



## Let's do a morning dance around the kitchen table

**2011**

Then I wrote the text 'Dance frictions in a (non-)landscape'. The reason was the small amount of dance shows for young audiences that was created and presented in Flanders. So little and also so one-sidedly 'contemporary'. Then there was not one single structurally funded young audience dance company in Flanders. Then theater companies argued that this was not necessary because there was little demand for dance.

Then Krokusfestival joined a Creative Europe project (Fresh Tracks Europe, other Flemish partner was Kopergietery) that focused quite a lot on dance. In addition, in 2009 and 2011 we created an exclusive dance edition of the festival, we asked established choreographers for adult audiences to also look at children and young people (including Wim Vandekeybus, Etienne Guilloteau, Benjamin Vandewalle) and we started the series 'De dans ontsprongen' in which we asked choreographers to think about dance for young audiences.

Together with Kopergietery and *f*ABULEUS and, importantly, a number of small, often unsubsidized companies (including Nat Gras, keski.e.space, etc.), a small dance wave emerged in the arts landscape for young audiences.

**2025**

The most bizarre is that the text from 14 years ago can now easily be copy pasted. Bizarre, but above all disturbing. Nevertheless, I will attempt here to provide a few suggestions based on analogous, if not identical, observations to make the dance landscape for young audiences 'once again' richer and more diverse. Perhaps as inspiration for the next funding round in Flanders?

In a country that was at the top (2011, and still is, 2025) of the global dance scene, in a country that played a pioneering role and is home to major top companies, in a country where young people from all over the world come to receive training, in such a country dance 'tout public' is little more than a non-landscape.

For example, Flanders has only one structurally subsidized dance company for young audiences and choreographers have to turn to a limited number of youth theater companies. The conversations I had with freelance makers in 2025 show that they are grateful for these opportunities, but they also point out the non-priority of

youth theaters to create dance and the fact that the environmental factors in the dance creation process are different from those of theater.

As far as distribution is concerned, research shows that 'only' 7% of all youth performances (family and schools) in Flanders are dance productions. Moreover, these performances exhibit almost identical aesthetic characteristics: contemporary, Western, children/young people on stage. As a landscape, we thus ignore so many diverse dance genres, from the technically refined ballet to the powerful urban/street/hip-hop.

But problems also arise on the presentation side: programmers are experiencing difficulties in finding audiences and schools are not really eager to get involved (understatement).

So the question itself arises: is this bad? Should there be more dancing? Maybe we are satisfied with this? I don't think so and believe that the arts offering for young audiences should be as diverse as possible and that efforts are certainly needed. Not only for dance, but also for classical and contemporary music, for opera, etc.

But back to the dance. It is clear that after the 'boom' of 2012-2015 we have again entered a deep wave. That is why we are taking up our driving role again at the Krokusfestival. To achieve this, we look across borders for inspiration, particularly to England and Germany. In my years of international prospecting, two countries that were not very high on the priority dance list for young audiences. Quod non.

### **Little Big Dance (England) - 2024**

This dance platform consists of South East Dance (Brighton), Dance East (Ipswich) and Yorkshire Dance (Leeds) and Take Art (Somerset). In the meantime, for a second operating cycle, they have jointly developed an inspiring dance climate that is academically substantiated. Performances are co-produced and distributed on an annual basis and a system of talent development and artistic exchange has been developed.

### **Explore Dance (Germany) – 2025**

This year we are also presenting a dance network, this time from our eastern neighbors. Core partners are Hellerau (Dresden), K3 (Hamburg), fabrik (moves) Potsdam and Fokus Tanz (Munich). Together they have founded a network platform with a focus on pop-up dance performances (various formats) to which they often invite choreographers who have never worked for young audiences.

Both examples have their challenges and setbacks, but both have positive results. The number of high-quality and differentiated dance performances in both countries has grown significantly, there are more presentation places and all this results in a positive impact on public interest.

### **2026 and beyond?**

What if we also created such a dancing network in Flanders where choreographers and dancers can research, rehearse, try-out, show, meet, deepen, talk. A place that is

not tied or connected to one company, but a network in which several companies work together.

And at the same time, let's also find an audience for it. Because the demand for dance is again non-existent, the need is absent. But where there is no need, you can create one yourself. Together we look for ways to go beyond the cliché that dance is abstract, difficult and incomprehensible.

The dance sector, especially in Flanders, has hardly given (or wanted to give) an answer to this public perception. Parents, children and teachers point out to me that this so-called complexity is mainly linked to the lack of a narrative (read: linguistic) structure. Dancers and choreographers, in turn, like to refer to the 'natural' urge of every child to move and dance. That may be true, but we should not forget that this urge to exercise is hardly or not at all socialized. For example, it is 'bon ton' for parents to read a story to their child in the evening before falling asleep, read: to familiarize the child with the narrative structures, it is much less familiar to start the day with a choreographed morning dance around the kitchen table. What if we started with that?

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text in the frame of 'Explore Dance' – Krokusfestival 2025