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1. Introduction

The YouDance project, held in Maribor, Slovenia, brought together young youth workers from four European countries—Slovenia, Serbia, Romania, and Latvia—to explore the power of dance as a tool for intercultural exchange, personal development, and community building. Dance represents a powerful tool for youth workers, as it not only promotes motivation for movement but also contributes to a healthy relationship with body image, allowing all participants to express themselves and collaborate without prejudice regarding gender, thereby fostering equality and inclusiveness. Through a carefully designed program of workshops, cultural activities, and collaborative performances, participants experienced firsthand the transformative potential of movement, mindfulness, and creativity. This document synthesizes the key good practices identified during the mobility, offering insights into their relevance for youth work, non-formal education, and cross-cultural engagement.

2. Dance as a Tool for Relaxation and Team Building

One of the central pillars of the YouDance mobility was the use of dance to promote relaxation, stress reduction, and interpersonal connection among participants. Throughout the workshops, several important dimensions of the benefits of dance emerged:

- **Physical benefits:** Dance-based activities significantly helped reduce muscle tension, improve posture, and increase flexibility. Through guided stretching, rhythmic movements, and gentle body exercises, participants were encouraged to explore their own range of motion, loosen up stiff muscles, and relieve the physical stress that often accumulates from prolonged sitting or repetitive tasks. These exercises also improved body awareness, helping participants recognize how they carry tension and how to release it effectively.
- **Mental and emotional benefits:** Dance proved to be a highly effective tool for bringing participants into the present moment. By focusing on movements, rhythm, and breathing patterns, individuals learned to quiet their minds and engage fully with the activity at hand. Gentle swaying, soft weight transfers from one foot to another, and fluid arm movements created a space for mindfulness and introspection. This kind of practice not only reduced anxiety and mental fatigue but also provided an accessible entry point for participants who may not have previous experience with meditation or formal mindfulness exercises.

- **Team-building effects:** The workshops showed how dance fosters connection, cooperation, and mutual trust. Group choreography tasks required participants to communicate clearly, delegate roles, and engage their collective creativity. Synchronization exercises, where participants matched movements with one

another, built a sense of unity, harmony, and shared purpose. As participants became attuned to the subtle nonverbal cues of their peers, they developed greater empathy, flexibility, and respect for one another's contributions.

Good practice: Combining physical movement with mindful attention creates a multi-layered learning experience that strengthens both individual well-being and group cohesion. Integrating these approaches in youth work fosters resilience, adaptability, and a collaborative spirit, essential qualities in today's rapidly changing world.

3. Promoting Digital Wellbeing through Digital Detox

A particularly innovative and impactful element of the YouDance mobility was the digital detox workshop, where participants explored the effects of excessive digital use on their well-being and learned practical strategies to restore a healthy balance between online and offline life.

The session introduced six key strategies:

1. **Set Device-Free Zones**: Participants were encouraged to establish clear boundaries in their daily environments, such as keeping phones out of bedrooms, bathrooms, and dining areas. Using an analog alarm clock instead of a phone was highlighted as a small but powerful change that prevents automatic morning and evening scrolling.
2. **Schedule Screen Time, Don't Drift Into It**: Instead of falling into unplanned, passive screen use, participants learned to create intentional "online windows" and use tools like Google Calendar, Focus To-Do, or the Pomodoro Technique. This approach emphasized the importance of time management and deliberate engagement with digital platforms.
3. **Remove Digital Temptations**: Turning off non-essential notifications, moving distracting apps into folders, and switching devices to greyscale mode helped reduce the impulsive urge to check devices. Participants were surprised to learn that even the mere presence of a phone can reduce focus and productivity.
4. **Replace, Don't Just Remove**: Rather than simply cutting back on screen time, the workshop emphasized substituting digital habits with meaningful offline activities—such as going for a walk, reading, journaling, or engaging in creative pursuits like dancing or drawing.
5. **Create a Digital Wind-Down Routine**: Participants were encouraged to avoid screens at least one hour before bedtime, replacing device use with calming

rituals like stretching, listening to music, or practicing gratitude journaling. This routine supports better sleep by minimizing blue light exposure, which interferes with melatonin production.

6. **Try Tech-Free Challenges**: To make the process engaging, participants explored challenges like a digital detox weekend, app-free Mondays, or a one-day social media fast each week. Gamifying the challenge—by partnering with friends or setting small rewards—helped strengthen motivation and accountability.

An unexpected and fascinating part of the workshop was the lively discussion that unfolded. Many participants realized for the first time how much time they actually spend in front of screens, often underestimating their daily usage. This realization sparked an honest and reflective conversation about the role of technology in their lives.

A key takeaway was the understanding that digital devices are an integral part of modern life and are not inherently negative. The challenge is to cultivate intentional, purposeful use rather than falling into patterns of passive scrolling out of boredom. By reframing their relationship with technology, participants felt empowered to make conscious choices that support their well-being, rather than being controlled by external algorithms and notifications.

Good practice: Addressing digital wellbeing in youth programs not only raises awareness but equips young people with actionable strategies to regain control over their time and attention. Integrating this topic into mobility projects fosters healthier digital habits and supports mental health and focus in both personal and professional spheres.

4. Experiential Learning and Cultural Exploration

The experiential learning elements of the YouDance mobility were central in deepening participants' cultural awareness, creativity, and sense of connection. Two activities stood out in particular: the **Self-Guided City Challenge** and the **International Night**.

During the **Self-Guided City Challenge**, participants explored Maribor's cultural and historical landmarks in small groups, fostering curiosity, autonomy, and collaborative problem-solving. A key element was that groups were asked to **capture their experiences through photos and videos**, encouraging them to document their impressions creatively. This activity not only strengthened their observation skills but also

provided opportunities for shared laughter, artistic expression, and collective storytelling. The visual materials created during the challenge later served as conversation starters, deepening the sense of group identity and belonging.

The **International Night** was a vibrant celebration of cultural diversity, with **dance at its heart**. Each national group presented a traditional dance or musical performance from their home country, sharing stories, historical context, and fun cultural facts.

Importantly, the evening did not end with the presentations: after the performances, participants taught each other the basic steps of their traditional dances, transforming the event into a dynamic, participatory experience. This **shared physical activity fostered a profound sense of synergy and mutual appreciation** among the participants, breaking down cultural barriers and creating lasting memories of joy, openness, and solidarity.

Good practice: Blending experiential learning with creative documentation and embodied cultural exchange amplifies intercultural competence, builds empathy, and fosters a playful, inclusive group atmosphere. Such practices allow young people to engage with diversity not only intellectually but also emotionally and physically, strengthening the foundations for long-term intercultural dialogue.

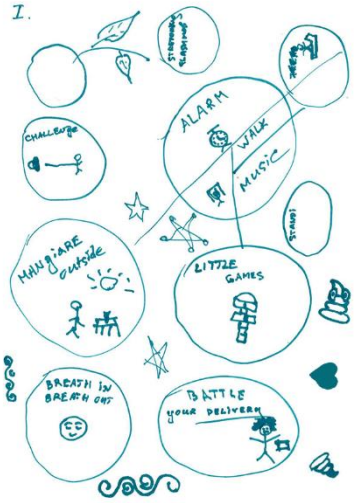
5. Creativity and Innovation in Movement

The “Active at Work” and “Creative Movement Ideas” workshops addressed an increasingly relevant topic: how to integrate movement into everyday work environments to counteract the harmful effects of sedentary lifestyles. This section explores not only the practical strategies introduced but also the underlying principles and creative solutions developed by participants.

Ergonomics is the science of designing workplaces, tasks, and equipment to fit the physical and psychological needs of individuals. **Good ergonomic practices** reduce physical strain, improve posture, and prevent musculoskeletal disorders. **Proper ergonomic alignment**—such as maintaining a neutral body position, adjusting screens to eye level, supporting the lower back, and keeping feet flat on the ground—can significantly improve comfort, concentration, and long-term health. Importantly,

ergonomics goes beyond just physical comfort. It also impacts **mental wellbeing**: an optimized workspace can reduce fatigue, enhance focus, and even boost mood and productivity. As the modern workplace increasingly involves prolonged computer use, addressing both ergonomic setup and regular movement breaks becomes essential.

Participants learned that even the best ergonomic setup cannot fully compensate for the risks of **prolonged sitting**. Incorporating **short movement breaks**—such as stretching, spinal twists, or neck rolls—improves circulation, reduces muscle stiffness, and reenergizes both body and mind. Movement at work also helps **prevent repetitive strain injuries**, **reduce stress and mental fatigue**, **boost creativity and problem-solving** by stimulating both brain hemispheres, and **improve social connection** when activities are done together with colleagues.



A highlight of the workshop was the **interactive group exercise**, where participants brainstormed **creative ways to integrate movement into the workday**. The session resulted in a wide range of practical and imaginative ideas, including **reward-based incentives** such as employees who complete 15 minutes of stretching exercises receiving an additional 15 minutes added to their lunch break; **group-based activities** where teams organize short group exercise sessions, such as stretching, light cardio, or dance-based routines during breaks to foster social bonds and collective wellbeing; and **guided mindfulness practices**, introducing "movement mindfulness" sessions such as dance meditation to calming music to create a calming atmosphere while promoting body awareness and mental relaxation.

These exercises were not only fun but also helped participants reflect on the importance of **culture change** in the workplace. The focus was not simply on **individual responsibility** but on creating an environment where **movement and wellbeing are supported collectively**.

Good practice: Encouraging workplace movement through **creative, inclusive strategies** promotes physical health, mental focus, and team cohesion. By involving employees in the design of these initiatives, organizations increase **ownership, motivation, and long-term adoption** of healthy practices.

6. Dance Workshops: Building Key Competences through Movement

The dance workshops were at the very heart of the YouDance mobility, providing a dynamic space where young participants could develop essential skills while engaging in creative and joyful physical expression. Throughout the week, participants prepared for a **flash mob performance**, working together on a choreography designed by a professional dance teacher. Importantly, the choreography skillfully integrated **traditional dance elements from the participants' home countries**, transforming the flash mob into a true celebration of cultural diversity.

Through these workshops, participants developed a wide range of **key competences**, including:

- **Collaboration and teamwork**, as they coordinated movements and supported each other in learning new steps.
- **Creativity and problem-solving**, as they adapted dance elements and contributed their own ideas to the choreography.
- **Intercultural awareness**, as they learned and respected the traditional dance contributions from different countries.
- **Self-confidence and body awareness**, as they gained comfort in expressing themselves through movement in front of others.

Beyond the dance rehearsals, the program also included **yoga sessions in the park**, which offered participants a moment of calm, grounding, and connection to themselves and their surroundings. This balance between high-energy dance and mindfulness practices supported not only physical wellbeing but also emotional resilience.

A particularly meaningful moment came during the **gratitude network exercise**, where participants stood in a circle and shared words of appreciation and support with one another. This activity profoundly strengthened the group's sense of connection, fostering trust, empathy, and a lasting sense of belonging.

The program culminated in a public **flash mob performance** in the city center, where the participants confidently showcased the choreography they had developed together. The inclusion of national dance elements within the flash mob captivated the audience and demonstrated the power of cultural fusion and collective creativity. For the participants, this was not only a moment of celebration but also a powerful affirmation of what they had accomplished together over the course of the mobility.

Good practice: Using dance as both an artistic and educational tool enables the development of transversal skills while fostering intercultural dialogue, group cohesion, and personal growth. The combination of structured rehearsals, mindfulness practices, and public performance created a rich, multifaceted learning experience that will stay with participants well beyond the project.

7. Conclusion

The YouDance mobility in Maribor exemplified a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to youth work. By integrating dance, digital wellbeing, cultural exploration, creativity, and movement innovation, the program addressed multiple dimensions of learning—**physical, cognitive, emotional, and social**.

Dance played a central role throughout the mobility, serving as a universal language that bridged cultural differences, strengthened team spirit, and offered participants a joyful and accessible way to express themselves. The dance workshops, particularly the preparation for the flash mob, allowed young people to develop key competences such as teamwork, creativity, self-confidence, and intercultural awareness. The incorporation of national dance elements into the final choreography underscored the value of diversity and mutual respect.

These good practices offer a valuable model for future projects seeking to **empower young people**, **foster intercultural understanding**, and **promote wellbeing** through innovative, movement-based non-formal education. They demonstrate how combining artistic expression, cultural exchange, and reflective learning can create transformative experiences that leave a lasting impact on individuals and communities alike.