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# Deprivation Versus Change Dancers' Pandemic Experience

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# Context of the research

- Ballet: A well-studied, ancient, codified dance form.
- Tribal Dances: Ethnological focus on cultural beliefs and myths.
- Social Dances: Under-researched compared to stage or tribal dances. (Aprill, 2005)



# Dance in western societies



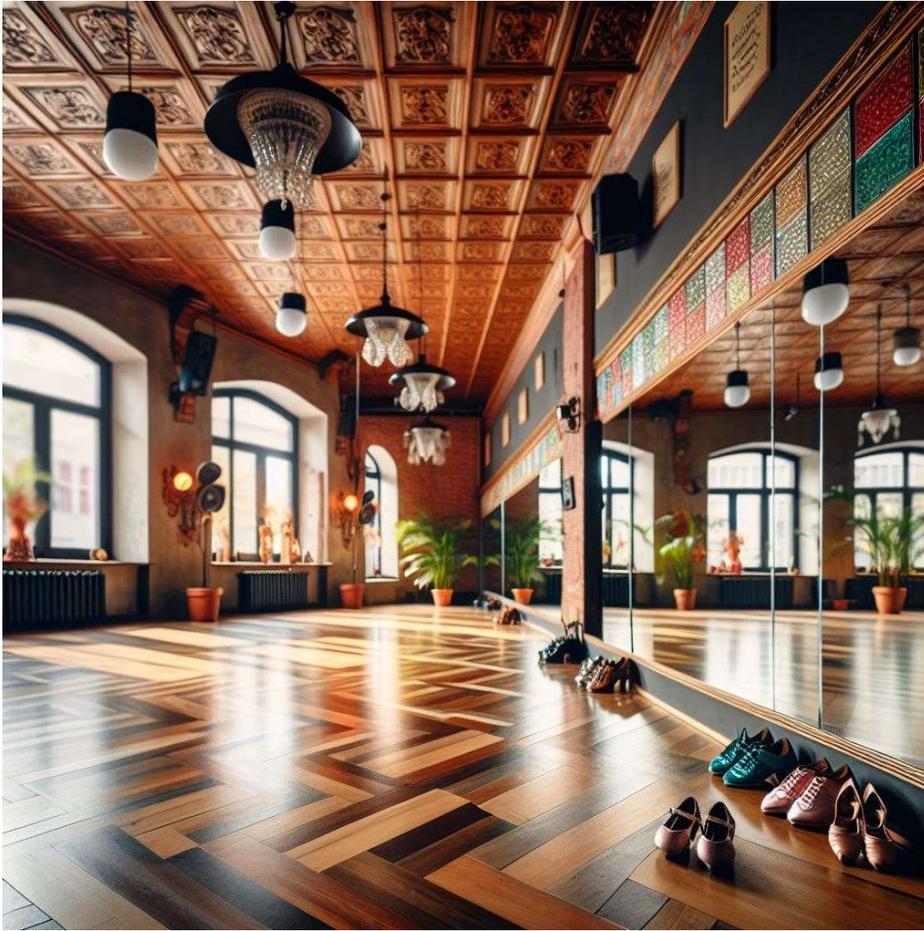
- Social dances rooted in Sunday balls and weddings (Aprill, 2018).
- Platforms for finding partners before dating apps.
- Influence of leisure **society** (Dumazdier, 1974).

# Social Dances studied

- Adults dedicated to their leisure (Flichy, 2010), who are following courses and practicing at events.
- Popular genres: Swing, Latin, Brazilian, and Oriental dances.
- Increasingly formalized with structured classes and festivals.



# Impact of the Pandemic



- Dance schools, bars, and theatres closed for extended periods.
- Reopening periods: restrictive health measures (limiting the number of attendees, prohibiting partner changes, imposing social distancing, mandating masks, requiring proof of vaccination, etc.)
- How dancers experienced the situation ?

# Research Methodology

- Online survey in 2020 through social media: 174 responses (61 in spring and 113 in fall)
- 100 interviews conducted between 2021 and 2023.
- Presentation based on the 50 interviews conducted in 2021, before the end of health restrictions.
- Comprehensive interviews (Kaufmann, 2016) analyzed by examining emphasized oppositions, mentioned actors, advanced arguments, recurring phrases or words, and slips of the tongue.

# Demographics of Participants

## Survey

- 2/3 Canada, 1/3 France
- 73% women
- 56% between 30 and 50 y.o.

## Interviews

- ½ Canada, ½ France
- 50% women
- From 20 to 90 y.o., average age of 39.

Almost all had been dancing for over five years.

Various professions : dance instructors, DJ, teachers, IT professionals, engineers, doctors, nurses, architect, state agent, technicians, students, retirees, etc.



# Gender considerations



# More than a hobby

- Described as a passion (fall in love), an essential nourishment.
- Dance plays an identity-defining role.
- Defines vacations: Dance festivals and congresses.
- Shapes career choices to accommodate passion.



# What Drives This Passion?

1) Dancing create unique emotions.

**Feelings while dancing:** joy, happiness, deep bonds, suspension of time, or even a trance-like state.

➡ All testimonies describe dance in terms reminiscent of mindfulness or Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow.

*“It takes a moment to warm up, and then suddenly something happens, and it's like an opening. There's a kind of whirlwind, something... well, I've never used drugs, but it's what I imagine it's like. It takes you to another world, one that's very exhilarating, gives you strength and energy. Sometimes, I'm so tired, but when I start dancing, I'm not tired anymore. It's a lot of joy. For me, it's like playing... often, I say when I dance, I'm five years old and playing in the sandbox with my friends.”*

(Tango dancer, interview 1)

# What Drives This Passion?

2) Satisfaction and pride in mastering a dance.

**Feed-backs** : compliments, invitations to join troupes, perform competitions, or opportunities to teach.

➡ Boost self-confidence and drive personal growth.

A dancer who describes herself as shy and who was given the opportunity to join dance troupes and assist the teacher in classes explains:

*"It really helped me a lot, you know, social dances, dancing, and the troupes too. I've really grown a lot since I started dancing, and people have told me that I seem more confident." (salsa and bachata dancer, interview 24)*

# Dancers Experience the Pandemic

+ First lockdown : a break from dancing, a relief...

*"For me, the pandemic is extraordinary, but you should never say that to anyone, because I'm thrilled. I'm thrilled because I was burned out, I was tired. You know, unemployment doesn't exist for us, nor do sick leaves. I had been tired for a year and a half, I was depressed, so I was happy, I was like: Aaaah! I can take some time to rest." (Tango teacher, interview 6)*

- Financial strain on professionals, need to find other sources of income:

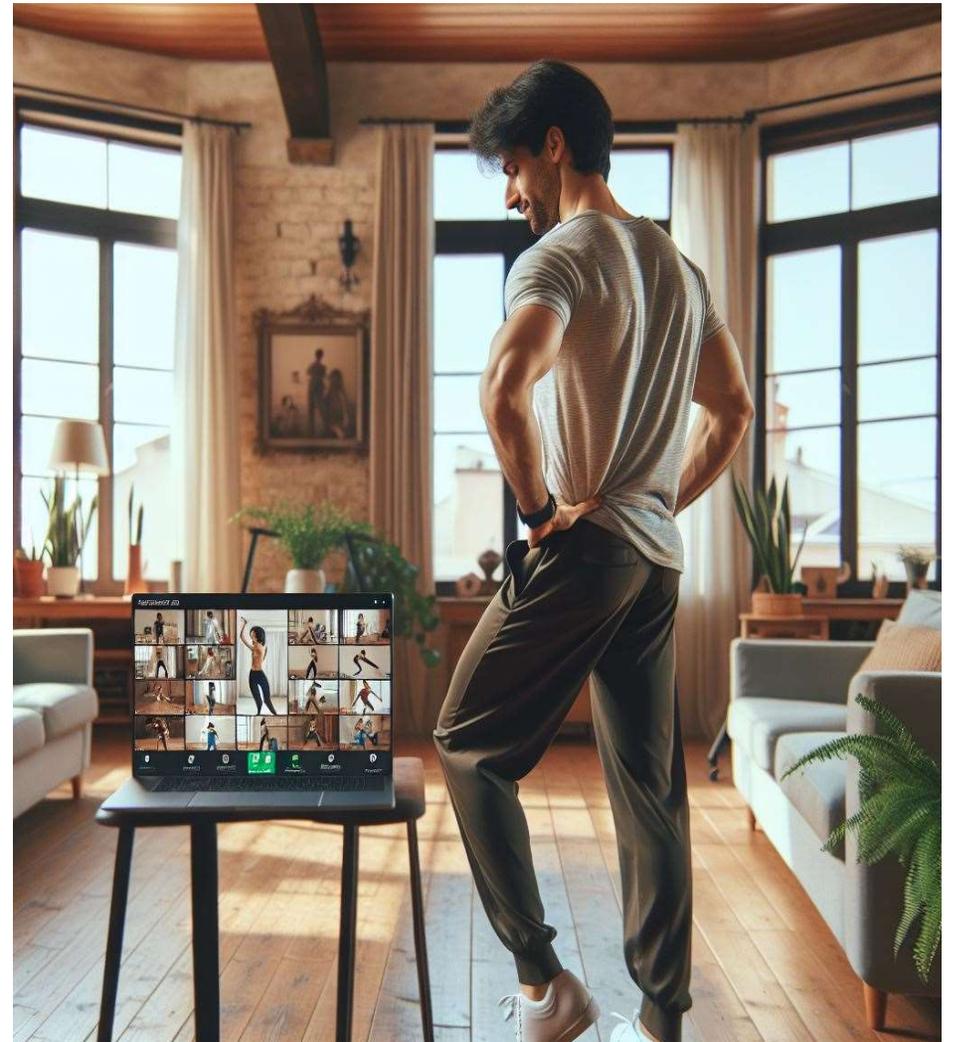
*"Dancing is great when the state doesn't forbid us from dancing... and that's it, simply put. So today, I'm putting dancing aside, but for now, my life goes on. I need to keep living, and for that, I need to work." (Salsa-bachata teacher and DJ, interview 11)*

# Challenges of Dance Communities

- Survey: 85.5% identified as part of a community founded on mutual support, sharing, tolerance, exchange, respect, enjoyment, and passion.
- Sense of belonging to a dance community  $\neq$  isolation imposed by health measures = “destruction of social bonds.” (salsa-bachata dancer, interview 22).
- Other activities alone (studies) / with dancers (outdoor)
- “It’s not a big deal,” “We don’t know when, but it will come back” (tango dancer, interview 1)

# Online Classes and Festivals

- Focus on technic, music, history, or solo moves/ choreography.
- Interesting and enriching experience  $\neq$  fatigue and discouragement.
- Access to all dances, famous artists  $\neq$  lack of social and physical contact, possibilities to apply learning at social event.



# The Resumption of Activities



- Clandestine dance events.
- Authorized events at home (10 persons) : only the bests...
- Body memory helped to get back quickly.
- Dance studio reopening: health measures (masks, mandatory vaccination, etc.) sometimes dampened dancers' motivation.
- Lack of intermediate level dancers in the courses.

# Synthesis and post- pandemic situation

- Pandemic significantly affected dance/art.
- Local/ international dance teachers.
- Development of online courses (Papi & Dugré, 2024).
- Amateurs' adaptation.
- Importance of the wellbeing generated by dance (Karkou, Oliver & Lycours, 2017; Christensen & Chang, 2018).
- Relief from the pression of learning and performing, being good leader or follower.
- Announcements on social media suggest a continued growth in group and private classes and festivals.





# Final Thoughts



Dance community as a space of many contradictions reflecting a performance-driven culture even in leisure:

- between relaxation and tension
- between the inclusion of a wide diversity of individuals, and the empowerment of a minority
- between the feeling of belonging to a community and the one of loneliness.

# A few references



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# Questions or Comments?

Thank You for Your  
Attention !

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