

Executive summary

The *Master Plan for Professional Dance in Quebec*, unveiled by the Regroupement québécois de la danse on behalf of the dance professionals who inspired its vision and contents, is impressive. It is a first, comprehensive review of the sector and all of its components, which have the potential to radically transform Quebec's dance landscape over the next ten years. It looks at professional dance in Quebec from within and without, on a macro- and microscopic scale, using a terminology that we hope will form the basis of a common language.

The initiatives, actions and tools proposed by the Master Plan are based on some 100 recommendations adopted at the second États généraux de la danse conference in April 2009 to address the problems, issues and challenges closely analyzed by over 200 dance practitioners during the Grands Chantiers de la danse project. The process and intentions behind this first Master Plan for dance are described in the introduction.

Where we stand

Chapter 1, "Taking the Pulse," identifies the issues and challenges that shaped this Master Plan. To accurately assess the work that lies ahead, the Plan takes an honest look at the strengths and weaknesses of Quebec's professional dance sector in a highly competitive environment. Since foreign markets offer the most attractive opportunities for research-driven and original dance works in terms of presentation, revenue and public recognition, our dance sector is held to international standards of excellence.

The pressure to excel puts strain on every link in the value chain—from training and research to creation, production, dissemination and services—revealing limits in human and financial resources and specialized skills. It also lays bare the shaky foundations of our professional dance sector. Dance shows in Quebec have low attendance rates (3.7% of total attendance in the performing arts). Contributing factors include the relative lack of facilities dedicated to dance in Montreal and Quebec City and, by extension, the regions; few training, creation, production and presentation facilities that meet professional dance standards; underdeveloped and under-resourced dance presentation networks in Quebec and Canada; fleeting media coverage; a scant body of literature on dance; and a negligible presence of dance in schools and public spaces.

Public funding levels have not permitted the establishment of a solid dance infrastructure in Quebec, and have made it difficult to even marginally improve the working conditions and remuneration of most dance artists and cultural workers, which some might qualify as poor. Not to mention the system's inability to provide almost three generations of emerging performers and choreographers with concrete opportunities to establish a career in dance. The challenge of calculating public funding shortfalls since 1980 points to a distinct lack of reliable qualitative and quantitative data on a sector that is leading the way in research, creation and innovation. There is insufficient data on the costs associated with the practice of dance, its multi-stage creation cycle, and the presentation and touring of shows, as well as the economic benefits of long-term investments in the dance job market. It is also difficult to assess the total amount of public funds currently allocated to the discipline, given program cuts, the diverse range of funding criteria and mechanisms, and the variability of funding amounts and duration (recurring or one-time grants).

This brief overview underscores the importance of the improvements and transformations proposed in this Master Plan. It is an ambitious undertaking, yet one that is vital for the future of the discipline, paving the way for growth on a local, national and international scale. It addresses structural problems tied to the specific history of dance and it seeks to remove numerous obstacles to expansion at all levels (artistic, organizational, audience-related, geographic and disciplinary). It covers a broad range of issues, including conditions of work and practice in studios and offices, on tour, during the creative process and performances, and in training or professional development classes. The motto of this Master Plan is to think globally and act locally—and vice versa. It is this notion that has shaped our vision and that will ground our future actions.

Five ambitions for the future

To foster commitment and rally the dance community around a common vision for the expansion of dance, this Master Plan focuses on five main ambitions, set out in Chapter 3.

- Have the means to excel;
- Become a strong, healthy occupational sector;
- Develop a national and international reputation for innovation;
- Reach out to audiences;
- Become an integral part of Quebec’s social and cultural fabric.

It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to consolidate and structure Quebec’s professional dance sector in order to ensure its sustainable growth, much like a healthy ecosystem. This joint mission is set out in Chapter 2, in the Declaration of Intent titled *Ours Together*, adopted by some 100 dance artists and cultural workers at the closing of the second États généraux de la danse.

Expansion framework

Chapter 4 presents the layout of the Master Plan, comprising five areas of expansion and their accompanying sets of actions, which exist in a synergistic relationship. The Plan’s chief merit is its comprehensive, integrated and dynamic approach. Any action aimed at reinforcing a given function in the value chain must take into account the balance of the dance ecosystem as a whole.

Each of the five areas of expansion—artistic, organizational, audience, geographic and disciplinary—aims to build on existing skills and, if necessary, adapt them to new realities. Chapters 5 to 9 offer detailed portraits of the areas of expansion and their respective challenges, along with guidelines and strategies for key stakeholders and partners to carry out a series of work plans. These work plans are basic roadmaps to be refined during the implementation of the Master Plan.

Following is a list of guidelines chosen for each area of expansion, along with the number of proposed strategies.

Artistic expansion (Chapter 5)

- Support dance work and the creative cycle (including the research, creation and production stages) (8 strategies);
- Acknowledge a diverse range of artistic approaches (5 strategies);
- Improve the conditions in which works are presented (4 strategies);
- Help to develop artistic careers (professional development geared toward supporting artists in their individual choices and paths) (4 strategies).

Organizational expansion (Chapter 6)

- Support dance organizations at the operational level (7 strategies);
- Improve work conditions and relations (5 strategies);
- Promote organizational innovation (5 strategies).

Audience expansion (Chapter 7)

- Build and reach out to audiences (5 strategies);
- Raise the profile of dance in the community (4 strategies);
- Help develop a dance culture in Quebec (4 strategies).

Geographic expansion (Chapter 8)

- Increase the foothold of professional dance in Quebec (4 strategies);
- Develop and promote dance outside Quebec (7 strategies).

Disciplinary expansion (Chapter 9)

- Invest more in dance (4 strategies);
- Provide top-quality training (6 strategies);
- Develop the dance job market (4 strategies);
- Promote knowledge production in dance (6 strategies);
- Celebrate our dance heritage (4 strategies).

In total, the Master Plan sets out 17 guidelines, 86 strategies, 128 actions and 218 means, and targets over 100 stakeholders and partners.

Galvanized into action

A number of actions associated with the five areas of expansion call on the same stakeholders or partners, or are part of the same issue to be resolved. By grouping them together, we were able to identify seven “major initiatives” that will help to consolidate the dance sector and propel it to greater heights. Presented and explained in Chapter 10, these major initiatives will be led by the dance community, with the essential contribution of government partners such as arts councils, municipal recreation and culture departments, MCCCCF, MELS, MRI and Canadian Heritage.

- Increased funding for dance;
- Review of existing funding programs;
- Creation of new funding programs;
- Plan to develop facilities and equipment adapted to dance (studios, schools, venues);
- Plan to invest in new technologies;
 - Plan to structure and oversee an initial dance training path;
 - Development and implementation of a Canadian and international action plan (reciprocal exchanges, presentation and touring of works, career development, promotional activities, co-productions, partnerships, and adequate resources for diplomatic bodies).

A key player in these major initiatives, the dance community will also be in charge of carrying out “growth-generating” projects, designed to rally stakeholders around common goals and to offer lasting benefits to the sector as a whole. They will require the support of several partners, including government agencies. The following three of these projects were adopted at the second États généraux de la danse:

- The establishment of regional dance hubs in Quebec;
- The establishment of a dance observatory;
- The creation of a dance foundation.

Other growth-generating projects could take form during the implementation of the Master Plan. Among the 30 proposed by over 80 professionals at the annual meeting of RQD members in October 2010, five are listed in the conclusion to Chapter 10 as examples of a comprehensive, integrated approach to structural challenges in the dance sector that will allow for the creation of new, unifying organizational models.

To consolidate and structure the dance sector and ensure the full expansion of the discipline, a significant investment of human and financial resources will be required. Some major initiatives, including the adaptation of funding programs and the development of implementation plans and strategies, can be started immediately. The same holds true for studies, analyses and assessments to document the realities of dance and lay the groundwork for other long-term initiatives.

Open conclusion

This Master Plan calls on the dance community and numerous key partners to join hands in radically changing the face of dance in Quebec. Its driving ambitions—for the discipline and for a community seeking to contribute fully to culture and society—must be embraced and realized by all parties concerned. We must start, right now, to put the necessary pieces in place for our Plan to materialize. RQD is ready to take the first steps.

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Founded in 1984, the Regroupement québécois de la danse (RQD) is the only association to represent all areas of professional dance in Quebec. With over 500 individual and corporate members, RQD is involved in professional development, mobilization, advocacy and the promotion of dance on the national and international stage.