



Protecting the Right to Culture of Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Cultural Diversity through European Union Law: Exploring New Paths (DANCING)

Report

**Role and Findings of Arts-based Research
in the DANCING Project**

'...Usually in the world it is the other way around...'

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30 September 2024



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'Dancing is just discovery, discovery, discovery'

Martha Graham

*'Many people still think of culture and cultural rights as luxury items.
We must continue demonstrating that cultural rights
are core to the human experience in and of themselves,
but also key to the overall implementation of universal human rights...'*

Karima Bennoune

Former UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
1. INTRODUCTION	10
1.1. THE DANCING PROJECT	10
1.2. KEY TENETS OF THE DANCING PROJECT	11
1.3. AIM OF THIS REPORT	11
1.4. TERMINOLOGY	12
1.5. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT	12
2. THE ROLE AND AIMS OF ARTS-BASED RESEARCH IN DANCING	13
2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1.1. Arts-based Research.....	13
2.1.2. Dance Research	14
2.1.3. Dance and Disability Research.....	14
2.1.4. Disability Arts and Disability Studies.....	15
2.2. THE AIMS OF ARTS-BASED RESEARCH IN DANCING	16
2.3. DEPLOYING ARTS-BASED RESEARCH IN DANCING.....	17
2.3.1. Building a Collaboration	17
2.3.2. Phases of the Arts-based Research.....	18
3. ARTS-BASED RESEARCH AS DATA COLLECTION: THE METHODS	21
3.1. OBSERVATION	21
3.2. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH MEMBERS OF THE STOPGAP DANCE COMPANY.....	21
3.3. WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE AND FOCUS GROUP WITH AUDIENCE MEMBERS	22
3.3.1. Written Questionnaire	22
3.3.2. Focus Group.....	23
3.4. LIMITATIONS	25
4. ARTS-BASED RESEARCH AS DATA COLLECTION: THE FINDINGS	26
4.1. BARRIERS TO AND FACILITATORS OF PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DANCE	26
4.1.1. Lack of Access in Dance Companies.....	26
4.1.2. Negative Attitudes and Lack of Knowledge	27
4.1.3. Lack of Routes to Professional Artistic Education	28
4.2. ENACTING INCLUSIVITY	29
4.2.1. Techniques that Creatively Engage All Dancers.....	29
4.2.2. The Creative Process and Representations of Disability	30
4.3. EMBEDDING ACCESSIBILITY MEASURES.....	32
5. ARTS-BASED RESEARCH AS REPRESENTATION: THE PREMIERE	34
5.1. THE ROLE OF THE PREMIERE OF ‘LIVED FICTION’ IN THE DANCING PROJECT	34
5.2. THE DANCING CONTRIBUTION TO THE ORGANISATION AND STAGING OF ‘LIVED FICTION’ IN DUBLIN	36
5.3. THE PREMIERE.....	37
5.4. FEATURES OF ‘LIVED FICTION’	38
6. CONCLUSIONS	40
REFERENCES	42

ANNEX I – INTERVIEW GUIDE.....48
ANNEX II – SURVEY QUESTIONS49
ANNEX III – QUESTIONS POSED DURING THE FOCUS GROUP.....54
ANNEX IV – PROGRAMME FOR LIVED FICTION, 11-12 APRIL 202455

Executive Summary

This report outlines and discusses the arts-based research undertaken within the larger multi-method project '*Protecting the Right to Culture of Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Cultural Diversity through European Union Law: Exploring New Paths (DANCING)*', funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and based at Maynooth University (MU), Ireland.¹ DANCING has been running from 1 September 2020 and will be completed by 31 August 2025.

DANCING has pursued three main objectives. First, it has identified and categorised barriers to and facilitators of cultural participation experienced by people with disabilities and how they affect the wider cultural domain. Secondly, it has provided a normative exploration of how the EU has used and can use its competence to combat discrimination and its supporting competence on cultural matters, in synergy with its wide internal market powers, to ensure the accessibility of cultural activities, to promote disability identities, while achieving cultural diversity. Thirdly, it aims to advance the understanding of the legal concept of cultural diversity, which stems from the intersection of different sources of law, and, in the final phase of the project, will articulate a new theorization of the promotion of cultural diversity within the EU legal order. The project is underpinned by UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which represents the global legal standard on disability rights.

Notably, DANCING deploys arts-based research alongside socio-legal and doctrinal research to explore the right of persons with disabilities to take part in cultural life as an essential aspect of enhancing cultural diversity in the European Union (EU). Arts-based research (i.e. qualitative research that employs the premises, procedures, and principles of the arts) has been used in the DANCING project as a data collection method to understand barriers and facilitators to cultural participation. In particular, arts-based research has helped identify what features are experienced as exclusionary by people experiencing different types of disability, both as audience and as artists, and to advance the understanding of what facilitates cultural participation. Arts-based research has also been vital to gauge a deeper understanding of key concepts of disability law, such as accessibility. Further, it has provided an actual demonstration of the cultural diversity brought by and inherent to disability.

Arts-based research revolved around inclusive contemporary dance and entailed a collaboration with the inclusive dance company Stopgap Dance Company (hereafter 'Stopgap'). Such collaboration focused on the creation, development and performance of an inclusive piece of choreography titled '*Lived Fiction*', which treated accessibility measures for audiences as an intrinsic part of the creative process. In this respect, the arts-based research carried out in DANCING builds on and advances relevant scholarship on arts-based methods and on intersections of dance, law and human rights. It also contributes to further unveiling cultural meanings of disability enriching broader debates within disability studies around representation of people with disabilities.

¹ <https://ercdancing.maynoothuniversity.ie/>.

The methods used within the arts-based research were observation, semi-structured interviews, written survey with audience members, and a focus group with audience members. The findings from this research are articulated in this report under three interlinked headings or themes. The first focuses mainly on experiences of Stopgap's members in respect of barriers to participation in professional dance. The other two focus on the creative processes employed in the creation of *'Lived Fiction'*, including its access measures, and how the piece was experienced by members of Stopgap and by audiences.

Regarding barriers to professional engagement, Stopgap members discussed a range of factors that inhibit participation in professional dance in general by people with disabilities and which confirm findings from the broader DANCING project (Leahy and Ferri, 2022, 2023). Identified barriers ranged from lack of access measures (not just as regards physical access but also in methods employed in teaching/developing choreography) to negative attitudes at a societal level, including amongst people engaged in dance companies and dance education, who were also perceived to frequently lack knowledge about disabilities. In that regard, these findings tally with the findings from the socio-legal research conducted in the DANCING project, which have shown that the persistence of barriers to cultural participation for people with disabilities means that inclusion continues to be denied to many.

Turning to the creative processes of *'Lived Fiction'*, interview participants highlighted factors operating within the approach to creation that engaged all dancers and contributed to the full inclusion of dancers with and without disabilities and considers how the techniques employed, involving a focus on individual approaches, diverse bodies and ways of moving as an intrinsic part of a collaborative and co-creation process, affects how disability is represented within the performance. Particular focus was on co-creation processes that engaged all dancers in artistically innovative roles from the outset, involving ongoing communication and 'translation' of movements, as well as a focus on the individuality and strengths of each member of Stopgap, supported by using 'open language' which does not assume that everyone interprets a movement in the same way.

Another theme discussed relates to the effect of embedding access measures from the start of the creative process and making them intrinsic to that process. Stopgap members felt that this would broaden out the approaches available and deliver a more enriching artistic experience for all audience members - with and without disabilities. This was somewhat confirmed by research with audience members. Survey feedback from audience members after a work-in-progress performance of *'Lived Fiction'* suggests in some cases that the integration of audio description added another 'layer' or was an enhancement of the artistic experience. Discussion at the focus group suggests that despite the challenges involved in facilitating access for an audience with requirements for diverse accommodations, there was an appreciation of the effort and care that was evident in trying to embed accessibility for all.

The world premiere of *'Lived Fiction'* (that took place on 11 April 2024 in Dublin) was a dynamic representation of normative concepts engaged in the DANCING project, such as accessibility, inclusivity and cultural diversity. It also shows that the approach taken to the

development of *'Lived Fiction'* of making access measures intrinsic to the creative process can provide a rich experience for all audience members - not just those with disabilities.

The findings presented here are complementary to the arguments made by the DANCING project as a whole. They can help to inform dance projects wishing to adopt more inclusive processes, but, more importantly, can provide a wider understanding of how to realise accessibility and inclusivity in culture and the objectives of the CRPD.

1. Introduction

This introductory section, after recalling the core objectives and key tenets of the DANCING project, sets out the aims of the report, expounds the terminology used and outlines its structure.

1.1. The DANCING Project

The project 'Protecting the Right to Culture of Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Cultural Diversity through European Union Law: Exploring New Paths (DANCING)' explores the right of persons with disabilities to take part in cultural life as an essential aspect of enhancing cultural diversity in the European Union (EU). The project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and is based at Maynooth University (MU) under Professor Delia Ferri as a Principal Investigator (PI). It explores the extent to which the protection of the right to take part in culture of people with disabilities and the promotion of cultural diversity intersect and complement each other in the EU legal order. On the whole, DANCING deploys interdisciplinary approaches to produce ground-breaking knowledge intended to challenge the cultural exclusion often faced by people with disabilities, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and culturally diverse European society.

DANCING commenced on 1 September 2020 and is due to be completed on 31 August 2025. It has pursued three main objectives. First, it has identified and categorised barriers to and facilitators of cultural participation experienced by disabled people and how they affect the wider cultural domain (experiential objective). Secondly, it has provided a normative exploration of how the EU has used and can use its competence to combat discrimination and its supporting competence on cultural matters, in synergy with its wide internal market powers, to ensure the accessibility of cultural activities, to promote disability identities, while achieving cultural diversity (normative objective). Thirdly, it aims to advance the understanding of the legal concept of cultural diversity, which stems from the intersection of different sources of law, and, in the final phase of the project, will articulate a new theorization of the promotion of cultural diversity within the EU legal order (theoretical objective). The project is underpinned by UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which represents the global legal standards on disability rights, and is informed by the human rights model of disability.

Methodologically, DANCING combines legal, empirical, and arts-based research to achieve its experiential, normative and theoretical objectives. It is divided into four complementary and partially overlapping work packages (WPs). Three of them correspond to the key objectives of the project, and the fourth one is a cross-cutting WP that focuses on translating the research into practical tools that can effect societal change (Tools for Change). The arts-based research, which this report expounds, sits within WP 1, which pursues the experiential objective (i.e.

understanding barriers and facilitators to cultural participation of persons with disabilities), and is part of WP 4.

1.2. Key Tenets of the DANCING Project

DANCING is informed by the principles and rights set out in the CRPD. It is underpinned by values of empowerment, respect for diversity and participation. It embraces the concept of disability laid out in Article 1(2) CRPD, which recognises that persons with disabilities include those ‘who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’. It further embraces the view explained by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee, 2018, p. 2) that ‘disability is a social construct’ and ‘is one of several layers of identity’.

Furthermore, DANCING looks at the right to participate in culture in a comprehensive way with reference to its twofold individual dimension and its collective aspect (Romainville, 2015; Chow, 2018). The twofold individual dimension encompasses the right to access cultural activities, goods and services, (i.e., the right to cultural consumption), and the right to active involvement in culture, which includes the engagement in the creation of cultural goods, services and activities. The collective aspect entails the right of cultural communities to be recognised and protected as well as to enjoy and make use of their cultural heritage and cultural expressions.

The project acknowledges the current comprehensive definitions of culture and the cultural domain that connect to cultural rights, but deliberately focuses on arts practices (encompassing different art forms, including literature, dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and heritage as forms of cultural expression (Caust, 2019), and uses dance as a selected art practice for the purpose of arts-based research.

1.3. Aim of this Report

This report aims to outline the arts-based research undertaken in the DANCING project and presents its findings. Notably, in DANCING, arts-based research has constituted a valuable data-collection method, a tool to investigate normative concepts such as accessibility in a non-cognitive way and a means of communicating and disseminating findings.

By presenting how the arts-based research has been deployed, the report aims to contribute to methodological literature and to scholarly work on interdisciplinary research. Since the arts-based research used inclusive dance, this report aims also to contribute to disability and dance research by explicating processes involved in creating an inclusive dance piece as well as the impact of access measures on dancers and audiences. In doing so, this may further

inform other dance companies wishing to be inclusive of performers and audiences with disabilities and those without disabilities alike.

1.4. Terminology

In line with the CRPD, which represents the global legal standard on disability, the report uses ‘people first language’ (i.e. persons/ people with disabilities). We also believe that it captures the broad range of people who could be interested and involved in the project. However, we acknowledge that ‘people first language’ is not used by everyone, nor is it wording which everyone identifies with or agrees with. For this reason, sometimes (and interchangeably) we use what is considered identity first language - ‘disabled person/dancer’ - as do several of the participants quoted in the report.

In the project and in this report, the term ‘inclusive dance’ is used to refer to professional contemporary dance including dancers with and without disabilities, and that describes dance methods stressing equal participation and respect for individual difference (Boswell et al., 2023). We also embrace the view that, as noted by Whatley and Marsh (2017, p. 5), ‘inclusive dance’ displays ‘an interest in exploring both common ground and individual differences’. We acknowledge that sometimes ‘integrated’ dance and ‘inclusive’ dance are used interchangeably to refer to professional dance contexts where people with disabilities work alongside non-disabled dancers (Boswell et al., 2023) and, indeed, that a range of other terms are used (Bergonzoni, 2022).

1.5. Structure of the Report

Further to this introduction, the report is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines how the arts-based research was approached within the DANCING project, situating the project in the context of current literature. Section 3 discusses the methods used in the arts-based research while section 4 presents key findings. Section 5 outlines the key features of the premiere of ‘Lived Fiction’, held on 11 April 2024 in Dublin, which represented the culmination of the collaboration between Stopgap Dance Company (hereafter ‘Stopgap’) and DANCING and a representation of disability and diversity. Section 6 provides some concluding remarks.

2. The Role and Aims of Arts-based Research in DANCING

This section locates the arts-based research conducted in the DANCING project at the intersection of different strands of literature. It then outlines the key aims of the arts-based research conducted in the DANCING project, and zooms in on the collaboration with Stopgap.

2.1. Literature Review

The arts-based research carried out in DANCING builds on and advances relevant scholarship on arts-based methods and on the intersections of dance, law and human rights. Such scholarship is reviewed, albeit briefly, in the subsections below.

2.1.1. Arts-based Research

Arts-based research has been advanced since the early 1980s (Eisner, 1981), although to a different extent within different fields. Having started out at the margins, arts-based research methods have become more central within various fields of research in recent decades (Liamputtong and Rumbold, 2008; Springborg, 2020). Nowadays, researchers from various disciplines have successfully adopted these methods, often in an interdisciplinary way, in their work (see, amongst others, Knowles and Cole, 2008; Coemans and Hannes, 2017; Woodgate et al., 2017). It has been defined as ‘any social research or human inquiry that adapts the tenets of the creative arts as a part of the methodology ... the arts may be used during data collection, analysis, interpretation and/or dissemination’ (Jones and Leavy, 2014, pp. 1-2; Leavy, 2015). Arts-based research enables a diversity of experiences to be communicated in ways that disrupt ‘common sense’ understandings and acts as a reminder that there are possibilities for things to be otherwise (Foster, 2016). Further, the arts also lend themselves to collaborative working (Foster, 2016).

Areas of scholarship to which arts-based methods are applied include the health and social sciences (Liamputtong and Rumbold, 2008; Fraser and al Sayah, 2011; Herron et al., 2023), business and the humanities (Ward and Shortt, 2020), digital technologies (Kitchin, 2023) and also social justice (Foster, 2016). Lawyers are also engaging with arts methods, albeit to a more limited degree, sometimes to try and effect change within the law (Parsa and Snodgrass, 2022).

There are many dimensions to arts-based research, reflecting the large variety of art genres (such as performance, writing, painting, photography, collage and installation art), and they can be used in a variety of ways, for example, as a method or as technical, communication or aesthetic elements (Franz, 2010). The arts-based paradigm is enormously diverse, but it typically values aesthetic understanding, evocation, and provocation (Leavy, 2017). Arts-based research is also associated with the potential to elicit deeper, more emotional or reflexive accounts and may also be capable of engaging a wider variety of audiences more readily (Ward and Shortt, 2020, p. 2). Furthermore, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study can be achieved through creative and arts-based research

methods, and they are often combined with other practices and methodologies in order to enrich or complement traditional (qualitative) approaches (Van der Vaart et al., 2018).

2.1.2. Dance Research

Interest in using dance in research is of more recent development than the development of arts-based methods in general (Springborg, 2020). However, dance too has developed in recent decades into a research subject that is recognised in many scientific disciplines, involving multidisciplinary research that considers methods and approaches as well as questions and ideas from all related fields and ‘has the potential to foster knowledge processes that challenge the normative and presumptions of what is “normal”’ (Quinten et al., 2022, p. 1). For Springborg (2020, p. 44) what comes through the body in dance is ‘a voice that has hitherto not been allowed to participate in the research process’.

There is also a growing body of research looking at how dance, law, politics and human rights intersect (Mulcahy and Seear, 2024; see, amongst others, Jackson, 2005; Kraut, 2015; Gover, 2021). Thus, Mills (2017, pp. 114-115) outlines how dance is used in public performances to promote human rights and involves the performance of differences between human bodies, which may illuminate the inequalities that deem some bodies unequal while at the same time, promoting ‘kinesthetic empathy’ as moments of shared empathy enabling ‘recognition through the body of the underlying assumption of the human rights doctrine: that all human beings are equal in dignity’. Further, Jackson and Shapiro-Phim (2008, p. xv) emphasise that dance can be a ‘vehicle for revealing, resisting, and rectifying differing forms of abuse and injustice’ suggesting too that dance bridges diverse communities, and provides avenues for cultural expression. Legal scholars also identify how dance may be well-suited for transformative human rights education in general and disability rights education in particular, because dance has the potential to draw attention to the way each body is simultaneously different and equal (Waldorf et al., 2023). Overall, however, even though the link between arts, law and human rights has been well recognised, arts-based methods in socio-legal research are often used as a means of communicating with non-academic audiences rather than a data collection method, in contrast to the method adopted in the DANCING project, as will be discussed in the remainder of this report.

2.1.3. Dance and Disability Research

There is an extensive and growing body of research on dance and disability (see, among others, Albright, 2001; Hermans, 2016; Whatley, 2010, 2023; Whatley et al., 2018). As Hickey-Moody (2017) puts it, the body is a language that cuts across cultural difference, and dance theatre devised and performed by dancers with disabilities can contribute new social and cultural meanings of disability. Similarly, for Whatley (2007, p. 23), dance can be ‘a radical and dynamic site for debates surrounding the disabled body’.

In parallel with the developments just outlined, since the 1990s professional inclusive dance companies have increased in number and influence in respect of society’s perceptions of dancers with disabilities and have been a major source of expansion of the scope of what are

considered 'acceptable bodies in dance' (Boswell et al., 2023, p. 508). This is against a backdrop where medical models of disability continue to constitute the overriding public discourse of disability (Hickey-Moody, 2017), and where there are still limited numbers of adult dancers with disabilities who dance in professional companies (Boswell et al., 2023). Furthermore, dance companies not only aim to disrupt the idea that dance ought to look a certain way, but they strive to provide an 'aesthetic of access', which considers accessibility as the starting point rather than as an add-on (Sealey and Lynch, 2012).

2.1.4. Disability Arts and Disability Studies

Scholarship on dance and disability links to the broad and varied field of disability arts and aesthetics. Nowadays, there are increasingly sophisticated ensemble groups of artists with disabilities and non-disabled artists engaged in high production-value recreational arts, serious leisure, semi-professional and professional performances and exhibitions (Darcy et al., 2022). Thus, the arts contribute to increased participation and visibility of people with disabilities in broader society (Swartz et al., 2018), and disability arts is recognised as a powerful source of aesthetic innovation in the arts (Hadley et al., 2022). Disability aesthetics seek to emphasise the presence of disability in the tradition of aesthetic representation, and prize difference as a value in itself, refusing to recognise 'the representation of the healthy body ... as the sole determination of the aesthetic' (Siebers, 2006, p. 64; see also Cameron, 2022).

There has also been considerable debate within disability studies around how artists with disabilities participate, represent themselves, and are represented within all forms of display and artistic expression (see, amongst others, Darke, 2003; Swartz et al., 2018; Hadley and McDonald, 2019). For Kupperts (2004) people with disabilities have re-claimed their differences as a source of communality and cohesion in the face of oppression and use cultural interventions in order to subvert and query these meanings, and 'disability culture emerges as a counterculture'. Sandahl (2002) highlights potential impact on wider society, as when people with disabilities are performing, they challenge the way that a lot of dramatic metaphors work, and she suggests that if 'disabled bodies' were to participate fully in our theatres, we would not only 'alter the ideology of our performing space, but we would ... serve as a model for change to the larger social order' (Sandahl, 2002, p. 24; see also Tolan, 2001). Similarly, Hall (2013) argues that, by engagement in creative arts, people with intellectual disabilities can transcend the exclusionary landscape (albeit temporarily) and begin to reimagine and transform understandings of learning disability and difference in society. However, empirical research, carried out within the DANCING project across Europe confirms that there continue to be many barriers to participation in the arts by people with disabilities, both as audiences and especially as artists and performers (Leahy and Ferri, 2022, 2023).

2.2. The Aims of Arts-based Research in DANCING

Consistent with the literature examined, within the broader remit of the DANCING project, arts-based research served as a way to collect data on what facilitates cultural participation and what operates as barriers as perceived by people working in inclusive dance, and supported the achievement of the experiential objective of the project. It also provided a demonstration of the cultural diversity brought to dance by people with disabilities participating in inclusive dance, contributing to the cross-cutting WP on dissemination. It is premised on the idea that the arts and artists have potential to ‘inspire change ... [or] to have impact’ (Ward and Shortt, 2020, p. 2). This aligns with scholarly findings that recognise that arts-based and creative methods can help create avenues for envisioning alternative futures and working towards social change (Seppälä et al., 2021).

Furthermore, as mentioned, the deployment of an inclusive choreography helped with gauging an in-depth understanding of concepts of disability law and engaging with normative principles, such as accessibility, in a non-cognitive way. This links to how, as Schein (2013) suggests, art provokes, shocks and inspires us to experience ideas, concepts and contexts differently.

The use of arts-based research allowed for participation of people with disabilities in the project, and was key to ensuring an element of co-design and co-creation in a PI-led project, enhancing the participatory approach of the overall project. In fact, our research with audience members provided feedback to Stopgap so that it could inform aspects of *‘Lived Fiction’* as it was developed prior to its world premiere in April 2024. In that connection, our approach is situated within collaborative approaches to research which recognise that legitimate knowledge is not only located with privileged experts but that it needs to be produced in collaboration with local expert knowledge of the knowers (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, p. 258). While interest in arts-based and collaborative research methods were originally marginal, they have moved into the mainstream and are seen as particularly rich, allowing researchers to access their own and their participants’ experiential knowing in more complex ways (Liamputtong and Rumbold, 2008).

The focus on dance chosen by DANCING is consistent with the general aims of arts-based research outlined above, but values dance as epistemological tool and builds on the considerable research on dance and disability. By using inclusive dance as a form of arts-based research, the project tallies with the ‘growing field of scholarship that considers how dance practice can be made integral to interdisciplinary, mixed-methods research processes’ (McGrath et al., 2021, p. 97; Archibald and Gerber, 2018). It recognises that dance has developed in recent decades into a research subject, acknowledged by many other disciplines. It aligns with the purposes identified by Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) for using dance in social science research, as supplemental knowledge and to explore meanings and representations. It also acknowledges that dance theatre devised and performed by dancers with disabilities can contribute to debate about disabled bodies and contribute to new social and cultural

meanings of disability (Whatley, 2007; Hickey-Moody, 2017). In that regard, the research conducted in DANCING builds upon and further advances disability and dance research.

2.3. Deploying Arts-based Research in DANCING

As mentioned in the Introduction to this report, the arts-based research conducted within the DANCING project involved a collaboration with Stopgap in the development of the choreographic piece *'Lived Fiction'*. Stopgap is a company composed of dancers with and without disabilities, whose mission is 'to create an inclusive world where diversity is not just accepted but pursued, a world where no one is limited by prejudice against Deaf, Disabled, or neurodivergent people' (Stopgap, n.d.).² As a collective of disabled, Deaf, neurodivergent and non-disabled allies, Stopgap's work is stated to be intended to demonstrate the power of diversity and inclusivity and the potential that comes from doing things in an alternative way.

2.3.1. Building a Collaboration

After the completion of the procurement process in alignment with the project proposal and in compliance with relevant EU and national rules as well as MU policies and practices, initial discussions between the PI of DANCING, Prof. Delia Ferri, and Stopgap helped in laying down a common vision of the collaborative work. These initial encounters were useful to sketch out an ambitious vision for the collaboration throughout the life of the project. Through partnership, research and engagement with Stopgap, the goal of the PI was that of contributing meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge and to support a more inclusive and diverse cultural domain.

The collaboration commenced in 2022 and focused on the development and performance of an inclusive choreographic work, which set out to treat accessibility measures for audiences as an intrinsic part of the creative process and that could represent diversity in a way that aligned with the ethos and the objectives of the DANCING project. A workshop titled *'Inclusive Dance: Addressing Challenges, Sharing Experiences, and Exploring Tools for Participatory Research'* involving Stopgap, academics from various disciplines and other stakeholders was held on 23 August 2022 at MU. The workshop offered the opportunity to discuss inclusive dance approaches as an innovative form of participatory research, and the arts-based research of the DANCING project. Additionally, the workshop served as an opportunity to discuss the involvement of stakeholders in academic research.

² www.stopgapdance.com.



Workshop, 'Inclusive Dance: Addressing Challenges, Sharing Experiences, and Exploring Tools for Participatory Research' held at Maynooth University, 23 August 2022.

Then, Stopgap engaged in a long creation process that intertwined with various research phases, which will be explained in the following section. Such process allowed the deployment of a layered choreographic work, with access measures embedded within, and intrinsic to, the creation and presentation of the piece. They involved audio description, attention to colour contrasts, creative/live captioning and digital, visual representations of the sounds. Attention was also paid to the soundscape and to the lighting with neurodiverse audiences in mind. Further accessibility and inclusivity features underpinned the performance, such as making it clear that it was acceptable to make noise during the performance and to leave and go to a quiet room. All these approaches (which we return to below in a discussion of the premiere of *'Lived Fiction'*) were also intended to present opportunities for non-disabled audiences to engage with dance work in new ways.

2.3.2. Phases of the Arts-based Research

The arts-based research was conducted in various phases over a period of time between 2022 and 2024, and in close collaboration with Stopgap.

The PI and researcher Dr. Ann Leahy of DANCING had the opportunity to engage with members of the inclusive dance company Stopgap in interviews at different stages. The PI also had the opportunity to observe and be immersed in the development of the choreography *'Lived Fiction'* created by Stopgap for DANCING during their residency in Ireland.

While the methods are explained in detail later in the report, it is worth mentioning that the research took place in three main phases that preceded the final performance in April 2024. An initial research engagement with Stopgap was conducted during their residence in Ipswich (UK), in December 2022, involving interviews with some members of Stopgap. A second and more in-depth engagement with observation, additional semi-structured interviews with

members of Stopgap, as well as a survey with audience members was conducted during their residency at Dance Ireland premises in Dublin, in February 2023. In that instance, the PI had the opportunity to partake in dance classes and training before observing the rehearsals. The work-in-progress or ‘scratch’ performance open to invited audience was held on 24 February 2023.



Stopgap members (l-r) Nadenh Poan, Emily Leu-Fong and Monique Dior Jarrett rehearse ‘Lived Fiction’. (Photo courtesy of Stopgap - Photographer Chris Parkes).



Stopgap members (l-r) Hannah Sampson and Jannick Moth rehearse ‘Lived Fiction’. (Photo courtesy of Stopgap - Photographer Chris Parkes).

Then, during a residency of Stopgap at the University of Surrey (UK) in April 2023, additional observation took place in a theatre setting at Guildford School of Acting. The PI and Dr. Leahy attended a first staging of the performance on 6 April 2023. A focus group discussion was conducted afterwards with six audience members.



Stopgap members Monique Dior Jarrett and Christian Brinklow (l-r) rehearse as choreographer Lucy Bennett looks on during ‘Lived Fiction’ rehearsals. (Photo courtesy of Stopgap - Photographer Chris Parkes).

To mark the halfway point of the DANCING project and to present interim findings and preliminary results, the DANCING project hosted the DANCING Mid-Term Academic Conference on 4 September 2023 at Maynooth University. The conference included scholars of EU law, disability law, socio-legal studies, and dance research throughout the day. The different sessions and activities also allowed the DANCING team to present the research conducted thus far and to situate it within broader scholarly debates, as well as to discuss the next steps and research tasks of the project. The conference was another opportunity to deepen the collaboration with Stopgap, as it involved the DANCING project’s PI and Sho Shibata (formerly Executive Producer of Stopgap) joining other dance researchers in a presentation and discussion of arts-based research and inclusive dance.

The arts-based research of the DANCING project culminated and ended with the world premiere of the piece ‘Lived Fiction’, directed and created by Lucy Bennett in collaboration with Stopgap, on 11 April 2024 in Dublin. The cast included Christian Brinklow, Monique Dior Jarrett, Emily Lue-Fong, Jannick Moth, Lily Norton (Audio Describer), Nadenh Poan, Hannah Sampson and Dan Watson (Voice of Dan). Full acknowledgement of all those who contributed in different capacities to ‘Lived Fiction’ is included in Annex IV.

3. Arts-based Research as Data Collection: The Methods

As mentioned above, there were a number of different qualitative research methods employed within the arts-based research of the DANCING project and we set them out in more detail here. Ethical approval had been obtained from the relevant MU Research Ethics Committee for all aspects of the DANCING research. All research participants received information in advance of their participation, and they consented in writing. Attention was paid to accessibility issues and information on the research as well as consent forms were made available in different formats.

3.1. Observation

The first method entailed observation of dance rehearsals and performances. It was carried out by the PI of the DANCING project, who has a background in dance. Participant observation allows the collection of data wherever it is important to capture human behaviour in its broad natural context (Glaser, 1996). The PI observed the Stopgap at various junctures of the creative process in the rehearsal room, during the residency at Dance Ireland in Dublin in February 2023, and on stage, in Surrey in April 2023, and watched videos of rehearsals in subsequent residencies of Stopgap in the UK. While not contributing to creating the choreography, she felt that she was an active participant in the mutual exchange, and participated actively in one dance class held before the creation and rehearsal of the choreographic piece.

3.2. Semi-structured Interviews with Members of the Stopgap Dance Company

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of Stopgap. Nine (n=9) Stopgap members participated in total. This included six dancers and three people working in various behind-the-scenes roles. Four of the participants self-identified as people with disabilities and they referred (either in interviews or in published profiles) to diverse impairment types. The interviews were conducted between December 2022 and February 2023, during the residencies in Ipswich and in Dublin and, thus, were able to elicit views of participants while the choreography of the piece was being developed and while its staging was being planned.

Some interviews were conducted in person, others online, maintaining the face-to-face element of interviewing (Foley, 2021). As is typical in semi-structured interviews, this involved an interview guide used flexibly and a series of open-ended questions (Given, 2008). Interviews addressed experiences of contributing to creating the piece as well as the approach to access measures, how disability was represented in the piece and the issue of barriers to and facilitators of participation in dance. The interview guide is included in Annex I. Interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and afterwards transcribed verbatim. We analysed the data using the reflexive approach to thematic analysis, developed by Braun and Clarke (2019, 2021).

3.3. Written Questionnaire and Focus Group with Audience Members

Audience members were also engaged in the research process. The aim was to explore how access measures were experienced, and to hear how/whether 'inclusivity' and/or 'disability' were perceived as represented in the piece. In addition, a practical aspect of the motivation for conducting research with audiences during the creation of the piece was to provide feedback on how the access measures were experienced and to inform their further development within '*Lived Fiction*'.

Engagement with audience members occurred at two stages and with two different tools: a written questionnaire and a focus group.

3.3.1. Written Questionnaire

The first involved a written questionnaire administered to an invited audience who attended a work-in-progress or 'scratch' performance of '*Lived Fiction*', which was presented without lighting, staging or scenery. It was held at the premises of Dance Ireland (DanceHouse), in Dublin, in February 2023. Invitees were drawn mainly from people working in the arts in a wide variety of capacities, amongst whom were people working as managers, arts-administrators and artists/dancers, and some associated with arts and disability. The questionnaire contained closed questions and some open-ended questions facilitating open text answers that enabled people to respond at greater length. After seeking some general demographic information on the respondents and on their familiarity with contemporary dance, in its main part, the questionnaire enquired about the accessibility of the dance piece, how it represented 'disability', and whether it challenged ideas about disability. It also gave respondents an opportunity to expand on the accessibility or inaccessibility of the piece as well as to add anything they might wish to about the experience of attending the piece. All adult attendees completed the survey (n=25). Twenty-four did so in writing on the day, and one person chose to record their answers and to forward them as a sound file afterwards. Thus, the response rate was 100% (n=25), which indicates a strong interest or engagement by the audience members. Of the 25 respondents, 17 were female, 8 male. Two people identified as people with disabilities. It would have been desirable to have had more audience members who were people with disabilities or Deaf people. However, some people with disabilities who had agreed to attend had to cancel. The surveys were completed anonymously, and no personal data were collected. Participants received information about the study in advance. The survey questions are included in Annex II to this report.

While findings as thematically analysed will be presented later in this report, it is worth noting that the vast majority of participants appeared to be familiar with contemporary dance and to be regular attendees of dance performances. Specifically, 20 out of 25 people (i.e. 80%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were familiar with contemporary dance. Consistent with this, a similar proportion (n=19, i.e. 76%) said they attended contemporary dance performances regularly and the same number indicated that they had knowledge of dance techniques. Only three respondents (12%) indicated that they rarely or

never attend and six people (24%) indicated that they do not have knowledge of dance techniques.

The majority of participants (22, i.e. 88%) found the piece accessible. There were, however, three (open-ended) responses to the question 'If you found it inaccessible overall, could you tell us what most made it inaccessible for you?'. Two of them shed some light on why participants might have found it inaccessible, and they present three different reasons. However, only one came from someone who identified as a person with a disability. That person commented on the audio description, which was perceived to be good at times but not at other times, and was perceived as not working 'artistically or from a creative perspective'. The second comment from a different respondent (expanding on why it was 'inaccessible') related to a site-specific issue concerning sightlines, namely, that, for audience members in the back rows of seats, it was difficult to see the performers. This issue was inherent to the venue which was a studio that did not allow for raked or elevated seating.

Most participants responded positively to questions about inclusivity of the performance, about how it represented disability, and as to whether it challenged ideas or assumptions about professional dance and/or the body of the dancer. Specifically, all 25 (100%) respondents chose 'yes' in response to the question, 'Did you feel that 'inclusivity' was represented or highlighted in the performance?'. Similarly, 24 respondents (96%) - that is, all apart from one - chose 'yes' in response to the question 'Did you feel that 'disability' was represented or highlighted in the performance?'. Further, all respondents agreed that inclusive dance could challenge stereotypes. Responses to the question that focused on whether their own ideas or assumptions were challenged would, of course, depend on the assumptions that participants brought to the performance. The majority (16, i.e. 64%) responded 'yes' to this question, with two of them qualifying this slightly by adding 'somewhat' and 'at times, it did', respectively. As with all the findings from the arts-based research, this survey feedback was used to inform the development of the piece subsequent to the 'scratch' performance.

3.3.2. Focus Group

Research with the audience also involved an in-person focus group held with six audience members who attended the first performance of *'Lived Fiction'* on stage with lighting and scenery. The focus group thus took place immediately after the first theatrical performance of the piece in Guildford School of Acting, University of Surrey, on 6 April 2023. All focus group invitees self-identified as people with disabilities of diverse types. The participants to the focus group had been invited by Stopgap.

Focus groups allow for participants' discussion to generate data that would be less accessible without that interaction, so the element of discussion, and joint construction of meaning is emphasised (Bryman, 2004; Morgan, 2019). This focus group aimed to elicit audience members' experiences of the accessibility of the piece, and how they perceived that it represented disability. Their interaction in the focus group, as people with differing access

requirements, was considered a potentially important contribution to these questions. Issues posed for discussion at the focus group included accessibility of the performance, whether it was perceived as inclusive of different types of people (relative to performers and audience) and whether/how 'disability' was represented or highlighted in the performance. Annex III contains the questions posed during the focus group. Findings based on a thematic analysis of the focus group discussion will be presented later, but it may be worth noting here that there was a lively discussion between participants. Participants expressed positive reactions to the artistry of the piece, to its emotional/artistic impact on them, and to its technical standards. Thus, discussion included appreciation for the piece and, for the most part, how disability was represented. A number of issues were raised about its accessibility with some conflicting opinions as to what made for accessibility and as to how various measures were experienced. As participants expressed their conflicting needs/preferences, some also acknowledged that accessibility represents a challenge for Stopgap and that it is important to feel that care is being taken to make the piece accessible to the widest group of people.

As with interviews, the focus group discussion was recorded with the consent of participants, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using the reflexive approach to thematic analysis, developed by Braun and Clarke (2019, 2021).



Setting up the room for the Focus Group, Guildford School of Acting, Surrey, 6 April 2023.

3.4. Limitations

Like all research, the arts-based research discussed in this report was carried out within certain constraints and is subject to limitations. In particular, this research took place as part of an ERC funded project within a university setting and, thus, the collaboration that is at the heart of this arts-based research had to be compliant with related procedures, timelines and funding requirements, which may not fully align with the organic, experimental nature of artistic collaboration. Given the timing and funding constraints that most projects within an academic setting are subject to, the arts-based research methodologies had to be planned and rolled out at certain junctures. The development and performance of the choreography had also to fulfil project timelines, whereas it might have been desirable to have engaged in a longer and more fluid process aiming to fully capture the experiential dimensions of the artistic contributions. Finally, the collaborative nature of the arts-based research was also subject to certain limitations as it took place within a fully-fledged project with key objectives and within a PI-led framework.

4. Arts-based Research as Data Collection: The Findings

This section presents findings from the different types of qualitative research under three interlinked headings. The first relates to barriers to, and facilitators of, participation in professional dance, which was explored with members of Stopgap and the focus here was on perceptions of barriers/facilitators in general. The other headings are more focused on the development of *'Lived Fiction'* and on how the piece was experienced by Stopgap members and by audiences. Some of these issues were explored across all the arts-based research, such as how the choreographic piece was perceived to represent disability and to provide for accessibility, while others were explored more with Stopgap members than with audience members, such as barriers to professional participation in dance, and processes involved in creating the piece. The analysis identified themes in common across all aspects of the arts-based research and the respective perspectives of those involved in the different aspects of the research were thought to enrich the discussion overall. This has informed our decision to present the findings from different aspects of the arts-based methods together in the sections that follow.

In presenting the findings, we have anonymised the contributions of participants, and we do not identify the gender of participants, choosing to use gender-neutral terms such as 'they' and 'them' for all participants to help preserve their anonymity.

4.1. Barriers to and Facilitators of Participation in Professional Dance

The issue of barriers to engagement in professional dance was largely explored through interviews with the members of Stopgap. They referred to a range of barriers that inhibit participation in professional dance. These ranged from lack of access measures to negative attitudes at a societal level, including amongst people engaged in dance companies and dance education. The issue of attitudes was linked to lack of opportunities for people both to be engaged professionally or to participate in professional training, something underpinned also by lack of knowledge on the part of teachers and people directing dance academies or managing professional training courses. Facilitators of participation were further identified by participants and are discussed below, in the context of responses to the identified barriers.

4.1.1. Lack of Access in Dance Companies

Participants referred to dance companies using premises that were simply not accessible for everyone or not being willing or able to provide accommodations required. For example, one talked about 'very obvious physical barriers in that facilities are not accessible, whether that be step free access, toilets, all of that, it is not made with extra access in mind' (Interviewee 2). However, lack of access could also be constituted by other means, such as a fast-paced environment or the requirement to apprehend a choreographic piece in very short time, that do not suit everyone. One Stopgap member, referring to a typical dance company, said:

... [a]nd then there is like cognitive barriers, a lot of this is around communication, the way things are explained, the way things are discussed ... There is little consideration for people with different cognition and there is the expectation that everyone is neurotypical and thinks the same way, so everyone therefore learns in the same way (Interviewee 7).

Instead, in an inclusive company, such as Stopgap, access is facilitated in a range of ways, operating on many levels, including embodying disability culture in training, rehearsal, production and presentation processes (see Hadley et al., 2022).

In Stopgap, there was a willingness to make accommodations intrinsic to all aspects of the work, including not only logistical access (such as ramps or wheelchairs adapted for dance) but also practices built into all its processes such as scheduling – allowing more rehearsal time in some cases. Factors that were identified by participants as facilitative included how all Stopgap members were aware of, and contributed to, making things accessible for everyone. This might mean, for example, that they would ‘buddy together’ to use public transport, and, if this required extra time for some Stopgap members, it was taken into account. Another accommodation included incorporating a variety of teaching and learning methods that were accessible for Stopgap members. These measures created a different type of environment, described by one participant in the following terms:

... [t]here is also no need or no expectation for people to explain why they need something ... it doesn't feel like you are having to do all of the work yourself, which a lot of the time as a disabled person you are ... (Interviewee 7).

4.1.2. Negative Attitudes and Lack of Knowledge

Participants in interviews discussed negative attitudes and ignorance around disability in society generally, and, relatedly, within dance companies and community dance groups, which operated as barriers to engagement and professional development. It was also associated with lack of knowledge about how to include people with disabilities. For example, as one participant articulated it, in society in general, people do not expect to see people using wheelchairs or people with Down Syndrome dancing, saying that ‘societal ideas about what disabled people can do are limited’ (Interviewee 7). Another participant, talking of other dance companies and community dance settings, said that people:

... still sort of underestimate what people can do or struggle to find ways that they can teach someone or give someone an experience where they can experience that on whichever level they are able to (Interviewee 3).

One dancer articulated experiences (prior to Stopgap) that confirm the lack of knowledge and appreciation of disabled dancers:

... I also find as well that even in situations where, you know, you get the opportunity to participate in dance not many people know how to interact

with somebody with a disability no matter what the disability is ... (Interviewee 4).

Instead, in Stopgap, participation was facilitated by dancers with disabilities being treated as equal contributors to the creative process from the outset (as will be discussed again below). This involved 'collaborating with disabled performers from the start and including them in the creative process as opposed to just casting them' (Interviewee 1). The issue of negative attitudes was also linked to lack of representation or visibility of people with disabilities in society, resulting in lack of role models of professional dancers with disabilities. For example, talking about barriers, one participant suggested that they were compounded 'by lack of representation' (Interviewee 3). These issues meant, however, that people wanting to become dancers could not only be limited by the attitudes of others, but could also self-limit their behaviours. As one participant said: 'having a career in dance is not something that people think they can do' (Interviewee 7). However, it was also felt that ever-greater engagement could be facilitated by having people with disabilities as role models and that integrated dance companies could contribute to that. One participant talked about meeting audiences after shows who might say they did not expect to see people with disabilities dancing, adding:

... [a]nd I think also visibility and having disabled role models and disabled artists producing work and having disabled people in mainstream culture, yeah I think that helps to sort of give people self-belief in seeing yourself represented in media and culture ... (Interviewee 7).

Consistent with this, one of the dancers, a disabled dancer, anticipated that the work that companies like Stopgap were doing would start to influence others, including parents of children with disabilities who would come to see that it was based on 'everyone having the same right, the same level, equal to do things', and which they anticipated was 'going to reach a bit further and further and further, it is growing around the world and then it is going to change people's minds' (Interviewee 9).

4.1.3. Lack of Routes to Professional Artistic Education

Lack of educational routes for dancers with disabilities was another issue identified, and this was closely linked to negative attitudes and lack of knowledge about disability on the part of those involved in dance/theatre education who operate as gatekeepers. Talking about dance academies, one participant said that their experience, 'as a very physically disabled person [...] I can't just go to a dance academy, the opportunity isn't really there, and you have to sort of fight for it' (Interviewee 4). Participants identified lack of knowledge on the part of teachers as exclusionary. One talked about courses being exclusionary when teachers have no inclusive dance experience or training (Interviewee 7). Another talked about vocational schools still being inaccessible physically and because 'teachers are still very frightened [by disability]' (Interviewee 1). In respect of facilitators, this implies the need to build greater knowledge and

capacity in respect of disability and of dance and disability amongst teachers and gatekeepers at different levels of education and in dance academies.

4.2. Enacting Inclusivity

4.2.1. Techniques that Creatively Engage All Dancers

During interviews, members of Stopgap talked about techniques that engaged all dancers and contributed to an equality of creation amongst dancers with and without disabilities. In this context they referred to co-creation, or working closely together and collaboratively to contribute to the development of the piece in a rather open-ended process, which involved improvisation, especially at the outset. All participants were creatively engaged in these processes and in informing the themes and the direction of the choreography and the production. Thus, dancers with and without disabilities were included in artistically innovative roles, consistent with approaches within inclusive dance companies of treating dancers with disabilities as potential sources of artistic expression rather than attempting for them to mirror dancers without disabilities (Boswell et al., 2023).

Specifically, the collaborative approach involved ongoing communication and ‘translation’ of movements as well as a focus on the individuality and strengths of each member of Stopgap, and thus on diverse bodies and diverse ways of moving. Participants stressed that collaborative ways of working required incorporating the unique traits of each dancer into the development of the choreography and learning from each other - not conforming to one pre-ordained way of thinking or of moving or speaking and not privileging the ways of moving of non-disabled dancers. ‘Translation’ for Stopgap involves finding a correlative version of a movement made by someone who has a different physicality to you and where non-disabled dancers do not assume that the disabled dancer is imitating traditional dance steps.

Thus, one dancer talked about enjoying the two-way processes involved and about developing a solo piece where other dancers translated their movements, finding this innovative. They explained: ‘usually in the world it is the other way around so a disabled person would have, especially a wheelchair user, ... [to] translate on their own what a standing dancer is doing’ (Interviewee 4). In short, this means that the approach is based on how real bodies move rather than adapting to a normative model of the dancing body (Whatley and Marsh, 2017, p. 7). This more equal approach to developing choreography, was supported by using ‘open language’, which did not assume that everyone interpreted a movement in the same way. As one explained it:

... we use creative words - like instead of saying ‘walk around the room’ we may say ‘saunter around the room’ or ‘glide around the room’. And that kind of additional description actually helps everybody. We work a lot with texture ... so we create a score that is all to do with texture and dancing from the inside. And that means that is like pretty universal ... (Interviewee 1).

A prerequisite for all of the above was that various access measures were provided as an intrinsic part of rehearsals and choreography development. This could (as mentioned already) involve allowing more time and different approaches to describing and learning the choreography for some members of Stopgap as well as having access to practical measures such as a customised dance wheelchair. This embedding of access measures across Stopgap's work was contrasted with somewhat superficial measures being adopted by some other companies, which involved as one interviewee said, using captions, but 'probably just not pushing it' creatively. Thus, the advancement of inclusive dance pedagogy is about both word-making and world-making (Østern, 2017). These processes involve a more equal experience for dancers with disabilities and for other Stopgap members than is often their experience and can, we suggest, help to inform other dance projects wishing to adopt more inclusive processes.

4.2.2. The Creative Process and Representations of Disability

Intrinsic to how 'disability' was perceived in the performance of *'Lived Fiction'* were processes described above, involving collaborative ways of working, with two-way communication, in which dancers with diverse bodies do not have to adapt to a normative idea of the dancing body, but, instead, actively contribute to the choreography based on the unique embodiment of each. This involves improvisation, especially at the outset, and clearly does not require all dancers to move in the same way. It therefore involves a focus on individual approaches, diverse bodies and ways of moving as an intrinsic part of the collaborative and co-creation process. This, in turn, affects how disability is represented within the performance. Thus, one participant mentioned that the choreography 'is using everyone's unique traits to add to the piece' (Interviewee 2), and another summed up that the performers with disabilities are 'represented for their skill, their talent', highlighting that this raises awareness of disability and shows 'the power, the presence on stage ... [which] is incredible and it is beautiful coming from everyone on our team' (Interviewee 5).

On the whole, interviewees (who, as outlined already, were drawn from amongst Stopgap members) suggested that they were involved in a process of exploring how different types of bodies can move and support one another, requiring that all participants recognise each other as artistic creators and that all performers - those with and without disabilities - are represented as such.

Our research with audiences also highlights the array of approaches displayed by different dancers, and sheds light on how disability or inclusivity were perceived by audience members. At the focus group, varied points of view were discussed about how disability was represented and about diversity. One participant stated that 'the beauty of Stopgap is to recognise the fact that it is a huge step forward for us and society to see people with disabilities coming together with non-disabled counterparts'. They added:

... what they are doing is amazing ... at Stopgap it is different because they are willing to take the risk in going that extra mile to include these people and make them take ownership (FG 2).

Another, who acknowledged that, when it comes to representation, 'you can't please everyone', added that it was good to see 'such diversity and all working together so well, that is really lovely to see' (FG 6). They also wondered if there were more people with disabilities behind the scenes who one does not get to see (FG 6). That led to a discussion about hidden or invisible disability, and some participants felt that it should not be necessary to disclose disability in all cases, and that the presence of disability on the part of some performers had been communicated quite subtly in the performance. In that they somewhat echo the views of Koppers (2004, p. 7) that 'many aspects of embodiment are private, and exclusive'. A participant suggested that they appreciated that a delicate balance had to be struck - involving difference but 'not making it about difference', and went on to state that:

... I felt like there was a diverse group of people performing. I felt for the most part people were represented. As someone that has stuff that is hidden I find it quite hard to connect with what people ... try to show as disability and inclusion in a theatre perspective because a lot of it is very physical (FG 5).

When it comes to survey respondents, the vast majority expressed positivity in response to questions about inclusivity of the performance, about how it represented disability, and as to whether it challenged ideas or assumptions about professional dance and/or the body of the dancer. There were many comments about the enjoyment of the piece, often suggesting that 'disability' was represented in ways that were novel or surprising or that diversity added to the experience. In this regard, examples, of feedback given in response to open-ended questions include the following:

I appreciated the diversity of bodies, of people who embody a range of cultures, experiences and forms. Also, the openness of the performers inviting us to be with them energetically as they danced.

The cast mix was interesting. Each dancer was strong and clear in their role and material - regardless of ability. It did not try to preach and was aesthetically interesting.

This was the most powerful artistic experience I had in a very long time.

The comments of others suggest, perhaps, that for them, the issue of 'disability' was transcended by the quality of the performance ('Good dance is good dance and this is good dance and good dancers'). These comments tend to support the argument of Lawrence (2008) that, by engaging the senses, the arts provoke strong, affective responses for both the creator and the witness of art, which can subsequently provide a catalyst for learning beyond traditional, cognitive ways of knowing. Specifically, they also appear to support the argument

from Mills (2017) that dance may promote 'kinesthetic empathy' or moments of shared empathy when all human beings are seen as equal in dignity.

4.3. Embedding Accessibility Measures

Central to the development of *'Lived Fiction'* was the desire that access measures would be treated as a creative element of the work itself, as mentioned already. This can be considered an 'aesthetic of access' (Sealey and Lynch, 2012). This is in addition to access measures, and inclusive approaches, being intrinsic to the creation of the choreography for the benefit of Stopgap members (as discussed above). Access measures designed for audience members involved attention by Stopgap to visuals, sound, and senses from the outset of the development of the piece. These measures were intended to be embedded within, and intrinsic to, the creation and presentation of the piece. One interviewee described this as follows: '[w]e are working with the aesthetics of access within the production and how accessibility can inform the work' (Interviewee 7). They went on to describe a holistic approach which is about the 'whole experience' by working to ensure that:

... we are actively considering deaf, disabled and neurodivergent audiences that we want to experience our work ... And both in their experience of the production and the surrounding journey to the work, so it is not just when they come, it is like getting to the theatre, being in the theatre, the whole experience of it (Interviewee 7).

Thus, in interviews, members of Stopgap talked about their hopes that embedding access measures from the start would create a different experience for audiences as opposed to a more mainstream approach where access measures, such as captioning or signing, might be added 'at the last minute'. Interviewees perceived that there was a difference in how audiences would experience the show: 'you will offer people a much fuller experience by embedding it in the process ... you are experiencing that in multiple ways and so we will all have that experience in whatever senses we have available to us - that is quite a unique representation' (Interviewee 3). Participants articulated how this approach would broaden out the approaches available and deliver a more enriching artistic experience. For example, one felt that it would deliver something 'worthwhile' to audiences which was 'broadening the scope of how you can present things within performance' (Interviewee 5).

Audience feedback on access measures, obtained, as mentioned, at two stages in the development of *'Lived Fiction'*, shed light on how people, including people with diverse disabilities, experienced the performance in practice. These informed the development of the piece thereafter. Survey feedback from audience members at the 'scratch' performance, which has already been introduced in section 3, above, suggested in some cases that the integration of audio description added another 'layer' or was an enhancement of the artistic experience ('The interaction between movements, dance, verbal description enhanced the whole experience'). Survey results included also a small number of suggestions for

improvement in respect of the audio description, perceived as 'confusing' in some places by one respondent.

There was a lively discussion about access measures at the focus group. Several participants stressed that they enjoyed the performance and appreciated its artistry. Access measures were experienced positively by some participants, with one saying 'I could really embark in this sensory journey ... I was able to experience it throughout' (FG 2) and another describing the performance as 'beautiful' indicating that they were 'moved by the movement' and also that the performance was broad and impactful: 'I was thinking about how big the performance feels right now; there is a lot of ideas in it' (FG 3).

There was also considerable discussion about issues that hampered access or made it difficult for participants to engage in aspects of the performance. For example, several participants raised issues with the lighting - one explained that they were sensitive to lighting, so changes from very bright to very dark over the length of the performance were challenging. Other issues were raised about the captioning, which was perceived as helpful by some but a bit 'confusing' by others. One participant found the soundscape was too loud. By contrast, another wished that it were louder, and they acknowledged the complications that this presented:

... [i]t was interesting the way it affects people differently, like for loudness for you [*addressing another focus group participant*] would be something for me the opposite (FG 6).

Thus, in general, focus group participants acknowledged that accessibility represents a challenge for Stopgap and, as the discussion went on, it was clear that access is in fact an extremely complex issue as participants expressed these conflicting needs/preferences. As participants talked through conflicting access needs, some interesting points emerged that allude to the need for 'compromise' and 'care' and a sense that it was important to feel that access issues were being taken seriously even if everything did not suit all participants at all times. That was expressed as related to the idea of 'compromise in flex and stretch' by one participant, who (while finding the lighting and the sound a bit overwhelming at times) also felt that they had had an 'artistic experience' by listening to the audio description even if they had to close their eyes at times (FG 5). Thus, even despite the challenges that facilitating access represents for an audience with diverse requirements for accommodation, some focus group participants articulated appreciation of the effort and care that was evident in trying to embed accessibility for all.

All of these issues, as well as suggestions for specific changes made by survey respondents and by focus group participants, informed the development of the piece thereafter as performed at the world premiere in Dublin, on 11 April 2024. Indeed, as the final piece will be performed for different audiences, it may continue to generate further insights and perspectives.

5. Arts-based Research as Representation: The Premiere

As outlined above, the DANCING project collaborated with Stopgap during a range of phases in the development of *'Lived Fiction'*, and used research to explore the processes involved, including soliciting opinions at two separate stages in its development as to how audiences perceived the performance. According to Lucy Glover, the Executive Producer of Stopgap, the research conducted by the DANCING team provided insights that bolstered Stopgap's reflection, creative processes, and course of action (Krolla, 2024). Thus, the research helped to inform the development of the piece. In that connection, the premiere of *'Lived Fiction'* represented a major milestone for the DANCING project as well as for Stopgap. It took place in Dublin in April 2024 at Dublin's Lir Academy Theatre in collaboration with Project Arts Centre (PAC)³ and marked the completion of the DANCING WP1.

This section briefly recalls the role of the premiere of *'Lived Fiction'*, directed and created by Lucy Bennett, in the project, and presents the work and features of this performance and the final staging. The cast included Christian Brinklow, Monique Dior Jarrett, Emily Lue-Fong, Jannick Moth, Lily Norton (Audio Describer), Nadenh Poan, Hannah Sampson, and Dan Watson (Voice of Dan).

5.1. The Role of the Premiere of *'Lived Fiction'* in the DANCING Project

The final dance performance for the DANCING project - namely, the premiere of *'Lived Fiction'* - has thus given a dynamic representation of accessibility, inclusivity and cultural diversity. Dance is in fact a powerful tool of non-verbal communication, which can reach out to a wide audience, going beyond rational cognitive ways of knowing to generate insight within the project's findings about what cultural diversity really means.

³ <https://projectartscentre.ie/>.



Members of Stopgap performing 'Lived Fiction'. (Photo courtesy of Stopgap - Photographer Chris Parkes).

Furthermore, the approach taken in the development of *'Lived Fiction'* points to how making access measures intrinsic to the creative process can provide a rich experience for all audience members - not just those with disabilities. Considering them artistically (and not as an afterthought) involves a creative vocabulary that combines choreography with audio description, captioning, tactile elements, and responsive sound design.



Members of Stopgap performing 'Lived Fiction' (Photo courtesy of Stopgap - Photographer Chris Parkes).

5.2. The DANCING Contribution to the Organisation and Staging of *'Lived Fiction'* in Dublin

DANCING team members worked with Stopgap in preparations that preceded the premiere. Work undertaken by DANCING team members included development and design of a bespoke programme for the performance (Annex IV). This programme, as well as providing the typical information about the performance and the performers, outlined the background to the development of *'Lived Fiction'*, from the respective perspectives of the PI of DANCING and of Stopgap. It also listed the various access measures embedded within the performance and articulated what it means to make dance accessible to the widest possible range of audiences, and to place the aesthetics of access at its core. Braille versions of the programme were made available at the event.

The programme was complemented by a Visual Story of *'Lived Fiction'* which was conceived of and written by Stopgap. It was made available to interested parties and potential audience members in advance, covering issues such as what to expect during the show and setting out introductions from the performers using their own words. The visual story and supporting videos were made available to view on tablets at a dedicated access table set up in the reception area of the theatre prior to the performance.



Members of Stopgap performing at the premiere in the Lir Theatre, Dublin, 11 April 2024.

5.3. The Premiere

As mentioned above, the premiere took place on 11 April 2024 at Dublin's Lir Academy Theatre in collaboration with PAC for invited guests. It was followed by a performance open to the general public on 12 April 2024. Guests invited to the premiere - identified by DANCING, Stopgap and PAC - included academics, policymakers, representatives from organisations of people with disabilities and those working in the arts, particularly those involved in inclusive practices. The audience comprised many people with disabilities, as well as people without disabilities. Following the performance, there was a lively and engaged Q&A with the full cast of *'Lived Fiction'* and choreographer Lucy Bennett as well as Professor Delia Ferri, who discussed the unique research collaboration, the creative process and how the dancers experienced the creation and performance. The Q&A was interpreted by a sign language interpreter.

The Q&A, and reception that followed, offered opportunities for artists, researchers and audience members to unpack how the performance connects with the DANCING project's wider purpose of protecting and promoting cultural participation of persons with disabilities and furthering cultural diversity through EU law. Thus, the premiere of *'Lived Fiction'* also showcased how DANCING has facilitated exchanges between researchers and artists that lead to artistic innovation and also enables artists who work inclusively.



Prof. Delia Ferri addressing the audience with members of Stopgap behind her just prior to the Q&A following the performance of 'Lived Fiction' in the Lir Theatre, Dublin, 11 April 2024.



Q&A following the performance of 'Lived Fiction' in the Lir Theatre, Dublin, 11 April 2024. The Q&A was interpreted into Irish sign language by Shelley Gibson.

The premiere was followed by a debriefing and further discussion between the DANCING team and members of the DANCING Advisory Board. Although the premiere represents the culmination of the collaboration between DANCING and Stopgap, it is the start of touring of 'Lived Fiction' by Stopgap, which will, we hope, continue to generate engagement and debate.

5.4. Features of 'Lived Fiction'

The show lasted 90 minutes, including a 15-minute intermission. The performers moved through a series of scenes involving ensemble pieces, solos, duets and trios, some of which were fast and full of energy, with others being slow and gentle. Dancers explored movements and engaged with their diverse bodies, experimenting with balances, counterbalances, falls and touch. Through lifts and rolling across the floor, sometimes leaning away from each other, sometimes in what seemed effortless lifts onto shoulders, hips and backs, the dancers brought an emotional truth to the movement.

Access measures were intrinsic to the performance and to all audience members' experience of it as briefly described above. These measures involved audio description, that was sometimes live and at other times pre-recorded, and attention to colour contrasts. These measures were intended principally for blind and visually impaired audience members. There was also creative/live captioning and digital, visual representations of the sounds, intended to express the choreography, and spoken word and music. These measures were typically intended for Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. Attention was also paid to the soundscape

and to the lighting with neurodiverse audiences in mind. As mentioned, the Q&A following the performance was translated into Irish sign language.

A feature of the premiere was also the presence of an Access Guide who acted as a contact point as audience members arrived and provided programmes in alternative formats, and sensory supports such as ear-defenders and sunglasses. Further accessibility and inclusivity features underpinned the performance, such as making it clear that it was acceptable to make noise during the performance and to leave and go to a quiet room. Furthermore, the performance started with a relaxed opening, with performers already on stage and moving as people arrived.

Before the performance, there was also the opportunity to participate in a touch tour, in which more information about the show would be shared, including things such as what costumes look and feel like. In fact, the customised costumes each made a distinctive sound as the dancers moved, and they were in different colours (though drawn from a single colour palette), again to contribute to accessibility, in this case especially for blind or visually impaired people. All of these approaches were also intended to present opportunities for disabled and non-disabled audiences to engage with dance work in new ways.

6. Conclusions

The findings from the arts-based research, reported here, are complementary to those obtained in other strands of the DANCING project. There is consistency between the issues identified as barriers and facilitators in interviews with Stopgap members and those identified in a larger set of interviews across European countries with organisations of persons with disabilities, of Deaf people, and of organisations working on arts and disability. These included barriers constituted, not only by lack of access measures, but by negative attitudes and lack of knowledge on the part of people who act as gatekeepers in cultural fields such as people who run dance companies or performance schools (Leahy and Ferri, 2023). In short, the findings from the DANCING project have shown that the persistence of barriers for people with disabilities means that inclusion continues to be denied to many, and suggests that dialogue between artists and cultural organisations, policymakers and people with disabilities is fundamental to bringing about inclusion for all, as exemplified in Stopgap's performance. The findings presented here are also complementary to the arguments made by the DANCING project as to what could facilitate greater participation by people with disabilities in cultural sectors. Amongst the facilitative factors that DANCING's academic outputs have identified are the need for more systematic enforcement of existing laws, for greater knowledge about disability to be embedded within cultural organisations (including amongst people working on training of arts professionals), and for more widespread employment of people with disabilities in the cultural sector (Leahy and Ferri, 2023, 2024).

In addition, the arts-based research discussed in this report can help to inform other dance projects and support companies (and cultural organisations at large) wishing to adopt more inclusive processes. As the members of Stopgap described it, the approach involves difference embraced and encouraged so that each dancer can generate their unique movement based on their unique body. Furthermore, audience reactions suggest that the performance resulted in shared empathy when all human beings are seen as equal in dignity (Mills, 2017).

Findings, especially from the focus group, also point to some of the complexities involved in making a performance that is truly accessible to all audience members. They signal the importance of openness and of taking and communicating care for audiences with different access needs that can, at times, be conflicting. As the programme for the premiere of *'Lived Fiction'* states:

... to make every minute of a full-evening's work accessible to everyone would assume all access needs are the same and disregard personal preferences and unique perspectives. Instead, *Lived Fiction* has an arc, where the balance of artistry and accessibility ebbs and flows, offering audiences an understanding of how different people might meaningfully experience dance and the wider world.

On the whole, the arts-based research conducted as part of the DANCING project and *'Lived Fiction'* in itself provide a demonstration of a more inclusive approach to cultural participation

and diversity, one that makes disability intrinsic to creative processes so as to be more inclusive of creators/performers and audiences. We hope that '*Lived Fiction*' will continue to spark conversations between those working in different disciplines long after its premiere.

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Annex I – Interview Guide

Interview Guide – Arts-based Research – Used Flexibly and with Follow-up Questions

1. Your Role

Can you tell me a little about your role in the creation of the Performance?

Is working in an integrated company a distinctive or different process for you?

How is approached?

2. Participation in culture and barriers to participation

What are the main barriers to participation in dance by people with disabilities in your experience?

What do you think helps people with disabilities to participate in dance?

What lessons can be learnt from your experience of creating the performance?

3. Disability Identities/ Representation

Do you think that 'disability' is represented in the performance? How?

In what ways might it be different from how we generally see (or don't see) disability or people with disabilities represented in popular culture/dance?

4. Diversity/ Intersectionality

To what extent do you think that 'disability' is (or should be) recognised as a form of diversity in cultural performances or products?

Annex II – Survey Questions

Survey Questions: they were preceded by an information sheet introducing the project and giving information about the Survey. It was made available in several formats intended to make it accessible to as wide a range of participations as possible.

Part I – General Questions

1. Do you identify as a Person with a disability?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

If yes:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Person with a physical disability or mobility issues
<input type="checkbox"/>	Person with a visual impairment
<input type="checkbox"/>	A blind person
<input type="checkbox"/>	A Deaf Person
<input type="checkbox"/>	A person with a hearing impairment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would prefer not to say.

2. What gender do you identify as?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-binary
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would prefer not to say.

Part II - Familiarity with Creative Dance

3. How strongly do you agree with the following statement:

'I am familiar with contemporary dance.'

Please choose between 1-5 on the following Likert Scale

(with 1 being 'strongly disagree' and 5 being 'strongly agree')

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree.	Somewhat disagree.	Neither agree nor disagree.	Somewhat agree.	Strongly agree.

4. Do you attend dance performances?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, regularly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, sometimes, but not regularly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rarely
<input type="checkbox"/>	Never

5. Do you have knowledge of dance techniques (either because you practice dance, or attend performances or read about them)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

Part III – Accessibility of the Performance of the Work-in-Progress Piece

6. How strongly do you agree with the following statement:

'I found the performance accessible as it was possible for me to fully engage with it.'

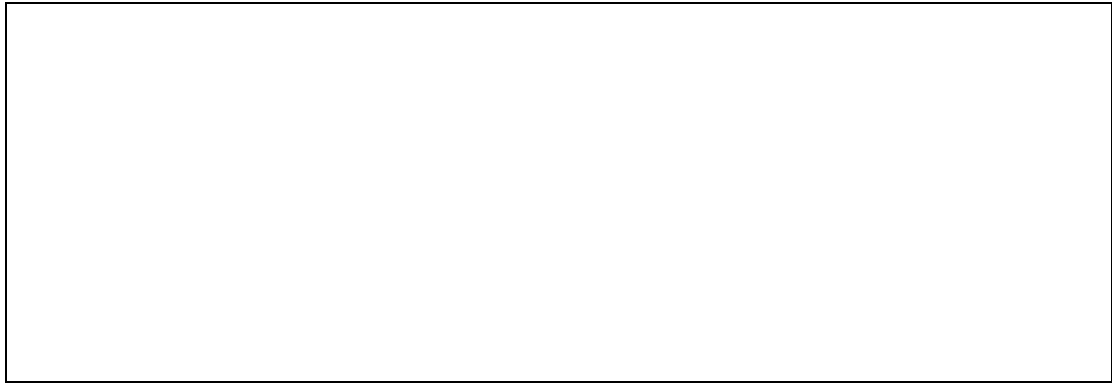
Please choose between 1-5 on the following Likert Scale

(with 1 being 'strongly disagree' and 5 being 'strongly agree')

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree.	Somewhat disagree.	Neither agree nor disagree.	Somewhat agree.	Strongly agree.

7. If you found it **accessible overall**, could you tell us what was most helpful in making it accessible for you?

8. If you found it **inaccessible overall**, could you tell us what most made it inaccessible for you?



Part IV - Perceptions of the Performance of the Work-in-Progress Piece

9. Did you feel that 'inclusivity' was represented or highlighted in the performance?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

10. Did you feel that 'disability' was represented or highlighted in the performance?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

11. Did you think that the performance challenged your ideas or assumptions about professional dance and/or the body of the dancer?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

12. Do you think that inclusive dance could contribute to challenging stereotypes or preconceptions in society about disability?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of the performance?

Insert your answer here:

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

Thank you so much for participating in our Study. We will aggregate all the answers we receive from all participants and publish summaries of all the answers received without identifying participants.

Annex III – Questions posed during the Focus Group

Focus Group – Format (1.5hrs)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and Introduction of DANCING • Introduction to the format of the Focus Group and Ground Rules 	
Introductory Question	
1.	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Say one thing that struck you about the performance that you have just observed.</p>
Intermediate Questions	
2.	<p>Did you find the performance accessible, by which I mean was it possible for you to engage with it?</p>
3.	<p>Did you feel that the performance was inclusive of different types of people?</p>
4.	<p>Did you feel that 'disability' was represented or highlighted in the performance?</p>
Wrap up:	
5.	<p>When we write up a report on this Focus Group, what is the single most important feature/aspect of the performance that we should pay attention to?</p>

Annex IV – Programme for Lived Fiction, 11-12 April 2024

The formatting of the programme has been adapted to the file and does not fully reflect the final graphic format of the final programme.

Stopgap DANCE
COMPANY

presents

LIVED FICTION



DANCING

Developed as part of DANCING, a European Research Council funded project exploring how EU law can promote cultural participation for people with Disabilities as artists and audiences



Lived Fiction

11-12 April 7pm

Project Arts Centre, Dublin

Developed as part of DANCING, a European Research Council Funded project at Maynooth University School of Law and Criminology

Premiere performance on 11th April, followed by a post-show Q&A with Stopgap and members of the DANCING research team

Show Duration: 90 minutes, including a 15-minute intermission

Welcome message from Prof. Delia Ferri, Principal Investigator of 'Protecting the Right to Culture of Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Cultural Diversity through European Union Law: Exploring New Paths (DANCING)'

Good Evening,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the premiere of Lived Fiction by Stopgap Dance Company, which was developed as part of DANCING, a European Research Council funded, interdisciplinary research project exploring how European Union (EU) law can advance the right to culture for people with disabilities, based at the Maynooth University School of Law and Criminology.

Lived Fiction challenges barriers that continue to make both performing and attending dance (as other cultural events) more difficult for people with disabilities. Stopgap have developed an exciting piece of contemporary dance and one where accessibility is considered artistically, not as an afterthought but intrinsic to a creative vocabulary that combines choreography with audio description, captioning, tactile elements, and responsive sound-design.

Tonight's premiere of Lived Fiction showcases how DANCING facilitates exchange between researchers and artists that lead to artistic innovation but also enable artists who work inclusively to support current developments in EU law and policy. We are pleased to welcome to tonight's event legal scholars, policymakers, representatives from organisations of people with disabilities and those working in the arts, particularly those involved in inclusive practice. We hope that Lived Fiction will continue to spark conversations between those working in different disciplines long after the house lights have dimmed. This is characteristic of how DANCING aims to disrupt conventional approaches to EU law scholarship, combining legal, empirical and arts-based research to understand the extent to which the protection of the right to take part in culture of people with disabilities and the promotion of cultural diversity intersect and complement each other in the EU legal order.

Having previously trained as a dancer and worked in the arts, I am keenly aware of the enrichment that cultural participation brings. DANCING is premised on the idea that cultural exclusion of people with disabilities has not only engendered their marginalisation but has also entailed a loss for society as a whole. To address this, DANCING supports the implementation of Article 30 of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognises the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life. DANCING's findings so far have shown that the persistence of barriers for people with disabilities means that inclusion continues to be denied to many. We believe that dialogue between artists, policymakers and people with disabilities is fundamental to bring about inclusion for all, as exemplified in tonight's performance by Stopgap.

Delia Ferri
Principal Investigator of DANCING

Statement by Lucy Bennett, Choreographer of Lived Fiction and Co-Artistic Director of Stopgap

“...It’s sharing and caring and finally chairing conversations about the mainstream or our own stream that we can slip down to our own big fat we don’t give a damn about being invited to the table, we invite you to ours instead...”

— Lived Fiction Text

Stopgap Dance Company wants everyone to experience an inclusive world where diversity is not just accepted, but pursued. We are a choreographer-led company that specialises in devising inclusive dance productions collaboratively. For Lived Fiction, our latest performance developed as part of project DANCING, we wanted to invite non-disabled people into the culture of Disabled creatives, together evolving a new way of experiencing dance.

In developing Lived Fiction, we wanted to go beyond reasonable accommodation for Disabled audiences and embrace Integrated Creative Access, considering access as an artistic element to the work itself. As a collective of Deaf, Disabled, neurodivergent and non-disabled allies we regularly break from the past and the traditional and thrive on the creativity and potential of an alternative way of doing things. We are inspired by the thrill of reinvention, upcycling and translating dance and theatre and for us creative access is just that, bringing everyone closer to the intentions, beauty and passion of dance.

One of the questions we revisited within the creative process was: ‘How can we balance access for audiences and the aesthetics of the choreography?’ We would take a long time as a team trying to resolve the question scene by scene only to realise, we needed to take in the whole production holistically to be able to truly answer that question. It was a constant dance between being up-close to the details of the work and experiencing the feel and pace from a distance. Every seemingly small change in the choreography would create a ripple effect for collaborators working to embed creative access throughout.

Our involvement with the DANCING research team meant at certain points in the process we could open rehearsals to Deaf, Disabled, neurodivergent and non-disabled stakeholders outside of Stopgap. We nervously prepared for huge changes in direction but found instead insight and clear solutions borne out of the lived experience of participants. This bolstered our course and gave us permission to keep pursuing creative access alongside inclusive choreography. The insights we gleaned, however, are not something we can just add to our ‘to- do’ list when making a show. To stay relevant, we need to continue to evolve through feedback from a diverse range of patrons.

Stopgap has employed Disabled performers for over twenty years and in this time, we have been disturbed by the lack of Disabled talent being developed by cultural institutions, dance organisations and local dance schools worldwide. We too must own up to a lack of diversity in our audiences. To change this, maximum effort is needed. In developing Lived Fiction, we have come to realise that Integrated Creative Access is not about simply ‘helping people who face barriers’ but helping everyone. The experience has taught us so much about how we receive and perceive dance. Through this, our practice has evolved and is now more original than ever. It is only now, at the end of the process and the start of a tour, that we understand how inviting diverse audiences into our dance world through creative access has broadened cultural participation in all directions. We hope Lived Fiction will ignite a passion for experiencing dance in new and diverse audiences worldwide.

Lived Fiction Credits

Lived Fiction was conceived, written and devised by Stopgap's Deaf, Disabled, neurodivergent and non-disabled creatives. The process was facilitated by Stopgap's Co-Artistic Director Lucy Bennett.

Cast and Creatives	Christian Brinklow, Monique Dior Jarrett, Emily Lue-Fong, Jannick Moth, Lily Norton (Audio Describer), Nadenh Poan, Hannah Sampson and Dan Watson (Voice of Dan)
Director and Co-Writer	Lucy Bennett
Access Artist and Co-Writer	Lily Norton
Rehearsal Director	Amy Butler
Composer and Sound Designer	Dougie Evans
Creative Captions and Projection Art	Ben Glover
Lighting Design	Jackie Shemesh
Costume Design	Ryan Dawson Laight
Prop Designer	Colin Holden
Access Guide	Lauren Trim
Production and Stage Manager	Ethan Duffy
Production Manager	Emma Henderson
Technical Manager	Francois Langton
Lighting Associate	Joe Hornsby
Costume Associate	Rosie Whiting
Consultants for Creative Access	Kelsie Acton, Angela Bettoni, Lucy Clark, Martin Glover, Andrew Loretto, Anne McCarthy, Lesta Woo, Sofia Young-Santamaria, Ada Eravamo, Maria Oshodi



Project Manager	James Greenhalgh
Access Workers Manager	Abbie Thompson & Laurel Flatley General Charlotte Mackie
Administrator	Amy Owen
Co-Artistic Directors	Laura Jones & Lucy Bennett
Executive Producers	Sho Shibata & Lucy Glover

Stopgap Dance Company is driven by a diverse creative team who uses dance as a movement for change.

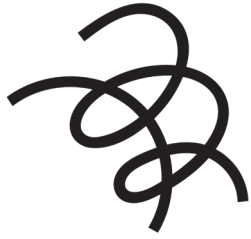
Stopgap's mission is to create an inclusive world where diversity is not just accepted but pursued, a world where no one is limited by prejudice against Deaf, Disabled, or neurodivergent people.

Working with an artform shaped by human touch and energised by the spark of connectivity, Stopgap's work demonstrates the compelling power of diversity and inclusivity. Stopgap's artists move together to create a remarkable experience that transforms society's perceptions of difference and dismantle the inequity of privilege, in dance and in all aspects of living, collaborating, and creating together as humans.

Stopgap's work is both focused on and born out of the company's rigorous investment in equity and inclusive culture. They are committed to removing barriers to dance, nurturing the talents of dancers born into any body and any mind. Stopgap are in coalition with a wave of organisations moving towards a better representation of diversity on our stages and in society.

Stopgap are a global leader of disability access in dance and continuously examine best practice. They actively advocate for the industry and the wider world to become more inclusive.

Discover more about Lived Fiction on our website:
www.stopgapdance.com/lived-fiction Twitter/X:
[@stopgapdance](https://twitter.com/stopgapdance)



DANCING

Protecting the Right to Culture of Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Cultural Diversity through European Union Law: Exploring New Paths (DANCING) is an interdisciplinary research project, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and based at Maynooth University, under Principal Investigator Professor Delia Ferri.

DANCING combines legal, empirical, and arts-based research methods to investigate the extent to which the protection of the right to take part in culture of people with disabilities and the promotion of cultural diversity intersect and complement each other in the EU legal order. This approach involves:

Identifying and analysing features of cultural access experienced as exclusionary by people experiencing different types of disability.

Exploring how the EU has used and can use its competence to combat discrimination to ensure the accessibility of cultural activities. This includes promoting disability identities, while achieving cultural diversity. In doing so, DANCING bridges the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Rethorising the legal concept of cultural diversity, stemming from the intersection of different sources of law to encompass the protection of the rights of people with disabilities. In doing so DANCING promotes a new way of understanding the right to participate in cultural life within the EU legal order.

DANCING believe that everyone has a right to take part in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts.

DANCING looks at the right to participate in culture in a comprehensive way that has individual and collective dimensions and encompasses:

Participation in culture, such as the right to access cultural activities, goods and services.

Active involvement in culture, including creating cultural goods, services and activities.

Recognition and protection for cultural communities, as well as the right to enjoy and make use of their cultural heritage and cultural expressions.

DANCING are committed to engaging in broader dialogue with artists, the academic community, organisations of persons with disabilities and society at large. DANCING provides platforms for collaboration and discussion of emerging findings, through conferences, workshops and public conversations with artists, legal scholars and key stakeholders. DANCING is also collaborating with an accessibility designer and artists with disabilities to raise awareness of the project through outputs accessible to a diverse range of people.

You can find out more about our activities, including an archive of resources, academic papers and previous events on our website:

<https://ercdancing.maynoothuniversity.ie/>

For news of upcoming events and activities we are involved in, follow us on Twitter/X: @DancingErc

Performers and audiences revelling in a shared-experience of an inclusive theatre space

Stopgap Dance Company explain their multifaceted approach to embedding access in the creation of Lived Fiction

To make dance accessible to the widest possible range of audiences, Lived Fiction places the aesthetics of access at its core. This is an approach which seeks to address barriers to art whilst also recognising the enormous artistic potential of access. Lived Fiction integrates audio description, creative captioning and a relaxed environment with world class choreography, allowing each element its own artistic voice so that dance takes on a new form that resonates with all audiences. Our success hinged on deconstructing dance in its purest form and reconstructing it in collaboration with creatives and advisors with lived experience of deafness, disability and neurodivergence. This collaborative approach to accessibility began right at the beginning of our creative process and was not an afterthought.

We want to avoid describing Lived Fiction as ‘universally accessible’. To make every minute of a full-evening’s work accessible to everyone would assume all access needs are the same and disregard personal preferences and unique perspectives. Instead, Lived Fiction has an arc, where the balance of artistry and accessibility ebbs and flows, offering audiences an understanding of how different people might meaningfully experience dance and the wider world.

Creative Audio Description

We are integrating both live and pre-recorded audio description, delivered by our on-stage audio describer and the dancers. The majority of scenes place emphasis on audio description and spoken word, supporting blind and visually impaired audiences with access to the choreography. This also presents opportunities for sighted audiences to engage with dance work in a new way. In some scenes text and description is pared back, leaving space for the music, sounds of the dancers, the space, and the costumes to do the descriptive work.

Creative Captions

We feel that the work is visually rich and engaging for Deaf audiences, supported by creative captioning and digital projections working together to artistically express the choreography, spoken word and music. Through consultation with our Deaf, Disabled, neurodivergent and non-disabled collaborators and creatives, we made a collective decision to not incorporate sign language interpretation during the performance. However, we will work with host venues to provide sign language interpreters for any pre or post show talks and announcements.

Relaxed Performances

We warmly welcome Learning Disabled and neurodivergent audiences to Lived Fiction and are committing to core elements of Relaxed Performances. Our Access Guide will be working with Project Arts Centre's Front of House staff to implement this, ensuring a committed shared approach to access.

We welcome voluntary and involuntary noise and movement in the auditorium.

We will have the house lights on at a sufficient level and leave the auditorium doors open throughout the performance, and we welcome audiences entering and exiting the auditorium at any time.

For our performances at Project Arts Centre, a Quiet Space is available before, during, and after the performance.

There is an Access table outside in the foyer of the Project Arts Centre, where audiences will be able to access resources, alternative format programmes and sensory supports such as ear defenders and sunglasses.

There will be no specific adjustments to the sound or lighting during the show. The show uses text, music and soundscapes, with varying levels of noise. When available, please take a look at our visual and sonic stories which share more about the sound levels. In particular, the eight-minute scene called 'Tight Textures' in the middle of act one has loud bass-filled music and bright moving lights. We will provide an in-show warning before 'Tight Textures'. This will allow people to prepare for the scene and potentially leave the auditorium temporarily if they wish to.

Alternative Formats

A Visual Story is available for this performance and braille versions of the programme and visual story are both available at our Access table.

A Note on Language

The dialogue between Stopgap and DANCING is a productive and enabling one that transcends boundaries between disciplines. Stopgap use 'identity first' language (i.e. disabled person) while DANCING use 'person first' language (i.e. person with a disability) in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the human rights model of disability.



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DANCING


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TRUST**

Lived Fiction was developed as part of the research project DANCING: Protecting the Right to Culture of Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Cultural Diversity through European Union Law: Exploring New Paths, led by Delia Ferri, Professor of Law at Maynooth University

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