MOVING BORDERS

Approaches to dance from the Ukrainian diaspora across Europe

Approaches to Dance from the Ukrainian Diaspora Across Europe (Dec 2023 – Nov 2025)

In 2023, Aerowaves (IE), together with Arte Sella (IT), la briqueterie CDCN (FR) and Tanec Praha (CZ), began to explore how female dance artists from Ukraine are informing approaches to welcoming and engaging refugees through dance, and in the development of inclusive and cohesive practices across Europe. As a consequence Moving Borders, a cooperation project co–funded by the European Union was conceived, and since that time the partners have organised international workshops, meetings (live and online), dissemination events, as well as commissioning this publication.

In order to provide tools for dance and cultural organisations to handle the arrival of forcibly displaced artists and civilians, Moving Borders brought together a team composed of three female dance artists from Ukraine with a team of researchers. The Ukrainian dance artists are: Rita Lira (based in Paris, France), Anna Kushnirenko (based in Bassano del Grappa, Italy) and Yana Reutova (based in Prague, Czech Republic). The research team are: Karina Buckley (based in Dublin, Ireland), Luisella Carnelli (based in Torino, Italy) and Monica Gillette (based in Freiburg, Germany).

This publication, designed by Sara Lando, pivots around three viewpoints from dramaturg Monica Gillette, researcher Luisella Carnelli and dance writer Karina Buckley. Their contributions offer different perspectives on what was discovered, informed by their own professional trajectories and expertise.

Transforming Practices
Monica Gillette - dramaturg

The Moving Borders project began in 2023 in response to the crisis caused by Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the many dance artists who fled and spread across Europe. The war at Europe's doorstep triggered an outpouring of support for fleeing Ukrainians, including several dance organisations who tapped into their personal networks to find ways to take in and support dance artists searching for a place to go while suddenly dealing with ruptured lives, refugee status and trauma.

Coping with this immediate war crisis, which was close geographically, but certainly not singular in violent conflicts globally, appeared to be one of the main struggles Europe was facing at that time. However, one layer that has painfully stood out over the course of this project is that in the span of two short years, the conflicts and struggles society is facing have exponentially risen and continue to do so. Threat, discord, insecurity and aggressive capitalism, nationalism and authoritarianism have taken on new dimensions, causing alliances to crumble and an overall dissolution of actions based on solidarity.

As usual in such moments of crisis, cultural budgets are often the quickest to be cut and eroded, exactly at the time when they are most needed. Meaning, what society needs right now is not isolation and separatism, but rather strong communities to foster connection across diverse backgrounds and to build collective resilience necessary to face challenges that are insurmountable alone and can only be overcome together – relationships that community engaged artistry and dance practices excel at cultivating.

What has also shifted in recent years is a sense of shared political beliefs within the arts community. With the recent conflicts, the perception of a common cause has collapsed. Divisions have often taken center stage as the passport one carries draws either sympathy and support or cancelling and boycotting. It is a new landscape to move within, so the question is: how can dance and artistic practices guide us as we navigate the multiple sorrows and tensions?

In the European contemporary dance landscape, artistic practice has often been cultivated and celebrated for its distinct ability to build community and to support people through challenging circumstances. Whether it be physical, mental or societal challenges, the way in which dance as an artistic practice can support people to move despite obstacles has been cultivated and explored for ages. In the context of the Moving Borders projects, delving into the many ways dance practice is being engaged with, transformed and renewed by Ukrainian dance artists

has been a guiding focus for the project and also an opportunity to experience and explore what is possible when faced with invasion, forced displacement and trauma.

What is a Practice?

In simple terms a practice is something one chooses to do regularly. Practices can be customary and habitual and they can also be consciously shaped through intention, artistic inquiry and one's reflection and behavior regarding how they want to show up in the world. In the context of contemporary dance, practices are also embodied actions of sensorial processing and physically informed observation. An embodied practice is an approach that centers the body as a site of knowledge, experience and learning, rather than treating the mind and body as separate entities, recognising that our bodies carry wisdom, memory, and understanding accessed through bodily awareness and sensation. Additionally, dance as an applied artform in socially engaged settings is often also guided by values that shape how the practices unfold and transform.

For the Ukrainian dancers dislocated by the war, embodied practices have become essential tools for recovery and transformation, revealing how several dance artists have reimagined their dance practices not only as a professional endeavor for artistic creations, but also as a vital bridge between their disrupted lives and the communities they now inhabit.

A key interest of the Moving Borders project has been to discover how practices have shifted for the Ukrainian dance artists as they have spread across Europe following the full scale invasion, as well as through a series of workshop gatherings, to nourish the emergent practices as they are developing. Unsurprisingly, the war has fundamentally shifted artists' relationship to their practice. Many found themselves questioning the relevance of dance in the face of war, pain, grief and invasion. One dance artist attending a workshop described, "When the war started, I didn't want to dance because it wouldn't protect borders and wasn't helping enough. Now, if I dance, it helps me be in better condition in the face of all the news." This observation encapsulates what is often underestimated about dance, especially in moments of crisis, which are the multitude of ways that artistic dance practice can provide solace, resilience, healing and connection through periods of extreme pain, shock and loss.

Dance Practices with Local Community

For many displaced Ukrainian artists, dance became a bridge to their new local communities. Several described offering dance classes to other displaced Ukrainian children and women, which for some, also opened up to include local citizens where they are currently living. Several described offering various aspects of their dance practices to facilitate emotional release and expression, create moments of joy and connection and to strengthen social bonds and collectivity. For the displaced children traumatized by war, dance workshops provided an opportunity to feel safe, where they could gradually look others in the eyes again, overcome fear of physical contact and reclaim their voices through creative co-creation.

For some, teaching dance became a pathway to connect while struggling with isolation in the place where they landed after fleeing. One Ukrainian dance artist described how dancing brought her back in contact with people and helped her be less internal and isolated and more open to society. This shift from worried inward focus to community engagement was not only therapeutic, but also offered a meaningful professional evolution as they found new purpose in creating accessible movement experiences that responded directly to personal and local needs. Their practices evolved to more specifically address fundamental human necessities for safety, trust, and agency – elements that have deteriorated not only for the displaced artists but also for local community members navigating their own forms of instability and disconnection.

These experiences reveal how dance practices developed in response to war trauma could benefit broader society, which is particularly noteworthy as communities worldwide face increasing instability, discord and displacement and as migrants and refugees are increasingly seen as burdens with false narratives ascribed to them rather than human beings positively enriching their new communities. The Ukrainian artists' journeys suggest that local dance initiatives can serve as potent tools for rebuilding confidence, processing collective trauma and fostering inclusion. Also, how those dealing with forced displacement bring valuable embodied knowledge in regards to recovery, resilience and community-building that extends far beyond their individual circumstances, offering practices that help address universal human needs for connection, expression and belonging.

The Body as Home and Dancing Metaphors to Reclaim Agency

For many displaced dance artists, the body has become a site of refuge—perhaps the only 'home' that remains when physical homes have been left behind or destroyed. Some of the physical practices explored during the workshop gatherings within the Moving Borders project focused on the body as a resource and pathway to access grounding despite displacement and to cultivate the capacity to feel one's own bodily borders. This physical reconnection to the boundaries of one's own body represents an important act of reclamation when external geographical boundaries have been forcibly overrun. Through collective movement practices, the dance artists explore questions central to their current experience: Who were they before? Who are they now? How do they relate to their current situation? The body becomes both the way to question and the response.

During one of the workshop gatherings at Arte Sella, an outdoor museum in Italy and Moving Borders project partner, Ukrainian dance artists explored movement in relation to landscape and environmental art. Dancing in nature heightened their sense of immediacy and presence. "There is a past and an unknown future, but through dancing in nature and the land art of Arte Sella, we are more immediately in the present," one dancer observed.

Dancing on the uneven terrain of the natural landscape created metaphorical parallels to their displaced lives, inspiring movement inquiries that directly addressed precariousness: 'What can you rely on, even when the ground isn't fixed or flat?' 'Do you enjoy the instability or the recovery?' The movement research allowed them to practice creating and organizing ways of falling – both literally and metaphorically – that could transfer to processing daily life. This work took on a metaphysical dimension as they confronted what one dancer described as 'hollowed bodies with a cancelled future,' finding instead that movement itself could create possibility and connection. The questions that guided the movement tasks transcended physical exploration to become existential investigations into what remains constant within their bodies amid profound loss.

Cultural Context and Artistic Transformation

Another layer revealed over the course of the project is how the full-scale invasion of the last three years forced many Ukrainian dance artists to confront their artistic lineage in profound and sometimes painful ways. Russian Imperial schools strongly influenced Ukrainian dance training over generations, often employing what one dance artist bluntly described as 'a military approach that used shame and degradation as a pedagogical method'. This revelation, as well as revisiting the folk and traditional dances they learned in their dance education, represents what one artist described as 'a high price to pay to discover and question the dance history they have been taught.' Many have come to recognize how the authoritarian teaching methods reflected deeper cultural and political dynamics that shaped their artistic development, sometimes without their conscious awareness.

For several of the dance artists who fled Ukraine, exposure to European choreographic approaches has offered alternative methods and perspectives, allowing them to reexamine and redefine their relationship to dance. For some, this was the first time they experienced their artistry being genuinely valued on its own terms, creating space for artistic exploration that hadn't been possible within the systems they were trained in. This redefinition occurs within multiple overlapping contexts—the trauma of war, displacement to unfamiliar cultural environments and exposure to different artistic approaches. In some European dance contexts, Ukrainian artists observed a greater emphasis on inclusion, personal sustainability and fair pay compared to the more competition-focused environments they knew before. While they didn't choose these circumstances, many are finding ways to let these new influences have a positive impact on their artistic development. One dance artist described a continuous navigation that, while caused by an ongoing traumatic experience, is also shaping their artistry and the dance landscape. This process represents both a rupture from their past training and an opportunity to synthesize diverse influences into new artistic approaches that better reflect their current reality and values.

Reimagining Practice and Purpose

The trauma of war and displacement has paradoxically deepened many artists' connection to their practice, transforming what was once primarily a professional activity into an essential tool for survival and meaning-making. This heightened sense of urgency has stripped away pretense and professional formalities, bringing many to the core of why they dance at all. Several artists described how the invasion forced a fundamental reevaluation of their relationship to movement, with one noting that 'before war, art was an opportunity, now it is a necessity. For those who are really struggling, they need art as inspiration and as a reason to survive.'

Several of the dance artists describe a reconnection to joy, becoming more selective about joining projects that align with their values and developing more interdependent practices that emphasize community support rather than individual, competitive achievement. This shift reflects both practical necessity – as displaced artists must rely on networks of support – and a deeper philosophical revision of what constitutes meaningful artistic work in the context of war and displacement. Furthermore, some artists have discovered entirely new approaches to their work. After the invasion, one choreographer became more interested in working outside theater spaces and exploring improvisation because of how it deals with impermanence. Another found that residencies in Western Europe offered her first experience of feeling that her artistry was truly valued, allowing greater artistic freedom than she had previously known.

The experience has also made several more critical of the work they see, noting that many performances they view in Europe feel frivolous or lack relevance to current global challenges. Their own work has become more focused on creating meaningful connections to their current circumstances while also benefiting other communities. One dance artist described becoming more demanding of dance practice and performances, seeking work that is more clear and connected to an artist's inner world and urgency to create. This critical perspective may be less about rejection, but rather a more essential awareness of art's social and political significance, especially during times of crisis.

Dance as Resistance

For several of the Ukrainian dance artists who came together over the course of the project, dance has become a form of resistance – against erasure, against despair, against the severing of connections. Their continued engagement with dance represents a refusal to be defined solely by refugee status or victimhood or to surrender their artistic identity despite profound disruption. This artistic persistence carries political dimensions as their moving bodies assert existence and agency when external forces have attempted to render them powerless.

Over the course of the project, participants discovered that while dance can not stop bombs or protect borders, it can preserve something deeply essential – the integrity of humanity and community.

Their journeys demonstrate that while the war has destroyed physical infrastructure and taken lives, the embodied knowledge and collective practice of dance can offer pathways for rebuilding both individually and communally. Through their dance practices they have found ways to maintain connections across borders, to process trauma and to generate new possibilities despite the ongoing instability. What began as survival mechanisms have evolved into skilled approaches for navigating uncertainty that hold relevance far beyond their immediate circumstances. As society faces increasingly fractured communities and the dissolution of solidarity across borders, the journey of the Ukrainian dance artists encountered in this project offers valuable practices and insights for personal sustainability and human connection. Their regenerative practices of creativity and resilience, despite the injustice of the invasion and an unknown future, offer practical embodied wisdom for how communities might sustain themselves through ongoing crisis – a demonstration that calls us not merely to witness their courage but to actively engage with, learn from, and continuously support the knowledge and livelihood they have fought to cultivate and preserve.

"Dance is deeply embedded in my life. A source of joy, a way to express, a way to connect and dialogue, to get to know people. It's a rich multifunctional instrument.

Depending on the context, borders can be something which supports you base your actions on, or can be something which limits you. The more I think about it, the less clear it is to me. Borders are at the same time to protect, but also to divide — the place where one finishes and one begins."

Anna Kushnirenko

Situated Research in Unstable Contexts
Luisella Carnelli - researcher

Moving Borders was never just about displacement.
It was about listening to what displaces us all.

Not a fixed knowledge, but a movement.
Not a solution, but a sequence of gestures, hesitations, attempts to stay close.

In the gaps left by institutions, it was the body that remained.
Dancing as a way to return to oneself, to reach the other, to recompose a
world,
even if for a moment.

This research does not end.
It pauses, like breath between movements.
It leaves questions trailing in the air, like a foot that hasn't quite landed.

How do we move with care, when the ground keeps shifting?
How do we stay with each other, when everything tells us to let go?

Perhaps the answer is not in holding on,
but in moving together, even when we don't know the steps.

Listening While Moving

When Moving Borders was first imagined in 2022, the war in Ukraine had just escalated with the full-scale invasion. Cultural organisations across Europe were mobilising, and it was widely assumed that this crisis would remain at the centre of artistic and institutional attention. Our research was designed with this urgency in mind — as a tool to understand, and prepare for, the challenges of welcoming and integrating forcibly displaced Ukrainian dance artists, and to be better equipped to support those who may find themselves in similar situations in the future.

What we observed over two years, however, revealed a more complex trajectory. While the war continued and deepened, the institutional responses shifted, gradually moving from an emergency-based logic to patterns of normalisation. The same shift could be seen both in the organisations that hosted the artists, and

in the artists themselves. The need to adapt, to find continuity in discontinuity, has become a defining feature of this landscape.

In this context, our research was intended as a form of situated witnessing — a process of staying with the trouble, as Donna Haraway might say, while embracing a perspective that recognises mobility not as exception but as condition. It was meant to listen, to make sense of fragmented movements, relational tensions, and evolving needs. It aimed to document not just practices, but patterns of response. Not just what was done, but how it felt, how it changed, and what it revealed about our collective capacity to host, support and transform. Drawing on the work of Shahram Khosravi, and particularly on his concept of 'being border', the border is not a line but a condition that migrates into bodies, relationships and institutions. In this sense, knowledge production in Moving Borders is itself a border practice: in flux, marked by vulnerability, and inevitably entangled in the same geopolitical currents it sought to observe.

The methodological approach adopted in Moving Borders was designed to be light, flexible and grounded in proximity. Rather than imposing rigid analytical frameworks, we opted for a strategy capable of adjusting to the shifting contexts and emotional landscapes shaped by forced displacement. This meant staying close to the realities unfolding within the project, and recognising integration not as a fixed goal, but as an evolving, relational process.

The research tools — two online surveys (one addressed to cultural organisations, the other to Ukrainian dance artists), open–ended interviews, group discussions and observation — were conceived not merely for data extraction, but as opportunities for shared reflection. They provided spaces in which artists and organisations could articulate their experiences, map out their evolving practices, and voice challenges and desires. In this sense, the methodology functioned as both a lens and a platform: a way to observe and a way to connect.

Throughout the process, we maintained a diachronic lens. The project unfolded across two years, allowing us to observe the shift from emergency response to patterns of normalisation. This temporal depth was essential: it revealed how attention and support tend to wane, how integration is not linear, and how the capacity to host — both artistically and institutionally — must be sustained and renewed.

Ultimately, the research became a form of preparation: a rehearsal for future encounters. It allowed us to ask not only what was done, but what might still be needed — and how we, as cultural actors and researchers, might better accompany the next movements across borders.

What We Learnt: Layered Trajectories of Integration

Integration is often imagined as a destination, a stable condition to be achieved. But what emerged from this research is something more fragmented and complex. The integration of forcibly displaced artists unfolds not as a single event, but as a constellation of processes, negotiations and partial recognitions. It is shaped by local ecologies, institutional constraints, legal frameworks, and above all, by relationships between artists, organisations, communities and the wider cultural field.

The following reflections are drawn from the experiences shared by both artists and host organisations, across different geographies and timelines. They do not offer generalisations, but layered insights. Taken together, they suggest a need to reframe how we think about artistic integration in the context of displacement, not as the resolution of a crisis, but as an ongoing practice of presence, care, and co–creation.

1. Integration Is Not Linear, but Negotiated and Uneven

Despite the shared urgency that initially mobilised many cultural organisations, the pathways to integration proved to be anything but uniform. Our survey addressed to cultural organisations1 revealed a spectrum of approaches: while a majority (54.5%) reported a transformation in their artistic programming after working with forcibly displaced Ukrainian artists, 45.5% stated that no significant changes occurred. This divergence already signals the uneven nature of engagement.

Most organisations hosted a small number of artists for a short period and the types of support offered varied widely. While 65% provided accommodation and 41% financial support, only a minority enabled longer–term professional anchoring, such as mentorship, access to creation spaces, or sustained inclusion in local artistic ecosystems. Artists' testimonies confirmed this disparity: some described supportive, co–creative environments, while others shared experiences of isolation and marginal participation.

1 The survey collects insights from 94 organisations across Europe —
ranging from large institutions to small grassroots initiatives, and offers
insights into the geographical distribution of support, the diversity of the
organisations involved, and the sustainability of the resources mobilised.
The complete report can be downloaded at https://aerowaves.org/wp–
content/uploads/2025/05/Report_Survey_last_–withArtists.pdf

During the workshops and interviews, several artists expressed ambivalence around their position in the host contexts. "Sometimes I feel I'm there to show something, not to be truly part of it," one artist noted. Another reflected: "We were welcomed, but I'm not sure they saw us as colleagues." This sense of partial belonging — of being acknowledged but not always integrated — resonates with broader migration studies, where reception is often framed by conditionality and symbolic inclusion.

Furthermore, the research highlights how the integration process was heavily influenced by the organisational cultures and local infrastructures into which artists were received. While some residencies facilitated deep relational work and peer learning, others remained focused on one-off outputs or events aimed at achieving visibility. The result was a landscape of variable practices, where the artist's experience of integration depended as much on place as on people.

These gaps reflect more than resource constraints: they reveal the structural fragilities of the cultural sector in sustaining long-term solidarity. Integration, in this context, emerged not as a policy goal to be measured, but as a field of lived negotiations — entangled with institutional readiness, legal ambiguity, and the affective labour of care.

2. From Emergency to Structure: The Fatigue of Solidarity

In the early phases of the war, cultural organisations across Europe responded swiftly and generously. Many activated informal networks, opened up spaces, mobilised public or philanthropic funding, and offered immediate support to Ukrainian artists. Yet, as time passed, this initial mobilisation began to lose momentum. While the urgency remained for the artists, the systemic attention to their presence started to fade.

Our data reflects this shift. Only a small portion of the organisations reported providing ongoing support over extended periods. Less than a third offered activities aimed at long-term inclusion or professional integration. The majority of initiatives focused on short-term hosting — 7 to 30 days on average — and few extended their involvement beyond the initial emergency response. In several cases, organisations openly acknowledged a decline in resources, attention, and institutional bandwidth as the months progressed.

This phenomenon is not unique to the Ukrainian context. Research on cultural responses to crises shows how solidarity often operates on a temporal curve: intense at first, then diluted by structural fatigue and shifting priorities. As one organisation put it during a follow-up conversation: "We wanted to do more, but we didn't have the infrastructure to sustain it."

Artists, too, felt the shift. Several spoke of a "visible enthusiasm at the beginning" that gave way to silence. The temporal fragility of support mechanisms revealed how much cultural solidarity still relies on exceptionalism — a moment of crisis — rather than being built into the fabric of institutional life.

If we are to move from episodic hospitality to structural inclusion, then this fatigue must be named. Not to assign blame, but to acknowledge the urgent need for systems that can sustain care over time. The challenge is not only to respond, but to remain present and to move from mobilisation to infrastructure.

3. Artist–Led Strategies and the Strength of Peer Networks

One of the most striking findings of the research is the degree to which forcibly displaced artists became not only recipients of support, but active agents in shaping their own integration pathways. Many Ukrainian dance artists initiated workshops, created informal teaching settings, and opened movement spaces for fellow displaced individuals, often targeting children, women, or other artists in precarious situations.

This grassroots dimension of care and creativity filled gaps left by institutional limitations. Several artists reported that offering dance sessions helped them re-establish a sense of purpose, regain confidence, and create community connections in unfamiliar environments. In some cases, these initiatives extended beyond Ukrainian communities, engaging local participants and building bridges across linguistic and cultural divides.

Peer networks played an equally vital role. Connections among artists — both Ukrainian and from other national contexts — enabled emotional support, exchange of opportunities, and collective visibility. As one artist observed during a workshop, "when institutions disappear, we find each other." These networks functioned not only as survival tools, but as platforms of co-creation and resistance against isolation.

These dynamics were particularly visible during the workshop held at Arte Sella, where movement, natural landscape and artistic exchange fostered new connections and a renewed sense of presence. The encounter with nature and with each other allowed artists to reflect on instability through the body, and to re-imagine not only where they belonged, but how they could act and relate within new contexts.

Host organisations that recognised and supported these self-organised practices tended to foster more meaningful and reciprocal relationships. In contrast, contexts that positioned artists primarily as beneficiaries or temporary guests often failed to

acknowledge the knowledge, initiative and community–making capacity embedded in their practices.

This observation challenges a common binary in emergency response: the division between 'providers' and 'recipients'. In reality, what emerged in Moving Borders were hybrid roles: artists as teachers, connectors, facilitators, and cultural workers operating across multiple systems. Recognising and supporting these roles requires not just hospitality, but humility and a willingness to share space, agency and authorship.

4. Transformative Impacts on Host Organisations — Between Intention and Reality

For many cultural organisations, hosting forcibly displaced artists triggered a deep and sometimes unexpected process of self–reflection. The project partners described the experience not only as a moment of solidarity, but as a catalyst for questioning their usual ways of working: from the formats they employ to the assumptions they hold about collaboration, authorship, and cultural value.

In interviews and survey responses, some organisations spoke of developing new kinds of sensitivity: greater awareness of the emotional labour involved in hosting; more conscious attention to language, care and power dynamics; a shift from curating for to curating with. These shifts were often subtle, but meaningful; they were signs of a growing commitment to relational and situated approaches.

At the same time, many respondents acknowledged the limits of their capacity to sustain these changes. In some cases, the work with Ukrainian artists remained peripheral, disconnected from core programming or long–term strategy. The pressures of precarious funding models, staff turnover, and short project cycles made it difficult to embed lessons learnt into institutional practices.

This tension — between what was felt and what could be sustained — reflects a more complex reality within the cultural sector. Institutions are often driven by a deep sense of solidarity and responsibility, especially in times of crisis. However, they must also navigate the limits of their infrastructures, mandates, and political environments. What emerged through Moving Borders is not a narrative of failure, but one of honest confrontation — with what can be done, what should be done, and what support is needed to respond meaningfully. These encounters opened not only questions of capacity, but also of commitment: how can the artistic field collectively act within current constraints, while imagining the frameworks it still needs?

While many organisations expressed a genuine will to change, the process of

transformation also revealed deeper questions about collective responsibility; not only what institutions can do individually, but what the cultural sector as a whole is willing to invest in, structurally and ethically.

Transformation, then, cannot be left to inspiration alone. It requires commitment, time, and support mechanisms. It requires organisations to see themselves not just as hosts, but as co-learners in a shared field of uncertainty. And it requires that we treat hospitality not as an exception, but as a principle of practice that reshapes not only how we work with others, but how we see ourselves.

5. Cultural Institutions as Civic Infrastructures in Times of Crisis

One of the most powerful insights that emerge from Moving Borders is the recognition that cultural institutions are not only sites of artistic production, but also, increasingly, civic infrastructures. In the face of geopolitical instability, forced displacement, and social fragmentation, cultural spaces become places of orientation, refuge, dialogue, and re-imagination.

This role was most visible in small and mid-sized organisations, often deeply embedded in their local contexts. Cultural organisations often stepped in where public services or formal aid systems struggled to respond, providing housing contacts, mental health support, language mediation, and access to community networks. What they offered was not always spectacular, but it was consistently grounded, relational, and responsive.

At the same time, this civic function remains precarious. Many cultural organisations expressed concern about their ability to continue acting in this way without dedicated resources, political support, or structural recognition. Their actions filled critical gaps, but often without the mandate or tools to do so sustainably. The risk, as several noted, is that cultural institutions are expected to play civic roles without being treated as civic actors.

Recognising this dimension means rethinking funding models, policy frameworks and partnerships. It means investing in cultural spaces not only as delivery platforms, but as sites where social cohesion, democratic values, and mutual care are actively practiced and redefined.

In the context of future crises — whether humanitarian, ecological or economic — the cultural sector must not be seen as an afterthought. It must be understood as part of the social fabric that holds communities together, not despite uncertainty, but through it.

Un–bordering the Imagination: What Remains When We Listen Deeply

Alongside data and testimonies, this project brought to the surface a set of reflections that resist closure. They belong to the emotional and sensorial landscape of Moving Borders, to the friction between urgency and slowness, between care and exhaustion, between being seen and being named.

Emotion and rationality coexisted throughout: the impulse to respond quickly, and the need to act thoughtfully. The paradox of low time for reaction and high pressure to "do something" shaped both artistic and institutional choices. There was no clear formula, only negotiation.

Language also played a double role: a bridge and a limit. Not only verbal language, but the language of forms, of movement, of silence. What does it mean to be understood — or misunderstood — when words fail? nora chipaumire reminded us that language often reduces experience to a digestible narrative, especially for those seeking to 'help'. She challenged us to listen without the expectation of legibility.

Many artists questioned the framing of their presence: is it still important to be called a "Ukrainian artist"? Or is it time to reclaim individual identity beyond national trauma? The notion of identity emerged as ambivalent, caught between pride and shame, visibility and constraint. As Mia Habib suggested, identity cannot be a fixed asset in the face of war, migration, and systemic collapse, it must be fluid, situational, and sometimes strategic.

We heard repeatedly that **borders are not lines, but sensations.** If you don't feel a border, it doesn't exist. Shahram Khosravi reminded us that borders are not only built around us, but also within us, internalised, carried in our bodies. He urged us to consider how imagination itself is bordered — by fear, by policy, by representation — and how undoing these internal borders might allow new forms of belonging.

Imagination, in this sense, is deeply political. It is not a luxury, it is a strategy. **To imagine is to resist.** To open up future alternatives, not in abstraction, but grounded in lived, collective experience.

That is why turning isolated experiences into shared understanding is vital. When personal realities are acknowledged not as anecdotal, but as structurally meaningful, they create the ground for new solidarities. As feminist, postcolonial and migration scholars have long pointed out, the personal is political — not as a slogan, but as an analytical lens that connects lived experience with systemic conditions. In this sense, what artists carry in their bodies, memories and practices

is not only personal testimony — it is insight. A resource for rethinking belonging, rights, and the forms of cultural infrastructure we need.

At the heart of it all, the need to stay human. To remain in relation. To feel. To touch. Not symbolically, but truly.

Because the right to move and the right to stay are not only legal questions. They are sensorial, emotional, and imaginative ones. And the task of art, perhaps, is not to resolve them. But to keep them open, with care.

Listening Forward: What Artists Asked For

As the project unfolded, it became clear that the knowledge we were gathering was not only about what had happened, but about what was still needed. The voices of the artists pointed beyond the frameworks of hosting and support, toward a deeper reflection on how cultural systems can be reimagined to sustain artistic life after rupture.

What follows is not a summary, but a listening exercise: a way to attune to the desires, needs and visions shared by the artists for themselves, for their communities, and for the sector as a whole.

Throughout the research, artists articulated a range of needs and desires — some urgent, others more aspirational — that reveal what it means to rebuild an artistic life in the aftermath of displacement. These needs were not only logistical, but emotional, relational, and political.

Artists spoke of the need for **time and space** — not just physical, but mental — to resume their practices in ways that were not shaped solely by the trauma of war. Many longed for **creative continuity**, for the ability to work on long-term projects rather than one-off outputs. They asked for **recognition** not merely as guests or survivors, but as peers and contributors to the European cultural landscape.

Alongside these artistic desires were **social and personal needs:** safe housing, emotional support, access to care, the ability to form relationships in new places. Several expressed the wish for **mentorship**, not only from established artists but also from cultural workers able to navigate local systems and offer guidance without patronising. Others highlighted the importance of being seen beyond the "Ukrainian" label as complex individuals with diverse aesthetics, influences, and visions.

What emerges is a call not for charity, but for **fair conditions:** for spaces where vulnerability and agency can co-exist, where artists can both heal and create.

Recommendations include:

- Sustaining support beyond the emergency phase
- Creating platforms for co-authorship and mutual learning
- Ensuring transparent, inclusive access to funding and residencies
- Offering structural recognition for the civic and artistic labour performed by displaced artists
- Avoiding extractive practices that reframe trauma as aesthetic capital

These are not demands of privilege. They are invitations to build a sector where mobility does not erase identity, where crisis does not eclipse creativity, and where the right to create is not contingent on the passport one carries.

Carrying Forward What We Have Learned

Moving Borders is not only a project, it is a passage. A passage through uncertainty, through proximity, through the discomfort of not knowing how to respond "well" in the face of rupture. It revealed how fragile our infrastructures are, but also how strong our desire to act, to connect, and to imagine otherwise can be.

The lessons gathered across these two years are not definitive. They are partial, situated, and still in motion. But they invite us to reimagine the roles of artists, organisations, and researchers in navigating forced displacement not as a temporary crisis, but as part of the ongoing condition of our time.

In this evolving landscape, **dance has offered a language when words fall short**. A way to listen through the body, to inhabit instability with grace, and to meet others beyond the logic of productivity or protection. The artists involved in Moving Borders reminded us that movement can be not only expressive, but infrastructural: a way of building relation, reclaiming space, and rehearsing different futures.

For research, this is a call to remain flexible, embedded and responsive, to hold space, rather than close it. For cultural practice, a call to build frameworks that can hold care, not just display solidarity. For institutions, a call to invest not only in artistic excellence, but in cultural responsibility.

If the border is no longer a line, but a condition, then the task may not be to cross it — but to stay with it. To move with it. To let it move us.

And perhaps dance — the kind that listens before it moves, that touches without taking, that appears in fragments and lingers in silence — is one of the few practices that already knows how to dwell where words hesitate. Perhaps this is where we meet.

"Dance is a way to connect with myself and reality. It's an intuitive language that bridges the external and inner world, the visible and the invisible.

Borders, on the other hand are about separation, but also about beginnings and endings. They can divide, but they can also define space, identity and transformation."

Rita Lira

Broader Horizons
Karina Buckley

Moving Borders began in the depths of winter and as the project's dance writer, I was prepared for my role documenting the workshop through journals. When we gathered in January 2024 to plot out the path ahead, a magical evening of snow on Day 1 morphed into a treacherous morning for walkers on Day 2 and I found myself having an out-of-body experience as a Paris pavement approached my face at speed. A broken tooth and trip to A&E later, I was back at la briqueterie, grateful to have escaped with a minor injury but shaken at how suddenly something as familiar as my smile could be transformed in an instant. I was also deeply disgusted with myself: annoyed with my body for letting me down and annoyed at myself for putting it in that position.

This was the context in which I joined Anna Kushnirenko's practice on Day 3. One of the three Ukrainian dance artists designing the Moving Borders programme, Kushnirenko's experience of war was obviously a world away from my petty faceplant but the exercise in self-care that she led spoke directly to my cells and my sorry state of mind. Reminding us that our skin is the border and the bridge between our inner worlds and everything outside, she invited us to minister to it with a touch as gentle and loving as a mother's. Being directed to treat my body as the precious object it is was the physical and spiritual salve I didn't know I needed. It gave me a new appreciation for the vulnerable flesh-and-bone vehicle carrying me through this life, as well as another lens through which to focus my experience of Moving Borders.

Few of us grasp in our regular day-to-day how delicately balanced our lives are; how one shock — personal, political, financial — could throw us off kilter or upend us completely. As the fragile equilibrium that masqueraded as our reality collapses, we are left unmoored; grappling to return ourselves to a place of safety and belonging, recalibrating who we are — sometimes to better resemble who we want to be — and carving out new possibilities that offer that most critical of commodities: hope.

It's a trajectory that has or will become familiar to many of us in our lifetimes — as survivors of illness or injury, through bereavement or other losses, through natural disasters or forced displacement that will increase in frequency with climate change — and one that the 41 million citizens of Ukraine have found themselves navigating since their country was invaded on February 24th, 2022. Moving Borders has been an attempt to map their journey by bringing us back to the one thing we all have in common — the body.

Together with their host organisations, a core group of three Ukrainian dancers each curated an in-person workshop for ten of their fellow artists in exile to explore how their influences, approaches and practices have changed since leaving their homeland. Their contributions unconsciously and organically worked their way up Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, outlining how their experience — though painful and difficult — may be putting them on a path to self-actualisation.

Body Consciousness

President of Moving Borders partner organisation, Arte Sella, Giacomo Bianchi noted at our opening meeting in Paris that every visitor to the outdoor museum in Northern Italy is a body, not just a brain. It's an assertion that chimes with neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's arguments that the thorny entity we call consciousness isn't confined to the brain but is mediated by the body and fueled by feelings. Bessel van der Kolk explores what this body-brain connection means for the treatment of trauma in his best-selling book, The Body Keeps the Score. In it, he argues that "the brain-disease model overlooks (the) fundamental truth (that) we have the ability to regulate our own physiology, including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the brain and body, through such basic activities as breathing, moving and touching... When we ignore these quintessential dimensions of humanity, we deprive people of ways to heal from trauma and restore their autonomy."

Unsurprisingly after more than two years in fight or flight mode, the impact of trauma was a constant presence, looming large over both practices and discussions. Movement meditations, thought experiments and gentle touch helped to ground bodies, delineate personal borders, and reestablish connections between the physical and the emotional that were severed by the trauma of war. Working with children, some of the artists see it manifest as an unwillingness to engage and an aversion to being touched, while they themselves report being unable to create and perform. Creative psychotherapist and Five Rhythms practitioner, Jenny Fahy says that these responses are not unexpected when considered in the context of the 'window of tolerance' — the optimal state of arousal or stimulation that allows us to function and thrive in everyday life:

> *"In war, it's fight or flight so you go into a state of hyper-arousal; but in survival mode, you can drop down into hypo-arousal, which is under-responsive, and (in that state) the body cannot work with steps. It cannot bring itself back into connection through structure. Freer movements encourage the body out of that freeze and shut down response — that freedom is about rebuilding trust with your body."*

The transformative power of that movement emerged in many different forms throughout the workshops with contact improvisation in particular identified as a tool to open people up, to quiet the mind and to mirror and transform the sense of impermanence created by war.

When I Am Among the Trees

'You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves' poet Mary Oliver reminds us in her masterpiece Wild Geese. The myth of human exceptionalism may have alienated us from nature but this project made the benefits of reclaiming our place 'in the family of things' abundantly clear.

Some of the artists working with Ukrainian children described practices that took place in parks, where they danced barefoot, splashed in water, walked like animals — real and imaginary — and drew on the forest floor; all the while building in marker moments to gauge if the activities helped them feel better. They did. One of the artists recalled having to completely abandon her lesson plan to allow her young charges to watch a dog leaping around in a pond. She read it as the children's impulse to have fun and bond with other Ukrainian kids but Fahy sees a deeper meaning:

> *"War completely erodes your sense of bodily autonomy and consent — you do not consent to a war happening around you. For recovery, you need to be in places where you're in full control of your experience — you get to say yes, you get to say no, you get to be spontaneous. The theory underpinning play therapy is that, if we as the adult or the professional can just hold the space, the child knows what they need — they know how to get to a place of healing and release and expression."*

Arte Sella was that place of healing and release for the adults. Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety; lower cortisol levels, blood pressure and heart rate; improve immune function and mood, and promote relaxation, creativity and better sleep. During our three day residency at the outdoor museum in the mountains, there was a palpable sense that nature was working her magic. Removed from the confines of a studio, bodies expanded, breathing deepened, senses attuned to the ever-changing, ever-evolving environment. Frayed nervous systems let down their guard, allowing their owners to truly connect and enjoy the sense of ease and belonging that came with being among fellow Ukrainian women. As one participant put it:

"When we were dancing, I became very emotional with this image of a bird flock. Sometimes you're in front. Sometimes you're behind. It doesn't matter. We're just moving around but we are together — which is something I miss a lot in my current life situation. That made me quite emotional but it also gave me quite a lot of hope — that there are places you can belong."

Borders and Belonging

Each Moving Borders gathering created a temporary home away from home for the Ukrainian dance artists, dissolving language barriers and facilitating the comfortable camaraderie that comes only with being around people who completely understand your context. The tangible air of relief and rejoicing was electric, and unsurprising given that something as simple as a conversation can surely feel like hard work in a host country that – however welcoming – is still foreign.

In one of the many online sessions that formed part of the Moving Borders project, Serbian dance dramaturg Maja Hrieŝik spoke to the limits imposed by language. She explained how it informed her choice of dance as her metier after she relocated to Slovakia in the '90s to escape the oppressive discourse in her home country that culminated in the Yugoslav wars. Not only did dance allow her to overcome her own (perceived) shortcomings with the Slovak language, it also permitted her to go beyond words and to "get into the meanings without being stuck with the small differences that divide us".

Language is just one of the obstacles to belonging that the artists face in their new reality in exile, however. As part of a series of online sessions around the topic of identity, MB participant Polina Bulat described being conflicted by the label 'Ukrainian artist' because of the inference that her work is only interesting in the current climate because of the passport she carries. In an admission that will be familiar to many of us, she says she never really thought about the idea of identity when she was in the majority in her own country – only when she found herself in the minority outside of it – and explained how fragmenting her personality allows her to exist in new environments that expect her to assimilate as much as possible.

These ideas echo the sentiments of anthropologist Shahram Khosravi who observed that the same border treats bodies differently depending on their race, gender, sexuality etc. In an online gathering, he explained that his research around borders focuses not on what they are but on what they do to bodies, saying "if you don't sense a border, there is no border for you." Likening borders to magic because both manipulate our perceptions – turning neighbours into enemies – he finds

himself increasingly embracing art because of the opportunities for encounter that it offers.

Khosravi identified dance as the arena with the richest potential for creating dialogue because it takes us from the removed position of observing to the direct experience of touching. Speaking to us from her native Norway, dancer, choreographer and activist, Mia Habib also addressed the possibilities dance offers in restoring the humanity of what she terms the taboo body, and in questioning the way we dehumanise the other – flattening the image of the enemy onto which we then project our own prejudices.

Many of these ideas and assertions were borne out by the experience of the Moving Borders participants. Whether working with fellow professional dancers or children, adults, the elderly, or people with Parkinson's disease, the displaced artists shared how they had forged bonds and hewn place for themselves in their new communities through dance. We even heard how one artist's teaching practice had drawn students from a migrant community that had not previously engaged with native teachers, suggesting that her outsider status appeals to people who may also perceive themselves as 'other'. There were first–hand testimonials too – when an Aerowaves partner says that their Ukrainian guest artist is the best thing to happen to the organization in years, you believe him, demonstrating that she had moved beyond belonging into the zone of esteem and respect.

I Dance, Therefore I Am

Folk, ethnic and national dances offered another window into issues of identity and belonging while also presenting a route to restore to health a heritage that has been appropriated and demeaned by a colonial power. As one Ukrainian artist put it:

> *"When I was a kid, if you were speaking Ukrainian, you were from the village. We didn't value (our culture). Now we're in the process of learning about ourselves; we're coming back to ourselves through a lot of pain and death since 2014 and it's such a high price – it's driving me."*

An encounter with Natalya Guzneko Boudier, director of the Paris branch of cultural diplomacy agency, Institut Ukranien confirmed that this drive is shared by official Ukraine, which sees artists as central to their mission to rebuild the country forward after the war.

However, in an online session, acclaimed dance artist and choreographer nora chipaumire cautioned against being protectors of the past. Having spent a dance

lifetime investigating and exploring how black bodies move – and her place within that vast array of experience – she has now put herself into the milieu of movement in her native Zimbabwe to find authentic elements (such as the sacred knowledge of ethnic people) to innovate with rather than be guided by what the Government nominates as culture.

Speaking to the power of dance as a force of cultural resistance, Palestinian choreographer Nur Garabli meanwhile describes how using her native folk dance, Dabke, in performance gives her agency to reclaim it from cultural appropriation – a luxury when many forms of agency are systematically denied to those living under occupation. Invoking images of planting, watering and harvesting, the gestural vocabulary of Dabke betrays its agrarian origins and reminds us how rooted folk dance is in lived experience. As a physical manifestation of our stories, it can illustrate that we are more alike than we realise, offering opportunities to find common ground with people who might at first seem very different to ourselves.

The concept of dance as identifier was explored at a micro level when one artist described her practice as an emancipation of the body. Teasing out how the body gives a truer indication of who we are and where we belong than any passport ever could, we reflect on the idea that our identity exists at a cellular scale, and that somatic practices have great value in helping us to really know ourselves. It's a thought that offers a deeper perspective on Martha Graham's observation that the body says what words cannot. It also resonates with Gestalt theory that underpins Gabrielle Roth's Five Rhythms somatic dance practice, which asserts that the body is primed for wholeness and wellbeing. Practitioner Jenny Fahy says:

"The practice supports people to have trust in their own bodies. If we can follow its movement and trust our own physical response, the body will actually know what it needs to do to release. We just need to allow ourselves to follow that innate human drive to always get to a place of wholeness and peak health."

Self. Sufficient.

Their determination to see Ukraine reach its cultural potential is matched by the artists' own impulses to self–actualise, with many of them articulating that the war has pushed them to get very clear about what they want and do not want. Their experience in Europe has also made them hungry to have the role of the dance artist respected in Ukraine, and to have their sector professionalised with a support structure that makes a viable career path possible. Some have even found that the war and their status as exiles in Europe has smoothed the path and opened doors to financially sustainable roles they had wanted but may not have had the opportunity to get in their homeland. As one participant put it:

"I'm grieving that it happened in such a tragic way but I'm really happy that life has given me this opportunity to work internationally; to meet people from different contexts and to travel; and to hear as many perspectives as possible because I learned a lot from them and I've become less rigid in my views."

It's an outlook that calls to mind Winston Churchill's philosophy to never let a good crisis go to waste and a stoic reminder that, while events themselves may be out of our control, it is up to us to choose how we respond to them. Every experience, however difficult, is an opportunity for growth and embracing that can both enrich and open the mind.

From the moment we are born, our bodies broaden our horizons. Before we can talk, we communicate by gesture; before we make sense of the world with language, we navigate it through movement. For better or worse, we develop our sense of self through our bodies. In a world obsessed with possessions, it's worth remembering that it's the only thing we will ever truly own and, however we feel about it, it is enough.

The body is the site of our shared humanity. It is the fragile but resilient wonder that a caregiver took much time and trouble to tend through infancy, save from itself in toddlerhood and nurture through childhood into a fully-formed adult. Each is a precious and unique instrument deserving of dignity, agency and expression. War strips away its personhood and dehumanises it. Illness alienates us from it. Loss numbs it. Stress overwhelms it. Dance can restore its health and humanity.

Though their experiences and ours may differ greatly in scale, the Moving Borders artists have much to teach us. Their struggles are our struggles, and they offer some universal lessons. Perhaps the most important is that, ultimately, there is no them and us – only all of us, together.

A Map of Displacement

   The geographic spread of respondents across 16 different European countries highlights the extensive and fragmented nature of displacement among Ukrainian dance artists. Italy, Germany, and Spain emerge as the most common destinations, but artists have also settled or passed through countries ranging from Sweden to Georgia. This diversity underscores both the complexity of mobility patterns and the urgent need for coordinated, cross–national support systems that address the lived realities of a dispersed artistic community.
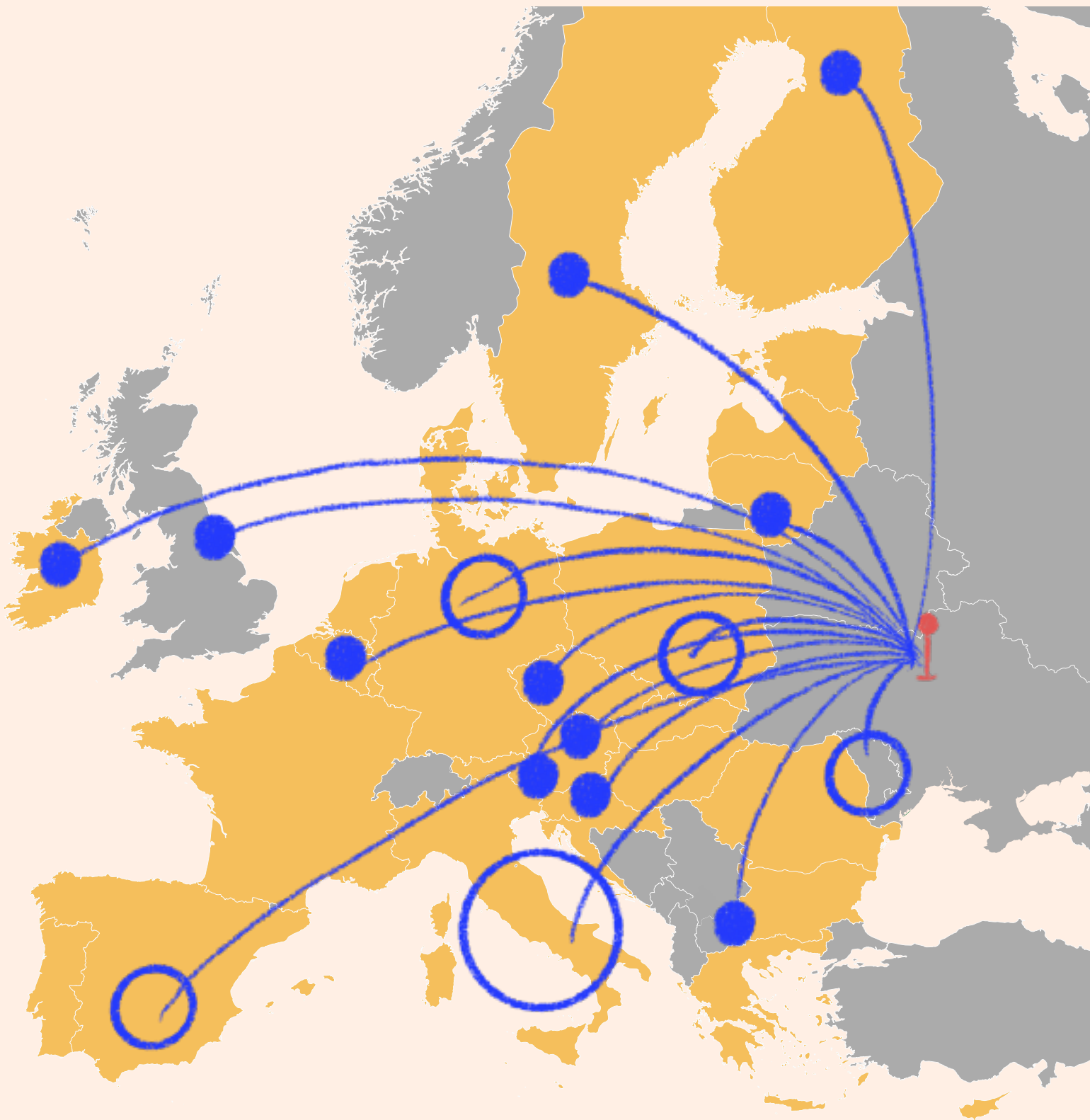
"Dance is a powerful tool for self-exploration and self-expression. Through motion and feeling. And beyond that, dance allows me to inspire others. It's more than art — it's a way of living, feeling, and healing.

What once felt like limitations have become opportunities — spaces to explore rather than walls to avoid. My personal boundaries, in every sense, have expanded. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, I've learned to adapt, to stretch, and to stay in motion. And with every step beyond what once held me back, I discover new parts of myself I never knew existed."

Yana Reutova

RESEARCH TEAM

Ukrainian dance artists:

Yana Reutova/ Based in Prague, Czechia

Anna Kushnirenko/ Based in Bassano del Grappa, Italy

Rita Lira/ Based in Paris, France

Researchers:

Monica Gillette – dramaturg / Based in Frankfurt, Germany

Luisella Carnelli – impact researcher /Based in Torino, Italy

Karina Buckley – dance writer / Based in Dublin, Ireland

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS & STAFF

Aerowaves, Ireland

Roberto Casarott – Co–director

Anna Arthu – Executive director

Clàudia Brufa – Communications manager

Morgan Steel –Project coordinator

Tanec Praha Festival, Czech Republic

Yvona Kreuzmannova – Artistic director

Ania Ania Obolewicz – International projects manager

Arte Sella, Italy

Giacomo Bianchi – Director

Rosa Zambelli – Communication and project manager

la briqueterie CDCN du Vitry–sur–Seine, France

Elisabetta Bisaro – International and programming manager

Arina Dolgikh – Audience manager

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOPS PARTICIPANTS

PRAGUE

Diana Durnieva, Antonina Kaminska, Daria Koval, Vita Vaskiv, Yuliia Chubareva, Olena Polianska, Tetiana Znamerovska, Yulia Grishina, Anastasiia Pavlovska, Veronika Horiacha, Olena Korotkova

Guest Facilitators: Clara da Costa

ARTE SELLA

Anastasiia Rembetska, Kateryna Pogorielova, Anna Lutsenko, Alina Tskhovryebova, Olena Polianska, Polina Bulat, Daria Herashechenko, Iryna Kifa, Oleksandra Lytvyn (Sasha), Mariia Bakalo

VITRY–SUR–SEINE

Anastasiia Melnychenko, Violeta Matiushenko, Polina Skarha, Mykyta Dudkin, Alla Shliakhova, Mariia Korobko, Viktor Ruban (online), Anna Fedoronchuk, Zoia Saganenko, Daria Koval, Alina Tskhovrebova, Anzhela Ttskovych, Diana Hefre, Diana Gebre, Marharyta Hohun

Guest Artists: Nur Garabli, Léonce Noah

Timeline

2024

(In person) **From 8 – 10 January 2024** we gathered with our partners at La Briqueterie (FR) for the kick off meeting. [Read Monica Gillette's journal.](#)

(Online) On **9 January 2024** we gathered online with **[Mia Habib,](#)** artist and curator. Mia Habib introduced her experiences working in war and conflict zones. She shared examples of projects, socially engaged programmes and performances in the Middle East; as well as dance practices developed to support human connection among people who belong to communities, or groups, in conflict.

> *Mia Habib is an Oslo-based dancer, performer and choreographer working at the intersection of performance, exhibitions, publications, lectures, teaching, mentoring and curating. Habib holds an M.A in conflict resolution and mediation from Tel Aviv University (2011) and a B.A. in choreography and dance pedagogy from the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (2003). Over the last 20 years Mia Habib Productions and her team of collaborators has entered into different contexts, looking for spaces where her work can interact with audiences and the realities of local communities.*

(Online) On **14 March 2024** we gathered online with **Olga Diatel**, founder of the [Antonin Artaud Fellowship](#). Olga Diatel presented the work developed by the Antonin Artaud Fellowship. The workshop was an opportunity to learn about special programmes for Ukrainian Artists and European presenters interested in visiting Ukraine as well as exploring international collaborations

> *The Antonin Artaud Fellowship programme is designed to support emerging artists and cultural managers in the field of performing arts working in Ukraine. Initiated in the summer of 2022, the Fellowship focuses on innovative approaches to performing arts and supports small scale experimental works that can develop into large scale projects.*

(Online) On **13 May 2024** we gathered online with **Simon Dove**, executive director of [CEC ArtsLink](#). Simon Dove shared the latest ideas discussed in CEC ArtsLink Assembly 2022 aimed at supporting international dialogue among artists still based in Ukraine, those who have moved out of the country and the international performing arts field.

> *CEC ArtsLink supports dialogue between artists and communities through individual encounters, public events, transnational networks, and virtual platforms. Founded in 1962, CEC ArtsLink believed that it was essential for*

citizens of the United States and the Soviet Union to meet and build mutual trust, while their governments engaged in the Cold War. Today, artists and arts leaders play a vital role in nurturing civil societies. As nations increasingly retreat behind their borders, it becomes imperative for the work of artists and arts leaders to catalyze communities in mitigating conflict and prejudice locally, nationally, and globally.

(In person) **17 – 19 June 2024.** International Workshop Meeting in Prague hosted by Tanec Praha (CZ). Read Karina Buckley's journal. OR Watch the video.

(In person) **25 – 27 August 2024.** International Workshop Meeting at the museum Arte Sella (IT). Read Karina Buckley's journal. or Watch the video.

(In person) **18 – 20 November 2024.** International Workshop Meeting at la briqueterie Read Karina Buckley's journal. or Watch the video. For this meeting we receive a special support from the Institut Ukranien in Paris.

(Online) On **10 December 2024** we gathered online with **nora chimpaumire**. chipaumire shared her perspectives and experiences on being replaced and how building an artistic identity may be relevant to dissolve borders.

nora chipaumire was born in 1965 in what was then known as Umtali , Rhodesia (Mutare | Zimbabwe) . She is a product of colonial education for black native Africans – known as group B schooling . She has pursued other studies at the university of Zimbabwe (law) and mills college , Oakland | CA. (dance) . As African knowledge acquisition does not come with baccalaureates it is impossible to quantify what the African body holds . chipaumire acknowledges these knowledges in addition to the western forms branded into her since 1965 .

"Having accepted that being black is not always the same, and starting to understand that being African is neither always the same, I was in the search of what could be a precedent that could guide me. Being exiled from some assumptions is being part of my liberation."

2025

(Online) On **13 January 2025** we gathered online for an encounter and workshop with **Polina Bulat.** Polina Bulat proposed a discussion around the idea of identity and shared her reflections about the topics informed by her experience as a displaced person and arts professional.

Polina Bulat is a dance producer and manager based in Berlin. Rooted in journalism, public relations, and audience engagement initiatives, she fully

transitioned to producing dance projects and managing artists in 2022, after relocating from her native Ukraine. In her professional practice, she balances and combines different contexts, working internationally while continuing being engaged in projects and initiatives in Ukraine.

"I never gave much thought about the topic of identity until I moved to live outside Ukraine after the full scale invasion. Suddenly, when outside Ukraine I became part of a minority, I realised opportunities were offered or people wanted to talk to me because I hold an Ukrainian passport, because my country was in the headline. I started to feel a bit uncomfortable about that. People were putting me in a box. Then I started to wonder what being Ukrainian meant to me."

(Online) On **6 February 2025** we met **Maja Hriešik** and **Polina Bulat.** A dialogue between dramaturg Maja Hriešik, writer and producer Polina Bulat to explore the topic of identity and displacement.

Maja Hriešik is a dramaturg, lecturer and researcher. Born in Novi Sad, ex-Yugoslavia, she has been living in Slovakia since the late 90s, where she completed her MA studies in aesthetics, theatre directing and dramaturgy. She published a book of essays entitled On Corporeal Dramaturgies in Contemporary Dance (2013) and is a lecturer at the Dance Faculty in Bratislava (classes on dance dramaturgy, history and aesthetics of dance).

"When I go to Serbia I feel like a visitor. In my twenties, which were crucial years, I worked so strongly on redefining who I am that I simply lost contact. Who I became was somehow different in Slovakia than I could have ever been in Serbia. Perhaps the sensibility of people that I met brought something out of me. (...) I am observing painfully that for me to speak in Serbian – I can still speak it– it's as if I was speaking something coming from the past. Since, when I left Serbia in the 90s it was much more difficult to stay in touch as it is now. I would just be able to write a text message or an email from the faculty where I was studying."

(Online) On **11 March 2025** we met with professor **Shahram Khosravi.** In the last Moving Borders Online Encounter we are invited Professor Shahram Khosravi, who was interviewed by Aerowaves co-director Roberto Casarotto, to dive into auto-ethnography research.

Shahram Khosravi is Professor of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University. Born in Iran he became an illegal migrant in 1988. Making his own

experience the starting point of his studies, he has focused his research on migrants, forced deportations and asylum seekers. He is the author of various essays, including: Young and Defiant in Tehran (2008); Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran (2017) for University of Pennsylvania Press; After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives (Palgrave, 2017) or Io sono confine (elèuthera, 2019).

"Instead of asking what borders are, I think it might be more useful to wonder what borders do. What borders do to the body is the question I have been asking myself the last fifteen or twenty years. I'm interested to see the relation between borders and bodies, because borders are very much about senses, from sight to taste. People drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, they get that the sea water in their mouths, and that salty taste is the taste of border."

Dissemination event 2 – 4 June 2025 in Dublin with the support and hosted by Dance Ireland

Dissemination event 21 June 2025 in Prague within Tanec Praha festival's programme

Dissemination event 4 July 2025 at Arte Sella

Dissemination event 2 October 2025 at la briqueterie CDCN in Vitry-sur-Seine

Authors and Artists

Karina Buckley is a dance writer with Springback Magazine, an Aerowaves publication whose mission is to advance European dance. She has previously written about dance and theatre for the Irish edition of The Sunday Times. She attended ballet classes into young adulthood and undertook a year's vocational dance training at Inchicore College of Further Education in Dublin. Karina studied science at university and subsequently spent two decades at Ireland's national media organisation where her work as a weather broadcaster sharpened her sense of urgency around climate change. She has since moved into public relations and now works with Cork-based PR agency, Healy Communications.

Luisella Carnelli is a senior researcher and consultant at Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, where she has worked since 2005. With a PhD in Theatre Studies and a Master's in Performing Arts Management, she focuses her research at the crossroads between culture, participation, and social transformation. Her work explores how arts-based and co-creative practices can foster individual and collective well-being, civic agency, and inclusive cultural ecosystems. She has led and contributed to over 80 research and evaluation projects at European and national level, including Dance Well, Empowering Dance, BeSpectACTive!, and EU Have a Dream. Her expertise includes impact evaluation, socially engaged arts, cultural welfare, and participatory methodologies. Deeply committed to ethical and relational research, she sees culture as a space for imagination, care, and justice.

Monica Gillette is a dance dramaturg, facilitator and Co-Artistic Director of the first edition of the Tanztriennale taking place in Hamburg in 2026. After dancing professionally she now guides multiple projects with dance as a pathway for social engagement and multigenerational cultural exchange. As a dramaturg she accompanied several European funded projects – Migrant Bodies – Moving Borders (2017-2019), Empowering Dance (2018-2023) and Dancing Museums – The Democracy of Beings (2020-2021), Dance Well (2022-2025) and Aerowaves' Moving Borders Project (2023-2025). Monica is also a dramaturg and transformation coach at Tanzhaus Zürich and researcher for EDN – European Dance Development Network, resulting in the 2024 publication, Practices of Care and Wellbeing in Contemporary Dance: Evidence from the Field.

Anna Kushnirenko is a dance and photography artist from Kherson, Ukraine, now based in Italy. After studying in a private contemporary dance school, she further developed her skills through workshops and dance festivals co-creating and being part of dance performances. Her movement practice is based on dance improvisation and performative practices, with the aim to create connection with space and people. Currently, she mainly works as a teacher with non-professionals and communities Anna is part of the Dance Well project (since 2022), Moving Arte Sella (2024–2025) – movement practices to interact with the museum's art works. She curated the International Workshop of Moving Borders meeting at Arte Sella (August, 2024), she is part of Performing Memory a project supported by Perform Europe.. As a photographer, she focuses on portraiture and documentation for dance events and projects, such as How to. A score (2024), Choreography connects (2022–2024) and Aerowaves Spring Forward Festival (2024, 2025). Her artistic practice, both in movement and visual art, is inspired by life's unique moments, nostalgia and an ironic vision of life.

Rita Lira studied contemporary dance in Kyiv. In her work, she combines contemporary dance, street dance styles, visual and documentary art. Her artistic work is closely connected with theory and reflections on the theme of mental traps, as well as reflections on the experiences of war and displacement. Rita's performances have been presented in France, Lithuania, Romania, Spain, Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine. She is also a member of the UA Contemporary Dance Platform. In 2022 Rita was forced to leave Ukraine. She moved to Paris, where she spent a year on a residency at Cité Internationale des Arts. She was in residency at La Briqueterie CDCN for three years. There she created and presented The Way from/to and The Trap. She has recently completed the Hérodote education programme at the Beaux-Arts de Paris during the 2023–2024 academic year. Currently, she is part of the international project Moving Borders developed by Aerowaves in partnership with Tanec Praha, Arte Sella, and La briqueterie CDCN.

Yana Reutova is a choreographer, dancer and teacher from Chornomorsk, Ukraine, now based in Prague. In 2014 she founded the company Dance Theatre Plastilin and created several award winning performances. She founded and organised festivals in Ukraine: the Dance Platform Most festival which ran for five years and Speaking with the Body, which took place once. In March 2022, she took her daughter and several students and fled from the full scale invasion to Prague, where she now works. Since then she has been collaborating with Tanec Praha and Ponec Theatre, she has created her own work, as well as collaborating with other artists such as the Brazilian choreographer Clara da Costa. She has also danced in works by other choreographers and participated in projects of several

European organisations such as EDN, Aerowaves and the Big Pulse Alliance. Yana's works have been presented at the Czech Dance Platform 2023–2024, Dance Prague Festival 2022–2024, as well as at other festivals and theatres. She has received support from EFFEA (European Festival Fund for Emerging Artists) to develop and present the triptych Together Alone with dancers from Ukraine, Czech Republic and Burkina Faso. Yana also leads workshops for children and has made interactive performances On the Road and Childhood Time as part of a project for Ukrainian refugee children. Through her choreographic as well as teaching practice she is inspired by therapy techniques.

Partner Organizations

Aerowaves Europe is a hub for dance discovery in Europe. Aerowaves identifies new work by emerging dance artists and then promotes them through cross-border performances, enabling them to bring brand new dance to brand new audiences. Aerowaves' network of partners in 34 countries, based in geographical Europe, brings together the professional knowledge, personal insight and love for dance of 46 Partners. Each year there is a public call for proposals, around seven hundred applications are received, then watched and discussed over the partners' annual meeting, where they select twenty works. The Aerowaves Twenty artists' work is showcased at Spring Forward, an itinerant festival, co-presented by Aerowaves by a different partner organisation in a different place each year.

Aerowaves also develops capacity building programmes for dance writers, curators, podcasters and choreographers. Aerowaves supports Springback Magazine, a dance publication led by an independent editorial team, and contributes to the dissemination of contemporary dance through projects such as On Record and its podcast series. Aerowaves is sustained as a vibrant dance community across Europe and is currently funded by the Platform strand of the Creative Europe programme of the EU. Aerowaves prides itself on its unique role as a connector between choreographers, programmers, audiences and dance enthusiasts across Europe.

La Briqueterie its mission is to promote choreographic creation and artists' development, transnational programmes and participatory activities to foster and support dance at multiple levels and for diverse audiences. La Briqueterie has an ongoing programme of residencies, studio showings, commissions and co-productions, festivals, EU-funded collaborative projects, masterclasses and workshops and an international exchange programme. The organisation encourages active involvement in dance at all levels, through an extensive programme of workshops, encounters, studio showings and creative activities aimed at widening the audience experience. La Briqueterie has been organising regular workshops for non-professionals, people with physical and mental disabilities, students and teachers led by artists in residence. A dedicated programme on "dance and wellbeing" is being held together with the DRAC and ARS Ile de France, addressing dance professionals and people working in the health sector. Within the frame of the European project Dance Well, dance teachers were trained to lead workshops for people with neurodegenerative diseases. It is a member of the Association of the National Centres for Choreographic Development (A-CDCN) in France, and the EDN and Aerowaves networks. It is the recipient of

several grants supported by the Creative Europe and Erasmus+ programmes of the EU.

Tanec Praha supports contemporary dance in the Czech Republic and international cooperation. Thanks to the TANEC PRAHA Festival, Czech Dance Platform and the year-round activities at PONEC – dance venue, the general public in Prague has access to exceptional works of art and cultural experiences. Tanec Praha supports community engagement projects as well as artists' international development. Its activities promote openness, cultural diversity and tolerance, while broadening the cultural offer and contributing to the artistic and ethical development of society.

Tanec Praha NGO is active on an international level and is a partner of several European projects under the EU Creative Europe and Erasmus+ programmes. It is also part of a number of European platforms and international networks, helping to build the reputation of Czech performing arts abroad.

Arte Sella is a contemporary museum set in a forest, in the mountains of Val di Sella (Trentino, Italy). It is a place where over more than thirty years, art and nature have been merging in a continuous dialogue, where artists from all over the world are invited to encounter the Sella Valley to conceive, develop and carry out artworks that are nourished by the unique history and nature of the place. Dance, music and art in all its forms have often been part of the activity of Arte Sella, giving life to unique projects and events. Arte Sella has been recipient of grants supported by the Creative Europe programme, and through the Dancing Museums and Performing Memory – Perform Europe projects Arte Sella has developed long lasting relationships with dance organisations and artists.