

Independent Dance in Cluj-Napoca: Organizational Strategies and Audience Dynamics

Beatrice LUPU*

Abstract: With two primary research questions in mind, this study investigates Cluj-Napoca's independent dance culture: "How do available resources (human, financial, and logistical) influence the organization and operational strategies of dance studios?" and "How aware, interested, and involved is Cluj's audience, and what influences their behaviour as public or students?" The study reveals a varied but vulnerable sector through a questionnaire with 85 respondents and four interviews with cultural dance space managers. Sustainability is impacted by several factors, including a lack of consistent resources, difficulties with promoting the opportunities, lack of support from the local administration, and the strain of operating in uncertain and unpredictable circumstances. Every studio operates using its own flexible structure, and there is no set organisational model. Even though there is public interest, low visibility and restricted information available continue to be major obstacles to wider involvement. The results highlight the necessity of better coordination among cultural actors and more support from local authorities. The dance scene in Cluj-Napoca may have a more sustainable future if these ties are strengthened.

Keywords: independent dance, cultural management, audience engagement, Cluj-Napoca, sustainability, cultural participation, dance studios, community arts.

* Researcher, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, elena.beatrice.lupu@ubbcluj.ro



Dance is a crucial form of artistic and social expression in the urban cultural landscape, contributing to social interaction, cultural identity, and personal growth. In Cluj-Napoca, a major cultural and academic hub in Romania, dance plays a vital role in its development. The city's dance scene is diverse and has significant untapped potential. To understand dance as both a performance and an institutional component, this study combines historical analysis with sociological and cultural management tools. Dance is deeply rooted in society's cultural realities, functioning as both a form of artistic expression and a social practice: "Dance history is primarily concerned with the understanding of past dance forms, explored within the context of their time and through the lens of the changes they have undergone," as June Layson explains in *Dance History: An Introduction*¹.

Independent dance studios, often operating without consistent public funding, face the challenge of balancing artistic goals with cultural entrepreneurship. According to Daigle and Rouleau, strategic planning can mediate managerial demands and artistic objectives, fostering internal coherence². This challenge is particularly pronounced in Cluj-Napoca, where dance studios must preserve their vision while navigating a resource-constrained environment. This study, therefore, examines dance in autonomous settings from the perspective of organizational viability.

Cluj-Napoca boasts a variety of dance styles, from classical ballet and contemporary dance to Latin genres (salsa, bachata), urban styles (commercial choreography), and street-derived forms (hip-hop, breaking). Emerging trends like African dance and K-pop are gaining popularity, especially among younger audiences. While there is potential for collaboration, the interaction between styles remains uneven. Additionally, many audience members lack understanding of the cultural significance of different dance forms, limiting engagement. As an example, another barrier to audience engagement is the general lack of education regarding dance terminology and its cultural roots.

¹ June Layson, "Historical Perspectives in the Study of Dance," in *Dance History: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson (London: Routledge, 1994), 3.

² Daigle, Pascale, and Linda Rouleau. "Strategic Plans in Arts Organizations: A Tool of Compromise Between Artistic and Managerial Values." *International Journal of Arts Management* 12, no. 3 (2010): 13-30. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41065025>

A common misconception would be the conflation of street dance with urban dance. As explained by the STEEZY Editorial Team, street dance refers to styles that developed organically within specific communities (such as hip-hop, popping, or breaking) and are rooted in everyday life, often practiced in social settings like block parties, clubs, or public spaces.³ These styles carry deep cultural and social meaning and are tied to the identities of the communities from which they emerged. In contrast, urban dance is a more recent choreographic form developed in studios or online platforms, such as YouTube or TikTok. It draws stylistic inspiration from various street styles, as well as from jazz, contemporary, or commercial dance, yet misses a distinct cultural identity. Rather than being grounded in social or community practices, urban dance is primarily performed for showcases, competitions, and video content.

This research uses qualitative data from interviews with studio managers and a survey of local audiences to map the challenges and suggest pathways for greater sustainability. The findings contribute to broader cultural studies discussions by offering insights into how independent dance spaces operate within urban cultural ecosystems. The study also seeks to offer practical guidance for cultural managers, artists, and policymakers. By understanding audience perceptions, it aims to improve cultural marketing strategies and community engagement. The research stems from a long-standing interest in dance's societal role, informed by direct engagement with Cluj's dance community. As the number of studios grows, a better understanding of the ecosystem's strengths and limitations is crucial. This study lays the foundation for further research into how dance is organized, communicated, and sustained at the local level, starting with a more systematic mapping of dance spaces and practices in Cluj-Napoca.

This research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the operating models of dance studios in Cluj-Napoca, the perspectives of managers, and the public's perceptions of the local dance scene. It focuses on the styles promoted, public knowledge of the studios' activities, and suggestions

³ STEEZY Editorial Team. "What Is 'Urban Dance.'" Accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.steezy.co/posts/what-is-urban-dance>.

for improving the field's quality. The study approaches dance as both an artistic and cultural phenomenon, as well as a social activity within the local context. The research consists of two complementary components:

- **Qualitative investigation:** Semi-structured written interviews with dance studio managers, representing a range of styles (street dance, urban dance, contemporary dance, ballet).

- **Quantitative analysis:** An online questionnaire targeting both dance enthusiasts and non-dancers (including practitioners, spectators, and occasional consumers).

These approaches combine insights from studio management with audience perceptions.

Methods of data collection

1. Semi-structured interviews with managers

As for the qualitative component of the interviews, three written interviews were conducted, transmitted via email, WhatsApp or Instagram messages to the managers of the premises and one telephone interview which I processed according to the manager's responses. Interviews were initially sent to six managers, but I received responses from four of them. The selection of the spaces followed the diversity of artistic and organizational profile, so in the end we finalized the interviews about the following:

- The Hive Dance Studio*: where urban dance (choreography, heels dance), modern African dance, K-pop, ballroom dance, etc. are promoted.

- Concrete Spot*: cultural center for street dance, especially break dance and hip-hop.

- Genesis Dance Studio*: dance studio with a variety of styles, including contemporary dance, breaking, street dancing, commercial dance.

- Hysteria Collective*: association promoting contemporary dance and performing arts.

Each interview included questions about the manager's professional background, internal organizational model (resources, team, legal structure), economic sustainability (funding, sources of income, partnerships), managerial

challenges and adaptation to the local cultural context. I mainly wanted to keep the same questions for each space but adapted them according to their specificities. The interviews were conducted through Google Docs and could be completed directly by the interviewers. Through these interviews I sought to figure out if there are any recurring patterns in the running of these dance spaces, common challenges and development strategies adopted.

2. *Questionnaire for the public*

The questionnaire called *Dance in Cluj-Napoca: How do you look at it?* was applied electronically, using the Google Forms platform. It was distributed on social networks, in groups and pages dedicated to dance (mainly on Instagram and WhatsApp), but also through dance instructors who agreed to help forward the questionnaire among the trainees. A sample of 85 responses was collected, mostly from young people aged 18-35, with the following categories from which respondents could choose: 14-18 years, 19-25 years, 26-35 years, 35-50 years, over 50 years.

The questionnaire consisted of 5 sections with a total of 20 questions, and the opening of the form consisted of a description of the purpose of the questionnaire and who is conducting it. The sections had the following headings: Introduction with the question "Describe in one word/sentence how you see/feel dance", Respondent profile, Perception of dance as an art form vs. recreational activity, Personal experience and exposure to dance and Dance in Cluj-Napoca - promotion and development.

The purpose of the questions was to capture:

- Public perceptions of dance
- Preferences about certain dance styles
- Opinions and knowledge about the local offer of dance courses and dance events
- Suggestions for improving the field

Thus, the interview approach was inductive, as I did not start from a fixed theoretical framework, but wanted the themes to emerge naturally from the managers' answers, adapted of course to the interviewing model which is a bit more rigid compared to capturing emotions and opinions face-to-face.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was processed in Microsoft Excel, with frequency and co-occurrence analysis of some variables (interest in styles vs. perception of their promotion). The automatically generated Google Form charts were also used for the closed-ended questions (multiple choice and choice grid). From the open answers were extracted the main recurrent ideas on the dance field in Cluj-Napoca (lack of visibility of the field, high costs, lack of space, desire for community coagulation, etc.).

Limitations of the study

The following research limitations should be mentioned:

- The sample of the questionnaire is a convenience sample, with a predominance of young people, which limits the generalizability of the results to the entire population of the city and is limited to 85 responses.
- The interviews do not cover the whole institutional range (for example, the perspectives of public institutions, such as the Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca, the House of Culture of Students, are missing) and the lack of managers' answers makes it impossible to carry out a very rigorous analysis. In total, perspectives were collected from four venues, including two successful dance studios, one urban cultural center and one start-up association.
- The possibility of a subjective selection bias: the research participants are largely people already interested in dance, which may lead to more positive or engaged views than the average public, and it is possible that this bias was also evident in the selection of dance studios, given my own individual involvement in the field.
- The qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses implies a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation as an inductive pattern was followed.

Field research

1. Interview Analysis with Dance Studio Managers

The first phase of the research involved interviews with managers from four dance spaces in Cluj-Napoca: The Hive Dance Studio, Concrete Spot, Genessis Dance Studio, and Hysteria Collective. The goal was to understand

both the organizational aspects of these studios and the broader cultural and social context in which they operate. Beyond visible elements like classes and events, the interviews explored how these spaces are imagined, sustained, and strategically shaped by their managers. These conversations revealed a strong sense of passion, courage, and hope for the local dance scene, despite its fragmented and often loosely defined “independent” or “alternative” nature. As Miki Braniște (professor and cultural manager) notes, this so-called independent scene is far from being cohesive or stable. Rather, it is marked by constant negotiation and adaptation.⁴ Despite the enthusiasm and creative energy that characterizes this environment, Cluj’s cultural sector continues to face systemic challenges: the absence of a coherent public infrastructure, limited institutional support, and persistent competition for visibility and funding. The managers interviewed pointed out the lack of support from local authorities, which place additional pressure on their work. In this precarious setting, cultural actors are forced to continuously reinvent themselves to survive. As Braniște puts it, this results in a fragile ecosystem sustained despite, not thanks to, any consistent cultural policy⁵.

In the field of dance, this precarity is especially visible. Most studios operate either as independent, self-financed initiatives or as non-governmental organizations dependent on unstable funding streams and seasonal partnerships. But the functioning of a cultural space can’t be fully grasped through organizational charts or managerial structures alone. As organizational theorist Charles Handy argues, the essence of how organizations function lies not only in formal processes but in the shared feelings, experiences, and informal dynamics that shape everyday life inside them.⁶ Starting from this idea, I approached the interviews with an interest in how dance studios work, not only as physical spaces for training and performance but as emotional, expressive, and strategic environments shaped by the people who lead them.

⁴ Miki Braniște, *Creativitatea-marfă: O perspectivă din interiorul scenei culturale independente clujene 2009-2019* [*Creativity as a Commodity: An Inside Perspective on the Cluj Independent Cultural Scene 2009-2019*] (Cluj-Napoca: Idea Design & Print, 2021), 21

⁵ Miki Braniște, *Creativitatea-marfă*, 21.

⁶ Charles B. Handy, *Understanding Organizations* (London: Penguin, 1986), 197.

Artistic Visions and Managerial Motivations. The Hive Dance Studio, manager Tudor Șchiopu

After entrepreneurial training, Tudor Șchiopu founded a dance studio in 2019, aiming to impact Cluj-Napoca's dance scene. Motivated by international trends, he applied to the European Start-Up Plus program to fuel his vision. The Hive Dance Studio became a vibrant, open space for dancers, blending creativity and professionalism. For Tudor, dance is both a lifestyle and a creative business. He said about himself and his passion: "I define myself as the soul of an artist, the brain of an entrepreneur and the body of a dancer. I'm a simple man who has had big aspirations from a young age and have enjoyed the sound of music ever since I learned to walk. Naturally, dance stuck with me, as it has always been part of my human experience,"⁷ as a compelling synthesis that also guides his approach to studio management. He often advises those just starting out to actively connect these three dimensions (body, mind, and soul) to find the balance they are seeking.

Concrete Spot, manager Simina Poinar

Simina Poinar, an Economic Sciences graduate and breaking instructor, founded a cultural center in 2019 to support youth through art. Inspired by an Austrian model of non-formal education, she saw a gap for such initiatives in Cluj-Napoca and Romania. Concrete Spot operates on the principle "each one, teach one," central to Hip-Hop culture, reflecting Simina's commitment to passing on cultural values. Together with her team, she manages both Concrete Spot and the Concrete Rockers Association, focusing on community and the principles of breaking. Simina speaks candidly about what dance means to her: she's not entirely sure how it all happened, but she knows with certainty that she couldn't imagine life without it.⁸

⁷ Interview with Tudor Șchiopu, The Hive Dance Studio, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „Mă definesc ca fiind suflet de artist, creier de antreprenor și corp de dansator. Sunt un simplu om care a avut aspirații mari de mic și care s-a bucurat de sunetul muzicii de când am învățat să merg. În mod natural, dansul s-a lipit de mine, ca și când a fost tot timpul parte din experiența mea umană.”

⁸ Interview with Simina Poinar, Concrete Spot, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „Nu știu exact cum s-a întâmplat dar sunt sigură că nu aș mai putea să trăiesc fără să am dansul în viața mea.”

Genesis Dance Studio, Founder and Manager Diana Pop

Genesis Dance Studio's motto, "Dream. Dance. Dare." reflects the energy of its founder, Diana Pop, a dedicated and community-focused leader. With over 20 years of dance experience, Diana opened the studio in 2014 to expand Cluj-Napoca's dance scene and provide opportunities for dancers with limited financial means. Genesis is an inclusive, supportive space that cares for both students' dance development and their everyday lives. Diana describes Genesis as "a space of continuous rebirth, construction, and discovery, of oneself and others," and this philosophy is reflected in her management style.⁹ One particularly meaningful discovery was learning that their administrative team includes a trained psychologist, while all instructors receive dedicated training on how to interact with students in a thoughtful and informed way. At Genesis, dance becomes more than physical movement, it is a form of emotional support and personal growth.

Hysteria Collective, Cultural Manager Alex Rădulea, President Hunor Varga

"Dance has always been present in Cluj, but only in phases, there have been interruptions, breaks in continuity, and over time, the audience has either lost touch or changed altogether,"¹⁰ says choreographer Hunor Varga, president of Hysteria Collective. This emerging initiative in the field of contemporary dance began its journey with a strong debut: it's very first project received the highest score in a funding call by AFCN (The Administration of the National Cultural Fund). Guided by bold artistic aspirations rooted in contemporary performance, the collective is committed to building something long-lasting beyond the fleeting life of a single show. The members of the association, shaped artistically within the independent performing arts scene, have experienced firsthand the instability and lack of coherence characterizing

⁹ Interview with Diana Pop, Genesis Dance Studio, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „Genesis pentru mine înseamnă a renaște, a construi, a descoperi neîncetat, pe sine și pe ceilalți.”

¹⁰ Interview with Hunor Varga, Hysteria Collective, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „Dansul a existat dintotdeauna în Cluj, însă doar în etape și între astea au existat pauze, discontinuități, iar publicul s-a dezobișnuit sau chiar s-a schimbat.”

the cultural field in Cluj-Napoca. “We want what we do to take shape over time, to carry a deeper meaning than just a performance that disappears after a few nights,”¹¹ one of the founders emphasizes. Their mission is to revitalize contemporary dance in Cluj, to rebuild the connection between artists and audiences, and to carve out a place within an independent scene that can often feel insular or difficult to access (whether in dance or theatre).

2. Economic and financial structures

The spaces operating under the legal form of an LLC are The Hive Dance Studio and Genessis Dance Studio. Concrete Spot works under the umbrella of the Concrete Rockers Association founded in 2019, which as of October 2022 has twenty-three volunteers working tremendously hard to achieve the association’s goal to create a self-sustainable cultural center. Hysteria Collective is a self-managed NGO, founded just a few months ago.

Most dance studios in Cluj-Napoca, including those featured in this study, rely primarily on monthly fees from trainees, with additional income generated through grants, especially from the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN), and special events or international workshops. The Hive Dance Studio, for example, benefits from workshops that not only enhance its visibility but also bring in extra income. Creative funding strategies like donation campaigns and community fundraising events are also common. Concrete Spot, for instance, has been hosting the One May Jam Hip-Hop event for seven years, which unites the community, celebrates Hip-Hop culture, and serves as a platform for fundraising. I attended the event at Camping Colina, where the vibrant atmosphere included dance sessions, live concerts, and graffiti art. Similarly, The Hive Dance Studio hosts its annual Summer Showcase, offering students the opportunity to perform and generate income through ticket sales. Their troupes also perform at local events, such as fashion shows and weddings, providing both exposure and financial support. Newer initiatives like Hysteria Collective have also sought funding through AFCN, with a successful debut project receiving top marks in its funding category.

¹¹ Interview with Hunor Varga, original quote: „Ne dorim ca ceea ce facem să se construiască în timp, să aibă un sens mai adânc decât un spectacol cu o existență efemeră.”

In addition to grants, they explore other funding sources like corporate and private foundations. An example of this is Concrete Rockers Association's urban culture project *Flori de Ghetou*, funded by Kaufland and the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society. Afterward, the group continued independently with personal development workshops and member support. Genessis Dance Studio has developed a strong event calendar, including themed winter shows, summer camps, and the Genessis Urban Session festival, which combines dance competitions, performances, and community engagement. These activities not only generate income but also foster a strong sense of community.

As expected, studios face a series of recurring costs:

- rent
- salaries and compensation
- utilities and maintenance
- dance equipment
- licensing fees for music rights used in classes
- subscriptions for scheduling or communication platforms
- annual expenses such as website hosting and maintenance
- content production costs: photo sessions (The Hive, for example, organizes a seasonal photo shoot at the start of each semester), video projects, and collaboration with videographers.

A significant portion of the budget at Genessis Dance Studio and The Hive Dance Studio goes into marketing and communication efforts: maintaining websites, running campaigns, producing promotional videos, publishing regular social media content, and investing in visual branding. This is clearly reflected in their polished online presence and active digital engagement.

3. Partnerships and Sponsors

The Hive Dance Studio maintains a partnership with Red Bull, receiving promotional packages, energy drinks, branded items, and a display unit for both Red Bull advertisements and studio content. The studio also collaborates with student associations, organizing charitable events to support disadvantaged children in Cluj, offering free or discounted classes and facilitating donations.

Concrete Spot has partnered with local residential homes, providing free dance classes for institutionalized children, and works with organizations like Trick It Up (extreme sports), Kick In It (fashion and streetwear), and U-BT Cluj-Napoca. Genessis Dance Studio occasionally partners with public schools, such as organizing a flashmob for International Day for Tolerance, but faces a lack of formal sponsorship and support from local authorities. Despite over a decade of success, the studio has not received public institutional support, and Diana Pop highlights the burden on families, who cover all travel and participation costs. Hysteria Collective is exploring partnerships with independent cultural organizations in Cluj-Napoca, such as NON-Centre for Performing Arts and Dance, OM Choreographic Centre, and Reactor de Creație și Experiment (Reactor for Creation and Experiment). The OM Choreographic Centre, founded by Oana Mureșan, is dedicated to contemporary dance and choreographic research, although it's currently restructuring. Despite this, the center's values are strongly aligned with those of the local dance community, as reflected in responses from its active members.

4. *Managerial Organization and Operating Models*

In the case of the dance spaces examined in this research, organizational culture takes on varied and context-specific form (shaped as much by vision and values as by operational constraints). To better understand these variations, I will refer to the organizational culture typology developed by Robert E. Quinn and Kim S. Cameron, outlined in the chapter *The Competing Values Framework* from their book *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* (2005 edition). This framework offers a useful lens through which to analyze the implicit and explicit models of functioning present in the dance studios studied:

Clan Culture emphasizes collaboration, teamwork, and a strong sense of community. Leadership in this context is defined more by mentorship than authority, with managers acting as “facilitators or mentors” rather than enforcers. Personal involvement and emotional connection among members are highly valued. “The organization is held together by loyalty and tradition.

Commitment is high.” Success is measured in terms of internal climate and concern for people.¹²

Adhocracy Culture is commonly found in startup or innovation-driven environments. Also referred to as a “creative culture,” it fosters risk-taking and experimentation, where individuals are encouraged to generate original and unconventional ideas. “The organization is a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative place to work.” Leaders are seen as innovators and risk-takers, and adaptability is a key goal.¹³

Market Culture is defined by its focus on results and competitiveness. Goals are performance-driven, and the emphasis is on productivity and goal achievement. Leaders tend to be tough and demanding. “The organization is results-oriented, with a major concern with getting the job done. People are competitive and goal oriented.”¹⁴

Hierarchy Culture is characterized by structured procedures, formalized environments, and clear lines of authority. “The workplace is formalized and structured. Procedures govern what people do.” Efficiency, stability, and control are the key values in this type of culture, with leadership focused on coordination and monitoring.¹⁵

The Hive Dance Studio has a structured team, with a main manager overseeing operations and an assistant manager handling finances and administration. The marketing team consists of four members, while events are coordinated by a designated person, supported by volunteers. The studio also employs a front desk receptionist, and the founder manages human relations, directly communicating with students and overseeing the community’s well-being. Genessis Dance Studio follows a similar structure, with the founder acting as the primary manager, supported by an assistant manager, a receptionist, and a team of instructors. What sets Genessis apart is the inclusion of a psychologist in the management team, emphasizing emotional

¹² Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 42-43.

¹³ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 40-41.

¹⁴ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 43-44.

¹⁵ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 37-38.

support for students. Diana Pop, the founder, stresses the importance of intrinsic motivation and relationship-building for long-term student engagement. Genessis also provides regular professional training for instructors, focusing on communication and age-specific pedagogy. Concrete Spot, operating under an NGO, has a core administrative team of three, complemented by approximately twenty volunteers across four departments. The team is committed to continuous development, offering training for instructors and facilitators. Hysteria Collective, on the other hand, follows a non-hierarchical and inclusive model, guided by a participatory artistic philosophy. The core team consists of six members, each with distinct yet complementary responsibilities covering the full spectrum of production and communication. These roles include choreography and performance (Hunor Varga), visual design and communication (Ștefan Zamfor), dramaturgy (Cleopatra Constantinescu), scenography and visual art (Zsofia Gabor), music composition (Mara Solomon), as well as project management and financial coordination (Alexandru-Florin Rădulea).

Due to this dynamic and value-driven setup, Hysteria Collective clearly embodies what Quinn and Cameron describe as the “clan culture” – an environment “similar to a family-type organization,” where teamwork, participation, and personal engagement are paramount.¹⁶ Looking across all the spaces included in this study, one can argue that “clan culture” is the dominant model. Team members tend to share close interpersonal relationships not only among themselves but also with their students. These studios frequently organize community-building activities such as movie nights, workshops, social events, or internal dance crews. However, at various points in time and under specific circumstances, elements of “adhocracy culture” (marked by experimentation and innovation) or “market culture” (focused on results and performance) may also surface. These cultural types often intersect and blend, forming hybrid models that allow the studios to adapt and remain functional.

¹⁶ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 42.

Pieces of advice and final perspectives

After presenting the diverse profiles of each studio, the managers also shared a series of reflections and pieces of advice for those who wish to pursue this challenging yet deeply rewarding path of cultural entrepreneurship in the field of dance:

- “Believe in your vision and be prepared for disappointments, because unfortunately we can’t avoid them. Still, if you have a heart of steel that can open when needed, maybe then you’ll be able to find balance more easily in what it truly means to be an artist-entrepreneur in our era.” (Tudor Şchiopu)
- “I believe that as long as everything is done with passion, success is guaranteed.” (Simina Poinar)
- “I would say to make sure you have a solid foundation of knowledge regarding legal matters and financial education, because many people feel this impulse of ‘yes, I want to open a studio,’ but it’s an enormous responsibility towards the people in front of you. What’s even more important is being mindful of who you choose to work with, because I often see people who aren’t properly trained to interact with various age groups and who don’t approach others in the right way” (Diana Pop)

The success of a dance initiative relies not only on the manager’s passion but also on the surrounding environment. Managers in Cluj-Napoca’s dance community have highlighted a recurring issue of unhealthy competition, which undermines collaboration and stifles collective growth. This mindset often hinders the exchange of ideas and best practices, creating a barrier to progress. There is a clear need for more open communication and a cultural shift toward a collaborative spirit that would foster mutual support. On a positive note, the city’s dance scene has become increasingly diverse, with new initiatives offering more opportunities for performers and audiences to connect and express themselves. However, the challenges facing emerging artists are significant – there is no structured support system, no centralized platform for guidance, and a noticeable lack of institutional support. Despite the presence of talented individuals in Cluj, isolation,

underfunding, and a lack of networking opportunities continue to impede growth. These obstacles can be especially discouraging for newcomers in the independent arts sector, where financial instability and a lack of mentorship create further barriers to success.

The survey “Dance in Cluj-Napoca: How do you see it?”. Public perception

We are shifting our focus from managers to the public, the consumers, the ones who see what is happening inside dance studios and at the city level. Through this questionnaire I sought to better understand and expose how the public perceives dance from an artistic, educational and social point of view.

A total of 85 individuals responded to the survey, *Dance in Cluj-Napoca: How Do You See It?* The majority were young people: 72.9% were between 19 and 25 years old, 22.4% between 26 and 35, while 2.4% fell into the 14-18 and 36-50 age ranges respectively. Most respondents were either university students (50%) or young professionals (32%), and the vast majority were residents of Cluj-Napoca.

This demographic structure highlights that the results primarily reflect the perspective of the city’s young and active generation, one that often engages with dance both as an audience and as direct participants.

Din ce categorie de vârstă faci parte?

85 de răspunsuri

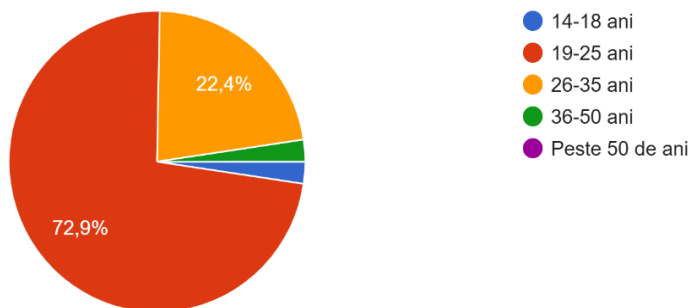


Fig. 1: What age category do you belong to?

INDEPENDENT DANCE IN CLUJ-NAPOCA:
ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES AND AUDIENCE DYNAMICS

It is worth noting that in response to the question, *what is your relationship with dance*, 43 participants indicated that dance is just a hobby, while 24 respondents described themselves as professionals in the field (either as instructors, members of dance crews, or individuals with long-term experience). Another 18 chose the option stating that they follow performances and dance events as audience members. Only 13 participants said they have no connection to dance. What emerges from the responses is a predominantly engaged and dance-aware audience. The high number of participants who describe dance as either a hobby or a professional pursuit point to a community that does not perceive dance as marginal, but rather as a meaningful and accessible part of everyday life. The fact that only a small percentage declared no connection to dance (13 out of 85) further reinforces the idea that dance in Cluj-Napoca has a tangible presence and cultural relevance, especially among the younger generation.

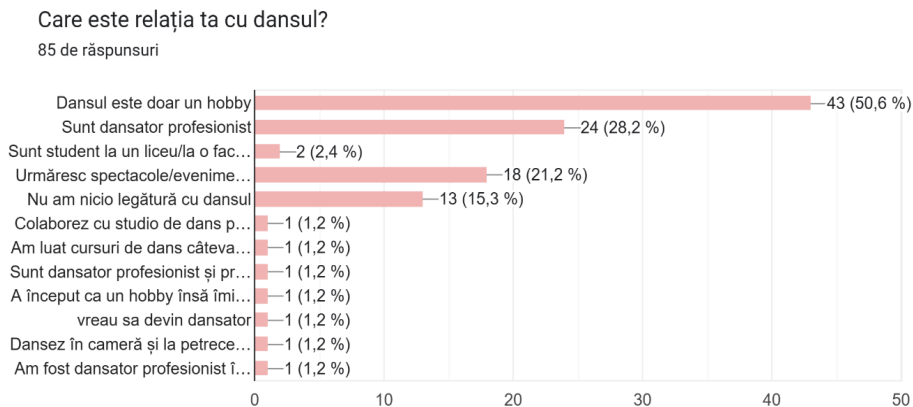


Fig. 2: What is your relationship with dance?

As for participation in dance classes in Cluj-Napoca, 27 reported having taken part at a professional level, 37 said they attended as a hobby, 18 selected the option *No, but I would like to*, and only 5 stated that they had never participated and had no interest in doing so. One respondent selected both *hobby* and *professional* participation, which suggests that their relationship with dance may have started as a recreational activity and later evolved into a deeper passion or even a professional trajectory.

Ai mai participat vreodată la cursuri de dans în Cluj-Napoca?

85 de răspunsuri

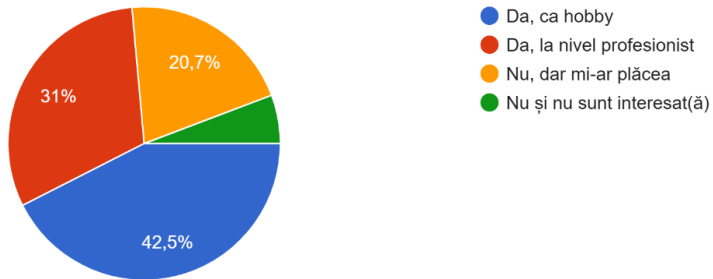


Fig. 3: Did you ever participate in dance classes in Cluj-Napoca?

As the managers noted, much of the local dance ecosystem operates independently, often lacking institutional support. The responses echo this reality: people are interested and involved, but access remains uneven and fragmented.

From a social and educational perspective, respondents were asked to select the factors they believe influence how dance is perceived as an art form. Multiple responses were allowed. The most frequently selected factor was *how dance makes you feel*, chosen by 60 participants. This highlights the emotional impact of dance on the audience and underlines its affective dimension as a form of expression.

The second most selected factor was *education and knowledge about dance*, chosen by 53 respondents. This reflects the role of artistic literacy in shaping perception as one understands the language and techniques of dance, the more one can recognize and appreciate it as a legitimate art form. Closely connected to this is the factor *the quality of performance and choreography*, selected by 48 participants. This choice reinforces the idea that appreciation comes with familiarity, and that creativity, execution, and originality all contribute to how dance is evaluated.

Another significant element is the *presence of dance in cultural institutions* (such as community centres, opera houses, theatres, and schools), which was selected by 40 respondents. This suggests that visibility in formal cultural settings contributes to the perceived legitimacy of dance as an art form.

INDEPENDENT DANCE IN CLUJ-NAPOCA:
ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES AND AUDIENCE DYNAMICS

In relation to public engagement and exposure to dance, respondents were asked whether they had ever attended a dance event or performance in Cluj-Napoca. The results show that while the dance scene in the city is relatively well known, there is still a considerable portion of the public that has not yet attended an event but would like to. Specifically, 35 participants reported attending events frequently, while 32 said they had not yet participated but would like to. Only two respondents stated that they were not interested, and 16 said they had attended occasionally.

These findings are encouraging, as they show that the Cluj-Napoca dance scene has successfully attracted a loyal segment of the public, while also suggesting strong growth potential. Among the events mentioned in the responses were ballet performances at the National Opera (such as *Swan Lake* or *The Nutcracker*), local competitions and showcases (*Women Fueled by Passion*, *Street Groove Jam*, *One May Jam*), as well as the annual showcases hosted by the studios interviewed earlier. Other events mentioned included contemporary performance pieces organized by NON Centru or OM Centru Coregrafic.

Ai mai participat vreodată la un eveniment/spectacol de dans în Cluj?
85 de răspunsuri

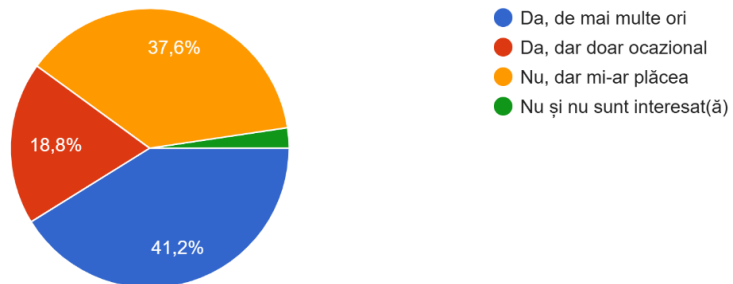


Fig. 4: Did you ever participate in dance performances or events in Cluj?

The presence of spectators who attend events and the interest expressed by those who have not yet joined a class suggest a significant untapped segment of the public, one that could be mobilized through better communication, more frequent public events, or stronger visibility of dance culture in urban life.

A significant portion of the questionnaire focused on public perceptions regarding various dance styles and how they are promoted. Respondents were invited to indicate both the styles they are most interested in and the ones they perceive as being best promoted in Cluj-Napoca. Topping both categories was *street dance*, including its related styles such as hip-hop, breakdance, and house. It was selected by 46 respondents as their preferred style, and by 59 as the most visible and well-promoted genre. In second place, in terms of popularity and perceived visibility, are *Latin American dance styles* such as salsa and bachata. These were preferred by 30 participants and considered to be well-promoted by 45. *Contemporary dance* came in third, reflecting its increasing presence on the Cluj scene. It was selected by 28 as a preferred style and by 23 as a style with good public visibility. This near alignment between the most popular and most visible dance styles suggests that there is a healthy balance between public demand and cultural offerings. The strong presence of street dance in Cluj-Napoca is also reinforced by comments from studio managers, who confirmed the genre's vibrant community and frequent events. While Latin and contemporary dance remain highly appreciated, respondents also highlighted the growing interest in *modern African dance styles*. These were selected by 24 participants as preferred style and by 26 as a well-promoted one. This growth is in part due to the efforts of The Hive Dance Studio, which actively supports the African community by offering beginner and advanced classes, and by hosting a dedicated Afro dance crew. This group performs regularly at events across the city, helping to share and celebrate the culture.

Following the analysis of the questionnaire, it becomes clear that the public is aware of and interested in the dance scene in Cluj-Napoca. Many already participate or express a desire to get involved. However, the lack of centralized information and the limited access to dance education contribute to the fact that this artistic field remains underdeveloped and somewhat out of reach for a broader audience. When asked to evaluate the current dance offerings in Cluj-Napoca, more than half of respondents (54.1%) described them as *fairly diverse, but with certain gaps*. Only 10.6% saw the scene as *very diverse*, while 9.4% felt it was *limited*. A notable share admitted they *don't really know what's available*. These results reinforce the idea that although the dance ecosystem has grown, it still lacks visibility and cohesion in the eyes of the public:

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Ce stiluri de dans te interesează cel mai mult? (selectează maximum 3 opțiuni sau scrie răspunsul tău propriu)

85 de răspunsuri

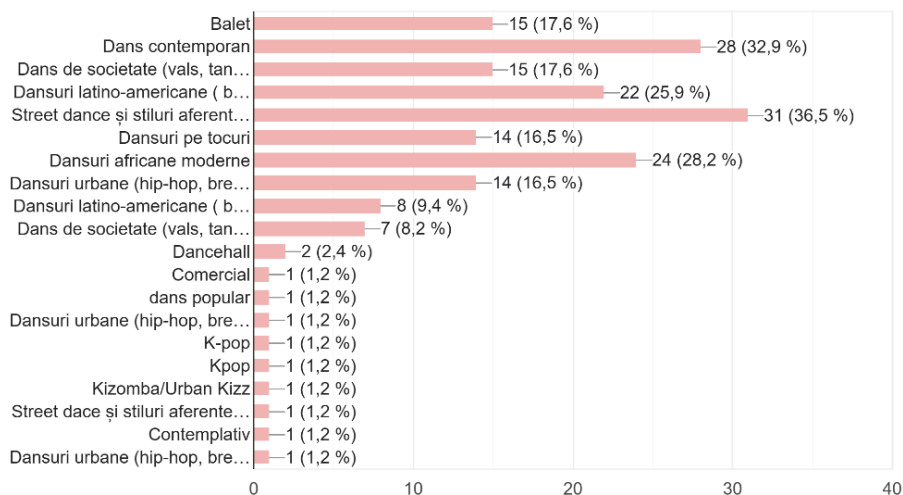


Fig. 5: What dance styles are you most interested in?

Care crezi că sunt cele mai bine promovate stiluri de dans din Cluj-Napoca? (Selectează maxim trei opțiuni sau propune răspunsul tău propriu)

85 de răspunsuri

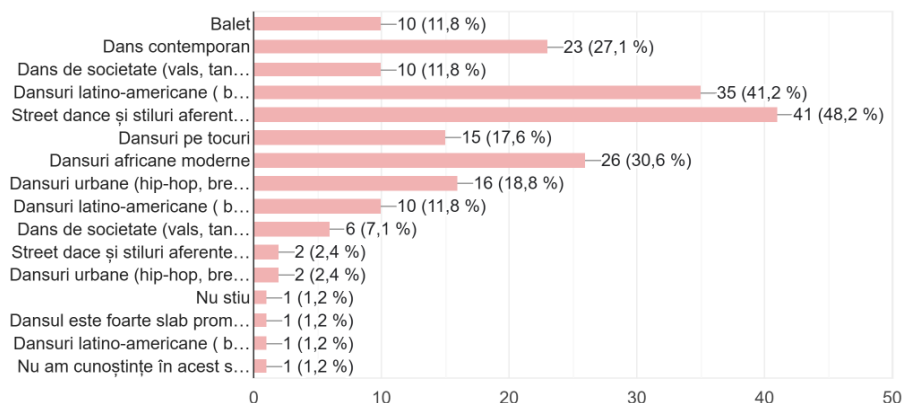


Fig. 6: In your opinion, which dance styles are best promoted in Cluj-Napoca?

Cum apreciezi oferta de dans din Cluj-Napoca?

85 de răspunsuri

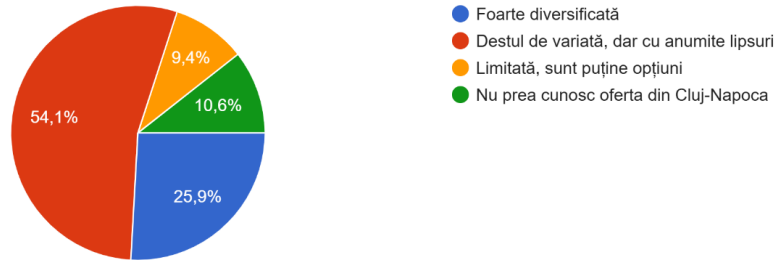


Fig. 7: How would you describe the dance offerings in Cluj-Napoca? With options: Very diverse, Fairly diverse, but with some gaps, Limited, with few available options, I'm not very familiar with the dance scene in Cluj-Napoca

Conclusion

The first research question addressed in this study was: "How do available resources (human, financial, logistical, etc.) influence the organizational structure and operational strategies of dance studios in Cluj-Napoca? Is there a general model of organization, or does each manager decide what works best for their space?" "Each studio attracts its participants through the people they work, especially the instructors, who have a particular kind of energy and therefore attract a specific type of people. If I look around Cluj, you can always see that in certain groups, people resemble each other based on their values."¹⁷ From interviews and observational insights, it is clear there is no universal model for how a dance studio should operate (beyond basic administrative and legal requirements). While at first glance many studios seem to follow similar frameworks (course subscriptions, a general structure of manager-assistant-marketing roles, etc.), the reality is far more nuanced.

¹⁷ Interview with Diana Pop, manager of Genessis Dance Studio, April 2025. Original quote: „Fiecare studio își atrage cursanții prin oamenii cu care lucrează, asta înseamnă instructorii studioului care au un anumit fel de energie și atrag un anumit fel de oameni, pentru că dacă mă uit în Cluj, de fiecare dată vezi în anumite grupuri vezi oameni care se aseamănă pe baza valorilor lor.”

As Tudor Șchiopu, founder of The Hive, simply says it: “The personal touch gives the vibes to a place.”¹⁸

The idea that a space is defined by the people behind it, by their energy, commitment, and vision, was echoed repeatedly by interviewees. These are not just spaces for dance practice, but ecosystems shaped by care and intention, where the values of the team trickle down into how classes are taught, how community is built, and how the atmosphere is sustained. This is precisely what the interviewed managers expressed when speaking about managing their spaces and communities: a constant balancing act of handling people, resources, finances, and well-being, all while preserving artistic identity.

The second research question shifts focus to the audience: “What is the level of knowledge, interest, and participation of Cluj-Napoca’s public regarding the local dance offerings, and what factors influence their behavior as spectators or course participants?” As the survey results suggest, dance is not perceived as mere entertainment. For many respondents, it is a powerful emotional and artistic form. “Describe in a word/phrase how do you feel and see dance:” freedom”, “ confidence”, “ therapy”, “ Dance is the silent whisper of the heart, spoken through footsteps and sighs of rhythm.” Dance is experienced through how it makes one feel, how educated one is about its language and form, the quality of performance and choreography, and its presence in public institutions.

Within the limitations of this study, Cluj-Napoca’s audience expressed a strong appreciation for the diversity of dance styles being taught and promoted across the city. The desire to engage with dance exists. However, a lack of centralized information and the absence of well-developed strategic interventions or culture policy are clearly reflected in the responses. Among the audience’s recommendations were noted: increasing dance promotion, making it more accessible to new audiences, building a stronger presence in student communities and on campuses, strengthening the dance community through collaboration, integrating dance culture into schools, encouraging the viewing of documentaries about dance, organizing outdoor community

¹⁸ Interview with Tudor Șchiopu, manager of The Hive Dance Studio, April 2025. Original quote: „Omul sfințește locul.”

events, and spreading awareness about the physical and emotional benefits of dancing. There is a noticeable gap in dance education, felt through hesitancy, lack of interest, and the fear of trying something new.

Although the art of dance is felt and appreciated, problems of collaboration and knowledge between the studios in Cluj-Napoca can limit the impact of dance on a more diverse and wider audience. Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, an American dancer and one of the pioneers in the study of dance ethnology, emphasizes in her article, "Panorama of Dance Ethnology," the importance of good connections between spaces and communities. She talks about the need to recognize and systematize dance as a complex form of social communication. In this sense, studios should not only be seen as places for training or performance, but also as cultural centers that can connect people and connect these communities to city life.¹⁹ Moreover, these places should not only be seen as such but actively supported to have a real impact.

Ultimately, this research is a first step toward mapping dance spaces and practices in Cluj-Napoca, with the aim of inspiring larger-scale studies, broader surveys, and the development of informed cultural policies rooted in the local context.

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¹⁹ Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, "Panorama of Dance Ethnology." *Current Anthropology* 1, no. 3 (1960): 233-54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2739713>

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ELENA-BEATRICE LUPU thrives at the intersection of structure and creativity, with a background in cultural management, languages, and literature (French and English). She was part of the organizing team for FxAME, University Festival of Theatre and Film, where she applied her managerial skills in a practical, inspiring environment. Her involvement with OSUBB, the student organization at Babeș-Bolyai University, strengthened her project coordination, communication, and leadership abilities. Now, as a Purchasing Specialist in Accounts Payable, Elena applies her skills in finance with transparency and precision, seeing this work as complementary to her creative endeavors. Her finance role has taught her valuable lessons in efficiency, teamwork, and integrity, which she carries into all her projects.

