



Sites of Significance

Final Report

Dr Victoria Durrer
University College Dublin

Professor Aoife McGrath
Queen's University Belfast

Dr Argyro Tsampazi
Queen's University Belfast

Acknowledgements

Sites of Significance was developed by Dr Victoria Durrer (University College Dublin) and Professor Aoife McGrath (Queen's University Belfast) with assistance from Dr Argyro Tsampazi (Queen's University Belfast) and in collaboration with Cavan County Council Arts Office.

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01: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Sites of Significance is a research project that develops understanding of how dance facilitators and artists working within the territorial rural border area of Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh experience the nature of, and pathways to, engagement and work in dance. The research was funded by Cavan County Council Arts Office (Cavan Arts) and Creative Ireland and focused on experiences in the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authority areas. Led by Aoife McGrath (Queen’s University Belfast) and Victoria Durrer (University College Dublin) and supported by Research Assistant, Argyro Tsampazi, the study was carried out in 2023.

Through a mixed approach that brings dance practice-as-research together with social scientific methods, the project captures traces of the largely “unseen” dance activity that occurs in rural regions that might not be represented in official “counting’ or “mapping” exercises of dance activity within broader dance, arts, and cultural policy research on the island.

Sites of Significance emerged from the experience of Cavan Arts Officer, Catriona O’Reilly, as a partner on *Building Capacity for the Cultural Industries: Towards a Shared Island Approach for Dance & Theatre*, a research project led by Durrer with McGrath and funded by the Irish Research Council through the Department of Taoiseach’s Shared Island Unit. Cavan Arts was interested in having a greater understanding of the interdependencies and shared potential of arts in the Cavan Border Space. An opportunity to connect with Fermanagh-Omagh District Council’s (FODC) Arts, Culture and Heritage Service staff was identified based on the two arts services’ previous collaborations and their engagement in workshops held for that research.

Dance on the Island

Existing arts policy and academic research related to creative activity on the island of Ireland indicates that place and locality influences the type, availability, opportunity, and aspiration of, or for, this activity. For dance on the island, there are differences in experience and opportunity for those based in urban and rural areas, which may be associated with: the cultural traditions of places; geography; transport and physical infrastructure; the presence, attraction and / or retention of cultural workers and professional, social and voluntary or amateur networks; arts resources, facilities and assets; and policy values, priorities and presumptions related to investment in culture. Despite differences, research also shows that dance work and engagement does not stop at the border. There is a strong network of interdependencies supporting and enabling professional, publicly subsidised practice across the whole of the island.

Existing research also indicates that the island of Ireland is home to a broad range of dance practices and genres. Yet, apart from research related to pre-professional dance training, much academic, sector- and policy-engaged research that regards working and facilitating dance on the island tends to focus on professional, publicly subsidised areas of practice. Further, while research exists on traditional, amateur, community, and theatre dance, very little research considers these combined areas of practice as an ecology, nor how they relate to one another (or not) across dance genres or styles in the context of place. This lack of knowledge has a bearing on our capacity to understand engagement in dance and the policies required for supporting and nurturing that engagement.

To build on existing research and address gaps in understanding of the nature of the dance ecology and its situation in and beyond the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh areas, *Sites of Significance* sought to:

1. Identify and locate existing dance facilitators and professionals in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region through an audit and mapping of existing practice;
2. Gain understanding of the pathways for taking part in dance that exist in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region from the perspective of dance facilitators and professionals through one-to-one interviews and dance practice-as-research enquiry at a Gathering event;
3. Facilitate sharing about the meaning, value, and regional needs for dance among dance facilitators and professionals in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region through dance practice-as-research exchanges and discussions at the Gathering event; and
4. Address a gap existing in the wider Shared Island research context regarding the development of connectivity between artists in rural, borderland regions.

Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh

Sharing 70km of the Irish land border, Fermanagh-Omagh and Cavan are rural local authorities. They encompass major town centres, including Enniskillen and Omagh in Fermanagh-Omagh and Cavan Town along with the 3 municipal districts of Belturbet, Ballyjamesduff, and Cootehill Bailieborough in Cavan, in addition to common experience of relatively dispersed and aging populations. The border features in the political, economic and cultural situation of towns within each local authority and their associated strategies with descriptions of many of their localities as being strategically located cross-jurisdictional routes as well as passages to and from urban centres.

Digital, economic, and social connectivity are noted in local policies and strategies as important areas of development to further enhance living and working in both local authority areas. There are a number of initiatives aimed at promoting liveable, vibrant, healthy, age-friendly, peaceful, and socially inclusive localities. Strategies point to the importance of the community and voluntary sector as well as the strength of the area's natural beauty and biodiversity.

At the commencement of the *Sites* project, there was fragmented information regarding dance activity within the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authority areas. Cavan's arts plan noted contemporary dance as an artform that is 'lesser developed' and in need of greater support in the Cavan context. There was also anecdotal information on various types of dance groups and events taking place through some school, community centre, and Comhaltas networks, but with little formal documented data regarding dance activity. Fermanagh-Omagh has an arts and cultural database that returns limited dance-specific information.

A Mixed-Methods Approach

Based on the extensive interdisciplinary experience of McGrath and Durrer, dance practice-as-research and quantitative and qualitative research methods within the social sciences were combined to gain understanding of the pathways to engagement and the work in dance in which dance facilitators and professionals who live and / or work within the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh territorial border area engage.

The project asked:

- What dance is happening in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region?
- Where is that dance happening?
- How is that dance happening
- With what effect?
- With what potential?

This research involved:

A policy review of cross-jurisdictional and local policy documents, specifically related to rural development, local government, and arts policy at national level as well as specific to Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh;

An audit of dance activity happening within local authority areas, capturing: type of dance activity / style; venue for that activity (physical sites); geographic location of activity (and / or physical site); target participant type; key contact person; frequency of activity (e.g., weekly, short term);

Telephone interviews with 5 dance facilitators drawn from the internet audit to get an initial sense of the pathways for taking part in dance;

A Gathering event on 22nd May 2023 at Marble Arch Caves, UNESCO Global Geopark. A selection of 15 dance practitioners and facilitators in Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh, identified through the audit as representative of the broad range of dance genres being practiced across the border region, were invited to attend a Gathering. Practitioners represented Irish Step Dance and Set Dance, Scottish Country Dance, Céilí, Sean Nós, Contemporary and Somatic Practices, Flamenco, Street and Hip Hop dance, Jive and Line-dance.

The Gathering event served: (i) as a platform for strengthening existing links and forging new connections between dance facilitators identified in the audit; (ii) as a way to deepen the researchers' understanding of existing dance activity and networks in the region. The event was designed to incorporate both movement-based dance research activities alongside social science research activities, in addition to providing opportunities for participants to connect informally (e.g., during tea breaks and lunch, and during a dedicated group tour of the Marble Arch Caves).

The site for the Gathering event (Marble Arch Caves) was chosen to underscore the place-specific ecologies of both jurisdictions, with the rivers that flow and meet underground connecting conceptually with the (often) "uncounted" or "invisible" pathways to, and connections between, rural dance and dancers in the region.

Research processes that took place at the Gathering not only captured personal, affective, interrelational, and location-specific experiences that would not normally be recorded in official counting or mapping of dance activity, but also provided an opportunity for these to be shared amongst participants. Activities included:

An Embodied Mapping Workshop in which research participants reflected on significant memories and experiences from their “dancing life journeys” and recorded thoughts for future developments. Taking inspiration from the confluence of underground rivers and caves under the participants’ feet at the Marble Arch Caves workshop spaces, McGrath based the workshop design on the life journey of a river. The river cycle provided a structure to map dance experience, labour, and connections between people, and people and place, that occur in rural regions. Working solo, in pairs, and in groups and using movement and drawing, participants responded to a series of questions regarding memories of first encounters with dance, dance steps learned and taught, and significant dance performances, while recalling atmospheres of places and spaces for dance, journeys getting there, and teachers, fellow dancers and students encountered along the way. Participants were supported to share these reflections through discussion, exchanges of dance steps and movements, and the creation of new dances together combining these steps and memories. These exchanges prompted conversations about dance locations in the region, dance customs, dance histories, intergenerational dance connections, and dance wear.

Dance Sharings were also facilitated at the Gathering workshop, whereby each participant had a chance to share their practice through a short performance or facilitation of a group dance. Solo performances encompassed genres such as Flamenco, Hip Hop and Sean Nós, with group dances being facilitated by participants for Contemporary dance, Line dance, Scottish country dance, and somatic practice.

The Sites of Significance Screendance Film captures the dance practice-as-research methods that took place at the Gathering: the embodied mapping workshop activities; the individual and group dance sharing sessions; and the group’s visit to the Marble Arch Caves. Directed by McGrath and videographer and editor, Simon Mills, the film is based on McGrath’s concept of a dance river journey, with accompanying text by McGrath including verbatim text from participant responses to workshop task prompts. The film also features an original composition and soundscape by Sorca McGrath, that interweaves field recordings of the caves, rivers, pools and surrounding Burren landscape in the Marble Arch complex with recordings of the conversations and dancing that took place during the Gathering event. You can watch the film here: <https://youtu.be/ipQ30XrVCaQ>

Focus group discussions, facilitated by Durrer, captured reflection with and amongst participants regarding the experiences and infrastructures (tangible and intangible) of / for dance in, across, and from the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh context. The focus group facilitated dialogue sharing on the experiences of ‘making dance happen’ in complement to the dance practice-as-research activities.

Research Insights

The audit and the site-specific embodied/danced explorations, sharings, and conversations held at the Gathering and captured in the film, reveal the diversity and multi-scalar nature of the dance ecology in the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh region.

147 separate dance activities in the region were identified in the audit across a variety of endeavours, ranging from professional dance companies to private dance schools, social dancing activities, and freelance dance artists. A diverse and varied representation of dance genres exists in and from Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authority areas, with Traditional/Folk - Irish representing the highest at 36%, followed by Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot and Line Dance at 23%, and hiphop / urban / street at 13%.

Localities, Movement and Venues for Dance

Of the 147 dance activities or data points found, 145 were geo-located and mapped. With 41 located in Fermanagh, 28 in Tyrone and 38 in Cavan. 12 are in Monaghan with the remaining activities across Donegal, Dublin City, Kildare, Longford, Louth and Meath in Ireland and Antrim, Armagh, Derry / Londonderry, and Down in Northern Ireland. Within Fermanagh-Omagh District Council Enniskillen and Omagh host the highest number of dance activities with Cavan's 3 municipal districts of Cavan Belturbet, Ballyjamesduff, and Cootehill Bailieborough and Cavan Town featuring the most found in the audit.

While the dance activity identified in this audit appears to be concentrated in certain towns, dance in and from Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh is happening in multiple locations. Those facilitating dance in the region often move to a number of different venues and towns as well as local authorities and sometimes across jurisdictions and even off the island. There is evidence of dance facilitators moving across the island and holding dance sessions in multiple local authorities (from Derry to Donegal to Cork), off the island (to Spain), across the border (Fermanagh-Omagh to Cavan).

Dance facilitators access and utilise a variety of venues to make dance happen in a variety of local areas.

- **30%** of activity takes place in Community Venues encompassing Community centres, Community halls, Youth centres
- **16%** of activity takes place in venues which are Unknown, where we have no data about the venue other than its town, locality
- **11%** of activity takes place in Religious Venues

Setting aside the 'Unknown' and 'Multiple' Venues (as they will likely also include Community and Religious Venues), Community and Religious Venues host a substantial amount of the dance activities uncovered in the audit. These largely constitute Traditional Irish; Hip Hop / Urban / Street; Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot & Line Dance and Musical Theatre. There is an absence of ballet and contemporary dance noted. The type of space available for dance has a direct impact on the experience of dance for practitioners with participants noting the size, flooring, lighting, temperature, and atmosphere/feeling of these spaces.

Dance Enterprises and Endeavours

There is a range of enterprises or forms of involvement taking place in dance in the region, including voluntarily-led social dancing, for-profit and not-for-profit, fee-paying and non-fee-paying. Some individuals facilitate dance as “pure hobby” while others do this as part or full time areas of work. As is often characteristic of rural social enterprise, many facilitators “make dance happen” through much of their own resourcefulness, based on public arts and non-arts specific funding at local, national and EU level and through the establishment of fees and sometimes through establishing dedicated dance or fitness-related enterprises.

Dance activity also takes place through different forms of engagement and a range of age groups, including children and young people, youth service-specific, hospitals and care centres or locale-specific. It takes place during the day, in the evenings, on weekdays and on the weekends. Activity may emphasise learning and skill development in addition to confidence building and / or place an emphasis on social nights out. Dance activity occurs at differing frequency, varied from one-off projects, to weekly sessions or classes for short camps, 5-week terms, or for several months.

The Value of Dance

The value of dance to those facilitating is both personal – that is for oneself - and includes being active, supporting self-awareness and having fun. Maps of earliest dance memories evidence both interpersonal connections, and a strong connection of these earliest dance memories with place.

Within accounts of interpersonal connections, familial, and intergenerational links (that were also noted in the provision of dance activity in the region) were important in the associations between people, and people and place. The continuation of dance traditions and cultures across generations was a further notable element of the study. The social aspects of connecting to a wider local community were also important for many participants.

Many research participants also indicated finding joy in supporting the joy and progress of others. Those facilitating dance commented on the importance of their work as giving back to the community. The *Sites of Significance* film captures the joy that participants experience through sharing dance and dancing together. It evidences an affective sense of the connections forged between participants themselves, and between participants and location, during the Gathering.

Further Development, Exchange and Connection

A series of recommendations have been devised to support and nurture the diverse and complex network of dance groups, activities, facilitators and artists that exist in the Cavan and Fermanagh–Omagh region. They have been arrived at by way of the focus group discussion and the embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering, and our overall analysis of literature and data gathered. Recommendations speak to the corporate, development, community, and arts and culture specific policies and strategies within each local authority. Considerate of national arts, creativity and spatial policies within the Arts Councils in both jurisdictions, and the Government of Ireland’s Creative Ireland programme, the recommendations also demonstrate the ways in which local level activity requires nuanced and situated focus within national level policies.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. **Develop a Database of the Existing and Diverse Spaces for Dance**

Engagement with facilitators to develop and annually maintain a cross-border database that is made accessible and open to the public will raise the profile of dance in, and from, the region as well as provide foundation for the development of a network of dance for those working in different genres.

2. **Enhance Existing Spaces for Dance within Area Development Planning**

A more detailed audit on what venues are available for dance, and for which genres these venues are most suitable, is recommended. Such an audit could also make recommendations on how to enhance existing spaces for dance through the provision of suitable flooring and other resources.

3. **Support Rural Connectivity and Bring Dance Expertise into Local Development Plans**

Dance facilitators’ high level of territorial and spatial mobility and use of varied venues indicates the breadth of experience and unique perspective they could bring to bear on the development of arts-specific and broader local and spatial planning initiatives. The inclusion of dance practitioners on relevant development and planning boards and committees is recommended.

4. **Celebrate the Diversity of ‘Rural’ Dance**

A programme of celebration that supports public engagement in the diversity and range of dance activities and genres in the region, and that captures and archives the development of dance over time is recommended.

5. **Recognise the Value of Dance for Social Connection and Health**

The value of dance for social connection and health that has been identified in previous research was echoed in these findings. Greater recognition and resourcing by local authorities of local dance facilitators for their contribution to social and health-based outcomes is recommended.

6. Recognise Social Enterprise and Voluntary Practice within Dance

The dance activity uncovered through the research contributes to the community and voluntary sector of the local area, indicating provision of infrastructural supports for youth, health, and socially related services. This indicates further growth potential for dance groups as local, social enterprises. More understanding of the range of enterprises through which dance takes place is needed, as well as the need to build skills specific to voluntary, not-for-profit and for-profit or business-based endeavours.

7. Support Knowledge Exchange across the Dance Ecology

Strengthening connections between dance practitioners both within, and from, the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh region would support the further development of dance on the island, as well as building capacity for dance artists and facilitators. This research identifies actions towards skills exchange and the development of a network that includes individuals from across different dance genres, which are supportive of broader local and national arts, culture, and community development policies.

8. Engage Interdisciplinary Research Approaches in Policy Development

Through knowledge exchange between dance and social science and the combination of mixed methods, *Sites of Significance* highlights the importance of different modes of research for illuminating the lived and embodied experience of dance in the local area of Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh. Further development of interdisciplinary approaches are recommended for inquiries relevant to policy development.



02: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Sites of Significance is a research project examining dance practice and places for dance in a rural, border region. Although many public policies stop at the Irish border, arts work and engagement does not. Recognising that place and locality have a strong relationship to the opportunities that are available to arts participants and workers, *Sites of Significance* responds to the unique territorial, geographic and cultural landscape of the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh border area.

Taking place in 2023, *Sites of Significance* was led by Aoife McGrath (Queen's University Belfast) and Victoria Durrer (University College Dublin) and supported by Research Assistant, Argyro Tsampazi. The project particularly grew from the experience of Cavan Arts Officer, Catriona O'Reilly, as a partner on *Building Capacity for the Cultural Industries: Towards a Shared Island Approach for Dance & Theatre* (Durrer, et al., 2023), a research project, led by Victoria Durrer with Aoife McGrath and funded by the Irish Research Council and supported by the Department of Taoiseach's Shared Island Unit. Focused on the publicly funded dance and theatre sector, *Building Capacity* found that dance and theatre on the island are interconnected, with the workforce typically requiring cross-island mobility for work, training and development. Cavan County Council Arts Office, or Cavan Arts, expressed interest in having a greater understanding of the interdependencies (or not) for dance existing in the Cavan border space and the shared potential for nurturing and developing the arts. An opportunity to connect with Fermanagh-Omagh District Council's (FODC) Arts, Culture and Heritage Service staff was identified based on the two arts service's previous collaborations and their engagement in workshops held for that research. Funding from Creative Ireland and Cavan Arts Public Art Programme made *Sites of Significance* possible.

Developing questions raised by the *Building Capacity* project, and on McGrath and Durrer's previous research, the *Sites of Significance* project focused on dance, an area Cavan Arts identified in their arts plan (2018) as being in need of support and development. *Sites of Significance* sought to capture understanding of the nature of dance, and the pathways to engagement and work in dance, that are experienced by dance artists and facilitators within the area of Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authorities. The project mixed dance practice-as-research and social science research methods to gain nuanced understanding of this lived experience.

The research sought to:

5. Identify and locate existing dance facilitators and professionals in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region through an audit and mapping of existing practice;
6. Gain understanding of the pathways for taking part in dance that exist in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region from the perspective of dance facilitators and professionals through one-to-one interviews and dance practice-as-research enquiry at a Gathering event;
7. Facilitate sharing about the meaning, value, and regional needs for dance among dance facilitators and professionals in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region through dance practice-as-research exchanges and discussions at the Gathering event; and
8. Address a gap existing in the wider Shared Island research context regarding the development of connectivity between artists in rural, borderland regions.

This report presents the findings of this study in relation to these questions and objectives, and concludes with a series of recommendations for nurturing dance in the region.



03: DANCE ON THE ISLAND

DANCE ON THE ISLAND

Existing research to date indicates that the island of Ireland is home to a broad range of dance practices and genres (McGrath et al., 2022). Yet, to date, much critical and sector- and policy-engaged research on the nature of working and facilitating dance on the island of Ireland - apart from that related to pre-professional dance training (e.g., O'Brien, 2010; Roche, 2016) - has largely focused on professional, publicly subsidised areas of dance practice (e.g., Macken and Curry, 2009; McGrath and Meehan, 2018; McGrath, 2021). And within this research, contemporary dance and ballet have tended to be the main focus of enquiry, due to these genres receiving the majority of public funding for dance.

Arts policy and cultural policy indicates that place and locality relate to the type, availability, opportunity, and aspiration of, or for, creative activity more generally (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015; ACI, 2022a; CI, 2023). Influencing factors include: the cultural traditions of places; geography; physical infrastructure; the presence, attraction and / or retention of cultural workers and professional, social and voluntary or amateur networks; and policy values, priorities and presumptions related to culture and about what is 'good' art and thus worthy of investment (Durrer, et al., 2023; Luckman, 2012; Gilmore 2013).

For dance on the island, there is a noticeable difference of working experience in urban and rural localities, especially with regards to professional dance. Professional dance artists work most often in the largest cities on the island, likely due to a concentration of, and thus easier physical access to, facilities and training (e.g., studios, rehearsal spaces, classes) and networks of support and opportunity (McGrath et al., 2022). Those in rural areas must travel, sometimes great distances with limited access to public transport, to access facilities and opportunities. In some cases they may work in isolation in rural areas and become the "source" of information on resources available (or not) for dance in some areas (Durrer, et al., 2023).

Regardless of where one resides on the island, Dublin is an important dance industry centre not only due to spaces, but also festival activity (McGrath et al., 2022). Yet, the high cost of living, accommodation, and short-term stays in places like Dublin has presented challenges for living and making work there (Durrer, et al., 2023).

While local place matters, research indicates that dance work and engagement does not stop at the border. There is a strong network of interdependencies supporting and enabling professional, publicly subsidised practice across the whole of the island. There is cross-island movement of dancers for: touring shows; facilitating youth and community activity; and cross-jurisdictional co-productions between dance companies. Activities may be enabled by social and professional relationships between individuals or by more formal arrangements including specific cross-island, local authority and EU funding streams (Durrer et al., 2023).

A significant recent development in the establishment of more formal support for cross-border cooperation is the initiation of a new national and all-island dance company, Luail, by Arts Council Ireland in March 2024 following recommendations outlined in the most recent Arts Council Ireland dance policy, *Advancing Dance (2022-2025)*.

While research exists on traditional, amateur, community, and theatre dance, very little research considers these combined areas of practice as an ecology, nor how they relate to one another (or not) across dance genres or styles in the context of place. To address this gap in knowledge about dance practice on the island, the *Sites of Significance* project captures traces of the largely “unseen” dance activity that occurs in rural regions: practices that might not be represented in official “counting” or “mapping” exercises of dance activity within broader dance, arts and cultural policy research on the island (O’Mahony, 2022; DfC & NIRSA, 2022) .

At the commencement of the *Sites* project, there was fragmented information regarding dance activity within the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authority areas. Cavan’s arts plan noted contemporary dance as an artform that is ‘lesser developed’ and in need of greater support in the Cavan context (Cavan Arts, 2022, p. 37). There was also anecdotal information on various types of dance groups and events taking place through some school, community centre, and Comhaltas networks. Beyond that which is within the contemporary dance genre and publicly-funded, there was little formal documented data regarding dance activity. Fermanagh-Omagh has an arts and cultural database that returns limited dance-specific information (FODC, 2024d).

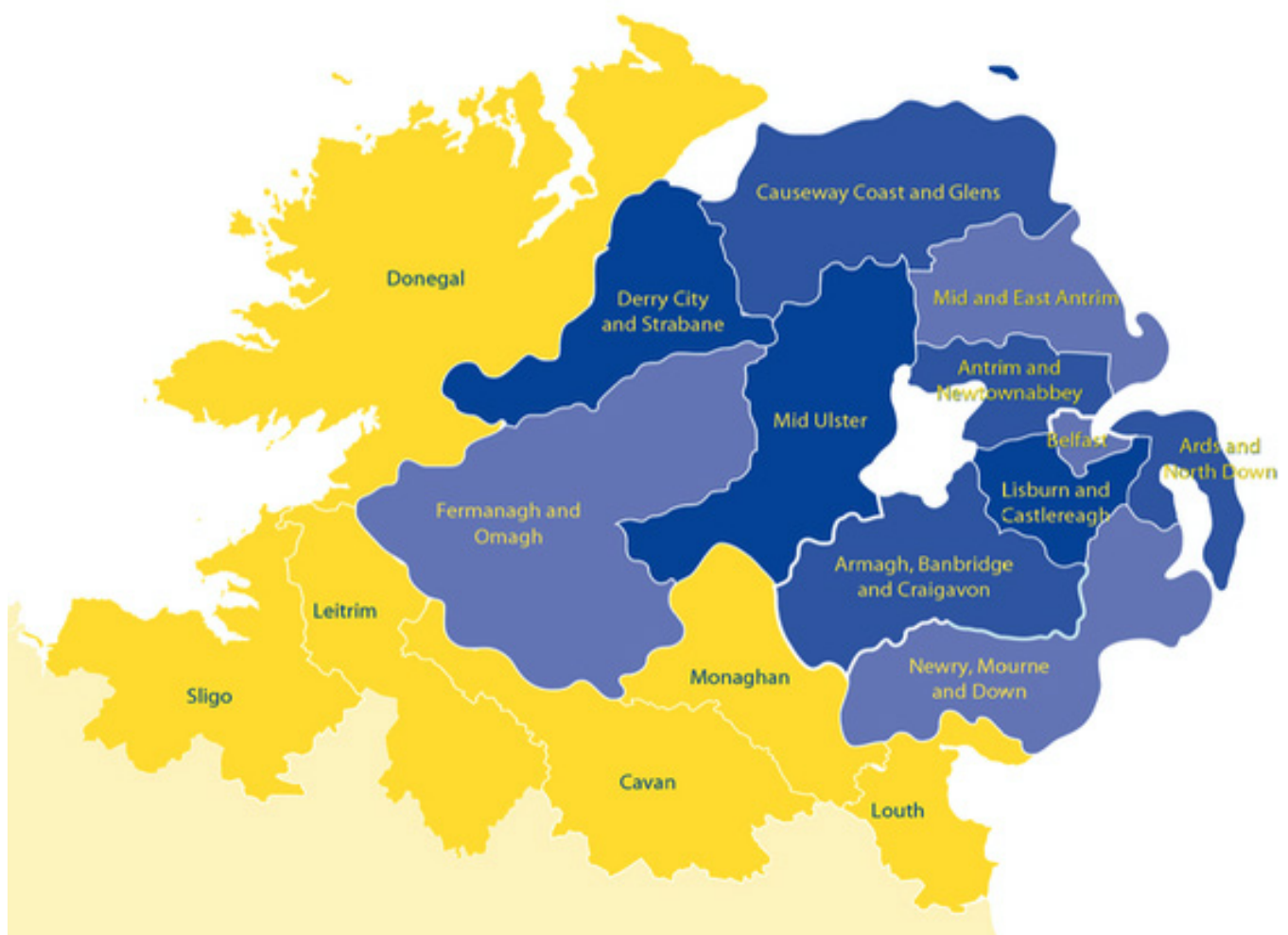


04: GETTING SITUATED: CAVAN AND FERMANAGH- OMAGH

GETTING SITUATED: CAVAN AND FERMANAGH-OMAGH

To facilitate sharing about the meaning, value, and regional needs for dance among dance facilitators and professionals in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region (Objective 3), it is necessary to ground the research in that place and context. This section situates the project in the geographic, socio-demographic, and policy-based landscape of this border region.

Sharing 70km of the Irish land border, Fermanagh-Omagh and Cavan are rural local authorities with major town centres along with relatively dispersed populations. While Fermanagh-Omagh (Figure 1) is the largest of Northern Ireland's 11 district councils, it has the smallest population at 116,812 (NISRA, 2021; FODC, 2020). Cavan (Figure 1) has a low population density with a population of 81,704 people, and ranks 19th largest of the 32 counties in Ireland in terms of area.



Northern Ireland and the border region

Figure 1. Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh Border Region (SEUPB, 2014).

The border features in the political, economic and cultural situation of towns within each local authority and their associated strategies. Cavan County is described as ‘a gateway to and from Dublin, the Midlands and the NorthWest’ (Cavan Co Co, 2019c, p. 6). Cavan Town is seen as a key junction, being on the ‘East West route from Dundalk to Sligo and just in excess of one hour from the M50 (Dublin) and just under two hours from Belfast’ (Cavan Co Co, 2019c, p. 6). In addition to sharing the border with Fermanagh-Omagh, Cavan county borders Leitrim, Monaghan, Meath, Longford, and Westmeath in Ireland. Fermanagh-Omagh borders the four counties of Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan and Leitrim in Ireland. Within Fermanagh-Omagh district council policies and strategies, Omagh is recognised as being ‘strategically located on the Western Economic Corridor that connects Omagh northwards to Derry/Londonderry, eastwards to Belfast and southwards to Dublin’, while Enniskillen is noted as being ‘in close proximity to the border with the Republic of Ireland and within 1 hour of Sligo’ (FODC, 2020, p. 13).

Commonalities and inter-relations between the two jurisdictions are a feature of life and work for these two local authority areas, in addition to their own unique characteristics (Cavan Co Co, 2019c; FODC, 2020). Data from both local authorities indicate that they are positive and healthy places to live (FODC, 2020b; Cavan Co Co, 2023) with digital, economic, and social connectivity important to living and working in both local authority areas. There are a number of initiatives aimed at promoting liveable, vibrant, healthy, age-friendly, peaceful, and socially inclusive localities. Strategies point to the importance of the community and voluntary sector in local authorities like Fermanagh-Omagh and Cavan.

Some key features include:

- **Natural Beauty and Biodiversity.** The two local authorities are notable for their natural beauty and their shared UNESCO Global Geopark. Cavan is a drumlin countryside with small hills and a number of lakes and a more mountainous terrain in the Northwest part of the county. Fermanagh-Omagh is regarded as ‘possibly the most biodiverse district in NI’ (FODC, 2020a, p. 6) with Lough Erne recognised as an important tourism destination (FODC, 2020a), ‘as part of the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ (AONB) (FODC, 2020a, p. 5).
- **Population Diversity and Aging Concerns.** There is increasing population diversity in terms of nationality.¹ The importance of recognising this shift is noted in local area policies (CCCT, 2023). Isolation and population dispersal and age are policy concerns in both areas.² Overall FODC has ‘low population density and high levels of isolation’ with 38 people per km² and the district having ‘5 of the 10 most remote wards in NI’ (FODC, 2020a, 6). Equally Cavan notes the 17% increase in the 2022 census of those ‘aged 65 and over living alone’ (CSO, 2022f, n.p.).
- **Connectivity Challenges.** Virtual connectivity and geographic connectivity in relation to transportation pose challenges for people living and working in the area with opportunities for policy intervention. In FODC, there are no motorways and only 0.6km of dual carriageway (FODC, 2020a) with public transport links in / out and across the area limited (FODC, 2020b). For Cavan, ‘inadequate transport linkages in the county [are noted as] exacerbating inequalities and limiting socio-economic opportunities’ (Cavan Co Co, 2023, p. 24).³ In relation to virtual connectivity, FODC’s *Community Plan* notes ‘37% of premises unable to access broadband speeds in excess of 10Mbps’ (FODC, 2020a, p. 6). With a dedicated *Digital Strategy* (Cavan Co Co, 2021), Cavan’s

Development Plan notes 'extremely limited ...availability outside of the main settlements ...as of 2017' (Cavan Co Co, 2022a, p. 270). While both areas are focused on addressing these concerns, they present challenges for arts workers based in rural areas for whom the potential to access work is subject to the availability of 'mobility-enabling infrastructure and services', such as transport and broadband connectivity (Rau, 2012, p. 38; see also NESC, 2022; Durrer, et al., 2023, p. 71).

- **Support for Health and Wellbeing.** Support for healthy and active lifestyles and engagement in play and cultural activities for all stages of life is a local policy focus. Social participation, civic engagement, and transport are noted as important for doing so (Cavan Co Co, 2022b). Active and Age Friendly strategies exist in both areas (FODC, 2020b; Cavan Co Co, 2022b), which highlight the 'provision of inclusive and accessible facilities, services and opportunities to participate in leisure activities' (FODC, 2020b, p. 18; see also FODC, 2019a). FODC's Community and Corporate Plans (2020a; 2020b) emphasise physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and social connectedness as priorities. For children and young people there are goals to foster greater voice in decisions taken, improving opportunities and spaces for play and encouraging participation in 'sports and other leisure and cultural activities' (FODC, 2020a, p. 21). While the arts have relevance to all strategies, there is no specific mention of dance. Cavan's Arts Plan (Cavan Arts, 2018) and its *Culture and Creativity Strategy, 2023-27* (CCCT, 2023)
- **Community and Voluntary Sector Importance.** Fermanagh-Omagh's Corporate Plan (2020b) notes the importance of the community and voluntary sector to providing infrastructural support at local level, particularly in villages and towns, and a need for auditing the types of provision that exist and developing capacity building opportunities.
- **Local Area Development and Business Growth.** Growing local businesses is an area of work in both local authority areas (Census, 2022b; Cavan Co Co, 2019c, p. 6; CCCT, 2023) with FODC noting the 'entrepreneurial' nature of work there (FODC, 2020a, p. 6). In Cavan, businesses with under 10 employees represent 27.6% of employment, with 10-19 employee businesses accounting for 14.4% (Cavan Co Co, 2023). Further, the redevelopment of public spaces and physical infrastructure is taking place in both local authorities. Within Fermanagh-Omagh, Enniskillen is undergoing an appearance improvement scheme with significant financial investment (FODC 2020b indicating £5 million) and there are also 15 villages under a village renewal scheme. At the time of writing FODC's Corporate Plan, Derrygonnelly, Ederney, Fintona, Gortin, Teamore, Kinawley, Dromore, and Garrison were completed, with Carrickmore, Lisnaskea, Magheraveely and Rosslea underway. In Cavan, Virginia will see a new flagship Civic Centre planned for the town of Virginia with a new library and the renovation of the Ramor Theatre (CCCT, 2023). There is also a goal for capital development for Kingscourt Library, pending funding and the planned redevelopment of Belturbet Library and Civic Centre (Cavan Co Co, 2022a). There are further development plans noted for self-sustaining and medium towns in the Cavan County Development Plan (Cavan Co Co, 2022a). Within these policies however, the artsworker is neglected as an area of employment impacting or impacted by these developments (Durrer, et al., 2023).

- **Tourism and Economy industry.** Tourism is an important industry in both areas, along with food, agriculture, retail, and manufacturing (Cavan Co Co, 2019c, Cavan Co Co, 2023; FODC, 2020b). There is particular focus on the natural landscape, though Cavan has recently increased efforts to strengthen relationships with its diaspora through the Cavan Diaspora Archive (begun through the establishment of Cavan Genealogy in 1987) and the Cavan Calling Homecoming festival initiated in July 2023 (CCCT, 2023). There is also development of a Digital Hub in Cavan (Cavan Co Co, 2023, p. 17).
- **Local Authority Arts and Cultural Policy.** The arts and cultural offices of both local authorities engage in a range of areas of work that are specific to the cultural (arts, heritage and creative expressions), as well as other policy areas. These are: social (related to e.g., age demographics, social inclusion), economic development, tourism, and peace and good relations (Cavan Arts, 2018; FODC, 2021; CCCT, 2023).

Getting a sense of the diversity (or not) of the dance practice that exists in this connected geographical and territorial landscape aligns with several policies and plans. In fact, cultural objectives are required to have this alignment across other local strategies as a matter of course (CCCT, 2023; FODC 2020b; Cavan Co Co, 2019a). Uncovering ‘the stories of places, memories and shared experiences’ (CCCT, 2023, p. 11), the significance of its rural-border situation, and the ‘possibilities offered for North-South partnerships through [...] arts, culture, and heritage-based creative initiatives’ (p. 10) are noted in local strategy. The importance of cultural diversity, as well as recognising the diversity of practice and ‘the range of ways in which artists make work; [and] in which people experience the arts’ has been an ambition of the arts office (Cavan Arts, 2018, p. 30). Cavan’s Culture and Creativity Strategy, 2023-27 (CCCT, 2023), equally recognises the importance of this diversity. While the professional artist is argued to be ‘central to the ongoing development of the arts’ in Cavan (Cavan Arts, 2018, p. 25), Cavan’s arts plan (Cavan Arts, 2018, p. 23) identifies the importance of fostering connectivity across their arts ecology to realise its mission; in particular developing ‘more cohesive relationships between artists, participants, consumers and key stakeholders.’

The report, *Building Capacities for the Cultural Industries: Towards a Shared Island Approach for Dance and Theatre*, for the Shared Island Unit highlighted the need for developing spatial connectivity ‘through financial investment in, and enhancement of, existing cross-island networks (e.g., venues; local authorities; resource bodies; festivals; arts workers) through meetings, gatherings, and information exchange’ with specific attention drawn to art workers in rural and rural border areas’ (Durrer, et al., 2023, p. 9). Policy from both jurisdictions seemingly challenges a deficit-based approach to understanding living and working in rural places, with an emphasis on a people-centred approach, on understanding the heterogeneity of what constitutes the rural as well as on the opportunities and ‘rural-urban linkages’ for rural life and work (NESC, 2021, p. 9). Key jurisdictional policies stress ‘the talent, skills and creativity of people in rural communities; ... the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places; and ... the potential to create quality jobs in rural areas and sustain our shared environment’ (DRCD, 2021, p. 5) with cooperative frameworks for spatial planning in place on the island that may support rural border development (Gol, 2021; DRD and DECLG, 2020). Cultural strategy notes that ‘bespoke’ approaches, which recognise the unique circumstances of rural border areas are also required (CCCT, 2023, p. 11). With the exception of some work focused on the creative industries (CCCT, 2023; Collins, et al., 2018; Creative Ireland, 2024), accounts for the lived experience of those working in and making the arts happen, as part of the cultural fabric of places is still marginalised in policy here, particularly those based in rural border areas (Durrer, et al., 2023). This broader situation of Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh and its policy landscape frames the nature of taking part and working in dance there.



05: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND APPROACH

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND APPROACH

Sites of Significance sought to build on the broader knowledge regarding the nature of working in dance on the island, particularly through bringing greater specificity. Accounting for its context, introduced above, the project asked:

- **What** dance is happening in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region?
- **Where** is that dance happening?
- **How** is that dance happening
- **With** what effect?
- **With** what potential?

Focus: Facilitators and Professionals

The research focuses on dance facilitators and professionals (rather than broader dance participants) who live and / or work within the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh territorial border area. Place-based and spatial arts sector-focused research and policy note the importance of physical infrastructure for supporting engagement in the arts (ACI, 2022) with that specific to dance highlighting a lack of suitable studios and performance spaces (McGrath, 2021; McGrath et al., 2022). Despite this concern, there is a dearth of information regarding how people – artists and facilitators – actually make dance happen and in everyday circumstances (McGrath, et al., 2022; Durrer, 2017). This lack of information has a bearing on our capacity to understand engagement in dance and the policies required for supporting and nurturing that engagement.

Literature

To understand the context and site we draw from a range of national, cross-jurisdictional and local policy documents, specifically related to rural development, local government, and arts policy.

A mixed method approach

The research draws from a range of disciplines: dance and social science, cultural policy, political science, post-conflict and border studies, public administration and arts management, performance studies, environmental humanities, and human geography. Dance practice-as-research and quantitative and qualitative research methods within the social sciences were combined to gain understanding of the pathways to engagement and the work in dance in which dance facilitators and professionals engage.

Sites of Significance continues to develop McGrath and Durrer's mixed methods approach combining dance practice-as-research (PaR) methods with social science research methods, which has built from their four-year collaboration over several dance practice and policy specific projects, listed below.

- Co-Motion: All-Island Dance Conference (2019, Dance Ireland, Dance Resource Base (now Theatre and Dance Northern Ireland), and Belfast International Arts Festival)
- Dance Conversations (2021, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Government of Ireland / Dance Ireland / Theatre & Dance NI)
- Dance Counts Survey with Dr Peter Campbell (University of Liverpool) (2021, Dance Ireland and Theatre and Dance NI)
- Building Capacity for the Cultural Industries: Towards a Shared Island Approach for Dance and Theatre (2023, Irish Research Council / Government of Ireland Shared Island Unit)

The approach to the project built from McGrath and Durrer's own individual interests and expertise in dance and cultural policy studies respectively. Quantitative and qualitative social science methods, in particular an audit and a mapping of dance activity, telephone interviews and a focus group, allowed for scoping and geo-locating activity producing insights through broad patterns and key themes. Dance practice-as-research methods allowed access to participants' embodied experiences of dance in the rural border region. The capture of danced responses to research questions was facilitated through the design and implementation of embodied mapping tasks that incorporated the sharing of dance memories and embodied experiences related to the origins and development of dance career trajectories. This innovative combination of dance and social science research methods connects both context and lived experience (McGrath et al., 2021). The approach draws attention to how dance, as an art form that is created and experienced through the body, is made to happen both in, through and of individuals' and groups' experiences of the sites and spaces of the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh area, and the interrelations between dance, people, and place. These methods are further explained below.

Audit

An audit of dance activity happening within the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authority areas was conducted (Objective 1). The audit sought to capture the following information:

- Type of dance activity / style
- Venue for that activity (physical sites)
- Geographic location of activity (and / or physical site)
- Target participant type
- Key contact person
- Frequency of activity (eg weekly, short term)

Both convenience sampling and snowball sampling were employed for the audit. Dance professionals / facilitators and dance groups were identified for the audit through two main ways. The first was via existing sets of information available through the local authorities and the second was by way of web-based searches. Finally, emails were also sent to the dance resource agencies on the island, Dance Ireland and Theatre and Dance Northern Ireland, to cross check any groups that may not have been identified in the internet, email and telephone searches.

Existing Lists:

An existing set of information was provided by the local authority arts and cultural officers themselves. Both local authorities sent a list of some names that were accessing existing opportunities or that they had come across through other events. A list of community, sports, and leisure centres as well as schools were also sent through.

17 Comhaltas Branches were identified in Fermanagh-Omagh via the Comhaltas website and the Ulster Comhaltas website. 17 Comhaltas Branches were identified in Cavan via the Comhaltas website. These were cross-checked with lists sent by the two local authority arts and cultural officers.

They are as follows:

Comhaltas Branches in Fermanagh-Omagh	Comhaltas Branches in Cavan
Benaughlin (Macken)	Ballinagh Comhaltas
An Baile Nua (Newtownbutler)	Belturbet CCÉ
Derrylin	CCÉ Baile an Mhuilinn (CCÉ Milltown)
St. Ninnidh's (Derrylin)	CCÉ Cill na Seanrátha (Killashandra)
Roslea	CCÉ Craobh Brian Galligan (Drumloman)
Roslea	CCÉ Killinkere (Bailieboro)
Lisnaskea	CCÉ Nyah (Cavan)
Lisnaskea	Cavan Town (Balling)/ Cavan Town CCÉ
Botha (Derrygonnelly)	Cootehill CCÉ (Bailieboro)
Botha (Springfield)	Crosskeys (Cavan)
Irvinestown	Glengevlin (Cavan)
Belleek	Muinchille / Cootehill
Trillick	Muintir Connacht Comhaltas (Virginia)
An Droim Mór (Dromore)	Mullahoran
Án Omaigh (Omagh)	Munsterconnaght (Cavan)
Dun Uladh (Omagh)	Swanlinbar Comhaltas
Tempo Fivemiletown	Cavan Comhaltas
Fintona	

Table 1. Comhaltas Branches Contacted for Audit.

All Cavan Comhaltas Branches with active email addresses were emailed and asked if they hosted any dance activity. All but 4 Cavan Comhaltas groups had active email addresses, excepting Crosskeys, Glengevlin, Mullahoran and Munsterconnaght. Only 1 (Cootehill) replied (and they stated as not having any dance activity).

All Fermanagh-Omagh Comhaltas Branches with active email addresses were emailed and asked if they hosted any dance activity. All but 1 Fermanagh-Omagh Comhaltas Branch had email addresses, excepting Botha (Derrygonnelly). Only 1 (Derrylin) replied (and they stated as not having any dance activity).

A list of schools was also provided by Fermanagh-Omagh's arts and cultural officer. Because we were focused on activity outside of formal education, we did not contact schools directly. However, schools do appear in the audit as a site where dance activity takes place.

Emails were also sent to 23 community / leisure centres across the two local authority areas for which email addresses were identified. Of these 2 were arts or cultural related spaces (Bailieborough Creative Hub and Belturbet Heritage Railway) and 1 is an Age Partnership (Southwest Age Partnership). A further 2 were youth-focused centres. In total, 6 replies were received: 3 from Cavan (in Abbeyland, Cootehill, and Bailieborough) and 3 from Fermanagh-Omagh (1 Belcoo and 2 in Omagh).

Belturbet Heritage Railway	Focus Family Resource Centre	Fermanagh Lakeland Forum
Omagh Boys and Girls Club	Education Authority NI / Youth Service	Lakeland Community Care
Flaxland Centre Drumduff	Kesh Community Centre	Belcoo Community Centre
Belleek Community Centre	Ederney Community Centre	Newtownbutler Community Centre
Rosslea Community Centre	Southwest Age Partnership	Stradone Community Centre
Cavan Leisure Centre	The Rectory Centre	Drumlin House
Gallonray House	Bridgestreet Centre	Bailieborough Creative Hub
Teach Oscail Family Resource Centre	Castlerahan Community Centre	

Table 2. Community / Leisure Centres Contacted for Audit.

Web-based Searching:

The second and main approach to capturing dance activity in the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh areas involved web-based searches. Hewson, et al. (2003) indicate the usefulness of web searches for identifying and locating groups of practice or interest. The use of social media in the arts has received increasing and international attention in arts management literature with a focus on marketing (Byrnes, 2022), for promotion particularly in the performing arts (for example Coleman, et al., 2019; Besana et al., 2018; Hausmann and Poellmann, 2013) and in creating co-produced activities with arts audiences (Miles, 2018; Walmsley 2016). For more locally-situated groups and activities such as those this study focuses on, research indicates that non-profit groups and organisations utilise social media for 'information - sharing and ...relationship-building' (p. 339).

The search terms 'Dance classes in Omagh' and 'Dance classes in Fermanagh' and 'Dance classes in Cavan' were inputted into the Google Search Engine. The Google Map feature was utilised to further examine the location of sites for the mapping. Results for 3 to 4 Google pages were examined until the results became irrelevant with place and with dance. Facebook pages, Instagram and specific websites were then examined.

Dance activity in Community-based venues was also considered through internet-based searches. First, the search terms 'Community Centres in Omagh', 'Community Centres in Fermanagh' and 'Community Centres in Cavan' were input into the Google Search engine. Results for 3 to 4 Google pages were examined until the results became irrelevant with place and with dance.

Comhaltas and Ulster Comhaltas directories were also examined as were the Cavan County Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council websites in order to collect information on Comhaltas, sports / leisure centres and locally or council-managed community centres. The Google Search Engine was utilised to locate the individual websites and / or social media pages for Comhaltas, sports / leisure / community centres and specific dance-related activity was searched for on each site. In the case of community centres, when no webpages were found or there lacked any detailed information, phone calls were made (if a phone number was available) to ask if dance activity takes place there. Not all phone calls yielded responses.

When dance activities or groups were identified by way of an internet search, their own websites and social media pages were searched to identify:

- Geographic location of activity
- Venue for that activity
- Participant focus of that activity
- Key contact person

These searches resulted in further snowball sampling by way of access to different websites and online groups. Such sampling is particularly useful for gathering information on 'low-information contexts' (Doesk, 2021, p. 651), such as dance.

Audit Coding and Categorising

Audit data was inputted into a Microsoft excel sheet across the following top line categories:

Name of Dance Group or Activity

Address of Activity

Dance Genre or Style

Description or Summary of Activity

Town / Area

County

Local Authority

Country

Postcode

Website

Venue Category

Latitude

Longitude

Dance Group or Activity was further broken down into the following categories, as relevant, as not all were present in this study:

- Professional Dance Company, and that which is publicly-subsidised
- Freelance, which may include freelance professional dance artists as well as dance facilitators who may not be professional, but may lead dance classes, social dancing or dance engagements.

Dance Engagement activities, including:

- *Dedicated longer term strands of work.* Where publicly subsidised arts or dance companies and organisations and local authorities have dedicated strands to their work that focus on dance for children, young people or other communities of age or interest.
- *Youth service settings.*
- *Short term Communities of Interest / Age Engagement in Dance.* Where organisations not focused on dance or publicly subsidised arts, or dance companies and organisations and local authorities have dedicated strands to their work that focus on dance for children, young people or other communities of age or interest, but on a short term or one-off basis

- Social dancing activities: may include dance classes but is not a dedicated school.
- Formal Dance Training: training in a specific discipline / disciplines with the possibility of pursuing a career, so vocational and employability-focused. (e.g., higher / further education)
- Pre-Vocational Dance Education Schools, providing 'a comprehensive foundation in dance practice, theory and performance' (O'Brien, 2010, pp. 12 – 13). Students attending are typically ages 17 - 21.
- Youth Dance Company: 'typically organised around scheduled dance classes with particular emphasis on learning, rehearsing, and public performance of specially created pieces of dance repertory. Classes for youth dance companies in Ireland are generally held once or twice a week (generally for three-hour sessions). They often involve auditions' (O'Brien, 2010, p. 20). Within the context of dance, there are youth dance companies that are associated with publicly subsidised professional dance companies and / or supported through Arts Council Ireland and / or local authority funding.
- Private Dance School activities: Private dance schools exist for a wide range of ages, such as from 3 to 18 years and additionally including an older cohort of adult students. Individuals may not be attending for the purposes of leading to formal dance study. They are typically fee-paying by participants attending (Leatherdale & Todd, 1998; Marzin, 2003). Some examples include stage schools, hip hop schools and ballet schools.
- Dance Competition: Dance competitions are important aspects for some private dance schools (including Urban Motion Dance) and some dance genres (such as Irish traditional and street dance). Competitions may be local, regional, national, and international where dance groups, studios, or schools compete for awards.
- Dance Festival-Youth
- Dance Festival-Professional
- Dance Artist in Residence

Dance Genre or Style was further broken down into the following categories, which are based on and matching categorisations in earlier studies (McGrath et al., 2022):

Ballet

Contemporary

Hip Hop/Urban/Street

Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot & Line Dance

Musical Theatre

Multi-genre (e.g. contemporary, ballet, musical theatre and / or traditional, hip hop)

Mumming

Traditional/Folk – Irish (e.g., step dance, sean nós, céilí dance, set dance)

Traditional/Folk – Ulster Scots

Traditional/Folk – Other World (examples include Flamenco, Polish Traditional, Chinese Traditional, Salsa / Latin, Greek Dancing)

Other

Venues were also further broken down into the following categories and meanings:

- Community Venue encompassing Community centres, Community halls, Youth centres
- Religious Venue encompassing Church halls, Parish halls, Parochial halls, and Churches
- Sports / Leisure Centre Venue encompassing GAA clubs, Fitness centres, Golf clubs
- Dance Studio / Venue encompassing dedicated dance studios (Macken & Curry, 2009)
- Arts (other) Venue: as associated with Arts Act 2003 definition and encompassing Theatres and Arts Centres
- Cultural / Heritage Venue encompassing Museums, venues with the title 'cultural', Heritage spaces, Libraries, and Civic Centres
- Industrial Estate
- Comhaltas Centre
- Pub / Bar / Hotel
- School or Higher Education Venue
- Multiple Venues: when we do not have specific data about the type of venue. We may have only the address for the group's offices and / or a list of types of venues as available on their webpage.
- Unknown: when we have no data about the venue other than its town, locality.

Mapping the Audit Data

The audit data is visualised using the geo-spatial mapping tool, Scribble Maps, recommended through University College Dublin. Scribble Maps is a Canadian-based mapping tool that utilises Google Maps technology and allows you to build, edit, and customise your own map through inputting exact addresses or latitude and longitude coordinates for the purpose of visualisation and analysis. The platform also allows you to isolate aspects of the data and generate correlating charts and diagrams of that data.

Ethics in Web-based Research

There are few ethical concerns associated with this project (Suguirá et al., 2017). The dance activities presented in the research were identified because information about them existed in the public domain, that is, they were being promoted or advertised to the public by way of different online platforms. As a result, any associated information (such as venues in which activities happen, lead facilitators, and contact information for dance facilitators and groups) with contact phone numbers were also in the public domain. Social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram are by their nature, public-facing, and they include their own terms and conditions which involve agreeing to those terms. So even though all dance groups present in the report may not have been aware of the research project (Suguirá, et al., 2017), the fact that posts are made within social media groups aimed at the promotion and sharing of their own dance activity, indicates that those engaged in any dance-group related social media activity would be aware of the public-facing aspect of such posts. Still, to address any concerns about privacy, only those contact details for groups that are publicly available were collected and are held in a private database only available to the researchers and the local authority research funders.

Limitations of the Audit

Some research limitations are necessary to keep in mind. 'Non-response bias', which occurs when those 'sampled' may not respond to the invitation to engage in the research (Ackland, 2013), was an occurrence in audit data collection. For one, most emails sent out did not receive replies. Similar non-responsiveness was met with any follow-up telephone calls. This meant that most of the data captured for the audit relied on web-based searching.

Many of the dance schools or dance classes do not have their own websites, but use social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to communicate with members and share and promote their work. Additionally, in many cases, information on the existence of dance classes in sports, community, and leisure centres were not promoted on the website of these centres themselves, but through those centres' own social media posts (e.g., Facebook).

For those social media pages, it is often the case that the exact details of where sessions or classes might be taking place, or the contact details, are either not readily available or require further searching within photos or in descriptions of social media posts. As a result, an initial audit of activity was carried out, and two further iterations of more in-depth search of social media posts took place. These follow-up searches yielded greater detail on the variety of the sites in which dance activity takes place, rather than a greater number of dance classes or groups themselves.

The currency of the data is a concern when dealing with social media posts, as posts can become out of date (Hewson, et al., 2003). The initial audit was carried out in mid-January 2023 through the end of February 2023. These follow up “checks” took place in March 2023 and November - December 2023. Separate versions of the audit document were saved each time. Doing so is aimed at accounting for the currency of the data. While we prioritised the most current data, we did account for venues and sites of dance activity that had taken place from January 2023 through December 2023.

It was not consistently possible to identify the specific facilitator associated with a particular dance class or school; perhaps as a result of individuals not wishing to provide this information via social media. Articles in e-newspapers were extremely helpful in identifying names of dance facilitators that did not appear in initial Google searches of ‘dance classes’ as individual listings. These articles resulted through the search of ‘dance classes’ detailed above.

The general Comhaltas website directory brings different results when searching for Comhaltas on the map provided, as when searching by geographical area in Google Maps. All the results from both ways of searching were included in the audit list. The characterization of ‘Possibly dance classes’ on these sites means there is no direct evidence that dance classes exist. While it may be likely due to the nature of facilities and other activities offered, if a particular group, school or facilitator could not be identified as associated with a physical venue, that venue was removed from the final audit list.

These internet searches may include ‘coverage bias’ (Ackland, 2013), or it is possible that the missing or potential neglect of dance professionals, facilitators, and groups for which information might not be available on the internet. For instance, such individuals and groups may not have a social media page or website, nor promotional information available via venues they utilise for dance. As a result, it should be noted that some activities that we identified may indeed take place in the two local authority areas. It could just be that we did not identify them at the point in time of our study. Equally, some may no longer take place now, but did exist at the time of our study.

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with 5 individuals drawn from the internet audit to get an initial sense of the pathways for taking part in dance that exist in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region (Objective 2) and the meaning, value, and regional needs for dance (Objective 3). 22 individuals were contacted. These individuals were selected to represent different forms of dance activity identified in the audit. In the end, 2 Contemporary Dance professionals and 3 facilitators of Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot and Line Dance took part in the telephone interviews.

Telephone interviews were deemed suitable for the purposes of the study. Telephones are now accessible for the general population of research participants within this study. Further, such an approach lessened the need for travel for researcher and participant, were accessible for those not wishing to or having access to using video conferencing tools, and allowed the participant to determine research location (Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Cachia and Millward, 2011).

Interviews were semi-structured. They were led with a set of guiding questions to ensure topics covered, but equally to allow the respondent to take the conversation in directions of their choosing. On-telephone consent or assent was requested following a description of the intent of the research. During this period, time was spent explaining who the researcher is, their background and their interests in the locale and the topic of dance in order to establish a rapport and respond to any concerns about the purpose of the study (Trier-Bieniek, 2012).

Open-ended questions sought to confirm and expand on information gathered by way of the internet-based audit. In addition to capturing more information on individuals (such as their age range and when, how and why they got involved in dance and any dance-related networks in which individuals were involved), questions focused on noting the type of dance activity in which individuals took part. Type included genre as well as the nature of the activity itself: e.g., professional performance, artist-in-residence, or choreography work; work with children and young people outside of formal school settings, such as in youth services or through running private dance schools; work with children and young people within school settings; and facilitation of social dancing. Interviews also sought to capture or confirm where their dance activity takes place, including particular locations and venue types. Questions also sought to capture if work was paid or non-paid / voluntary. Interviews were not audio-recorded, but detailed notes were taken with consent. A summary sheet of key points were sent to interviewees afterwards to confirm understanding gleaned by the researcher. Approval on the summary of the discussion was sought and gathered.

A Site-Specific Approach to Dance Practice-as-Research

The project incorporated a site-specific approach to the dance practice-as-research elements, acknowledging the importance of the rural border region of Cavan and Fermanagh / Omagh as an embodied space and “practiced place” of dance (following De Certeau, 1984). Recognising the specificities of the border region as a formative context in understanding dance practices and connections (e.g., a dance practitioner living and working in a city will have different lived experiences of dance in comparison with a dance practitioner working in a rural location), the site chosen for conducting the dance practice-based research became an additional physical and conceptual “dance partner” for the project. Although the production of a performance was not the main aim of the project, documentation of the connections forged during the project through a choreographic frame and culminating screendance (dance film) output was an important project element for communicating findings and promoting dance activity in the region to interested stakeholders and the general public. The engagement with site for the project can therefore be seen to align with Kloetzel & Pavlic’s (2009) category of applied site dance, which enables civic interventions and community engagement.

Preliminary research of the landscape of the border region highlighted its unique characteristics, including lakelands, mountains, and a limestone plateau (or Burren) with caves and underground rivers. With the knowledge that place and space matter to making and taking part in cultural activity, and with the importance of these shared physical elements of the landscape for both jurisdictions in mind, the site for the Gathering event was chosen following discussion between the researchers and the local authority partners, and an expressed desire by all for the participants to meet at a location that had connections to the place-specific ecologies of both jurisdictions. The geo-political and socio-cultural complexities of the “shared” space for this project (Durrer et al., 2023) therefore necessitated what Hunter describes in relation to site-specific dance as, “other ways in” to thinking about how space and place can be experienced beyond limiting territorial considerations (Hunter, 2015); something especially important for the *Sites of Significance* project in the context of the nuances of “shared” space in a border region. Following a suggestion from the local authority partners for a site, the Marble Arch Caves in Enniskillen, which is part of a UNESCO Global Geopark (discussed above) was chosen to serve this purpose for the project, as it is the only UNESCO Global Geopark worldwide that crosses a territorial border. This unique shared site also became a key choreographic element of the dance-based research for the Gathering workshops and for the project film, as the theme of the (often) “uncounted” or “invisible” pathways to, and connections between, rural dance facilitators was linked conceptually with the rivers that flow and meet underground at the Marble Arch Caves (Objectives 2, 3).



Figure 2. Project participants during a group tour of the Marble Arch Caves (photo: Donny Phair).

The Gathering

On 22nd May 2023, a selection of 15 dance practitioners and facilitators, identified through the audit as representative of the broad range of dance genres being practiced across the border region, were invited to attend a ‘Gathering’ at Marble Arch Caves in Enniskillen. This included practitioners of Irish Step Dance and Set Dance, Scottish Country Dance, Céilí, Sean Nós, Contemporary and Somatic Practices, Flamenco, Street and Hip Hop dance, Jive and Line-dance in Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh. The event was designed to incorporate both movement-based dance research activities alongside social science research activities, in addition to providing opportunities for participants to connect informally (e.g., during tea breaks and lunch, and during a dedicated group tour of the Marble Arch Caves (see Figure 2)).

The Gathering event had two main functions; (i) as a platform for strengthening existing links and forging new connections between dance facilitators identified in the audit, and (ii) as a way to deepen the researchers’ understanding of existing dance activity and networks in the region (Objective 4). This Gathering served as a “space” in which to engage research participants in addressing the (often) less publicly visible pathways to dance and dance connections between people and places that occur in rural border areas.



Figure 3. Participants at the Marble Arch Caves during a dance sharing activity at the Gathering event (photo: ©Donnie Phair).

Mapping Workshop

The workshop design took inspiration from the network of rivers and caves that crosses the territorial border between the two counties underground. At a preliminary research visit to the Marble Arch Caves, cave guide Seán Corrigan drew attention to the fact that the underground network crosses the territorial border and that this network is not yet fully mapped. The idea that these underground waterways exist on their own terms, in a shared, borderless space that is partially unmapped, and that operates apart from more known cartographical and territorial mappings of the region, provided a rich conceptual link to the often hidden experiences of the labour required to make dance happen (see McGrath, 2020; McGrath et al., 2021), and the embodied connections that are made through dance labour; labour that, by necessity, often moves back and forth across the territorial border on the island (Durrer et al., 2023), and that often goes unseen.

As noted earlier (see *Dance on the Island* section), this lack of wider visibility can be due to this work not being officially recognised in some way: perhaps it is activity not in receipt of public funds and therefore not appearing in official audits of funded activity; or it may be activity or work within a social dance context that is not “counted” as part of informal or formal dance education provision on the island; additionally, it may be self-employed or small-business-oriented dance work that does not directly connect to broader dance activity. As this

activity falls outside usual processes of mapping dance on the island, there remains a lack of knowledge about local/regional/rural activity beyond the local contexts of those engaged in this activity themselves. However, this work represents a vital, complexly interwoven, and well-established, rural dance ecology, and this neglect in broader policy and arts / dance sector contexts has a knock-on effect, as sections of professional, community, educational, social, and entrepreneurial-based dance activity may not be accounted for in social, economic, and development plans at local and national level (see the *Getting Situated* section).

Taking inspiration from the confluence of underground rivers and caves that was happening under the participants' feet at the Marble Arch Caves workshop spaces - rivers that have carved out their own, partially unmapped underground pathways through soft rock and around hard rock – McGrath based the workshop design on the life journey of a river. This “life journey” functioned as a conceptual structure to map dance experience, labour, and connections that occur in rural regions. The workshop was designed to explore embodiment in relation to cartography to capture personal, affective, interrelational, and location-specific experiences that would not normally be recorded in official counting or mapping of dance activity. As Graham Huggan suggests from a literary perspective, a map is both a ‘product and process’ that ‘represents both an encoded document of a specific environment and network of perpetually recoded messages passing between the various mapmakers and map readers who participate in the event of cartographic communication’ (Huggan, 1994, p.4). Following this approach to mapping as a communicative, networking process in a perpetual state of becoming, and applying it to an embodied context, the structure of the workshop followed the life journey of a river and its three stages:

- The Source and upper course of the river – representing the beginnings of participants' experiences with dance;
- The Middle Course, where the river establishes itself and connects with tributaries – representing experiences of the participants as a dance performer, or someone who is becoming known as a dance facilitator;
- The Lower Course, where the river widens and maybe slows down a bit (or not), joining with larger bodies of water - representing experiences as a teacher, as a master of dance craft, and the passing on of dance knowledge to the next generation of dancers.
- The Future Flow of the River - representing participants' ideas for where they would like their dance life journeys to flow next.

Participants were given a movement task for each of these sections of the river that asked them to work solo, in pairs, and then in groups, to create alternative maps of their personal dance life journeys, both on paper as a notated dance score (through drawing and / or writing, see Figures 4a and 4b), and in movement. As there was a wide age range amongst participants, tasks were designed to be relevant to different stages of a dance life journey, and participants were free to adapt the tasks and questions to make them relevant to their own, personal experience; dance journeys could therefore represent 5 years or 50 years of dance life experience. Each task also asked participants to share their experiences with others, supporting connection and networking between people and places.

The choreographic tasks used a questioning methodology to access participants' memories and sensory experiences of their dance life journeys. Examples of embodied memory mapping prompts from the first task included:

- Can you remember where and when you started dancing?
- Can you remember where you took your first dance class? Or where you learned your first dance steps?
- Can you remember anything about what the dance space was like? What did it feel like? What did it smell like?
- How did you get there?
- Who was your first dance teacher?
- What was the first memorable dance step or phrase that you remember learning?

Responding to prompts such as these over the course of the workshop, participants created a river score as an alternative cartography and "sensory landscape" (Serematakis, 1994) of their dancing life journeys, sharing their movement memories with partners along the way (e.g., the first dance step they remember learning), and building their dance maps through a range of different kinds of embodied experiences: e.g., sensed, spatial, and interrelational. As Roisín O'Gorman suggests, 'maps [can] seem like natural or neutral tools of mobility, allowing us to render invisible the lives and bodies missing in the landscape', which leads to a 'subtle normalisation of who matters and what is valued in a culture' (O'Gorman in Gilson and Moffat, 2019, p.107). This personal, embodied approach to mapping significant places, people, and experiences that all connect to build a dance life journey, offered new perspectives on who matters and what is valued for dance in rural border regions.



Figure 4a and 4b. Participants create a dance map of their dance life experience as a river's journey from source to mouth (photos: ©Donnie Phair).

Dance Sharings

As the workshop progressed through the different stages of the river cycle, or dance life journey, participants were invited to first show, and then teach (see Figures 3, 5a, 5b, 8 and 9) each other steps/phrases from their own dance practice in pairs, and then come together in groups of four to combine learned steps and create a short, choreographed phrase to perform to the rest of the group. To achieve this, participants had the opportunity to share individual memories and experiences of dance with their peers, teach steps from their own dance genre to someone working in a different dance genre - and sometimes also from a different cultural background - and similarly, learn about a different dance genre and dance culture through listening to dance memories of another participant, and embodying dance steps related to them. In this way, the project approaches dance as a community initiative that, as Nielsen & BurrIDGE suggest, works 'with and through diversity', with shared dance practice functioning as a 'transformative experience' in which people from different backgrounds and different sides of territorial borders, 'come together to seek commonality through their embodied experiences (Nielsen & BurrIDGE, 2020, p.2).



Figure 5. Practitioners of Sean N6s, Irish C6ill, and Scottish Country dance perform a shared dance combining steps from their individual dance life journeys (photo: Aoife McGrath).



Figure 6. Practitioners of Sean Nós, Irish Céilí, and Scottish Country dance perform a shared dance combining steps from their individual dance life journeys (photo: Aoife McGrath).

In addition to sharing dance memories and steps, participants also shared conversation (see Figures 6 and 7) about dance locations in the region, dance customs, dance histories, and dance wear, finding connections, for example, through materials used in dance shoes to make the required sounds for percussive dance genres (e.g., sean nós and flamenco), or through common experiences with challenges and successes related to finding suitable spaces for dance practice, or recruiting new participants for dance groups.



Figure 7. A participant shares a boot with a wooden and metal sole worn by her aunt for dancing Sean Nós with another participant who is a flamenco dancer (photo: ©Donnie Phair).

Each participant was also invited to share a short performance of their dance practice with the group. These performances took place both inside the room used for the embodied mapping workshop and in the overground paved and grassy areas of the Marble Arch Caves site. The whole group also participated in sharings for contemporary dance, somatic practices, Scottish country dance, and line dancing.



Figure 8. Participants during a sharing of line dancing practice at the Gathering (photo: ©Donnie Phair)



Figure 9. Participants during a sharing of Scottish country dance at the Gathering (photo: ©Donnie Phair).

Sites of Significance Screendance Documentary Film

All activities across the Gathering event were filmed: the embodied mapping workshop activities; the individual and group dance sharing sessions; and the group's visit to the Marble Arch Caves. Directed by McGrath and videographer and editor, Simon Mills, the footage of Gathering activities was edited to mirror McGrath's concept of a dance river journey, with accompanying text by McGrath including verbatim text from participant responses to workshop task prompts recorded in their dance river scores. The film also features an original composition and soundscape by composer and sound designer, Sorca McGrath, that interweaves field recordings of the caves, rivers, pools and surrounding Burren landscape in the Marble Arch complex with recordings of the conversations and dancing that took place during the Gathering event.

The film communicates the sense of the joy experienced through dance connections made during the Gathering itself (Objective 3), as well as providing a visual introduction to the broad range of dance genres practiced across the two jurisdictions for interested stakeholders and the general public (Objective 4). It also functions as a means to share and celebrate the vibrancy and range of dance activity, and importance of dance, for this rural border region.

You can watch the film here: <https://youtu.be/ipQ30XrVCaQ>

Focus Group

Focus group style questions by Durrer facilitated and captured reflection with and amongst participants regarding the experiences and infrastructures (tangible and intangible) of / for dance in, across, and from the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh context. The goal was to facilitate dialogue sharing on their experiences of 'making dance happen' in complement to the danced data sharings. Questions discussed were:

1. What happens for you when you do this dance activity?
2. What do you see happening when you do this dance activity? (for others)
3. Where does your dancing take you?
4. How do you make dancing happen?
5. What would you like to see happening for dance in the area?
 - a. What do we have to make that happen?
 - b. What is needed to make that happen?

Data Analysis

Analysis of data gathered by way of the internet-based audit focused on identifying, notating and locating or mapping existing dance facilitators and professionals and the venues in which they dance (Objective 2). While semi-structured interviews were analysed for content of information rather than the nature of the conversation, or how things were stated (Reissman, 2005), analysis of focus group data focused on content as well as the nature of the exchange that took place between participants (Objective 1). Thematic analysis was applied to both sets of qualitative data. Useful in the study of both dance and cultural policy and at local level (McGrath, et al., 2022; Durrer, et al., 2023; Durrer, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006), this form of analysis involves identifying themes or patterns and—in this case—of those regarding the pathways of participation, experiences (types of activity as well as meaning and value), (dis)connections, and development areas of dance for facilitators and professionals in the Cavan / Fermanagh-Omagh Border region (Objectives 1 - 4).



06: RESEARCH INSIGHTS

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The audit, the interviews, and the focus group discussions at the Gathering revealed that a rich and diverse ecology of dance practice exists in and from Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh. The embodied mapping workshop, dance sharings, and the documentary screendance film, captured lived experiences related to dance, and supported the development of dance connections between people and between people and place. In combination, the findings from these research activities demonstrate the value of dance and its potential (and needs) for future development.

The findings from research activities are outlined below. When relevant, findings from different activities, but relating to the same topic, are combined. Where appropriate, suggestions for future actions are also provided.

Scoping of Dance Activity in Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh

Due to the territorial and spatial frame in which we conducted our study, we accounted for and mapped the sites in which dance activities take place. This means that when one private dance school might be holding dance classes across multiple towns, we counted all of those sites. In some cases, dance schools and social dancing groups were holding sessions on multiple days of the week but in completely different towns and sometimes across the jurisdictional border. 147 separate dance activities were identified. In relation to the coding noted above, the following types and their amounts were identified in the audit:

- **1** - Professional Dance Company
- **17** - different Freelance, professional dance artists or facilitators. As freelance, professional dance artists were all engaged at some point or another as artists in residence, these are combined codes. (**17** different freelancers)
- **36** - Social dancing activities: may include dance classes but is not a dedicated school. by **13** separate dance schools or groups.
- **84** - Private Dance School activities by **23** different dance schools.
- **9** - Dance Engagement activities by **4** different organisations or non-profits.

The Professional Dance Company is known to hold a number of educational and community based activities. However, these were not separately counted.

The following categories were not identified in the audit:

- Formal Dance Training
- Pre-Vocational Dance Education
- Youth Dance Company
- Dance Festival-Youth
- Dance Festival-Professional
- Dance Competition. Some private dance schools' do regularly engage in Dance Competitions, such as within Irish Traditional Dance or Hip Hop. These are not noted as being part of some key dance activities. A separate study on competitions is warranted to build further and genre-specific understanding of the mobility of dance groups from and into Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh.

Dance Genres

A range of dance genres are taking place in and from Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authority areas. As indicated in Figure 10, Traditional/Folk - Irish represents the highest at **36%**, with Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot and Line Dance following at **23%**, followed by hiphop / urban / street at **13%**, then Multi-Genre (**9%**), Musical Theatre (**7%**), and Contemporary (**4%**). Ballet (**3%**), Traditional/Folk - Other World (**1%**) and Traditional/Folk-Ulster Scots (**1%**) and Mumming (**1%**) representing a total of **6%**.

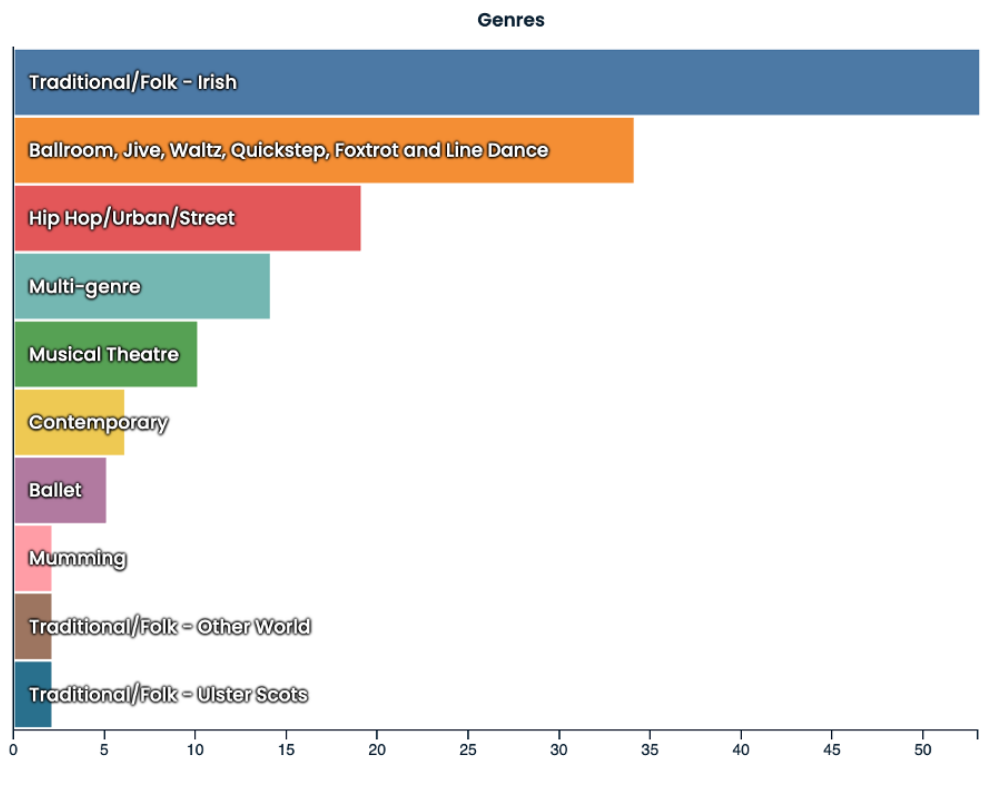


Figure 10. Dance Styles / Genre taking place in and from Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh.

100 activities are located specifically in Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh local authority areas, the charts presented below in relation to these two local authorities also include 3 additional dance activities located in Mid-Ulster district council. This is because at the time of mapping, Scribble Maps did not have the facility to differentiate local authority areas. These 3 are from one company, Urban Motion, which is based in Fermanagh-Omagh district Council.

The 103 geo-located in these areas largely match the figures above:

Traditional/Folk - Irish represents the highest at **38%**, with Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot and Line Dance following at **24%**, followed by hiphop / urban / street at **12%**, then Multi-Genre (**8%**), Musical Theatre (**6%**), and Contemporary (**5%**). Ballet, Traditional/Folk - Other World and Traditional/Folk-Ulster Scots and Mumming representing a total of **6%**.

Siting Dance

Of the 147 dance activities or data points found, we were able to geo-locate and map 145. The county (as opposed to local authority) breakdown is presented in Figure 11. 41 are located in Fermanagh, 28 in Tyrone and 38 are in Cavan. 12 are in Monaghan with the remaining activities across Donegal, Dublin City, Kildare, Longford, Louth and Meath in Ireland and Antrim, Armagh, Derry / Londonderry, and Down in Northern Ireland.

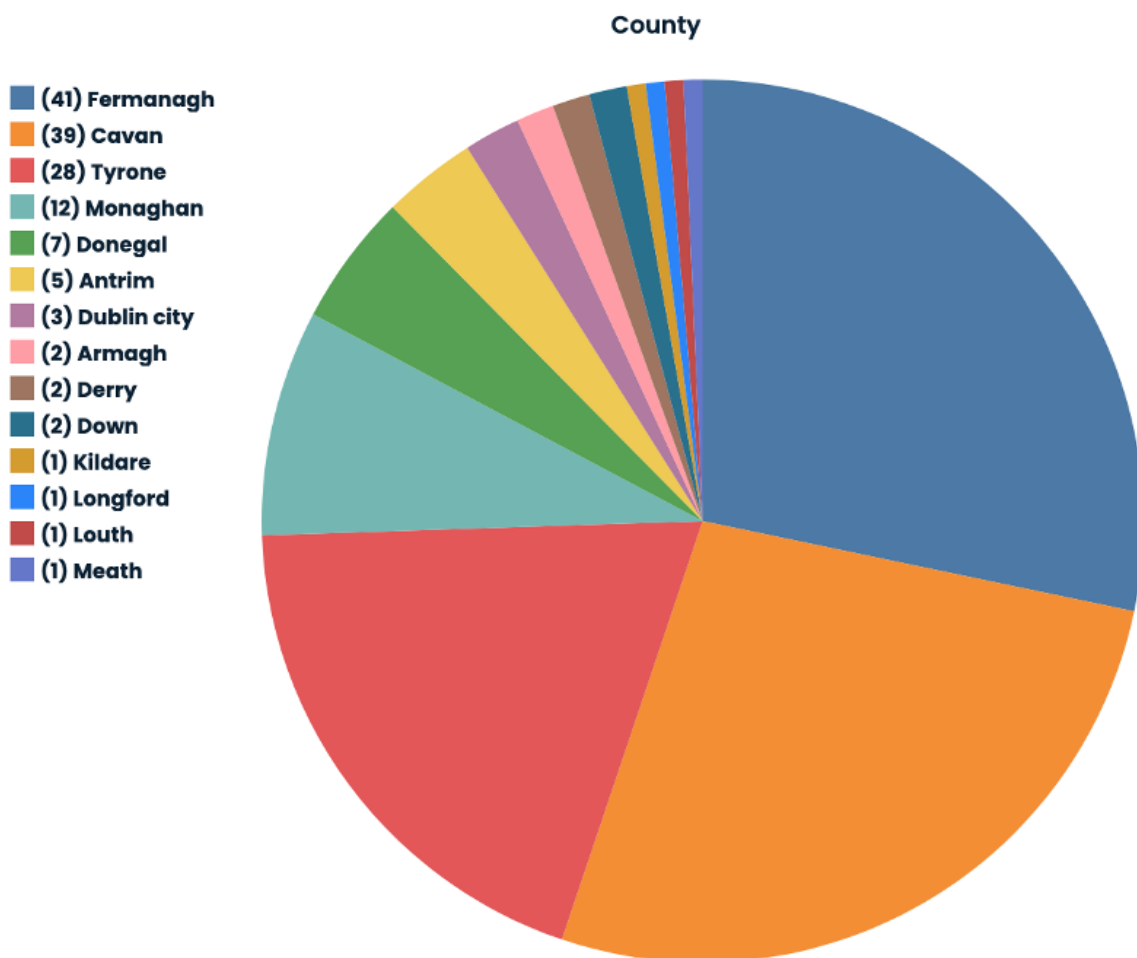


Figure 11. Dance Activities by County.

Table 3 and Figures 12 and 13 present how dance activities spread across towns in Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh.

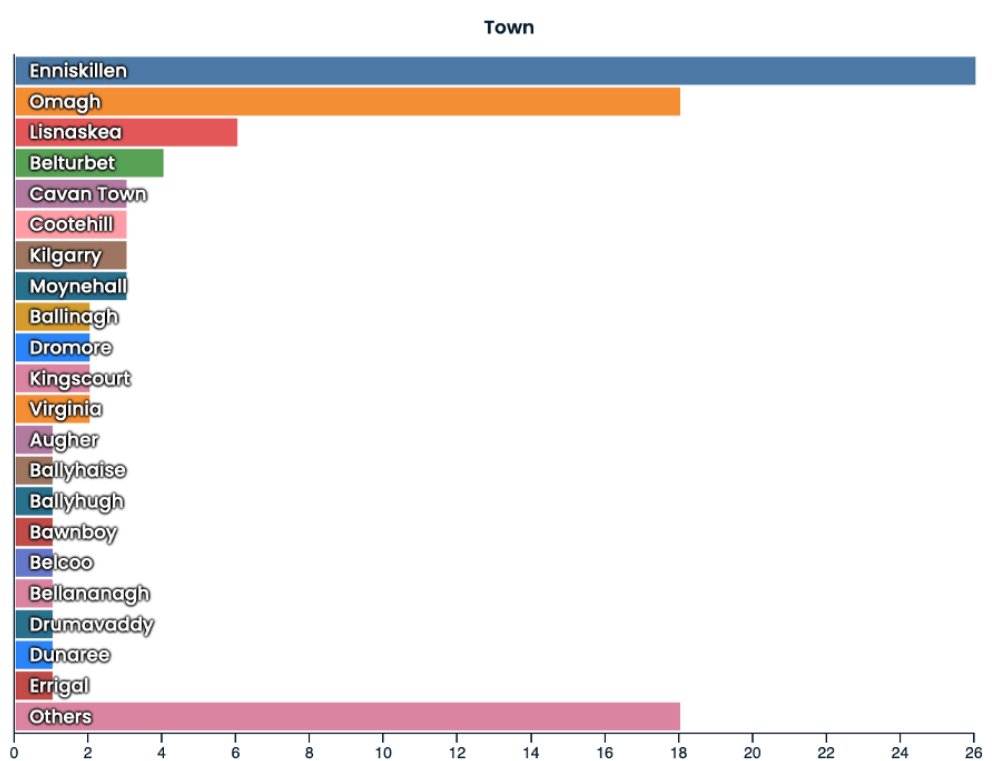


Table 3. Dance Activities by Town.

Most dance activities captured in the research feature in Enniskillen (26) and Omagh (16), FODC's two main towns, which qualify 'as urban and act as main service centres and market towns servicing wider rural areas and communities' (FODC, 2020b, p. 20). Of FODC's five main towns—Carrickmore, Dromore, Fintona, Irvinestown and Lisnaskea—the most dance activities were located in Lisnaskea (6) (Table 3).

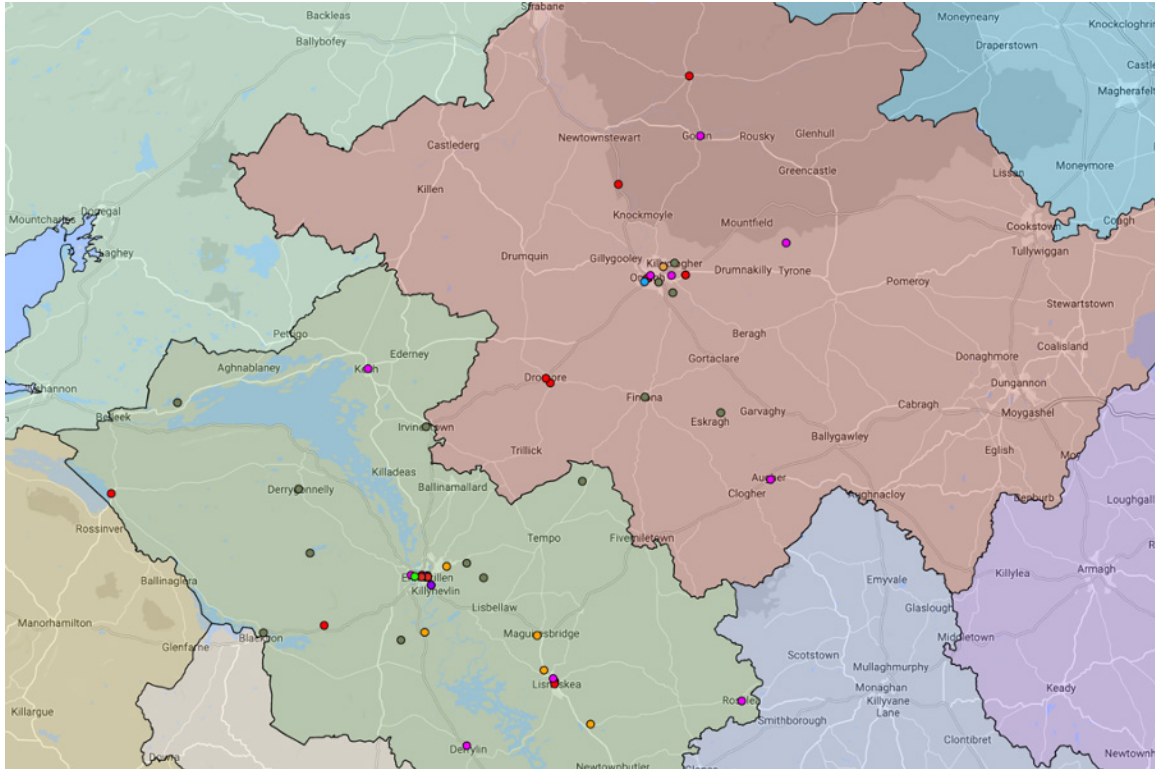


Figure 12. Dance Activities sited across Fermanagh-Omagh District Council.

As the 'western part of [Cavan] has a lower population density than the central and eastern parts' (Cavan Co Co, 2023), it may not be surprising that less dance activity was located in the west. As shown in Table 3, we did locate one more activity in the 'medium town' (Cavan Co Co, 2022a, p. 125) of Belturbet (4) than in Cavan Town (3), which has the largest town population in the County at 11,741 in the 2022 Census record (CSO, 2022d), with Cootehill, Killgarry and Moynehall matching the count we discovered in Cavan Town, and Ballinagh, Kingscourt and Virginia only marginally behind (2). All of these areas are associated with Cavan's 3 municipal districts of Cavan Belturbet, Ballyjamesduff, and Cootehill Bailieborough, with Ballyjamesduff, Bailieborough, Cootehill, Kingscourt following as self-sustaining towns or 'towns with high levels of population growth, but which require consolidation and targeted "catch up" investment to become more self-sustaining' (Cavan Co Co, 2022a, p. 21).

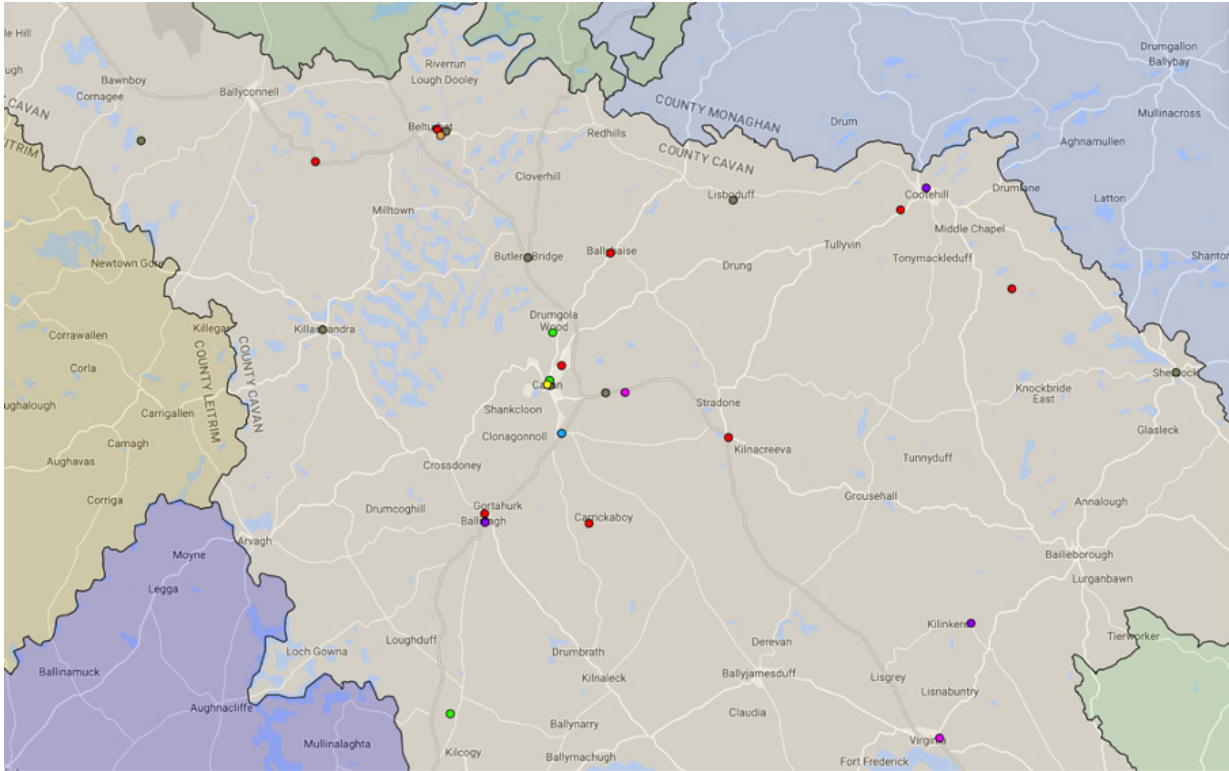


Figure 13. Dance Activities sited across Cavan Local Authority Area.

Mobility Across Sites

Dance is locally situated and highly mobile. Looking more closely at the locations of the dance styles demonstrates the ways in which one dance school might be providing quite a lot of dance activity within one local authority area. For instance, the 12% of hip hop / street / urban activity happening in the two local authority areas is actually based on an identification of three Dance Schools: Urban Motion, based in Loughmacroy in County Tyrone (Fermanagh-Omagh), Dance Revelation in Omagh, and Fusion Dance School based in Lataveer, Cavan, with classes also in Monaghan. As shown in Figure 14a and 14b, at the time of data collection, Urban Motion, a Hip Hop & Multi-Activity Coaching Company that holds classes, events, workshops, and competitions was then hosting classes / workshops and events in 13 different locations to children in Enniskillen, Omagh, Armagh, Augher Dungannon, Kesh, Derrylin, Moy, Keady, Lisnaskea, and Derry / Londonderry.

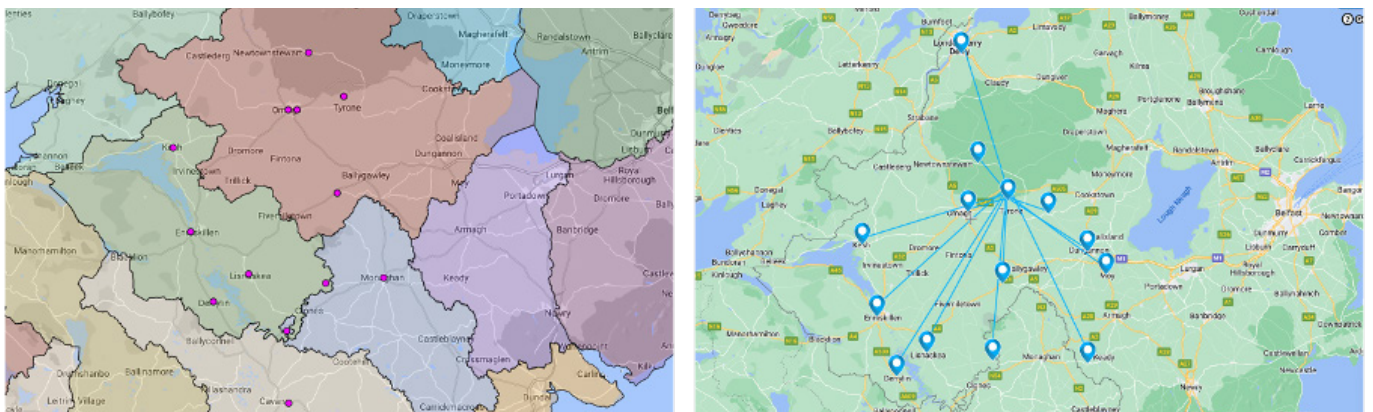


Figure 14a and 14b. Dispersal and Reach of Urban Motion.

As the maps in Figure 15a and 15b show, while the dance activity identified in this audit appears to be concentrated in certain towns, dance in and from Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh is happening in multiple locations. The research also indicates that dance facilitators (and not simply contemporary dancers, documented in McGrath, et al., 2022) are moving across the island (Derry, Donegal, Cork), off the island (to Spain, for example), across the border, and holding dance sessions in multiple local authorities. For instance, one dance school is holding classes across the week in Cavan, Dublin City, Naas in Kildare, and in Meath. We have thus far recorded 4 facilitators / schools holding classes in both Cavan and Monaghan.

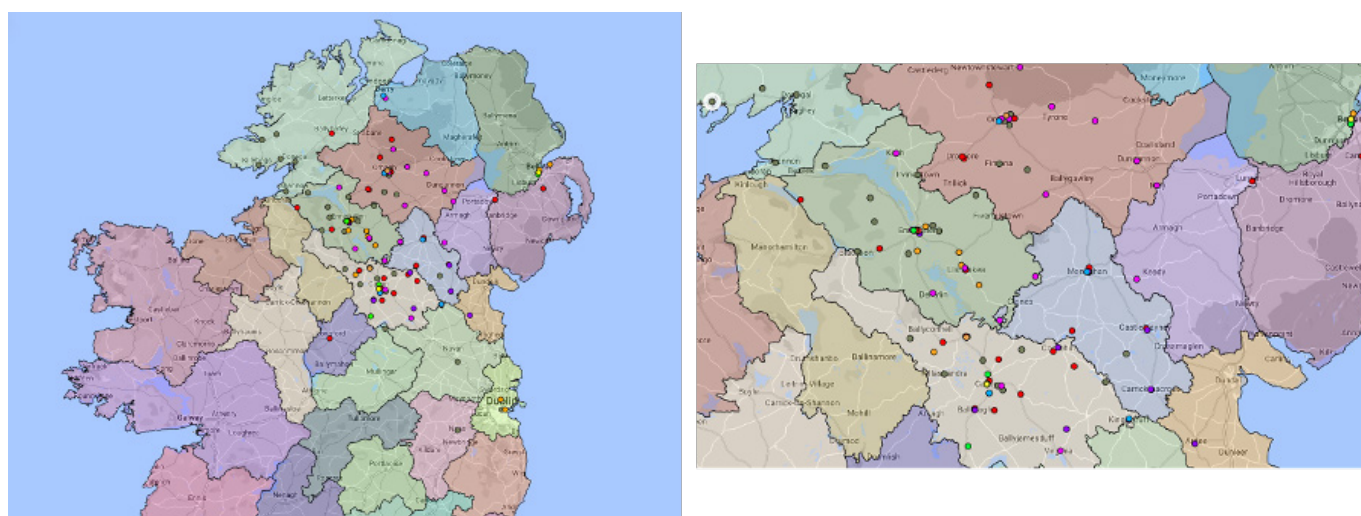


Figure 15a and 15b. Dance Activities mapped for Sites of Significance Audit.

Contemporary dance artists based in Belfast or Dublin are working across the local authority areas. Dance facilitators are moving to different geographies and venues to lead dance sessions for different age groups. While we cannot be absolutely certain how many dance facilitators do or do not facilitate dance across the jurisdictional border, the audit data gives certainty that engagement across the jurisdictional border does happen. For instance, two Traditional Irish Dance Schools hold classes in multiple counties and in both jurisdictions at the time of data collection: McNeilis Cunningham was holding 1 set of classes located in Cavan, 6 located in Donegal and 2 located in Fermanagh; and Flanagan Academy of Irish Dance was recorded as holding 6 classes in multiple counties and in both jurisdictions with 4 in Fermanagh, 1 in Belfast city, and 1 in Monaghan. Social Dance facilitators are also moving across the border. For instance, at the time of data collection, we noted 9 different dance classes hosted by Gerard Butler Dance, with 5 in Cavan, 1 in Donegal, 2 in Tyrone and 1 in Longford. Red Marty Promotions was recorded as having 3 classes: 1 in Fermanagh, 1 in Monaghan, and 1 in Newry. Dance competitions bring dance schools across and off the island.

Responses from participants during the embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering provided lived data about where the participants perform, teach dance, and engage in dance training themselves. They also provided insight into the extent of travel and labour that is undertaken by individual dance facilitators across the region. One participant, for example, listed 41 different towns and villages in Northern Ireland and Donegal to which they currently travel to teach children and young people:

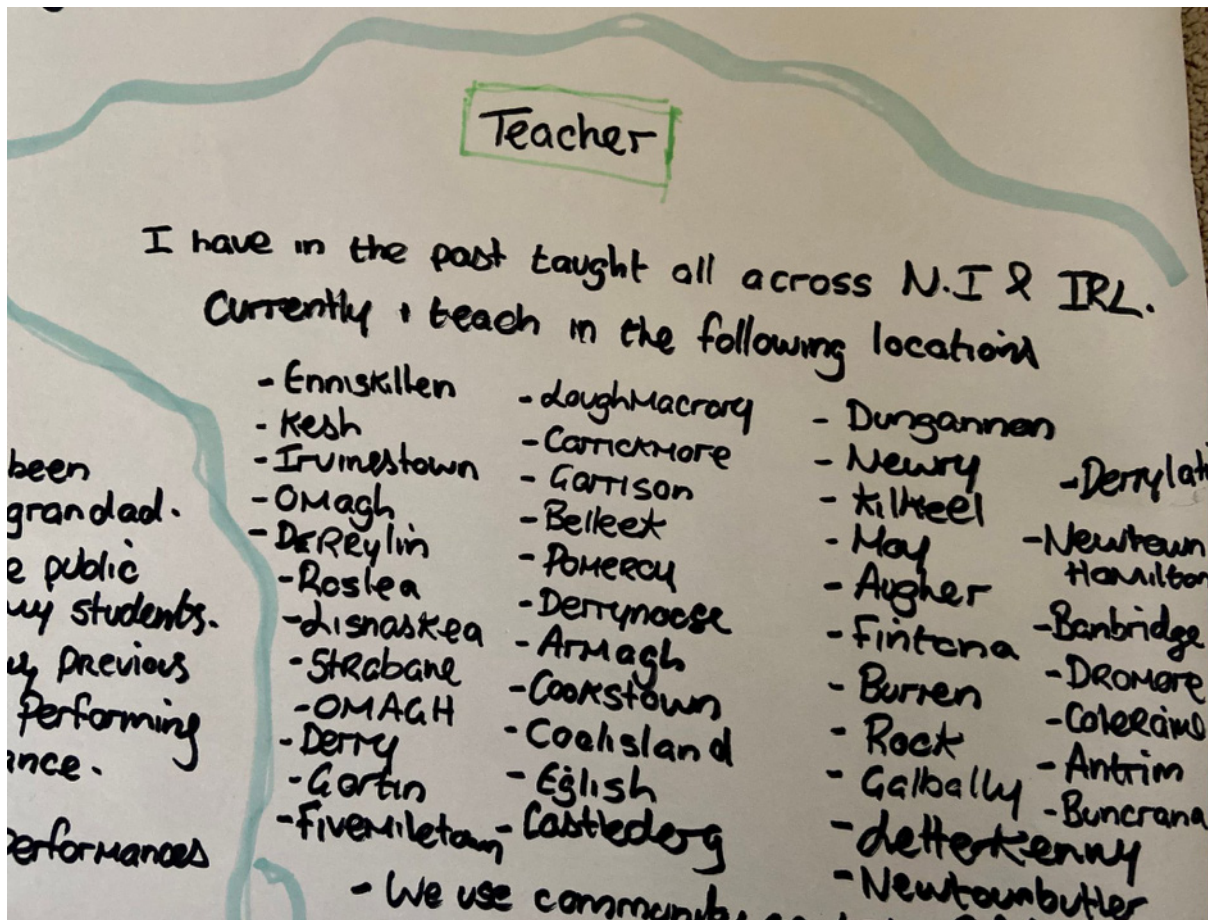


Figure 16. Example of a list of locations to which a participant travels to teach dance. Detail from their dance score created during the embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering (photo: Aoife McGrath).

Other participants also mapped their travel overseas (see Figure 16 for example), with one participant listing their delivery of, and participation in, “workshops/ceilithe” in,

Leitrim, Sligo, Fermanagh, Monaghan, Cavan, Tyrone, Longford, Dublin, Donegal, Mayo, Clare, Antrim, Down, Donegal, Armagh, Germany, Spain, Finland, NY [New York, USA].

It is noteworthy that in the embodied mapping workshop, participants recorded their travel to access dance classes as based on walking or by car, rather than by public transport. Such data may correlate with the connectivity issues raised in local policies (FODC 2020a, 2020b; Cavan Co Co, 2023).

Venues for Dance

The physical infrastructure for dance in and from the Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh area is varied. As indicated in Table 4, we were able to identify:

- **30%** of activity takes place in Community Venues encompassing Community centres, Community halls, Youth centres
- **16%** of activity takes place in venues which are Unknown, where we have no data about the venue other than its town, locality
- **11%** of activity takes place in Religious Venues
- **8%** of activity takes place in Multiple Venues
- **8%** of activity takes place in Pubs / Bars / Hotels
- **7%** of activity takes place in a School or Higher Education Venue
- **7%** of activity takes place in Arts (other) Venues
- **4%** of activity takes place in Sports / Leisure Centre Venues
- **3%** of activity takes place in Comhaltas Centres and in Industrial Estates
- **1%** of activity takes place in Cultural / Heritage Venues and Dance Studio / Venues
- less than **1%** of activity takes place online

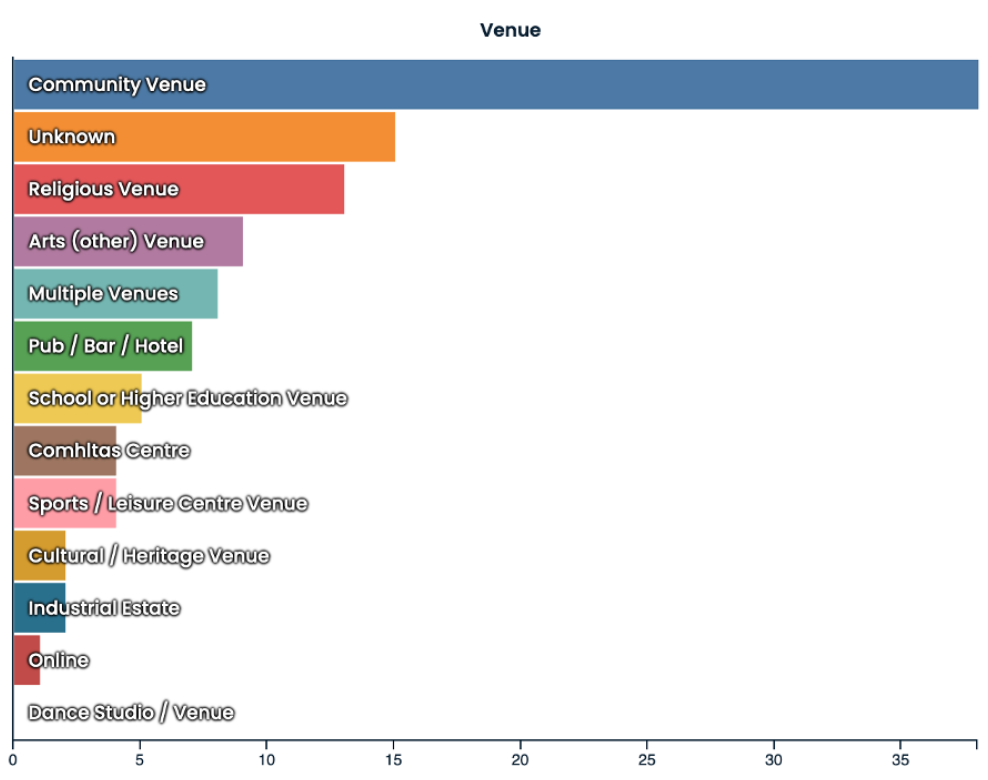


Table 4. Venues in which Dance Activity Takes Place.

When looking at the counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone, and Cavan, the venues remain largely the same; however, arts venues identified increase. This is likely due to the fact that we were focused on Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh in our study and we would have examined dance activity in arts venues in these areas, but not have looked for (for instance) Cavan-based groups in arts venues in Donegal.

- **24%** of activity takes place in Community Venues encompassing Community centres, Community halls, Youth centres
- **9%** of activity takes place in venues which are Unknown, where we have no data about the venue other than its town, locality
- **8%** of activity takes place in Religious Venues
- **6%** of activity takes place in Arts (other) Venues
- **6%** of activity takes place in Multiple Venues
- **5%** of activity takes place in Pubs / Bars / Hotels

Setting aside the ‘Unknown’ and ‘Multiple’ Venues (as they will likely also include Community and Religious Venues), Community and Religious Venues host a substantial amount of the dance activities that we uncovered through our audit. The dance genres that take place in these venues, as indicated in Table 5 and Table 6, largely constitute Traditional Irish; Hip Hop / Urban / Street; Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot & Line Dance and Musical Theatre in Community Venues, with Religious Venues hosting largely the same with community venues hosting Ballroom, Jive, Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot & Line Dance; Hip Hop / Urban / Street; and Multi-Genre followed by Irish Traditional.

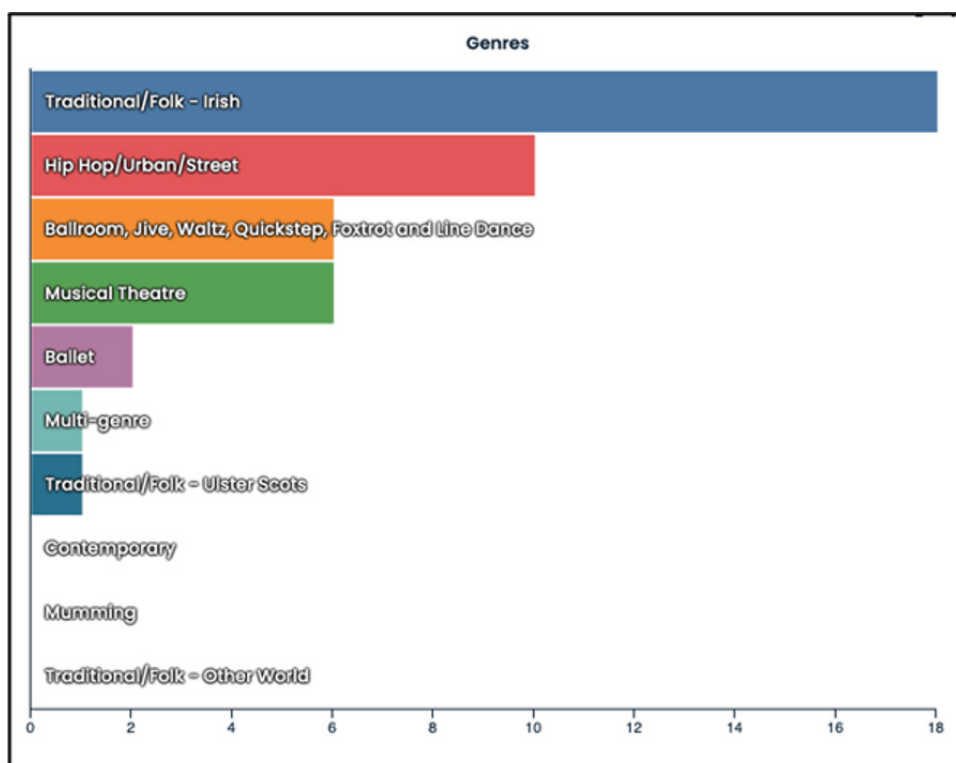


Table 5. Community Venues with Dance Activity by Genre.

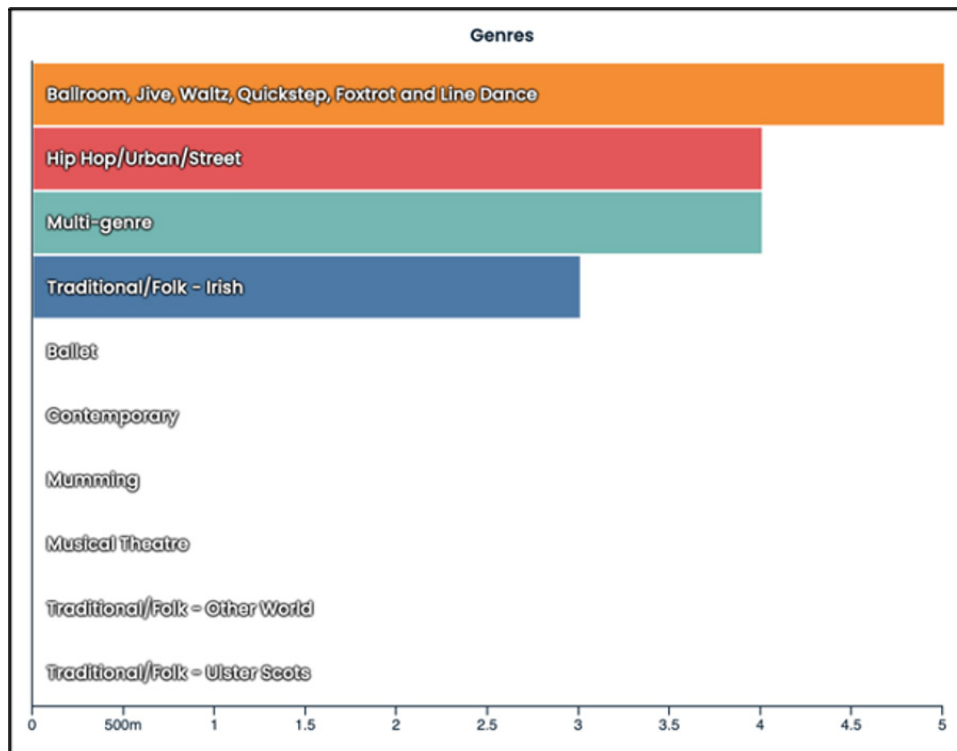


Table 6. Religious Venues with Dance Activity by Genre / Style.

The genres that are not largely present in these venues include Ballet and Contemporary.

The embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering provided insight into participants' experience of the spaces in which they dance (see Figure 17). The type of space available for dance has a direct impact on the experience of dance for practitioners (Mackin and Curry, 2009; McGrath et al., 2022). Therefore, it is not surprising that descriptions of participants' experiences of dance spaces were a recurring memorable feature in participant's dance life journey maps. These included sensory details from memories about the spaces they learned to dance in:

- 'powder on floor' [for ballroom dance]
- 'tiled floor, tape recorder, kitchen'
- 'small space in Rathmines [Dublin] beside Tesco - upstairs - dimly lit'
- 'Learned in my bedroom, living room. Very little space. I used a TV as a mirror when it was turned off.'
- 'old and cold halls and classrooms'
- 'dusty wooden floor'
- 'An old hall built in the early 60's. It has a good well-sprung wooden floor, but is otherwise rather dilapidated [...] the curtains are literally disintegrating where they hang!'

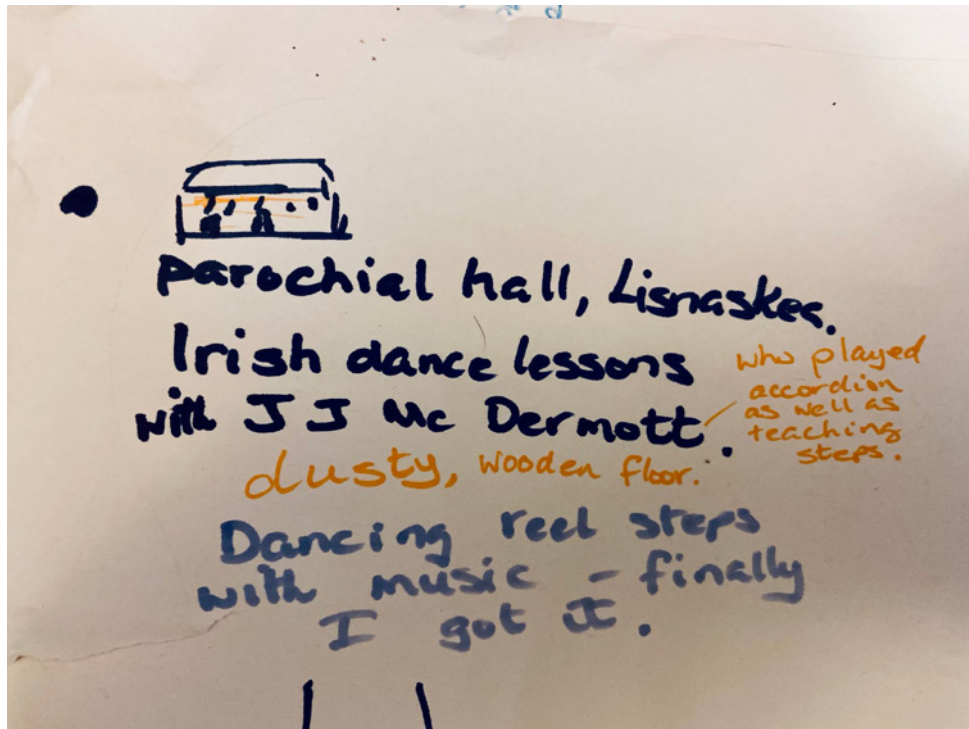


Figure 17. Example of a description of a space for dance in Lisnakee, Co. Fermanagh. Detail from a participant's dance score created during the embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering (photo: Aoife McGrath).

Making Dance Happen

The dance activity identified as taking place in and from these two local authorities encompasses differing forms of engagement and involvement or enterprise. While the audit did not clearly reveal what activity may be led by dance facilitators who are employed on a full or part time basis, paid or unpaid, voluntary or amateur, the telephone interviews did. While the sample size is not large enough to make a determination, it is clear that there is a range of enterprises or forms of involvement. For instance, there is voluntarily-led social dancing. There is profit and not-for-profit, fee-paying and non-fee-paying. Some individuals facilitate dance as "pure hobby" while others do this as their full time line of work. While it was not a focus of the audit, examination of social media pages and telephone interviews indicate that more research into the gender and age profile of facilitators is warranted. What we did identify indicates that the demographic may challenge the demographic age norms for dance workers identified in previous surveys of the professional dance sector (e.g., McGrath et al., 2022).

Dance activity also takes place through different forms of engagement and a range of age groups. These include children and young people, youth service-specific, hospitals and care centres or locale-specific. It takes place during the day, in the evenings, on the weekends and in the evening and later night. Activity may emphasise learning and skill development in addition to confidence building and / or an emphasis on social nights out. As an example, the telephone interviews identified dance facilitators within social dancing who were working with youth, supporting disability day centres, working in hospitals, and aiming for their dance sessions to serve as social outlets for older people.

Telephone interviews and discussions at the Gathering indicated that many 'make dance happen' through much of their own resourcefulness, found to be characteristic of rural social enterprise (Olmeda, et al., 2023). This activity might include those who apply for public funding through the Arts Councils, or local authority arts funding, or for dedicated dance artist in residence programmes; particularly for those who are part of, and /or considered to be working within, professional, publicly-subsidised dance. Those that are amateur are often leading their own dance activities. These range from charging fees that cover costs, to setting up actual dance- or fitness related businesses. Even still, fees are not the only means of financial engagement. EU funding projects and Fermanagh-Omagh District Council 'Go For it' funding support from Fermanagh-Omagh District Council have been a source of support for 1 Social Dancing facilitator.

Fees seem to vary from term-based commitments to a small fee of £2 for adult participants in social dancing to cover only the hire of the venue and equipment (e.g. PA system) as well as refreshments. Sometimes facilitators' charge fees to cover the costs of petrol for travelling to different venues. In the case of social dancing, while some payment may be received, this is not the case for all who took part in the pilot study and in some instances, payment might only cover costs, as opposed to the facilitators' time. Brief examination of Facebook pages indicate a sharing and joint promotion of one another's enterprises. Though how this actually unfolds needs further research.

The dance activity we identified occurs at differing frequency. There are one-off projects. There are weekly sessions or classes for a short term period, such as 5 weeks long, that move from one venue to another for the purposes of serving participants within their own localities. There are also whole terms of classes. Activities include: regular weekly classes; fundraising activities; one-off dances, and showcases. While Community and Religious Venues are noted as being less costly venues for hire. Hotels are regarded as being 'very expensive' with a requirement to charge £10 per participant to cover costs. Vestries were noted as the decision-makers with regards to whether or not a religious venue might host a dance activity, with not all vestries seemingly welcoming of doing so. Though this was not the reflection of all research participants.

As indicated above, those facilitating dance in the region often move to a number of different venues and towns as well as local authorities and sometimes across jurisdictions and even off the island. They may do so for their own enjoyment as well as to teach or educate others, and foster opportunities for socialisation and connections for, with, and amongst local people (see also Gibson & Gordon, 2018). In one case, combination insurance policies have been availed of in order to teach dance in the UK, NI and Ireland.

There appears to be some strong familial ties to how dance develops in the region. Some examples include: Dance schools in the area were started by a grandmother in Fermanagh and now continue to take place by way of her children who now run classes across different parts of the two local authorities. There are also grandchildren who learned dance from a school started by a grandmother who have now moved and started new schools in Belfast, but continue to return to Fermanagh-Omagh to deliver classes there.

The Value of Dance

Data gathered by way of the telephone interviews and the Gathering demonstrated a sense of shared value in dance as a source of professional, as well as everyday, enjoyment and support for wellbeing. The value of dance to those facilitating is both personal – that is for oneself - and includes being active and having fun. The ways in which dance allows time to focus on oneself was noted as important for personal wellbeing. At the same time, others found the social aspect of dancing to be very important.

When asked to engage with their embodied memories of their dance life journeys in the embodied mapping workshop, the participants themselves became a “location” of both personal and cultural memory (Brandstetter & Völckers, 2000). The value of dance for self-development was clearly articulated in responses to a question about participants’ first memorable dance step that they learned:

- ‘Tuning into the feeling of my feet on the floor and listening to how my body wanted to move. Dropping out of busyness of mind into the body/feet’
- ‘side step reel – difficult. Freedom’
- ‘dancing reel steps with music – finally I got it’
- ‘7 dancers in a set who knew the dance – I got whirled in the right direction in an Eightsome Reel. Exhilarating. I seemed to know how to do it without ever having done it before. Something inside me connected.’

Tracing the “Source” (see Figure 18) of their dance practice during the embodied mapping workshop was often articulated by participants in interrelational terms. Maps of earliest dance memories evidence both interpersonal connections, and a strong connection of these earliest dance memories with place. Within accounts of interpersonal connections, familial and intergenerational connections (that were also noted in the provision of dance activity in the region), were important sources of connection between people, and people and place. The continuation of dance traditions and cultures across generations was a further notable element in the memories related by several participants about how they started to dance:

- ‘lilting mother and grandmother’¹
- ‘The first dance I really remember was a Waltz with my dad in a hall full of people, and he asked me to waltz. That, I wasn’t sure of, but I could refuse – his reply was “if you can walk you can dance with me” (he was a great dancer).’
- ‘First performance I was 3 years old. It was [at] the communion [of a] family [member]. My stage, it was a table.’
- ‘Family time. Kitchen. 6 family members, I was the 2nd youngest, 3 boys, 3 girls [...] it was our way of exercise.’

The dance life journey scores also provided additional insight into participants' pathways to dance, which evidenced both facilitated and unfacilitated pathways:

'[I started] [t]o dance to understand types [of] dance so I could play the music to make people dance. Got to love dance. To waltz and learn to be able to use steps as the woman!!!'

'self-taught'

'youth dance'

Some came (back) to dance later in life: 'Think 45 year sabbatical!'. And some came to dance through other art forms: 'Dance passion was a happy accident and discovery! I arrived at the school to train as an actor.'

The social aspects of connecting to a wider local community were also important for many participants. Some also noted positive relationships with first dance teachers as significant to their earliest connections with dance:

'made good friends'

'friends, Saturdays, fun, confidence',

'We dance for fun and social interaction'

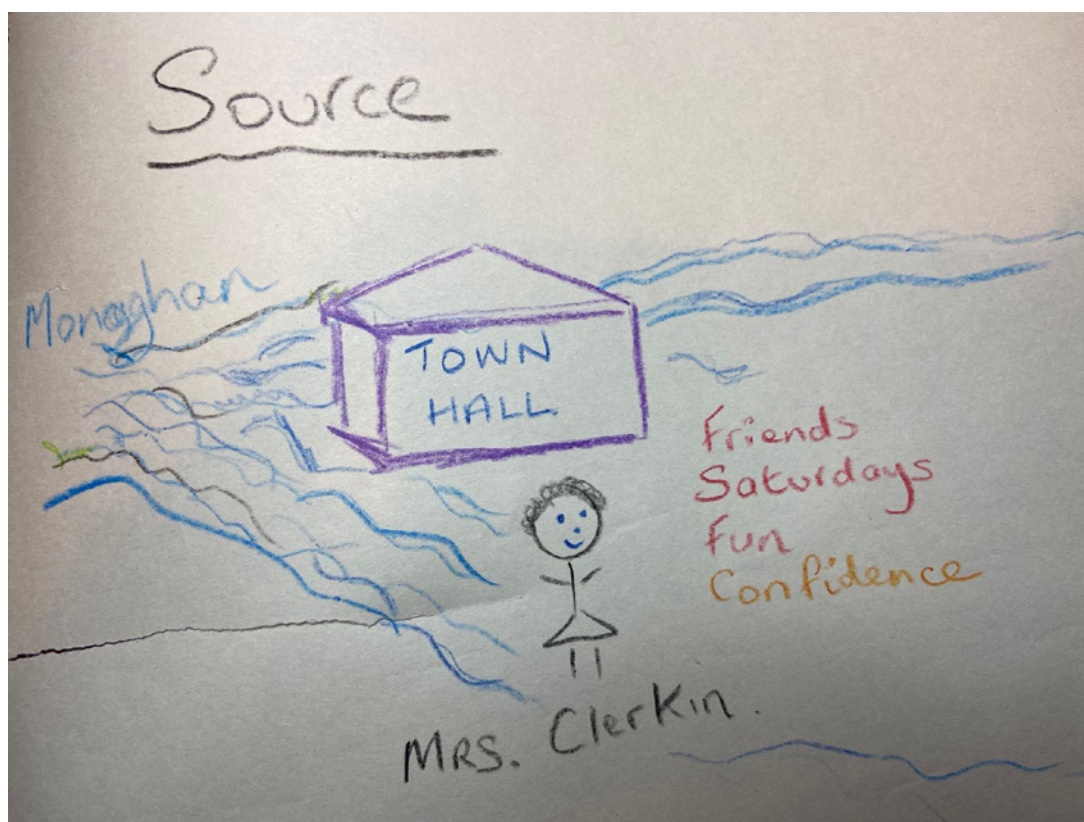


Figure 18. Example of the importance of first dance teachers, and the connection of people and places for dance with the social value of dance. Detail from a participant's dance score created during the embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering (photo: Aoife McGrath).

Participants' memories of their first dance performance also evidenced connections created through dance between people, people and place, and the wider local community, in addition to the importance of dance for self-development:

'1st show in Town Hall for parents and family. Stage was so big, lights were strong. Group performance with class, magical experience. [...] Music so loud and exciting'.

'I remember it being so transformative – bringing me into connection with my body and myself in a liberating way'

'I just remember feeling so free and on a high after it a wonderful feeling of connection to the group'

'Main [school] hall, stage with lights and curtains, "Man in the Mirror", a group of me and my friends – I choreographed it'

The *Sites of Significance* film also captures the joy that participants experience through sharing dance and dancing together. It provides an affective sense of the connections forged between participants themselves, and between participants and location, during the Gathering. The film also demonstrates how danced responses in the workshop and sharing performances produced an alternative cartography of dance experience in this rural border region; an embodied mapping that allows for what Cusick & Gladwin suggest is a, 'more generative process of cartography' that permits a mapping of cultural terrains (Gladwin & Cusick, p.8).

You can watch the film here: <https://youtu.be/ipQ30XrVCaQ>

Many also indicated finding joy in supporting the joy and progress of others. Those facilitating dance commented on the importance of their work as giving back to the community. They all shared stories of particular participants in their own classes who they felt they had witnessed joy through improvement in dancing. They noted seeing the sense of achievement in others as they build skills over time, seeing participants build in their own confidence, and they noted a sense of joy in helping to create moments of joy for others. Those involved in social dancing in particular highlighted the importance of providing dance activities for older people. In fact, many facilitators of social dancing are in the 50+ age-range themselves. They also shared stories that demonstrated the intergenerational nature of dance and the ways in which people make new friends and build new relationships through taking part in dance.



07: FURTHER DEVELOPMENT, EXCHANGE, AND CONNECTION

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT, EXCHANGE, AND CONNECTION

‘The feeling was that we were creating a network that day’

(Participant feedback from the Gathering event)

The research reveals that a complex network of dance groups, activities, facilitators and artists exists in the Cavan and Fermanagh–Omagh region. Dance activity in Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh is a site of, and for, networks at multiple scales. As indicated in Figure 19, there is a spatial connectivity that is hyper local to local, regional, jurisdictional, and international, with practices of different emphasis: children/ youth; social and community contribution; or professional. This connectivity also stretches across the experiences of family, learning, participation and professional development. Further, the research demonstrates that dance work and engagement does not stop at the border. As a result, and in line with Cavan’s Creativity and Culture Strategy and the arts plan (CCCT, 2023; Cavan Arts 2018), engagement in ‘North-South Partnerships’ and initiatives are stressed within all recommendations below.

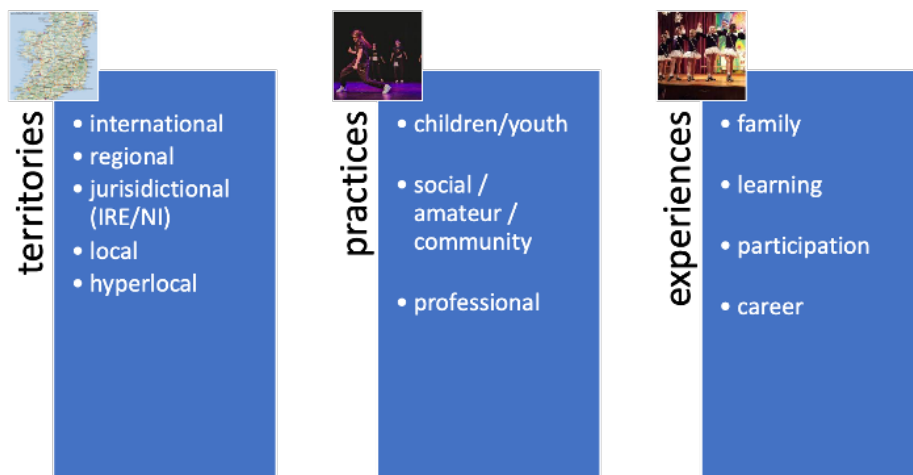


Figure 19. Spatial Connectivity within Dance from / in Fermanagh-Omagh and Cavan.

This section concludes the report with a series of recommendations for building capacity and nurturing dance in the region. In doing so, the report seeks to contribute to broader and arts-specific policy in the region and advocate for further contribution to the broader call at national level for nuanced, spatial analysis of dance activity happening in the rural border region (ACI, 2022). It also calls attention to the nature of dance as a cross-border and shared island endeavour (Creative Ireland, 2023). These recommendations have been arrived at by way of the focus group discussion and the embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering, and our overall analysis of literature and data gathered.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

1. Develop a Database of the Existing and Diverse Spaces for Dance

In line with developing knowledge exchange, engage with facilitators to develop and annually maintain a cross-border database that is made accessible and open to the public. In partnership with dance facilitators themselves, determine what is the most useful and sustainable. Databases may include those of dance groups, classes, and / or of venues. Fermanagh-Omagh District Councils have some models from which to draw learning and add value. Doing so also aligns with Cavan's Creativity and Culture Strategy (CCCT, 2023, p. 10) which calls for 'the development of a dedicated cultural portal'. While it is aimed at events, the development of a database of lesser known venues for dance would not only support opportunities of the local, but also from those outside the area to host activities within Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh. This type of database may also go some way to supporting the broader network of dance for those working in genres that are less represented in the region.

2. Enhance Existing Spaces for Dance within Area Development Planning

Not all physical spaces identified in the study are suitable for all dance genres. Community and Religious Venues serve multiple purposes. These venues are not dedicated dance spaces providing regular, frequent and sole access to the development of one's practice, technique or skills. The offering of these venues may not suit all styles, with certain kinds of flooring, ceiling height, ventilation and lighting being necessary for some forms of dance (Mackin & Curry, 2009). Further, as community centres and religious venues both host activities and serve as venues for hire, it is not clear who or what organisations encourage dance activity in these venues. More research into both the facilitation and gatekeeping of dance within these locations is needed. The redevelopment of public spaces and physical infrastructure that is taking place in both local authorities (FODC 2020b; Cavan County Council, 2022a), should include consideration of the diverse and resourceful use of existing physical infrastructure for dance.

The study has shown that a variety of sites are being used for dance. Venue data indicates that dance does and can take place in a range of venues not typically perceived as performing arts venues. With Arts Council Ireland (ACI) aiming to 'ensure the provision of optimum arts infrastructure locally is integrated into wider county and city development planning', there may be an opportunity to engage with other local government departments and ACI on providing suitable flooring to enhance these spaces, and seek opportunities to include new spaces for dance (ACI, 2022). This aligns with the fact that, 'places for Cavan people to make and experience art and cultural expression...[as]... essential to the social, cultural, and economic wellness' is recognised as an important aspect of Cavan's 'infrastructural renewal' in its three Municipal Districts (CCCT, 2023, p. 14).

3. Support Rural Connectivity and Bring Dance Expertise into Local Development Plans

The participatory approaches for arts planning development in which ACI (2022, p. 23) aims to engage should ensure inclusion of Cavan Arts and the experiences and the voices of dance facilitators, such as those represented in this study. This inclusion is not just about arts plans at national and local level, but about valuing the experience that those in the arts can bring to bear in broader local and spatial planning as well. Dance facilitators use a variety of buildings and venues across several local authority areas. They have strong awareness of the challenges and opportunities for dance that local buildings provide.

Further, the high level of mobility in which dance facilitators are engaging to deliver classes and workshops indicates that they have a great deal of experience regarding the connectivity challenges, particularly in relation to broadband and transport, that have been noted as local policy concerns (FODC, 2020a, 2020b; Cavan Co Co, 2023). This high level of expertise and knowledge of local infrastructure for dance, and the creative arts more broadly, will be of great benefit to all planning exercises for the region. The inclusion of dance practitioners on relevant boards and committees engaged in such planning aligns with recommendations articulated by practitioners in the *Dance Think Tanks Report* (McGrath, 2021).

4. Celebrate the Diversity of 'Rural' Dance

The dance practice identified in this study indicates that there are rich traditions of dance in the region and that new styles and cultures are being embraced. Practitioners of Irish set dancing and Scottish country dance both articulated a need for the recruitment of young people to keep traditions vibrant in the region:

'Would love to see young people involved in set dancing. Happens in Co. Clare. Somehow doesn't attract young adults in Northern counties.'

'We would like to attract new members [for Scottish Country Dance]. Younger people? More men? We would like to be able to have a separate class for more experienced dancers dedicated to improving dancing skills as well as just having fun.'

Practitioners of Street dance and Hip Hop expressed a need for expansion of activities:

'We plan to spread classes to the UK and further South.'

'[I would like] [t]o take more of my students to national and international competitions and events [...] [and] [t]o expand my school to more locations.'

While limited in representation within the data gathered, the presence of contemporary dance, as well as Irish, Ulster Scots, Polish, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Indian, and Malaysian dance (FODC, 2020d), and the growth of Hip Hop, shows there is more to be uncovered in understanding the cultural contribution of dance in the region, particularly in light of the growing population diversity noted in the area (CCCT, 2023; CSO, 2022f; FODC, 2020a).

The seeming absence in the audit data of genres such as Ballet and Contemporary needs further consideration. This absence may be, in part, reflective of low levels of activity in these local authority areas due to the lack of concentration of network opportunities and suitable dance spaces for practitioners working in these genres. Previous research of dance on the island has shown a concentration of dance activity in cities and towns with a more established building-based infrastructure suitable for dance, and spaces dedicated to dance practice (McGrath, 2021; Durrer, et al., 2023). This finding may also indicate a low level of public subsidy for these genres in this border region, and subsequent reduced profile for these genres.

The diversity of dance practice and the mobility of dance facilitators' between town centres and lower population density areas align with the greater recognition of 'rural-urban linkages' and heterogeneity of what "rural life" actually is like in public policy (NESC, 2021). Those engaged in the research pointed to a greater need to raise awareness of the range and diversity of dance activity happening generally in local areas and the value of dance activity as a fun, social and healthy activity for the public. Awareness raising could happen through events that celebrate and profile dance activity. It could also take the form of developing a website that archives and presents this activity. A programme of celebration that supports public engagement in a range of dance activities and genres and that captures and archives the development of dance over time in the region is recommended.

5. Recognise the Value of Dance for Social Connection and Health

In line with previous findings of cross-border dance projects on the island, dance can function as a 'powerful intervention in strengthening cross-border connections' (McGrath et al., 2019, p.24). Across all of the modes of participation that took place at the Gathering, new connections can be seen to have been forged through danced experiences of both 'the "strange" and shared' (Thompson & Pringle, 2020, p.11). The importance of dance for the connection of people and place was articulated by a participant during the embodied mapping workshop in their plans for future development of their practice:

'place and people shaping; being-place and making that place'

Participants also identified health and wellbeing as areas of their practice that they wish to further expand in the future:

'Dance wellbeing workshops in schools'

'workshops for women – dance embodiment'

'Schools. Work with groups – brain injury foundations.

Fitness – dance – wellbeing'

Further, data gathered by way of the telephone interviews and the Gathering demonstrated a sense of shared value in dance as a professional as well as a source of everyday enjoyment and support for wellbeing. The value of dance activity as a fun, social and healthy activity for the public contributes to a series of Fermanagh-Omagh and Cavan strategies, such as Corporate and community-based strategies and Age Friendly strategies (Cavan Co co, 2022b; FODC 2020b; FODC, 2019a, see *Getting Situated* section). Greater engagement with local dance expertise across these areas of local authority work is recommended.

6. Recognise Social Enterprise and Voluntary Practice within Dance

The study points to a need to understand the potential range of ‘cultural capacities’ (Gibson & Gordon, 2018, p. 269) existing in rural arts, and in dance specifically, that are perhaps less documented not only within arts policy, but also within local corporate strategy. More understanding of the range of enterprises through which dance takes place is needed. The dance activity uncovered through the research contributes to the community and voluntary sector of the local area, providing infrastructural supports for youth, health, and socially related services. This work aligns with the recognition of the contribution of community and voluntary sector activity in Fermanagh-Omagh’s Corporate Plan (2020b).

Additionally, dance facilitators may often be engaging in social enterprises, managing small or self-employed businesses that address needs in relation to social isolation and health and wellbeing (Olmedo, et al., 2023). Research demonstrates that rural social enterprises can promote ‘social innovation that can contribute to rural development’ and in ways deeply connected to the people and environment of their locales (Olmeda, et al., 2023, p. 273). This is particularly relevant in Ireland where the Irish government has recognised rural social enterprises

‘for their contributions to the social and economic progress of the country through innovative tools and in 2019 the first National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland (2019–2022) was published, representing a milestone for their institutional recognition (Gol, 2019).’ (Olmeda, et al., 2023, p. 276)

Greater understanding of the situation of some dance facilitators and their potential for social enterprise development is needed, as are opportunities for dance facilitators to access business skill development supports (for example, in areas such as marketing and promotion, not-for-profit vs. profit-based organisations, and pricing). Gaining this information would contribute to local area and business development goals identified for locales in the region (see *Getting Situated* section)

7. Support Knowledge Exchange across the Dance Ecology

Relationships between individuals and place, as well as specific venues, are evident, but connections between practitioners themselves need to be strengthened. During the embodied mapping workshop at the Gathering, many participants noted (often with surprise) that they had either not known of each other before, or had not previously met each other in person. Established connections were mostly between practitioners working in the same, or similar, dance genres, and participants articulated a wish to continue developing the connections created at the Gathering across all dance genres. The *Sites of Significance* film evidences the joy that participants experienced in getting to know more about each other's practice and finding connections between people and place across territorial boundaries both on and off the island.

With the growing support for dance at national arts policy level in Ireland (ACI 2022b) and arts in the rural (ACNI, 2024), and an awareness of the need for further research of the working conditions of dance artists and arts practitioners in rural locales (McGrath, 2021; Durrer et al., 2023), there is an opportunity to build on the interconnectedness of dance across the border region that the research has uncovered. Participants pointed to a desire to meet with other dance facilitators and across different genres. Opportunities for exchange within genres should also be encouraged. The development of a sustainable cross-border dance network could be explored with those interested dance facilitators as key partners. In order to promote cross-genre, cross-border, and cross-practice (e.g., festival to artist) learning, previous research has called for the funding and development of 'place-based, short-stay residencies without expectation of output for arts workers living in different parts of the island: urban-rural / rural-rural' (Durrer, et al., 2023, p. 78). The Gathering was identified as contributing towards 'building a network' in which such exchanges could be initiated. Further developing these ideas addresses a number of local authority and community plans that emphasise good relations as well as skill development (Cavan Co Co, 2022a; FODC, 2020a, 2020b)

8. Engage Interdisciplinary Research Approaches in Policy Development

Through knowledge exchange between dance and social science and the combination of mixed methods, *Sites of Significance* highlights the importance of different modes of research for illuminating the lived and embodied experience of dance in the local area of Cavan and Fermanagh-Omagh. The audit, the site-specific embodied/danced explorations, sharings, and conversations at the Gathering, and finally the film, collectively evidence the richness and multi-scalar nature of this rural dance ecology. This comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to understanding dance in a cross-border region has also facilitated increased awareness of existing connections between people and place, and opportunities and needs for future connectivity and growth. It has provided evidence of how dance practitioners are contributing to local communities and social enterprise, and pointed to the potential for further development in ways that are deeply relevant and beneficial to arts, culture, and local development plans. Further development of the potential of interdisciplinary approaches are recommended for inquiries relevant to policy development.

Endnotes

- 1 In Fermanagh-Omagh the number of people born outside of the UK/Ireland increased from 4,500 in the 2011 census to 6,000 in 2021 (FODC, 2021a). In Cavan, dual citizenship has increased in the 2022 Census from 1,297 to 2,335 with 'dual Irish citizenship increasing by 63% from 104,784 to 170,597 people'. Non-Irish citizens accounted for 12% of the county's population in that Census and are 'Irish-UK (507 people), Irish-US (440) and Irish-Australia (231)' (CSO, 2022b). Approximately 64,000 people living in Cavan in the 2022 census identified as having a White Irish ethnic group or background with 8,707 people identifying as Any other White, 469 identity as Travellers, 1,114 people identifying as being an ethnic group/background of Asian or Asian Irish – Indian/Pakistani/ Bangladeshi and 896 people with a Black or Black Irish – African ethnic group/background (CSO, 2022b).
- 2 Both areas have a median age at around 38 / 39 years old, with NI having 33% of the population aged 40 - 64 and 18% of the population over the age of 65 (FODC, 2020b; FODC, 2021a) and the number of people aged 65 and over in Cavan growing at 11,868 (CSO, 2022f). While rural areas are growing faster in NI overall, Enniskillen and Omagh are growing at a slower rate. Cavan has a growing cohort of younger people with the 'largest age cohorts in the 0-9 and 30-39 age groups, accounting for 14.4% and 14.2% of the total population respectively' (Cavan Co Co, 2023, p. 14) and 17,752 children (aged under 15) were noted in the 2022 Census (CSO, 2022f).
- 3 As indicated in FODC's Corporate Plan and referenced elsewhere (Durrer et al., 2023), the public transport network is 'solely reliant on the Translink bus service which is limited across the district's wide rural geography' (FODC, 2020b, p. 22). For Cavan there is a reliance on the road network for transport links with the county 'served by three National Arterial Routes, the M3, N55 and N16' (Cavan Co Co, 2019c, p. 6) with most people driving to work as well as going by car to drop children at primary school. Those that commute are doing so for an average of 30.7 minutes (CSO, 2022a).



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