Reflections, challenges, benefits for all involved

The dance exhibition is a new venture for SEM, since dance is an intangible cultural heritage, which is difficult to materialize and present (musealize). Throughout the process, our aim was to present dance not only as something that folkdance ensembles engage in, but as a spontaneous dance that requires no special attire / costume. This was successfully communicated through interactive virtual contents, but as the dance community wished to present at least some of their dances in the costumes from a certain period, we incorporated four costumes worn by the folkdance ensemble members in their stage performances in the exhibition.

It was also a challenge for the museum professionals to collaborate with the dance community and individuals, and we all had to learn something and adapt to achieve our shared goal. Our main link with the dance community was Jelka Breznik, who commented: *“Collaborating in the project (field work, the staging of the exhibition, dance events, and other) was extremely rewarding and I saw it as a token of recognition and pride, as well as an opportunity to exchange views and work with other professionals, who have taught me a lot. Coordinating our expectations and views was compelling, but the most important aspect was working with like-minded people who respect each other and share the same goal: to safeguard our cultural heritage.”*

Dance and music go hand in hand and it was through the collaboration process with the dance community that it became clear just how important live music really is, whether it comes from a band or just an accordionist. This highlights the vibrancy of dance as it is manifested in its numerous variations, thus enabling the development of new

Photo 4: Stage performance by the dance group at the exhibition opening. Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2024. Photo: Miha Špiček.



Photo 5: Transferring knowledge of dance heritage to younger generations in elementary school, Beltinci, Slovenia, 2021. Photo: Adela Pukl.

forms while constantly turning back to its roots. Live music accompanied our dance events for children, students, and adults. For some it was an opportunity to socialize, for others, in the words of one of the visitors, an opportunity to *“break with the stereotypes associated with dance heritage through the first-hand experience of learning a folk dance. In Slovenia, folk dance in its various forms is still subject to certain stereotypes and even stigma. Such performances in urban settings are therefore important in dispelling the negative contexts of folk dances and dance communities. I would be delighted if there were more such opportunities!”*



Co-creation focuses on jointly developing something new, incorporating input from everyone involved.



Facilitator is a person who helps a group of people to work together better, understand their common objectives, and plan how to achieve these objectives, during meetings or discussions. In doing so, the facilitator remains “neutral”, meaning they do not take a particular position in the discussion.



Participatory means providing the opportunity for people to be involved in deciding how something is done.



Transmission is the way / process a person learns different knowledge and skills. The transfer of knowledge and skills can be linear or horizontal.



Community: people, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain, safeguard and transmit heritage.

ROMANIA

Simona Malearov

Raluca Ioana Andrei

Teodora Verza



Introduction

The study of the Lads Group from Rucăr, Braşov County, a village on the right bank of the River Olt, results from extensive research campaigns by the ASTRA Museum. Rucăr exemplifies a Romanian community with a rich dance culture that preserves and adapts traditions, including social dance elements. A community refers to a group of people who live in a geographical space and who regularly interact, forming bonds based on neighbourhood, culture, or common customs. Its selection was determined by its organization and functioning, which sets it apart from other present-day communities.

The Lads Group dances – the male Fecioreasca, couple Poşovoica (Haţegana) and Şchioapa (Învârtita), and group Jiana and Sârba – mark key winter celebrations. The movements of each type of dance are passed down, through imitation from one generation to the next. Experienced members of the Group have the task of teaching younger members to understand and master the dance techniques. The museum supports a group of young people still attached to tradition.

The additional elements – the costume, the shouts, the music and the choreography, make traditional dance a rich expression of intangible heritage.

The community's expected outcome was to raise the degree of visibility in order to attract tourists to the area to experience the customs of the heritage community. The museum is a mediator between the community and the wide audience, thus contributing to maintaining the local specificity.

Photo 1: Rehearsals
at the Community Centre,
Rucăr, Romania, 2023.
Photo: Karla Roșca.



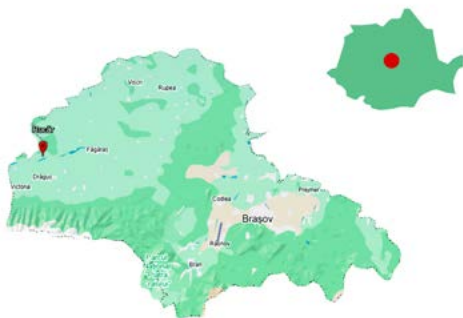
Our community

In Rucăr, the transmission of dance through the Lads Group results from the community's assumption of this cultural heritage. The Group operates in the context of calendar customs, having a strong collective character and a cyclical performance frequency. The Lads Group activity marks the milestones of the winter festivities, moments with a unique value of renewing time.

In early December, young unmarried boys and girls gather at a house (the Host) to form the Group, each with defined roles and responsibilities. By Christmas, the whole repertoire of dances and shouts is learned and rehearsed by all. On Christmas Eve, only the boys go carolling, visiting village figures and eventually the homes of unmarried girls who join them. On Christmas, Epiphany, and Saint John's Day, in the afternoon, the community gathers at the Cultural Centre where the Group starts the dance. On New Year's Eve, the Group dances at crossroads and community wells to assure the water supply for the whole village. These are elements of continuity, tradition preservation and renewal.

One room in the exhibition was produced exclusively with the members of the community in a co-creation process. These included donations of traditional costume pieces, their input on how the objects should be displayed, and the selection of archive photographs that best represent the community. The room also combined the results of fieldwork and archive research carried out between 2022 and 2024, which resulted in a documentary dedicated to the Lads Group in which they are the protagonists.

Photo 2:
Map of case study area.



Methodology

The case study used a comprehensive methodology: field research, analysis of musical and choreographic repertoire, and exploration of specific spaces. Direct interaction with Lads Group members and the local community revealed the deep ties between music, dance, ritual, and the venue (for rehearsals or festivities). The musical repertoire was analyzed for its role in shaping traditional identity.

The ASTRA Museum documented and promoted the Lads Group's intangible heritage through collaborations, events, workshops and support, boosting the community's visibility. Community members joined work meetings where archive materials were shared, creating a bottom-up dialogue rooted in local knowledge. Audio-video recordings supported understanding of regional cultural identity and the value of local dance in European heritage. The community embraced the opportunity to share their customs in the exhibition.

Outcomes, solutions, audience

The heritage communities and the public who wanted to experience different types of dance were able to actively take part in all the events of practice. These were designed to encourage and stimulate dance events, where participants interact and have a good time, by creating a dance arena within the museum. Dances presented by heritage communities: Învârtita, Hațegana, Fecioreasca, and Jiana, illustrated the richness and diversity of the tangible and intangible

Photo 3: The Lads Group from Rucăr, Romania, 2022.
Photo: Dumitru Andrei.



community's cultural heritage. The participants learned the specific dance styles of each ethnic community through rhythmic movements.

The *events of practice exhibition* aimed at showcasing European dances by creating an interactive and educational space. These events facilitated a cultural exchange between practitioners and the public, fostered intercultural dialogue and promoted dance as a form of active heritage.

During these events we collected impressions from the participants, both through questionnaires and direct interviews. Many visitors mentioned that they were touched by the opportunity to learn traditional dances in an interactive arena. Some of them highlighted that they felt a stronger connection to Romanian traditions and were particularly impressed by the bond between the participants and wellbeing given by dance as well as the authentic experience.

Effective marketing communication was ensured to attract a diverse audience, from dance enthusiasts and specialists to the general public, including children, young people and adults. The promotion strategy was designed to attract a diverse audience by utilizing communication, promotion and media dissemination across local, national and international platforms, both online and offline.

We aimed to create a link between visitors and national traditions, emphasizing the value of dance in preserving cultural identity and strengthening intercultural connections. The events were designed to be accessible and educational, stimulating the curiosity and active involvement of the audience. Overall, the events of practice aimed to inspire an appreciation and understanding of participatory dance traditions from Romania as an integral part of European cultural heritage.

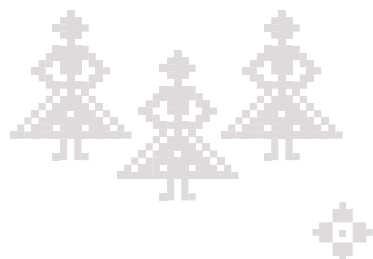


Photo 4: The Lads Group
at the event of practice,
Sibiu, Romania, 2024.
Photo: Silviu Popa.



Reflections, challenges, and benefits for all involved

Today, in the commune of Viștea, there are two groups in the five villages belonging to the commune - in Rucăr and Viștea de Jos. Interest in carols, traditional dances, and the Lads Groups has declined, and their numbers are steadily decreasing. In the mid-20th century, every village in Țara Făgărașului had at least one group. Music and dance were essential for socializing and intergenerational connection, with people of all ages eager to learn and uphold tradition.

A major challenge we faced was the reluctance of some members of the community to attend events organised in unfamiliar locations, such as the museum. In the face of this, we implemented solutions by organizing training and familiarization sessions designed to help participants feel more comfortable with the new formats. We also encouraged their active involvement in the process of organizing the events, so that they could become more confident and take key roles in promoting their traditions. The chosen case study proves that the system of Romanian customs is unitary and unmistakable, being built on a long tradition and at the same time open to renewal.

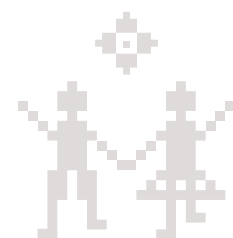
Our role is to be involved both in the promotion of communities, their customs and traditions, and in raising awareness among community members of the values they hold and which they can exploit for their benefit and that of other communities. To counteract the decline of interest in traditional dance and all its implications, we have implemented various educational and cultural initiatives, such as the organization of dance workshops in order to sensitize young people and stimulate their desire to learn these customs still preserved by the heritage communities.

The events organised had a significant impact on the participants, giving them the opportunity to express their creativity through dance and to pass on their

knowledge. At the same time, the general public had the opportunity to discover and appreciate the cultural uniqueness of Rucăr, especially through the prism of traditional dance and music. Many visitors expressed a desire to participate in future events, suggesting a growing interest in this type of cultural heritage and a greater commitment to the preservation and promotion of local traditional dances.

Communicating intangible heritage through an interactive exhibition created new ways of staging knowledge and objects, all illustrated to create the overall, complex and unified picture of dance.

Photo 5: The Lads Group at the event of practice, Sibiu, Romania, 2024.
Photo: Silviu Popa.





Co-creation is a collaborative process in which cultural institutions and the public or involved communities work together to create content, interpretations, or cultural experiences. This model involves an active exchange of knowledge, perspectives, and values, emphasizing participation and inclusion. Co-creation transforms visitors from passive recipients into active partners in shaping the meaning and value of heritage.



Facilitator: The cultural institution assumes the role of facilitating access to culture, promoting active participation, and fostering the development of intercultural dialogue. In this role, the institution goes beyond preserving and exhibiting heritage to creating contexts for learning, collaboration, and co-creation, thus becoming a catalyst for social inclusion, informal education, and community development.



Participatory refers to the act of helping to shape – whether directly or through an organisation – the policies and future of an establishment, association or informal group, for the benefit of a community; it is often considered to guarantee the sustainability of a project or the growth of an institution; participation takes three forms: support from elites, visitor behaviour and local community involvement.



Transmission refers to the process of communication, conservation, and intergenerational transfer of the cultural, historical, and symbolic values associated with a heritage object. This involves not only the physical preservation of artifacts, but also the maintenance and dissemination of their identity-related and educational meanings through cultural mediation, scholarly interpretation, and public presentation.



Community: a group of people sharing interests, cultural practices, geographical origins or ethical and political ideals as well as a common heritage and customs. The members of a community obey the same rules, and their actions are in accordance with others.

Márta Bokonics-Kramlik

Dóra Pál-Kovács



Introduction

In Hungary, the professional coordinator of the execution of the 2003 Convention about the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage is the Hungarian Open Air Museum. During its existence, the institution has formed an extensive community and professional network and has become a centre of knowledge on the safeguarding of cultural heritage and has established the Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Directorate's work includes maintaining a national inventory of intangible cultural heritage, in close contact with the ICH communities.

Taking into account the objectives of the project, we have chosen the Sárköz community, which has been included in the national inventory since 2012. In addition to its rich dance tradition, other areas of folk art are dominant here. A characteristic couple dance of the Sárköz dance tradition is the *csárdás*, a slow and *friss* version of which is still part of the cultural heritage. The *csárdás* is a very deep-rooted dance in this region, and it has flourished in the recent past. The entire folk art of the region reflects the objectives of the 2003 Convention: it is inherited from generation to generation, it is constantly responding to the social and cultural context, it is not static, and it is an essential part of the community's identity.

The focus of the exhibition's events was on the transmission of knowledge through museum education based on the dance community, to help children and adults become museum visitors, and to educate them to understand and enjoy the arts and dance.

Photo 1: *Friss csárdás*
from the Sárköz region,
Szentendre, Hungary, 2024.
Photo: Hungarian Open Air
Museum, Balázs Farkas-Mohi.



Our community

The Sárköz is a specific cultural region of the lower Danube in Hungary. The typical culture of weaving and embroidery, beaded collars, colourful costumes made of high-quality materials, accessories, dialect and folk songs and dances characteristic of the region together define the cultural identity of the people of the Sárköz.

The region continues to uphold a rich tradition of community practices, with one of the most prevalent methods of learning being the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. The places of transmission in the Sárköz region are dance houses, dance groups and other organised dance events such as harvest balls. The dance house movement has led to the institutionalisation of local dances in schools and community centres, which are open to children and adults, men and women equally. In addition to dance houses and rehearsal rooms, the stage is also a frequent venue for traditional dance culture, including the Sárköz csárdás. On stage, performances of folk traditions or dance theatre have become increasingly popular.

In the *events of practice exhibition*, dances, including the Sárköz csárdás is presented as a complex cultural phenomenon. The community encouraged visitors and people of the museum education programmes to experience the traditions through dance and singing workshops, as well as handicraft activities.



Methodology

One of the aims of the fieldwork was to find out about the place and role of dance in community life, and what methods have been developed locally to transmit knowledge. Based on this, the Hungarian Open Air Museum has designed different programmes, which can be run by members of the community as well as the museum at any time. We have worked with different age groups, including primary school children, high school students, and elderly people living with dementia.

For the elderly we wanted to improve their quality of life, both their physical and mental wellbeing by implementing dancing into their reminiscence sessions. For the high school students, we created an outreach programme where they could compare different dance events in the past and the present, which made them realize the importance of dance in socializing and relationship-building. For smaller children, the aim was to become engaged with dancing, to feel free to express themselves, and to enjoy the movement.

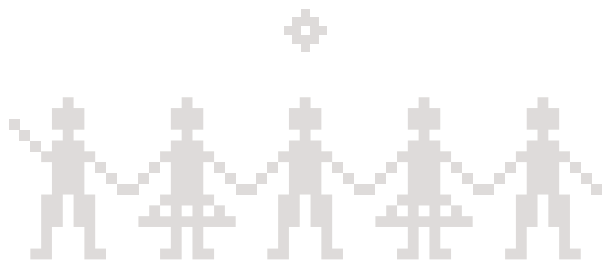


Photo 2: Dancing together at the event of the exhibition in the Hungarian Open Air Museum, Szentendre, Hungary, 2024. Photo: Hungarian Open Air Museum, by borsi.



Photo 3: Dancers and musicians from the community welcome guests to dance together, Szentendre, Hungary, 2024. Photo: Hungarian Open Air Museum, Eszter Csonka-Takács.

Outcomes, solutions, audience

In connection with the participatory exhibition, several events were held to experience the community character of the Hungarian dance tradition and to learn about the diversity of its intangible heritage. Some of the programmes were open to the public, so all visitors to the museum could participate, and the museum education activities were mainly aimed at children and the elderly. Through the programmes, participants were able to experience the dance, the dance of the Sárköz, with their own bodies. The sense of belonging to the community was strengthened by the representation of the Sárköz community. The events of the exhibition provided visibility to the intangible heritage, celebrated its diversity and helped the community to bring its own intangible heritage closer to the museum's visitors.

For example, with elderly people living with dementia we could do ordinary dancing (couple dances and round dances) or seated dancing. Dancing is a multi-sensory activity: the sound of music, the visual surroundings, the touch of another person and the movement all together help people living with dementia. It is also good physical exercise and potentially improves cognitive functions like memory, not to mention its effectiveness in enhancing mood.

The programme for high school students was based on the Sárköz community narratives. By listing dance events past and present, we drew attention to the diversity of dance events and how they were an important means of communication between people and socialisation within the community. By presenting Sárköz costume, we also introduced another level of non-verbal communication during dance. At the closure, we held a debate where the students expressed their opinions

Photo 4: Transmission of knowledge between generations, Szentendre, Hungary, 2024.
Photo: Hungarian Open Air Museum, Balázs Farkas-Mohi.



and could deliberate on the importance and role of dance events today and in the past.

During school break, the children of the summer camps were encouraged to look at the video installation in the exhibition and be inspired to dance freely. This worked well as a group bonding exercise and taught them how they could express themselves through motion and dance.

The programmes provided an opportunity for museum visitors and groups to engage with the intangible cultural heritage community, to “capture the intangible”.

Reflections, challenges, benefits for all involved

The *events of practice exhibition* has strengthened the importance of participation and community in our programmes. The active participation helped us to understand the verbal and non-verbal knowledge transmitted by dance. This was further encouraged by the presence of the community, for whom it is natural to transmit and safeguard their tradition. Reaching out to the younger generation is an ongoing challenge for the ICH community. The programmes developed together give them another opportunity to transmit their heritage.

As an example, let’s look at the experience of activities for different age groups. Research showed that dancing can significantly benefit people living with dementia. It can improve their mood, reduce anxiety, and stimulate cognitive function. Socially, it encourages interaction and connection. Physically, it enhances balance, coordination, and overall well-being. Importantly, dance can boost self-esteem. One of the challenges that we easily overcame was the physical condition of some participants (some had limited movement, and others were in wheelchairs); we simply offered seated dancing, which worked very well. This way nobody was left out.

Most high schools have a very busy schedule, so organising trip to the museum to attend the

programme wasn’t an option. The solution was that we created an outreach programme that we delivered on the school site. We took objects from the museum that we could show the youngsters because it was important to us to connect the programme to the museum as well. Gaining the attention of Gen Z and Gen Alpha students and keeping them engaged can be challenging. We knew from the beginning that asking them to participate in dancing wouldn’t work, because they might be too shy in front of the whole class, so we had a different approach. Instead of learning dance moves, we wanted them to think about the impact of dancing on relationship-building and socialization. Rather than testing their encyclopaedia knowledge, we focused on their own experiences, problem-solving skills, and creativity. With this programme, the youngsters improved their communication skills and became more cooperative; we also strengthened their interest in dances and the museum.



Photo 5: A dance suitcase, an essential accessory for a dance event linked to the exhibition, Szentendre, Hungary, 2024. Photo: Hungarian Open Air Museum, Fruzsina Arkhely.



Co-creation: By *co-creation*, we mean that museum professionals worked together with members of the community to develop and implement the programmes detailed in the text.



Facilitator: In the development of museum education activity sessions, the museum educators acted as *facilitators*, gently guiding the sessions, facilitating the course of the activity, but not taking sides.



Participatory: This is a key concept of the entire project, emphasizing the importance of engagement in understanding intangible cultural heritage and promoting *participation* over passive, presentational events.



Transmission: In a broader sense, *transmission* refers to the conveying of the message of dance, which can take place both within the context of intangible cultural heritage and during museum education activities.



Community: In this Hungarian context, *community* refers to the bearer community of the heritage that is listed on the national inventory of intangible cultural heritage.

Rebeka Kunej



Introduction

At the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU in the following), the Institute of Ethnomusicology, founded in 1934, has an extensive collection of field recordings made by the Institute's researchers, to which new recordings are constantly being added. The Institute's efforts are also focussed on acquiring and archiving external sound collections of Slovenian folk music owned by other institutions and individuals.

Today, the Institute's research work is focussed on two main areas. On the one hand, it seeks to identify the images of Slovenian identity in the form of folk music and dance and to explore their boundaries and interrelations with surrounding cultures. On the other hand, the Institute examines the areas in which contemporary creativity merges with the music and dance heritage and at the same time interprets modern phenomena.

The Institute complements its research work by converting the rich analogue archive of Slovenian folk song, dance and music into a digital form and making the collections available to the public via the [Etnomuza platform](#). This is a digital space of the ZRC SAZU Institute of Ethnomusicology, where we present audio, manuscript, image and video material, mainly related to the folk music and dance heritage of Slovenia. The published material is selected, compiled in complete sets and provided with metadata and accompanying studies. It primarily offers users an insight into past musical practices and related social phenomena, but at the same time can be a source for further studies or (re-)production activities.

Photo 1: Drawing on historical recordings of the accordion player, young musicians, members of the folkdance ensemble, engaged in a co-creative process that bridged tradition and contemporary interpretation of local dance heritage, Horjul, Slovenia, 2024.
Photo: Rebeka Kunej.



Photo 2: The folkdance tunes recorded by Rudy Sečnik (1907–1991), a local traditional musician, served as the foundation for the Institute's collaboration with the local community.
Source: Private collection.



Our community

The project Dance-ICH focused on stakeholders in the Municipality of Horjul. Our heritage community is multimodal, so we have worked in different ways in the local environment, adapting to each one individually.

At the primary school in Horjul, in collaboration with the teachers, we organised several lessons for the pupils to introduce them to the music and dance heritage of the area. We presented our institute and project and listened to some archive recordings. Together, we then danced various folk dances and created the music to accompany them. The result was a performance at the Christmas bazaar. Similarly, the specific groups we worked with were children in kindergarten and pedagogical staff from both of the above-mentioned educational institutions in the community.

In the folklore ensemble, we spent most of our time working with musicians. The starting point was old recordings of the accordion player, which we used for a new co-creative process. The recordings were offered to the artistic leader of the ensemble as a starting point for her choreographic interpretation of the dances on stage. In the ensemble of violin, clarinet, accordion and double bass, we created dance pieces together. They were presented by the young musicians at a display of folk music tradition re-creators.

Their music was also the starting point for the co-creation of the *events of practice exhibition* that we carried out in spring 2025 and were connected to the display of the project exhibition. These were addressed not only to the local community, but to all those interested in the dance heritage of the Horjul Valley.

By setting up the exhibition in Horjul, we wanted to attract and involve other local people, at least indirectly, because we also see the all-encompassing local community as a heritage community.

Methodology

The starting point of our collaboration with the local community was recordings in the archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU, but unknown in the community from which they originate. These are cassette recordings made by Rudi Sečnik, locally known as Cankarjev Rudi, who recognised the value of traditional dance tunes from his youth. In the 1980s, he recorded himself playing the button box accordion to ensure that these melodies would not be lost and forgotten. He gave a copy of the recordings to his sister, who passed it on to her granddaughter. By a lucky coincidence, it ended up in the archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU. This sound material, which is directly related to the dance heritage of the place and had been completely overlooked, was the starting point for a creative collaboration with the local community in Horjul. We presented the Dance-ICH project to various community stakeholders (the municipality, the primary school and the cultural association hosting the folklore ensemble). Based on the discussions with the individual interest groups and the needs and wishes they expressed, we outlined further collaboration, resulting in the following initiatives: contemporary musical recreations (reviving recordings), the use of dance tunes for participatory children's activities linked to heritage discussions, and raising cultural heritage awareness through a local exhibition.



Photo 3: Participatory dance event for children, both dancers and musicians, held at a primary school during the Christmas bazaar, Horjul, Slovenia, 2023. Photo: Rebeka Kunej.



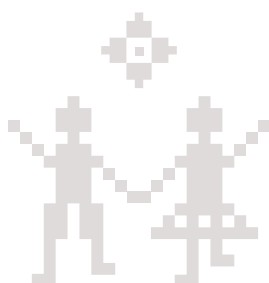
Photo 4: At the opening of the project exhibition in Horjul, Slovenia (April 2025), the local folkdance ensemble gave a special performance.
Photo: Nace Kunej.



Outcomes, solutions, audience

Our starting point for the *events of practice exhibition* was primarily sound recordings and a curated selection of dance melodies. Thus, the first segment of the *events of practice exhibition* was directly related to these aural documents and could take place partly before the opening of the joint exhibition of the project partners. The objective was to empower the stakeholders to claim their music-dance heritage as their own and to interpret it in a manner that resonates with their needs and appropriations, even if these differed from our expectations.

We held workshops in the community's kindergarten and primary school, reaching almost all children aged 3 to 15 with the local dance heritage. In the kindergarten, age-appropriate workshops included discussion of the community's dance tradition and customs, a documentary screening, and dancing. At school, selected classes learned dances during lessons. A highlight was the children's public performance, where they shared their dance heritage with their peers, parents and the local community, effectively bringing the dance tradition into the present. Encouraged by the positive response from staff and children, it was decided to add a third series of *events of practice exhibition*: dance workshops for teachers and educators. This training empowers them to integrate the local dance and music heritage into their teaching, enriching their pedagogy and ensuring the tradition's continuity.



The folkdance ensemble, which is part of the only active cultural association in the municipality, took a different approach to co-creating events. The music section of the folkdance ensemble recreated Rudi Sečnik's recordings and made them resonate beyond their own locality. They presented these melodies at a display of traditional music re-creators, and with this programme they achieved great success and a national level of excellence. The folkdance ensemble has also performed its modern choreographies at various events organised as part of the exhibition (opening, workshops), or just its musicians performing Rudi Sečnik's dance tunes.

The second part of the *events of practice exhibition* was directly related to the project exhibition. In the light of mutual satisfaction, we wanted to empower the local community by hosting the exhibition not only in the capital of Slovenia, but also in their local community. Therefore, the exhibition was held in both destinations – Ljubljana and Horjul. In Ljubljana the *events of the practice exhibition* were mainly animation-dance workshops for random audiences, and in Horjul they were orientated towards local people and tailored to age groups – from the youngest in kindergarten, who saw the exhibition and tried dancing, to the oldest-seniors. In this regard, we collaborated with the local retirement society, where the participatory dance experience was replaced by various testimonies and discussions about past dancing. In this way, precious memories of dance were brought back to life while viewing the exhibition.

Photo 5: Engaging the youngest residents in the local dance heritage discourse offers both a valuable experience and a pedagogical challenge. *Events of practices exhibition* event at the kindergarten in Horjul, Slovenia, November 2024. Photo: Andreja Naglič Kumer, © OŠ Horjul.



Reflections, challenges, benefits for all involved

As a research institution, the project has yielded new insights into the manner in which we can collaborate with the local community. It has also confirmed that both sides can benefit by being transparent about their needs and wishes.

In accordance with predictions, the response of the local authorities has been positive. They have offered both support in principle and, when necessary, in practice, by providing both infrastructure and exhibition place when required. They have expressed satisfaction at having hosted the European exhibition in the municipal building and at being included in the exhibition content as one of the communities represented. Being aware that a small town on the periphery would be exhibited in five other European countries has made them proud. It is crucial that we approached them in a non-academic, partly factual and pragmatic way, and that we recognised their needs: to discover their dance traditions, to create a dance heritage discourse within and about the locality, and to provide additional cultural content for the local population.

We were certain that the least challenging element would be working with a local folkdance ensemble experienced in the re-creation of a dance heritage on stage. However, the co-creation processes have repeatedly been caught in the grip of divergent interests of both sides. The fact is that the folkdance ensemble is involved in activities that are determined by the cultural policy for amateur activity, which is rather competitively oriented towards performing arts productions. This is also linked to the priorities of the ensemble which include offering the evaluators an attractive programme in the field of interpretation of dance traditions, and which are not necessarily linked to the local context. From this perspective, the sound material and the local dance heritage did not prove

attractive enough to be the basis for a new stage choreography.

On the contrary, despite the school curriculum, the principal, teachers and educators have included local music and dance heritage in their programme. They have also expressed a desire to learn more in this domain, as they feel that this will empower them to transmit the dance heritage to the children, thus safeguarding the local cultural heritage for future generations.

The most valuable contribution of the project is the establishment of new collaborative relationships between the research institution and the local heritage community. The contacts and positive experience gained from this project can provide a solid foundation for cooperative endeavours in the future.





Co-creation: In the collaborative process of the project, the course of work was negotiated continuously. Project outcomes were adapted to meet the expectations of all stakeholders, and joint decisions were pursued to accommodate everyone involved.



Facilitator: The institute served as a facilitator, acting as a mediator between two distinct yet interconnected domains: the archival sound heritage and the dance heritage on one hand, and the local heritage community on the other.



Participatory: Participatory engagement occurred on multiple levels, including individual cooperation, institutional collaboration with municipal authorities and educational institutions, as well as formalised structures within a cultural-artistic association.



Transmission: The project enabled various forms of heritage transmission and knowledge sharing: from participatory experiences of dancers and musicians to the communication of local heritage through exhibitions and in local media, and finally, the conversion of analogue sound recordings into digital format, allowing this sound heritage to be transferred into a virtual environment.



Community: In this case, the heritage community consisted of individuals spanning a wide range of age groups, interests, and preferences. Within a single local community, several groups were identified as legitimate components of a shared heritage community.

Zoi N. Margari

Maria I. Koutsouba



Introduction

Our approach recognised the pivotal contribution of academic institutions, such as the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens (hereafter HFRC-AA) and the School/Department of Physical Education and Sport Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (hereafter S/DPESS NKUA) in the sustainable management of Greek dance and its cultural heritage communities. Our study focused on a hybrid reference community, which, according to ethnographic research, plays a catalytic role in the sustainability and resilience of dance and dance practices as living heritage in Greece.

Based on the findings of the HFRC-AA, which acts as the National Documentation Centre for Greek Popular Culture - specializing in ethnographic, folklore, anthropological, and ethnological research- the importance of specialised dance teachers across all aspects of experiencing dance as living heritage was highlighted. Their importance was underlined by the HFRC-AA, which is dedicated to the collection, documentation and study of cultural heritage expressions. It is also focused on supporting sustainable management practices applied by Public Administration bodies and communities (local/ supra-local, diaspora/ic, hybrid) that strive to safeguard and transmit traditional knowledge and skills. Within this scope, the HFRC-AA observed the decisive role of this community and thoroughly examined its relations with other dance heritage communities across Greece.

Additionally, in collaboration with the S/DPESS-NKUA, the oldest and largest state university in Greece, a deeper analysis was conducted. The S/DPESS-NKUA offers a holistic and interdisciplinary environment for dance studies, drawing on its long-standing tradition in teaching, researching and archiving dance as living heritage across educational levels. As a result, we concentrated on the dance teachers community, which has continuously been fostered within its frame.

Photo 1: Fostering synergies between institutional frameworks and grassroots heritage communities through public folklore and co-creative methodologies during the *Dance as living ICH of the 21st century*.

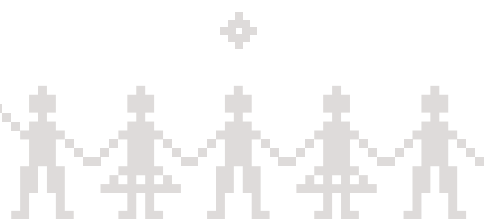
From dance ethnography to a dance class: Dance knowledge, research, transmission, presentation & the role of dance academics Workshop, organised by the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens, Athens, Greece, 2023.
Photo: Thanos Kinigaris.



Thus, within the Dance-ICH Project, this reference community -comprising specialised dance teachers, students, graduates and postgraduates and acting as a core heritage that bridges institutions, public administration and heritage communities- was selected as a hybrid model to exemplify sustainable interaction and co-creational approaches to dance as living heritage.

Our community

The dance teachers, students and graduates who are specialists in Greek traditional dance at the S/DPESS-NKUA constitute a supra-local heritage community that serves as a dynamic bridge between local/supra-local and diaspora/ic dance heritage communities. They act as catalysts in safeguarding dance as living intangible cultural heritage, contributing substantially to the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, and revitalization of Greek traditional dance and dance practices. On this basis, this hybrid reference community of more than 2,500 members, fully meets the prerequisites established by UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Its members interact actively with multiple local/supra-local, diaspora/ic, and hybrid heritage communities. The majority of its members originates from the periphery of Greece and were already engaged with Greek traditional dance through family, community, or personal experience before attending university. Even those without a formal background are generally familiar with dance as a



vibrant, living expression of Greek cultural identity. Upon entering their studies and choosing to specialize in Greek traditional dance, they often select their own communities, or broader, under-researched regions, as the focus of their ethnographic projects, thereby documenting dances and practices rarely studied before. Thus, the members of this hybrid community, coming from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, converge and interweave through ethnographic and educational practices, embracing multiple layers of Greek cultural expression. Within the context of the case study, emphasis was placed on documenting, analysing, and supporting their actions, highlighting the pivotal role they assume in the post-Convention era. We followed their engagements as they unfolded, across traditional dance events, festive, celebratory, and educational gatherings in local and urban contexts, as well as through new hybrid forms such as open dance classes, all of which demonstrate the community's evolving and sustaining vitality.

Photo 2: Developing the concept of 'Events of Practice Exhibitions' through co-creation and synergies: Core heritage community members while collaborating and dancing alongside local/supra-local, diaspora/ ic and hybrid dance communities members during the *Dance as living ICH of the 21st century. From dance ethnography to a dance class: Dance knowledge, research, transmission, presentation & the role of dance academics* Workshop, Athens, Greece, 2023. Photo: Zoi N. Margari.



Methodology

Within the framework of the Greek Case Study, the Greek partners, aimed to foster synergies between institutional frameworks and grassroots heritage communities through public folklore and co-creative methodologies.

The process began with meetings where members of the *core heritage community* (hereafter CHC) were introduced to contemporary safeguarding frameworks, updated on national/international regulations, and familiarised with participatory methods in cultural management. Additionally, we focused on participatory research models, wherein the CHC assumed active roles in amplifying the voices of dance heritage practitioners. The structured discussions provided insights into the challenges posed by institutionalization and musealization, fostering co-creational approaches tailored to community-driven heritage management.

The collaboration culminated in the Greek Dance-ICH Workshop (14–16 December 2023), where CHC members worked alongside local/supra-local, diaspora/ ic and hybrid communities on developing *events of practice exhibitions*. Following that, all stakeholders participated in the co-creation of the exhibition materials (panels, films) and the design of participatory dance events, ensuring a holistic representation of dance as living heritage.

To do so, the following stepwise participatory methodology was adopted: a. developing facilitator models; b. identifying and planning exemplary cases and c. co-producing sustainable exhibition guidelines. Through this holistic approach, the agency of communities in safeguarding dance and dancing as living heritage was reinforced.

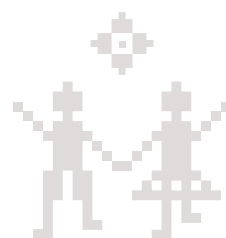


Photo 3: 'Participatory Dance Event' held as part of the 'Events of Practice Exhibitions' within the framework of the exhibition *DANCE. Europe's Living Heritage in Motion*, Athens, Greece, 2025.
Photo: Eleni Filippidou.



Photo 4: 'Participatory Dance Event' held as part of the 'Events of Practice Exhibitions' within the framework of the exhibition *DANCE. Europe's Living Heritage in Motion*, Athens, Greece, 2025.
Photo: Maria I. Koutsouba.

Outcomes, solutions, audience

The implementation of the *events of practice exhibition* concept, following the participatory dance events, represented an innovative attempt to foster participatory engagement in the safeguarding of Greek traditional dance and dancing as living ICH. These events functioned as dynamic spaces where heritage bearers, dance practitioners, scholars and cultural managers converged to negotiate and co-create sustainable models for the transmission and revitalization of dance traditions. Through interactive exhibitions, live performances, and structured discussions, the project aimed to bridge the gap between academic institutions and grassroots cultural communities, emphasizing the active role of local and supra-local actors in heritage management.

During the Athens Workshop, organised by the HFRC-AA and supported by the S/DPESS, the events showcased diverse approaches to dance heritage, integrating ethnographic case studies, audio-visual documentation and embodied knowledge transmission. The participation of the CHC members was pivotal in structuring these events. By acting as mediators between institutional frameworks and vernacular dance practices, they facilitated a participatory co-creational process that reinforced the agency of dance heritage practitioners. Their contributions encompassed demonstrative dance sessions, oral testimonies and reflective dialogues on the challenges of institutionalizing ICH without undermining its fluidity and adaptability.

A key outcome was the formulation of an adaptable facilitator model, which provided a flexible methodological framework for integrating local/supra-local and diaspora/ic heritage communities into dance safeguarding initiatives. The facilitator model was built on three interconnected pillars:

- i. ethnographic engagement and documentation
- ii. participatory co-creation in heritage events and
- iii. policy advocacy for sustainable cultural management.

By actively involving community members in the structuring of the exhibition, the project fostered a bottom-up approach that counterbalanced the traditional top-down heritage management paradigms.

From an audience perspective, the events attracted a diverse group of participants, ranging from academics, scholars and policymakers to local cultural associations, schools, clubs and the general public. The strategic marketing of the exhibition emphasised accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring that community members could recognize their own lived experiences reflected in the presentations. Through targeted outreach efforts, including digital media campaigns and local partnerships, the events successfully engaged both specialised and non-specialised audiences, demonstrating the relevance of Greek traditional dance in contemporary socio-cultural contexts. The integration of performative elements within the exhibition framework heightened visitor engagement, transforming the audience from passive spectators into active participants in heritage transmission processes.



Photo 5: 'Participatory Dance Event' held as part of the 'Events of Practice Exhibitions' within the framework of the exhibition *DANCE. Europe's Living Heritage in Motion*, Athens, Greece, 2025. Photo: Zoi N. Margari.

Reflections, challenges, benefits for all involved

The *events of practice exhibition* offered a unique opportunity to observe and critically assess participatory heritage management dynamics in real-world conditions. One of the most profound insights gained through the project was the recognition of the CHC's pivotal capacity to act as cultural intermediaries. By navigating between institutional frameworks and vernacular heritage communities, they facilitated meaningful dialogues, negotiated diverse heritage narratives and advocated for more inclusive safeguarding policies.

Among the primary benefits, the empowerment of local/supra-local, diaspora/ic and hybrid heritage communities stood out. Through their active involvement, these communities reclaimed agency over their intangible cultural expressions. Participants emphasised that the participatory exhibition platform enabled them to network, exchange experiences and strengthen intergenerational knowledge transmission processes, enhancing the perceived value and resilience of Greek traditional dance.

However, the Project encountered several challenges. A major difficulty was balancing diverse stakeholder expectations. While academic and institutional partners sought to implement structured safeguarding strategies, many dance practitioners hesitated, fearing that without formalised frameworks or expertise, they might not be able to engage fully in the heritage process. Additionally, it became evident that the strong academic environment within which the exhibition and participatory events were designed, namely HFRC-AA and S/DPESS-NKUA, initially generated apprehension among visitors and dance communities. They feared that institutionalisation could lead to over-regulation and eventually stifle the organic evolution of their dance practices.

Another significant challenge was ensuring long-term sustainability. While the events successfully demonstrated the feasibility of participatory heritage management models, questions remained about how these initiatives could be institutionalised without compromising their grassroots character. To address this, it was initially decided that the Dance-ICH exhibition would become a permanent installation, allowing it to function beyond the project's completion as a stable yet flexible pillar for the experiential approach to dance and dance practices as living heritage.

Recognizing these concerns, the project prioritised the necessity of maintaining flexible, participatory public folklore methodologies that emphasise community-driven approaches over rigid institutional frameworks.

Furthermore, CHC members were instrumental in establishing permanent networks of cultural convergence among local/supra-local, diaspora/ic, hybrid dance heritage communities and communities of practice in Greece and abroad. These networks were designed to: a. continually enrich the exhibition content through community contributions and b. systematically foster new thematic expansions of *events of practice exhibitions*, ensuring continuous cultural interaction and mutual reinforcement.

Overall, the project illuminated the transformative potential of participatory heritage safeguarding, demonstrating that flexibility, community empowerment and sustainable models are key to preserving and revitalizing dance as living cultural heritage in the contemporary world. As heritage policies continue to evolve, the experiences gained through this case study provide valuable lessons for ensuring that safeguarding efforts remain attuned to the needs and aspirations of the communities they aim to serve.





Co-creation: A collaborative process where institutions and communities jointly design and implement heritage management and safeguarding practices and actions while sharing knowledge and responsibilities.



Facilitator: An individual or an institution that enables community-driven practices by supporting dialogue, participation and access to information and resources.



Participatory: A methodological approach that actively involves communities as equal partners in planning, decision-making and implementation of heritage management and safeguarding processes.



Transmission: The ongoing process of passing cultural knowledge, skills and practices across generations or within communities.



Community: A group sharing and practising specific cultural expressions, rooted in identity and continuity, and central to heritage safeguarding.

CONCLUSION

Tone Erlien Myrvold

Anja Serec Hodžar

Mieke Witkamp



The Dance-ICH project was conceived as a transnational initiative for the sustainable safeguarding of dance as intangible cultural heritage through co-creative approaches between museums, research institutions, and local communities. The key need, as reflected across all case studies, is to ensure long-term transmission of dance knowledge and to maintain the vitality of traditional dances within contemporary contexts. The ultimate goal of the project is to transform cultural institutions from passive exhibitors into active facilitators of living heritage and to create sustainable collaboration models based on participation, co-creation, and mutual respect between institutions and communities.

Both sides – institutions and communities – show strong interest in collaboration. Institutions contribute professional expertise, infrastructure, access to funding, and opportunities for greater visibility, while communities bring experiential and living knowledge, emotional investment, and creative energy. While differences in expectations and approaches do exist, open, transparent, and flexible processes have allowed for mutual satisfaction. Communities often express a need for recognition, greater inclusion in decision-making, and involvement in content development, while institutions seek ways to incorporate living heritage into their frameworks without commodifying or over-institutionalising it.

Cooperation has taken place in diverse local contexts – from urban centres to rural communities – involving a wide range of stakeholders: schools, dance communities, folk dance groups, local authorities, senior citizens, and children. The timeframe for each activity has generally spanned one to two years, yet foundations for longer-term partnerships have been established in most cases. Financial frameworks rely on a combination of European funding, institutional support, and in-kind contributions from communities, requiring constant adaptation to the availability of resources.

Partner roles are clearly defined: institutions provide organisational, logistical, and supportive functions, often acting as mediators between various groups, while communities contribute content and are active co-creators of the programmes. Despite many good practices, some challenges emerged: lack of youth interest, stereotypes around folk dance, limited access to infrastructure, and funding uncertainty. These issues were addressed through participatory methods, fieldwork, hosting events in familiar and accessible locations, involving local mentors, and tailoring approaches to different age and interest groups.

The implementation plan was designed to allow for flexible execution within realistic parameters. Events were modular, adaptable, and responsive to local needs. Regular evaluation through surveys and direct dialogue enabled continuous improvement of both content and approach. Each *events of practice exhibition* included reflection and performance assessment, forming a basis for future activities and enhancements. From a practical standpoint, institutions handled meeting coordination, invitations, communications, venue arrangements, basic funding, and logistics.

Understanding community needs best happens through field engagement, dialogue, working within their environments, and enabling them to express their aspirations. Drawing from local archival material, personal stories, and oral traditions helps build authentic relationships based on trust. Through this process, communities developed tools ranging from teaching methods, approaches to breaking down stereotypes, to event and workshop management. Institutions, in turn, developed tools for presenting living heritage in exhibitions and participatory dance events, established digital platforms, and devised new ways of engaging the public with heritage.

Partnership with external actors (schools, municipalities, associations, research and educational institutions) has proven essential, expanding the reach

of the project, providing additional resources, and reinforcing cross-sectoral links. Maintaining dialogue beyond the end of the project rests on established relationships, open communication, shared values, and the capacity to collaborate on new initiatives. The greatest added value of the project lies in the formation of new sustainable collaboration models between institutions and communities – not based on one-off events but on lasting relationships where the community plays a central role in the creation, presentation, and transmission of living heritage.



GUIDELINES

FOR CO-CREATED CASE STUDIES AND EVENTS OF PRACTICE EXHIBITIONS WITH DANCE COMMUNITIES

For Cultural
Workers in Heritage
Institutions and
Members of Dance
Communities

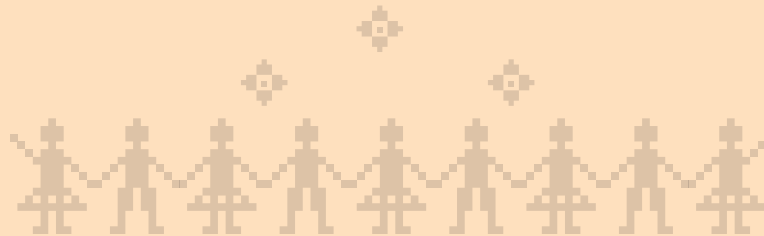
WHAT IS AN EVENTS OF PRACTICE EXHIBITION?

An *Events of Practice Exhibition* combines dance, exhibitions, and community participation to keep dance traditions alive through cultural heritage institutions. It brings together co-created exhibition materials, live dance events, and active dance practices connecting dancers, their communities, heritage professionals, and visitors. It is a tool for intergenerational transmission and safeguarding, and a space for dialogue cultural vitality. Above all, it offers opportunities to strengthen community agency and visibility.

WHAT MAKES A CO-CREATED EXHIBITION DIFFERENT?

In a co-created exhibition:

- The community decides how their dance, music, and traditions are seen, heard and experienced.
- There is room for spontaneous, embodied and interactive elements, acknowledging that dance is living, moving, and hard to “freeze” in glass cases
- The focus is on building relationships, not just delivering an exhibition.



STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR THE CO-CREATION PROCESS

STEP 1: PREPARE FOR ENGAGEMENT - REFLECT ON YOUR OWN ROLE AND MOTIVATION

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNITY FIRST - CONDUCT FIELDWORK WITH CARE

STEP 3: DEFINE COMMON GOALS TOGETHER

STEP 4: RECOURSES

STEP 5: CO-DESIGN THE FORMAT

STEP 6: PREPARE FOR DIVERSE AUDIENCES TOGETHER

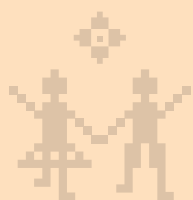
STEP 7: EVALUATE THE COLLABORATION

STEP 8: PLAN FOR AFTER THE EXHIBITION

STEP 1: PREPARE FOR ENGAGEMENT - REFLECT ON YOUR OWN ROLE AND MOTIVATION

AS A HERITAGE PROFESSIONAL, ASK YOURSELF:

- Why do I want to engage with this community?
- What are my institution's responsibilities towards safeguarding living heritage?
- Am I ready for a process that requires, time, flexibility and shared authority?



AS A CULTURAL BEARER WITHIN A DANCE COMMUNITY, ASK YOURSELF:

- Do I feel the need for outside support to transmit and share my tradition?
- What do I hope to gain from collaboration? What concerns or boundaries do I have?

FOR BOTH:

Be transparent about expectations and limitations (e.g., funding, time).

Message to dance communities:

It's valid to keep certain knowledge or practices exclusively within the community.

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNITY FIRST - CONDUCT FIELDWORK WITH CARE

Fieldwork means spending time with the **dance community** to build trust, understand their practices, and learn directly from them - in rehearsals, at performances, during informal gatherings, and through conversations. The goal is to **get to know the community**, the different groups within the community, their dance traditions, their ways of knowledge transmission, their needs, and their perspectives. Fieldwork lays the foundation for meaningful, equal partnership.

LEAVE ROOM FOR THE UNEXPECTED

In Norway, the institutions began with a survey followed by meetings and a dance party. Only in the second meeting did they share their own goals, ensuring dancers could answer questions like: *How can we help you? What are your dreams for the future?*

USE OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

In Romania, museum staff shared archival materials to spark conversations, grounding the dialogue in local knowledge.

Message to dance communities:

This is your space to express your vision, concerns, and hopes. Fieldwork is not just about being "studied"- it should feel like the beginning of a respectful conversation.

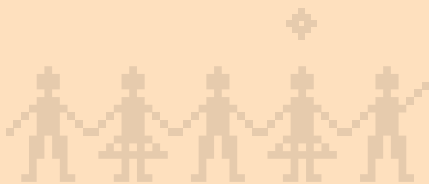


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GUIDELINES FOR CO-CREATING

WITH DANCE COMMUNITIES
02

STEP 3: DEFINE COMMON GOALS TOGETHER

Take time to jointly define the purpose of the collaboration. This is a crucial moment to align expectations, needs, and possibilities. Ideally, goals defined respond to needs, such as revitalizing a tradition, increasing youth engagement, raising public awareness, documentation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, or making space for dance practice.



STEP 4: RESOURCES

BEFORE YOU PROCEED, ASK TOGETHER:

- Do we have the necessary knowledge and resources?
- Are finances secured?
- Is there enough time and capacity?
- Are spaces available?

BUILDING TRUST

In Romania, some dancers hesitated to engage with the museum. The museum responded with familiarization sessions, creating a welcoming space and encouraging active involvement.

CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES

In Greece, dance teachers acted as cultural intermediaries, bridging institutions and communities. They facilitated dialogue, negotiated heritage narratives, and advocated for inclusive safeguarding.

Message to dance communities:

Think about the potential impact - both positive and negative - of working with the cultural heritage institution. Do you have any concerns? Talk to the heritage workers openly.



STEP 5: CO-DESIGN THE FORMAT

RECOGNIZE THAT DANCE IS EMBODIED, MUSICAL, SOCIAL, AND OFTEN EPHEMERAL. SO GO BEYOND STATIC DISPLAYS. TOGETHER EXPLORE:

- Interactive installations (video's, dance-along spaces)
- Live practice events within the exhibition, that combine dance with live music.
- Objects that support storytelling (costumes, instruments, photos)
- And other options.

PLAN THOROUGHLY FOR COLLABORATIVE ELEMENTS LIKE FILMING

At the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, test sessions and open communication before film shootings were key, as dancers often move instinctively and are not used to performing for the camera.

LISTEN TO THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS AND ADAPT IF NECESSARY

When live dance during opening hours proved difficult, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum responded by offering virtual interactive workshops for visitors.

Message to dance communities:

Your active participation remains essential during implementation. Your lived knowledge should guide decisions.

STEP 6: PREPARE FOR DIVERSE AUDIENCES TOGETHER

Your exhibition may (and should) reach different audiences: the general public unfamiliar with the tradition, cultural bearers, elderly people, youth groups and schools, ...

WORK TOGETHER TO:

- Adapt language and formats for accessibility
- Provide alternatives for older or less mobile visitors
- Regularly check if your activities are inclusive and adjust if needed

BRING THE EXHIBITION BEYOND INSTITUTION WALLS

In Slovenia, pop-up displays in the community centre and workshops in local schools brought the exhibition back to the community, reconnecting people with their dance heritage.

USE DANCE TO SUPPORT WELLBEING

In Hungary, dance workshops for all ages included a special programme for people with dementia, using both standing and seated dances to include everyone and promote physical and mental health.

CO-CREATED CASE STUDIES AND EVENTS

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STEP 7: EVALUATE THE COLLABORATION

ONCE THE PROJECT PHASE OF REALISING THE EXHIBITION IS COMPLETED, REFLECT TOGETHER ON THE COLLABORATION:

- What worked? What needs improvement?
- How did the exhibition impact the safeguarding of dance?
- How can the experience inform future initiatives?

DELINES FOR CO-CREATED

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STEP 8: PLAN FOR AFTER THE EXHIBITION

SAFEGUARDING IS A CONTINUOUS WORK. A CO-CREATED EXHIBITION IS NOT THE END - IT CAN SPARK:

- Ongoing dance workshops
- Educational programmes
- Touring versions for schools and community centres
- Digital archives or virtual exhibitions for diaspora access
- Permanent spaces for dance practice in accessible locations

FURTHER COLLABORATION

In Norway, cooperation continued beyond the *Events of Practice Exhibition*, with school tours, promotion of traditional dance and music at the World Championship in Nordic genres, and representing the community's interests in cultural, political and academic networks.

EXHIBITIONS WITH DANCE COMMUNIT

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