

Rerouting Choreography: dance and culture policies in Catalonia between 1975 and 2000

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With the death of General Franco in 1975 and the restoration of democracy, Spain entered a new historical stage and thus opened a new chapter for the performing arts. The constitution of 1978 recognized culture as a right of all citizens and declared that the State was to guarantee their access to it in an equal manner (art. 44.1). Thus from 1978 on the performing arts, along with dance, became a matter of State policy and a series of actions were started by different institutions, bodies and levels of the central government and regional and municipal administrations to favour the creation, dissemination and training of dance.

This paper will present the paradigm where dance found itself in 1975 and analyze the policies that were applied in Catalonia between

1975 and 2000 in terms of dance production, exhibition, dissemination and training. It will draw the map and the new paradigm arisen after the first 25 years of democracy with regards to creation (formats and trends), exhibition, dissemination and training, and will analyse the context. The history of 20th century Spain has been marked by political discontinuity: a civil war, forty years of dictatorship and a democracy period. This discontinuity has influenced and affected the development of choreographic culture in each of the levels of creation, its social rooting, the opening of training centres, traditions and styles as well as its research and dissemination as cultural heritage.

Key Words: Dance, Choreography, Catalonia, Democracy, Policies.

Introduction

The following paper is a summary of some aspects of my PhD thesis entitled *Catalunya 1975-2000: Politiques i identitat* [Catalonia 1975-2000. Policies and Identity]. This study analyzes the characteristics of dance in this historical period in Catalonia within the artistic and political context and the framework of cultural policy articulation. The fragment I am presenting is an overall picture of these 25 years.

The methodology used in this paper combines both quantitative and qualitative instruments as well as historical method instruments based on archival procedures. In addition, secondary sources related to socio-political contextual studies have been used. The classification of choreographic diversity has followed the Preston-Dunlop (1998) choreographic analysis approach.

I divide this historical period into 3 parts according to Oliva's periodization (Oliva, 2004). The first one is from 1975 to 1982, when the Spanish political transition takes place and a new paradigm and policy framework for dance is set.

1. Dancing transitions and swinging paradigms

Franco's death in 1975 put an end to the dictatorship and led to a parliamentary democracy in Spain. Democracy closed a period characterised in terms of culture by censorship, isolation, mass entertainment shows such as music hall, comedy, operetta, folklore and national flamenquism, the domain of private enterprises, and of values close to the regime (Agustí, 2013: 50-60).

According to Rubio Aróstegui the cultural paradigm in Spain as well as the dance paradigm at the beginning of democracy was characterised by:

(...) The artistic and cultural dynamism of civil society, backwardness in the social consumption of culture and art, the void and obsolescence of the legislation concerning cultural issues, an outdated bureaucracy, both inefficient and disorganised regarding public activity, the crisis in industrial and commercial structures in the private management of creation, production, distribution and cultural consumption and, last but not least, the crisis of cultural identity and tradition (Rubio Aróstegui, 2003:38).

Democracy opened a new chapter for the performing arts and dance that had been deprived of any consolidation of artistic and educational projects due to the discontinuities of democratic politics in the 20th century.

The new legal framework for the development of the country's cultural policy was determined by the Spanish Constitution of 1978, whose article 44.1 states that "public authorities shall promote and watch over access to culture for all citizens".

The cultural model introduced in Spain followed the state interventionist tradition, and in Catalonia it resulted from the application of the Statute of Autonomy of 1979.

Paragraphs 9.4 and 9.5 of the Statute of Autonomy of 1979 led to the creation of the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Catalonia. The new Ministry designed a roadmap based on the diagnosis of the sector and the society, and it laid the foundations of the new political horizon. This was the turning point to reroute dance in Catalonia and insert it into European dance movements. The Catalan Ministry's main objective was to restore the Catalan local culture that had been battered by forty years of dictatorship, the backbones being the policies to retrieve neglected Catalan culture and the Catalan language. Thus the main areas of action were 1) the creation and revamping of premises, 2) the creation of new units of cultural production and 3) cultural recovery (Departament de Cultura de la Generalitat de Catalunya, 1980-1982: 3-4).

This roadmap boosted a system of direct grants addressed to activities, organizations, groups and companies. Dance policies were based on the following six key areas: 1) grants to groups and companies, 2) grants for dance professionals, 3) support to creative spaces, 4) support to different entities all over Catalonia, 5) support to creation itself and 6) awards for choreographic contests and national awards. Drawing up this roadmap began in 1982 and it was finally completed in 1985.

In order to implement the six key areas and support dissemination and exhibition, the Entitat Autònoma de Difusió d'Espectacles (EADE) was created. This office's mission was to support the exhibition of dance all over the Catalan territory, which was not easy due to the poor condition of the theatres on the one hand and the effervescence in dance creation on the other. Over time the creation of a network or circuit has proved to be the most difficult goal but, in the case of dance, there were two milestones: the Teatre Obert 1989-1991 season and the Espai de Música i Dansa (1992-2005).

However, the context and artistic framework did not quite match the slow development of the institutional transition years, which began to materialize during the first period of Felipe González's Socialist Party (1986-1990) and the second period of the Government of *Convergència i Unió*, the centre-rightwing nationalists, in Catalonia (1984-1988).

In 1975, the context of dance in Catalonia lacked stable and acknowledged professionals with one exception: the corps de ballet of the *Gran Teatre del Liceu* and the commercial flamenco dancers. The rest was a segmented sector. There was an emerging core of young dancers and students of modern dance and Jazz trained at Anna Maleras' Centre or abroad, and there was also a group of pupils of the official school of dance at the Institut del Teatre, where modern dance pedagogy had been recently introduced.

By contrast, there was a broad core of classical and Spanish dance "dancers and teachers" from different generations, disciples of Master Magriñá, Master Tena and other private schools, who hoped that democracy would foster joint public projects in the image of other European countries, projects that had not been possible in the 1950s (Ballets de Barcelona 1951-1953, and Ballet Juan Tena 1954-1957). This generation mirrored itself in the ballet companies of Europe and North America, which dominated the classical, neoclassical and contemporary ballet styles introduced after the Second World War

The deployment of institutional support was too slow and lacked a roadmap. It would take ten years to materialize. However, the civil dynamism of the sector needed articulating, and waiting for resources did not help at all. In many cases, projects and hopes were thwarted by delay and lack of specificity.

So during the seven years of the political transition (1975-1982) we get a choreographic picture that looks like this:

A. Creation: The birth and eclosion of small dance groups that without government aid or private support showed the creative concerns and needs of the sector. Among these we must highlight the Grup Estudi Ana Maleras, Toni and Cesc Gelabert, who had already shown experimental pieces such as *Acció O-I* (1973-76). Barcelona Contemporary Ballet led by Ramón Solé who as a ballet master of the Institut del Teatre returned from years of emigration and created the first company 1974-1975, with its subsequent split in 1977 into two groups, a classical one and a contemporary one. The group Heura was formed by students from the pioneer contemporary dance department at the Institut del Teatre, which after its split in 1980 turned into Ave-lina Argüelles Company; L'Espantall led by French professor Gerard Collins; the group *Acord*, based on jazz stylistic principles; and Taba i Empar Rosselló, experimental choreographers. Some of these groups had been presented at international competitions in choreography and won several awards. This is the case of pieces such as *Passacaglia* (G .R. Lang, 1980) *Absència* (A. Argüelles), *Anells sense dits* (Argüelles, 1980), *Laberint* (Heura, 1979), *La dona sa casa vella* (Harris Antachopolou, 1980).



Toni and Cesc Gelabert. *Acció I*. (1976). Teatre Lliure 1982 (Photo: Josep Aznar)



Grup Estudi Ana Maleras. *Gernika*. Guillermo Palomares. (1977) (Photo: Josep Aznar)

To this momentum we can add the initiative of young professionals trained in classical or neoclassical tendencies in the tradition of the 20th century, who were able to create dance groups such as the Eixample Experimental Ballet, Ballet Alexia, Ballet-Drama Joan Tena, Esbatec Neoclàssic and Ramon Solé Company.

B. Exhibition: If we talk about exhibition, it is important to highlight how the Institut del Teatre organized the first “Mostres” (shows) performed by these groups to give dance visibility in the eyes of the sector. This happened in 1977, 1979, 1980 and 1982. In the late 1980s, this practice was retrieved to cater for the exhibition of new dance tendencies.

Moreover, the first democratic city councils (1979) were the first authorities to display dance in local exhibition premises to support and invigorate the dance sector.

The creation of the first festivals of performing arts worked as a platform to link international trends with local trends, where creation had no living references. These festivals were Festival Grec de Barcelona (1976), Festival de Dansa de Castelldefels (1980), Fira de Teatre al Carrer de Tàrraga (1981), Festival Internacional de Teatre de Sitges (1967-2004) and Mostres de dansa de l’Institut del Teatre (1977, 1979, 1980, 1982). These festivals were either linked to modern and contemporary dance or to classical and neoclassical dance, setting the ground of a bipolarity and confrontation of styles that would last until today.

In these years a total of 26 different groups appeared in the dance context, some of them led by young students or by “professional dancers” and some led by local and international dance teachers.

Between 1976 and 1982 choreographic production would boom and 173 pieces would be produced.

The choreographies were produced by groups of artists, young dancers and choreographers, or by teachers who choreographed for their students. In seven years we can highlight 26 different authorships, some of which were produced by the same people but with different companies.

This creation was mainly made up by short pieces in several styles and topics. Modernity meant using the language of movement associated with modern American dance techniques and compositional approaches. Most pieces were non-narrative and presented an expressive and emotional burden channelled through movement. The counterpoints were Gelabert’s company and Heura group, positioned on the principles of abstraction and compositional methods linked to Merce Cunningham and Alwin Nikolais’s aesthetics. Neoclassical groups differed in the use of body language style and academic technique based on ballet but also reflected expressive concerns. There were also some visual arts-related works and some experimental proposals related to Catalan artists belonging to the Informality movement. There were also some isolated performatic proposals.



Ballet Experimental de l'Eixample. Consol Villaubí. 1980. Hospital de la Santa Creu. Festival Grec 1980. (Photo: Josep Aznar)

We can say that most pieces produced at the time were of short duration, that is between 5 and 20 minutes long, except for the *Temps al biaix* (1982) by Heura, that opened the season of one-hour pieces in the image of the emerging author productions in Europe. The novelty was the piece *Le ciel est noir* in 1984, the first Bauschiene Tanztheater creation thanks to Isabel Ribas, a dancer who had performed in the Wuppertal Tanztheater for a short period of time.



Heura. *Temps al Biaix*. 1982. Teatre Regina (Photo: Josep Aznar)



Heura. *Le ciel est noir*. Isabel Ribas. 1984. Teatre Condal. (Photo: Josep Aznar)

On the whole, programming and dance exhibition in Catalonia was very poor and unbalanced. We can say that it was the sector itself that got organized to promote the exhibition of its own projects. In the absence of a real network of theatres and spaces for dance, dance achieved public presence in a territorially unbalanced way and in precarious spaces, many of which were managed by the same dance professionals. Almost 100% of the exhibitions took place in Barcelona.

We should also mention the dance programme of the Gran Teatre del Liceu. Since the creation of its Consortium in 1980 until the fire of 1994, the presence of dance was reduced to two or three companies per season. Most young lovers of modern dance moved away from the theatre, but not ballet students who viewed it as a reference point for decades. This was the context that fuelled the imagination of Catalan choreography.

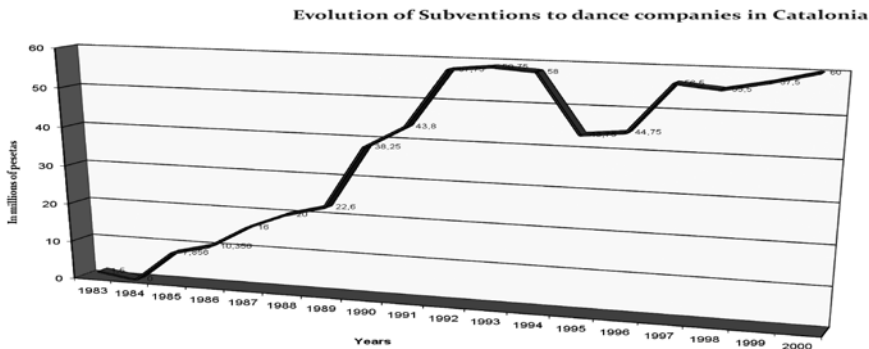


Chart 1. Source: Annual reports of the Catalan Ministry of Culture (1982-2000).
1 Million pesetas = €6,000. Author: Ester Vendrell.

2. Deployment of settlement policies and references. From 1983 to 1992.

The years between 1983 and 1992 may be regarded as one of the most exciting periods of change, transformation and modernization of Spanish society of the 20th century in economic, educational and cultural areas.

Under the mandate of the central government led by Felipe González (PSOE, socialist party) and the Catalan autonomous government headed by Jordi Pujol (Convergència i Unió, centre-right nationalist party), dance experienced one of the most important transformations by deploying a battery of cultural activities that laid the foundation for a model which in some way, and

with some modifications, has lasted until today. The political and cultural context would be represented by the entry of Spain into the European Union, and in the socio-political and infrastructural fields, events like the Olympic Games of Barcelona in 1992 must be mentioned.

The political context of Catalan society would be dominated by the bipolarity of a regional government run by the centre-right nationalist party, *Convergència i Unió*, and local government and Barcelona City Council dominated by the PSC-PSOE socialist party. This factor is interesting to highlight that the policies developed at that time were not cooperative but compartmentalized.

1985 was a turning point in artistic support and cultural policies. Dance exhibition and programming was driven by the municipal facility *Mercat de les Flors* (1985) and a series of festivals, such as *Festival Grec*, *Festival de Otoño*, *Festival Olímpic de les Arts*, and a line extension of the performing arts focused exclusively on the new international avant-garde languages.

The Catalan Government finally managed to take its first actions for dance, such as grants for creation to groups and creative spaces, albeit rather scarce and lacking a clear scheme. These grants, together with choreographic competitions and awards, dance programming, and festivals and theatre productions fostered the creation and favoured the birth of companies, although some were set up during the previous decade, such as *Gelabert/Azzopardi*, *Avelina Argüelles*, *Mudances-Margarit*, *Danat*, *Metros*, *Mal Pelo*, *Lanònima Imperial*, *Transit*, *Nats Nus*, *Senza Tempo*, *Búbulus* and *Mar Gómez*. Some multipurpose facilities also received financial support for creation and exhibition, such as *La Fàbrica*, *Buge* and *Berlin Centre*, an ecosystem of contemporary creation, with the only counterpoint of the neoclassical ephemeral style of *Dart Companyia de Dansa*. Throughout these years they laid the foundation for a model that excelled in choreography. All this creative effervescence had an artistic and political reward at the *Biennale de Danse de Lyon 92 Pasi3n de Espana*, that programmed almost entirely contemporary pieces by Catalan groups and companies.

Dance had a place in local festivals and all over Spain.

From 1983 to 1992 the provision of aid to dance gradually increased. The number of beneficiaries also increased and a clear map was being depicted. However, the amount devoted to dance can be considered scarce if we take into account that the budget of the Catalan Ministry of Culture never reached 2% of the national budget and dance was the “Cinderella” of the artistic disciplines. The most prominent creators had access to these grants to develop their own projects, although many of them did not have any professional experience in a dance company as dancers or as choreographers and they did not have professional managers or producers specialised in the field of dance.

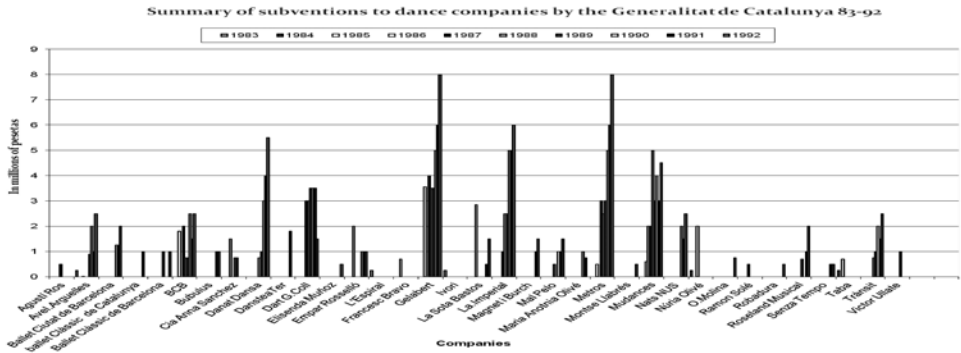


Chart 2. Source: Annual reports of the Catalan Ministry of Culture (1982-2000). 1 Million pesetas = €6,000. Author: Ester Vendrell.

This period we are talking about, between 1983 and 1992, was indeed a successful one. 343 choreographies belonging to 114 different groups or dance companies were staged. Funding increased meaningfully: from 6 companies funded in 1983, to 23 funded groups in 1994. But over the decade, 35 different companies supporting creation had been recorded. The rest of choreographies were presented in public spaces without any public funding.

The increasing number of companies was higher than the Catalan Ministry's budget devoted to dance, which caused a growing impoverishment of these companies, although grants also came from the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Barcelona City Council.

Chart 2 shows how the public budget for dance did not match the number of groups applying for financial help, which meant both a stagnation of the pioneers and also growing difficulty for new creators and choreographers to access grants. The sector started a fragmentation process, a ranking by seniority, and a dispersion of public resources that have lasted until today. Chart 3.



Chart 3. Source: Summary of theatre seasons, MAE (Museum of Performing Arts) at the Institut del Teatre run by Barcelona Provincial Council, dance reviews and chronology in various authors *Noves tendències de la coreografia catalana* (1994). Author: Ester Vendrell.

These events had another further consequence, namely that in the field of dance the only way to become a professional was to turn dancers into choreographers.

The fact that grants were addressed to the staging of a piece conditioned the choreographic philosophy of a company, as the pieces were programmed for one hour to match the format of theatre productions. This had obvious consequences in the rhythm and quality of the pieces. As we can see in Chart 4, with the beginning of grants and co-productions, the growth of long one-hour pieces is non-stop and this has several consequences, such as the importance of brand new pieces, growing concern to present novelties, massive production, forgetfulness with regards to repertoire, and little exploitation of the pieces due to the poor condition of premises and the non-existence of circuits.

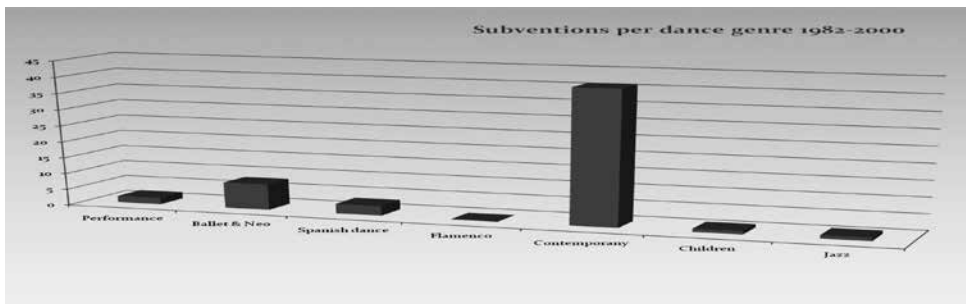


Chart 4. Source: Annual reports of Catalan Ministry of Culture (1982-2000). Author: Ester Vendrell.

The main dance genre chosen for grants was contemporary dance and author production. The system of subvention favoured mainly production and innovation. In this way grants discarded other formats: classical and neoclassical style, flamenco and projects that were more demanding with regards to the basis of dance technique and long-term technical requirements that cannot be achieved with low budgets, lack of stability and unclear future expectations.

In spite of this, we should say that during this period the Catalan Government commissioned two studies to evaluate the feasibility of having a regular dance company in Catalonia in order to respond to the demands of the sector. It would have been the resident company of the Gran Teatre del Liceu. Such an idea was finally dismissed due to cost and the difficulties in finding the right person to lead the project (Bonet et al., 1987).

According to Chart 5, we can say the dance style that came out of the institutional roadmap for dance between 1982 and 2000 was an author-based contem-

was privately managed with state funding, whose programmes responded to the artistic direction of the moment. All the other dance programming was in the hands of state-funded theatres that were the only existing public cultural premises. If we have a look at the chart we can see this unbalanced distribution in Catalonia (Chart 6). As we have already mentioned, many emerging companies were created by dancers with a strong personality and a clear philosophy: formalism and abstraction in Angels Margarit's Mudances, expressionism and physicality in Danat, abstract aestheticism in Lanònima Imperial and Transit, theatre-dance in Mal Pelo, Senza Tempo and Nats Nus, narrative dance in Ramon Oller and Mar Gómez. Finally, there was the failed attempt to exist of two small companies close to neoclassicism or post-classicism.

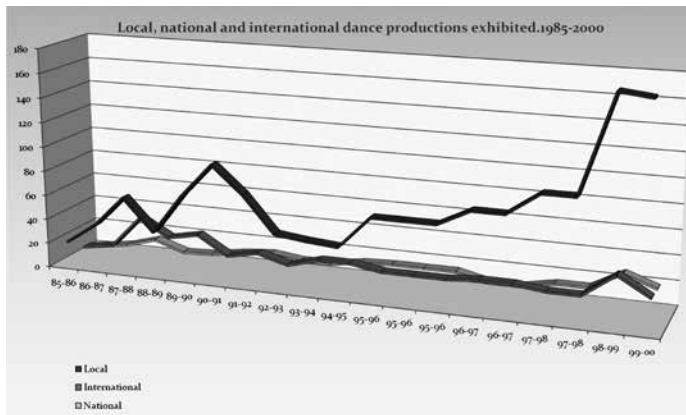


Chart 6. Summaries of seasons' programmes, MAE (Museum of performing arts) de l'Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona.



Danat. *El cielo está enladrillado*. Mercat de les Flors. 1990. (Photo: Josep Aznar).

3. 1993-2000. A period of continuity and stagnation in dance policies

The last 7 years of the 20th century were conditioned by the so-called post-Olympic crisis, and the decrease of the country's general budget and the culture budget in particular of the Spanish government, led by the conservative neoliberal party, the PP. This period features the growing of economic neoliberalism and privatization in many sectors. Culture underwent an important change with European policies backing cultural industries and with the coming into force of a new but insufficient and ineffective Sponsorship Act. It is true that, during these years, theatre private enterprises emerged and the private dance programming offer completed the public one for both companies and audiences.

In 1992 the Catalan government opened the *Espai de Música i Dansa* with only 200 seats, a very small but regular annual grant, and a very small fixed budget. It would last until 2005. The *Espai de Música i Dansa* gave birth to a number of new creators in the 1990s. The most outstanding feature here is the diversity of styles and personalities of these companies. Theatre-dance was strengthened by Marta Carrasco and Jordi Cortés, butoh dance was introduced by Andrés Corchero, narrative dance with a touch of humour by Mar Gómez, contemporary Spanish dance by *Increpación y Color Danza*, abstract and poetic physicality by *Erre que Erre*, and the very first performatic and conceptual dance pieces by *General Electrica*. In other exhibition premises *Sol Picó* showed up as the most radical of the new choreographers. One of the general phenomena of that period was the "solo" format, a reflection of how a poor budget could condition the development of creation. Once again we can see how the general budget did not match the stamina of the growing companies. If we look at Chart 6 we can see how the growth and sustainability of the pioneer companies stagnated, and how the emerging companies got smaller grants than the previous companies the decade before. This is how the generational change-over became even more difficult. We can also see how these democratic policies preferred quantity over quality, so they mortgaged the professional and labour conditions of the coming generation. The life of the companies was relatively short: between 1983 and 2000 in Catalonia, 54 different companies received grants but only 9 of them lasted for ten years: the average was 6 years of life per company. This lack of investment in culture could be seen in the programming of quality international dance. The *Mercat de les Flors* had to put an end to international proposals at the same time that the *Gran Teatre del Liceu* had to close due to the great fire and its subsequent reconstruction that would take 5 years between 1994 and 1999.

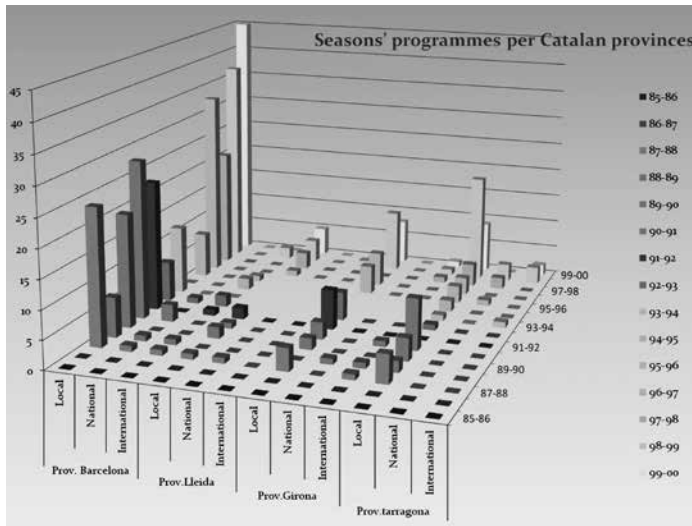


Chart 7. State of dance in Catalonia between 1985 and 2000. Summaries of seasons' programmes, MAE (Museum of performing arts) de l'Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona.

Chart 7 shows the state of dance in Catalonia between 1985 and 2000. We can see how it is almost only local dance on the stages from the 1995-96 season onwards and the total decrease of international companies, and just a few companies from the rest of Spain. We could even say that *Catalonia danced herself* and this only brought about stagnation and isolation.

If we have a look at the chart of statistics of the Oficina de Difusió Artística (ODA) [the Office for Artistic Diffusion of Barcelona Provincial Council created in 1993], we will see that it shows other aspects of dance at the time that must be taken into account (ODA, 2001). If we have a look at the programmes, we will see that, when it comes to styles, contemporary is the predominant one. We can state that promotion went mostly to local companies with low budgets and avant-garde proposals. Another outstanding feature of Catalan dance is the unbalanced distribution across the country. We can see no productions at all in Lleida or Girona. But neither can we see international dance productions or productions from the rest of Spain. The only contact with the international scene takes place almost exclusively in the city of Barcelona. Another relevant point is from the 1990s is the division between the programmes in public and private theatres and the division of audiences according to dance styles. This became more so as we approached the new millennium and with the role of cultural industries.

This is how outstanding ballet, flamenco and Spanish dance companies and musicals from Spain or international would be staged by private festivals or seasons, and in turn Catalan dance and contemporary dance would be staged by public theatres. This fostered a deep and serious division. Local creators had

no access to important stages such as Gran Teatre del Liceu or Festival de Perelada and, in turn, classical dance, flamenco or Spanish dance did not get staged by public circuits at low subsidised prices. What is more, the two national dance companies from Madrid could hardly be seen in Catalonia and only *Compañía Nacional de Danza 2* could be seen in private theatres. The public policies for dance exhibition were biased and unbalanced: only contemporary local projects were supported (not so much by audiences sometimes) and they left other styles like ballet or flamenco unattended and in the hands of private theatres, with higher prices and little publicity which did not favour their social dissemination or rooting.

Conclusions

To conclude we could say that the policies of the first years of the Spanish democracy between 1975 and 2000 drew a choreographic picture that looks like this: Catalonia gave birth to a cultural model merging the nationalist cultural tradition and the avant-garde movements to catch up with modern times. This is the model that Catalonia had been trying to build since the middle of the 19th century, during the expansion periods of the *Mancomunitat* and 2nd Republic both shattered by the 2 military dictatorships of the 20th century. The government's policy of grants proved not to have a long-term roadmap and did not respond to the real needs of the sector. It fostered a fragmented panorama of many creators with small companies, who responded to the trends of international avant-gardes in an attempt to fulfil the demands of the audiences and discarding other stylistic proposals or socio-cultural needs of the moment. However, we can consider this as the richest and most productive period in history as far as choreographic creation is concerned. The policies of the time promoted creativity and creators rather than stable companies. There was excessive democratization of economic resources that impaired the consolidation of larger projects and fragmented resources in such a way that it became difficult both to become a fulfilled professional and to facilitate the generational change-over.

Due to the conditions attached to the grants, companies were bound to produce new shows and pieces on a yearly basis and were not able to preserve their own repertoire or to develop other kinds of projects more culturally, pedagogically or socially oriented. The demands of the grants system also conditioned the format of companies and the duration of performances and choreographic pieces. Identifying ballet, flamenco and Spanish dance with the favourite genres of the immediate past of Franco's dictatorship drove

them to marginality, although in time they would retrieve their place on stage and the favour of wide audiences. This has also compelled a whole generation of dancers to leave the country to find a job in the great international companies or in Madrid. Another relevant fact is the huge amount of companies in the city or Barcelona, or its province, and the almost non-existence of projects for the rest of the Catalan territory. Dance has been an urban phenomenon. The international projection and exchanges during the first years of democracy were shattered during the mid-1990s, as the attempt to show local productions at international levels failed completely. We can conclude that, with democracy, Catalonia managed to reroute dance, a cultural activity that had been entirely at the dictator's service before 1975. However, although article 44.1 of the Spanish Constitution, and article 20 of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy did guarantee access and right to culture to all the citizens, they have not been fully developed and neither have they been completely fulfilled.

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