



**SPACES
FOR
STREET
DANCE**

REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5	Collaborators
6	Executive Summary
10	About Street Dance
12	Sydney's Street Dance Culture
14	Case Studies
18	Literature Review
23	Methodology
25	Results
45	Discussion
48	Current Spaces
53	Recommendations
62	Conclusion
64	From Rachael and Feras
66	Endnotes
70	Appendix

COLLABORATORS

This project is an initiative by Spaces for Street Dance, an unincorporated group, in partnership with Critical Path funded by a City of Sydney Innovation and Ideas Grant.

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photography.JNY
Claire Hicks
DSDA Inc.
AusBreaking
Kai Reid
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The Spaces for Street Dance research and feasibility study conducted extensive research into Sydney's street dance community, engaging over 194 individuals representing diverse styles and perspectives. Using surveys, a focus group and interviews, the study is the first of its kind to explore street dance experiences and practices in Sydney.

This study was designed in response to the National Cultural Policy consultation, which highlighted the need for greater support of dedicated spaces for street dance in order to facilitate community interactions, and to provide a platform for artists to collaborate and evolve.

Promoting Inclusive and Diverse Cultural Spaces: Street dance in Sydney encompasses a rich tapestry of styles, each with its unique needs and requirements. Providing specific spaces for various street dance styles is essential to accommodate and support the diverse artistic practices within this culture.

Fostering Community and Artistic Exchange: Street dance thrives on active participation and communal interaction and support. Street dance events serve as vital hubs where dancers come together to exchange ideas, refine their craft, and develop a strong artistic practice supported by a larger community.

Addressing Recognition and Respect: Despite the extensive training and dedication required to excel in street dance forms, there is a notable lack of recognition and respect from insitutionalised structures and the wider public. Street dancers must often deal with abuse and harassment from the general public and people in positions of authority.

Summary

This research project explores how street dancers use and experience public space in the City of Sydney. It provides an overview of the Sydney street dance community, including insights into demographics, patterns of participation, as well as experiences of current public spaces used for street dance activities. It analyses the advantages and disadvantages of current public spaces, and identifies areas for further development. It also showcases case studies of high profile international examples of public spaces used for street dance.

The overarching goal of the project is to develop a deeper understanding of street dance community practices, to provide a way forward for improved use of city spaces, to set the foundation for stronger relationships between arts and business, and to highlight the valuable contribution of street dance to the cultural fabric of the City of Sydney.

Methodology

The research included:

Literature review: A literary overview of street dance and public space in order to situate this project within the larger fields of dance studies, cultural studies, urban planning, and creative cities.

Case Studies: An analysis of current spaces in the City of Sydney and international examples to identify elements of success and areas for improvement.

Survey of Sydney Street Dance Community: A comprehensive survey specifically designed for the Sydney street dance community to gather insights into demographics, participation trends, and experiences.

Focus Group and Interviews: One focus group and select interviews with stakeholders in the Sydney street dance community. These interactions provided valuable firsthand accounts of experiences that elaborated upon and provided more nuanced insights into individual experiences.

Key Findings

Sydney Street Dance Demographics and Trends: Insights from the survey, focus group, and interviews illuminated the demographic makeup of the Sydney street dance community, shedding light on trends in participation and dance styles. These insights provide a foundation for tailoring strategies to better support street dance activities and practitioners.

Benefits and Limitations of Street Dance in Public Space:

Participants' perspectives highlighted unique challenges faced by the Sydney street dance community, such as space limitations, broader public perceptions, abuse, and safety issues. The research also revealed the importance of public space in street dance cultures, uniquely able to facilitate community-building, artistic exchange, and improved wellbeing. These insights guide the project's approach to fostering the development of street dance cultures.

Recommendations

The project identifies three possible recommendations that will address current issues and limitations in street dancers' use of public space. These recommendations include:

Relationship-building: For existing spaces, it is recommended that stronger relationships are developed with key stakeholders, such as security in the area, to ensure there is clarity and consistency in how the space can be used. There is also a need for more all-weather public spaces, and so a number of potential sites are suggested for further consultation and development.

Signage: Signs can assist with designating a public space for dancing. These signs can also hold important information, such as no filming without permission, CCTV in use, and a QR code for further information about Sydney's street dance culture and this project.

Structural modifications: The two highest priorities in terms of what street dancers are looking for in a public space are a flat, smooth surface and protection from the weather. Structural modifications can be made to existing spaces to enhance them for street dance activities, and to address the need for more spaces.



ABOUT STREET DANCE

‘Street dance’ is an umbrella term that encompasses various distinct contemporary dance forms developed outside ‘institutionalised’ spaces (such as studios and companies) by African-American as well as Latinx young people. Grounded in the traditions of African-American social dance, street dance styles are largely improvisational, highly social, and often competitive. They are cultural forms that have community and individual identity at their core. They are situated as part of a wider multi-arts culture that originated alongside other elements of hip hop culture and other ‘underground’ forms in New York and Los Angeles from the 1970s onwards.

Street dance is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of forms, including but not limited to:

[Breaking](#)
[Popping](#)
[Locking](#)
[House](#)
[Hip Hop](#)
[Krumping](#)
[Waacking/Whacking](#)
[Vogue - Old Way, New Way, & Vogue Fem](#)



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
 Sydney Square Dance Battles (DSDA Inc.)
 Pier Street Underpass
 2021

Dancehall, Afro styles, and newer forms such as Litefeet, are now also being included under the umbrella of street dance, as seen in ‘all style’ or ‘open style’ battles.

While there are shared values across street dance styles, in terms of the emphasis on community, creativity, and improvisation, they also vary in important ways due to their differing historical contexts. Styles such as waacking/whacking and vogue were developed as a means of expression, resistance, and empowerment for LGBTIQ+ communities. Some styles, such as breaking, developed a strong practice of battling (competition), while other styles, such as house, had jamming and freestyle at their core.

The basis of the development of all forms of street dance has been participation. Participation as a dancer, as an audience member, as a teacher, as a mentor, and as a community member. Selected public spaces become hubs through which dancers meet, exchange ideas, and build their artistic practice.



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
 Made in Redfern (DSDA Inc.)
 Redfern Community Centre
 2023

Due to the accessibility of street dance, in that no expensive equipment is required, in conjunction with the opportunities for self-expression and community-building, street dance is a highly diverse activity. It is performed and practised all around the world by people of a variety of ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientation, and gender identities.

Street dance has become a global industry. Dancers travel the world to attend events, exchange with local dancers, learn from senior street dance artists, and build a global reputation. Such renowned international competitions include IBE (Netherlands), Freestyle Session (United States), and Radikal Forze (Singapore/Vietnam).

SYDNEY'S STREET DANCE CULTURE

Street dance has been practiced in Sydney since the late 1970s/ early 1980s, introduced through a mix of music, video clips, and films as well as dancers travelling around the world and passing on knowledge. It is a vibrant and diverse community, or connected communities, that spreads across the city and draws people in from surrounding areas. The Sydney scene has extended as far as Newcastle and Wollongong, but with key scenes across Western Sydney, City of Sydney, and the Inner West.

Sydney's street dance scene is very diverse. It is practiced by significant numbers of artists drawing on South East Asian and East Asian heritage. Historically, there has been a strong connection with First Nations communities in Redfern. There is also a growing number of artists that identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Street dance is an established sector in Sydney, with many studios, events, and community organisations supporting this vibrant scene. See appendix for the key organisations that make up this sector.



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
4A x DSDA Dance Battle: Open Styles
(DSDA Inc.)
Pier Street Underpass
2022

Sydney Street Dance and Public Space

There is a long history of using public space for street dance activities and jams in Sydney. Much of the research from the report refers to ICC (detailed below).

Other sites that have been historically used for street dance activities, and have many of the same benefits and limitations as the above, include:

[Under the bridge / Pumphouse](#)
[Outside of the Blood Donation Centre](#)
[Outside of the Powerhouse Museum](#)
[Hyde Park](#)

International Convention Centre (ICC)

The use of this space for street dance activities precedes the building of ICC. Dancers have used the Entertainment Centre for practice sessions, jams, and events since about 2005. This is the most popular space used by street dancers, but the characteristics of the space means that it is preferred by some street dance styles over others. The space will be discussed in more detail in the discussion.

143 (Pronounced 'One Four Three')

The foyer outside The Downing Centre Courts, 143-147 Liverpool Street Sydney, has been used by breakers since around 2004. Breakers may train there Monday to Thursday nights from about 7pm till late. While this is an open practice spot, it is the home to breaking crew '143 Liverpool Street Familia' (established 2005).



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
143 LSF Anniversary Jam
143-147 Liverpool Street
2015

CASE STUDIES

Dancers use and repurpose a range of public spaces around the world. Common examples include train stations (such as Mizokonuchi Station in Tokyo since 1994), bus terminals (such as OCAT in Osaka), outside art galleries and museums (such as the Hong Kong Museum of Art, or the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane), public parks (such as Yoyogi Park, Tokyo), shopping arcades (such as Tivoli Arcade in Melbourne), other public spaces (such as outside the IMAX Theatre in Melbourne, the Manorom Tower courtyard on Rama 4 Road in Bangkok), as well as of course gymnasiums (such as Kisahalli in Helsinki since the 1980s). These spaces become famous and attract dancers from overseas. They become hubs for dancers from overseas to connect with the local scene and learn about the local culture.

In this section, we have selected some key case studies to discuss in more detail. These include Forum Q – a purpose built space in Campbelltown, Le Centquatre – a cultural centre in Paris, and Yoyogi Park – a public park in Tokyo.

FORUM Q, CAMPBELLTOWN

'Forum Q' is a bespoke creative space in Lithgow Street, Campbelltown. Conceptualised and designed by one of the authors, Feras Shaheen in collaboration with Campbelltown Arts Centre, it features a dance floor, bean bags, mirrors, lighting, and a bright, inviting design for people to "gather, train, and create". It was created as an art installation as a reclamation and celebration of public space, with the aim of building and inspiring a vibrant street culture within the Campbelltown CBD. It was commissioned by Campbelltown City Council in 2021, with special thanks to Paduano Investments, and funded by the NSW Government Streets as Shared Spaces. It has hosted a variety of street dance events and jams, attracting dancers from beyond Campbelltown, while also bringing the local Campbelltown community together.

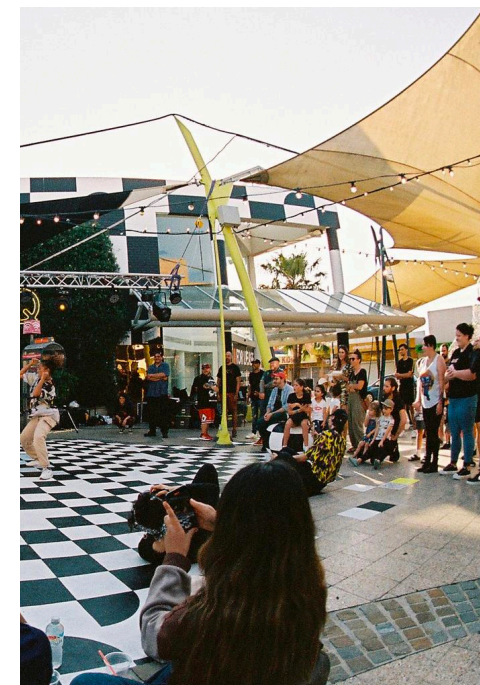


image credit: **Tom Kentta**
Cypher Session
Forum Q Campbelltown
2022

LE CENTQUATRE, PARIS

'Le Centquatre' is a public cultural centre in Paris in the 19th Arrondissement. Originally a funeral service building, it was redesigned as part of a larger urban renewal project and established in 2008. It is spread over approximately 39,000 square metres, and is home to resident artists, artist workshops, exhibition spaces, theatres, restaurants, and more. Specifically, it offers a free space for dancers and artists to train. It attracts people from a range of disciplines (not only street dance), and there is space for the general public to watch the dancers while they eat/drink/shop. The free large training space provides clean concrete floors, powerpoints, access to toilets and water fountains, protection from the elements, and security on sight. It is open Tuesdays to Sundays from 11am/12pm until 7pm.



image credit: **Rachael Gunn**
Le Centquatre, Paris
2021

YOYOGI PARK, TOKYO

'Yoyogi Park' is one of the largest parks in Tokyo. The space contains grassed areas, concreted areas, and tiled areas, with lots of trees around these spots for shade, which allows dancers to practice and train in the shade. The round spaces allow better viewing and more space to share and connect with people. The space has attracted a variety of disciplines, including football freestyles, jump rope, rockabilly, and breaking. Breakers have used the space since the early-mid 1980s, with the park also being referred to as 'Break Park'. There was also a famous 'B-boy Park' yearly hip hop festival free to the public from 1999-2017. Certain unique dance groups that use the space, such as the Rockabilly Dance Group, have gone viral with their dancing videos and made the park a large tourist attraction.



image credit: **Yoyogi Cypher**
Yoyogi Park, Tokyo
2023

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dance Engagement

The recent National Arts Participation Survey showed that in 2022, 97% of Australians engage with the arts, with 44% creatively participating.^[1] It also showed that 6% of the Australian population aged 15 and over creatively participate in dance (that is, not specifically to engage with their own language group or community or cultural background). Significantly, **3% of Australians over 15 participate in street dance or hip hop**, a figure that is consistent with the 2019 survey. This is the same participation rate as contemporary dance (3%) and much higher than ballet (1%). **Yet there is comparatively little support for street dance activities and practices**. Such a disparity in funding and representation was highlighted in the recent joint submission from leaders from street dance to the National Cultural Policy. Convened by Critical Path and Dancehouse with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts, the submission called for a national strategy for street dance, more robust, transparent, accessible and contestable funding, and targeted initiatives to strengthen the sector (among other things).

In terms of the demographics of who participates in dance, the survey found that 25% of First Nations respondents participated in dance (in comparison to 8% of non-First Nations respondents), 17% of CALD respondents participated in dance (compared to 6% of non-CALD respondents), and more than one in ten respondents with disability participated in dance (12% compared to 8% of those without disability). From these figures it can be said that dance attracts a diverse cross-section of the population. This study contributes further knowledge to these figures by gathering data on who participates in street dance within the City of Sydney area.

Street Dance

Street dance and street dance communities have existed in Sydney since the late 1970s/early 1980s, providing a space for people of diverse cultural backgrounds to come together and develop modes of artistic expression and social exchange. Local street dance communities are part of a global movement, interconnected through large street dance events, social media, as well as shared cultural practices and values. There is a growing body of research on street

dance cultures around the world,^[2] showing the way in which these diverse styles and cultures connect and become embedded within localised social structures and identity politics. More specific research has emerged on particular styles, including waacking,^[3] krumping,^[4] house,^[5] popping and locking,^[6] and breaking.^[7] These works historically situate contemporary street dance practices around the world, mapping contemporary practices to the origins of the forms. Due to the way street dance is grounded in notions of community, identity, and belonging, much of the growing field of street dance has looked at how it operates within specific spaces and socio-cultural contexts. For example, hip hop dance in the Philippines,^[8] and Hawai'i,^[9] work on breaking in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China,^[10] Havana,^[11] as well as increasing research on Australia's breaking culture^[12] and all-style scenes.^[13] Some of the research into street dance styles has examined the relationship between dance practices, local places, and institutions, such as in Toronto,^[14] France,^[15] and Japan.^[16] This work reveals the integral role of institutional support for the artistic, communal, and creative development and sustainability of street dance cultures, events, and networks.

Breaking, one form of street dance, has received greater attention and support as a result of its Olympic connection. After a successful showing in the Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires in 2018, breaking will have its debut and potentially only event at the 2024 Paris Summer Olympic Games after not being included in the LA 2028 programme. There is a growing body of research looking at the impacts of breaking in the Olympics around the world,^[17] which some view as part of a longer history of sportification.^[18] Breaking's categorisation as a sport complicates the way in which many dancers have viewed themselves as artists.^[19] This also points to the way street dance exists across multiple categories and funding domains, as it is not only a dance, but also an art form, a sport, and a community engagement activity.

Creative Public Space

This research project seeks to not only contribute to discussions of street dance, but feeds into larger discussions on city design and development. As a creative practice-based activity, street dance is an important contributor to the cultural and social expression of a city.

The design of 'creative cities'^[20] has been a recurring priority for many governments over the last twenty years. Seen as a way to attract affluent professionals to leisure activities, the development of creative cities was seen to drive economic growth, tourism, and enhance social inclusiveness.^[20] Within the City of Sydney, the Creative City: Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024 outlined 'precinct distinctiveness and creativity in the public domain', 'new avenues for creative participation', and 'sector sustainability: surviving and thriving' as its three main strategic priorities.^[21] With dance attracting participation from people of a range of ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, it can be seen as a valuable site for not only leisure activities, but also creativity and cultural participation.

The subject of cities, and the balancing of inclusivity and equality with economic growth and innovation, has been the focus of much recent debate in the field of urban sociology and human geography.^[22] This work takes a broader look at the historical development of cities, as well as the intersection of cities and culture, examining the different ways cities support creativity, cultural diversity, economic opportunity, and identity formation.

20



image credit: **photography.JNY**
International Convention Centre (ICC)
2024

One way to support increased creative participation is to break down the once separate boundaries between city and institutionalised spaces and dancing. From thinking about how choreographers could build better cities,^[23] to dismantling the separation between art museums and street dance,^[24] there is a growing call to blur the once distinct hierarchies and boundaries as to where art can be experienced and accessed.



image credit: **photography.JNY**
International Convention Centre (ICC)
2024

Public Space and Wellbeing

There is growing research examining the impacts of different kinds of urban spaces, such as open spaces, green spaces, and blue spaces (areas dominated by water), on community-building and wellbeing. One recent systematic review showed the importance of designing public spaces that facilitate social interaction in terms of enhancing a sense of community.^[25] Another looked at the way vulnerable groups were considered in urban redesign, and found that interventions that focused on participation, quality of design (such as perceived sense of safety), and sustainable living were associated with increased wellbeing and satisfaction, particularly among women and low-income communities, yet more research was needed on the experiences of migrants, racial minorities, and people with disabilities.^[26] The COVID-19 pandemic, and related restrictions and lockdowns, forced a reevaluation of the relationship between urban space and quality of life, and led to increased research in this area.^[27]

Public Space and Safety

Thinking about cities as sites for leisure activity and cultural expression must be coupled with considerations of public safety. Experiences of the urban environment significantly differ for women and people of diverse gender and sexual identities, and some researchers have called for increasing consideration of spatial equity in the urban environment.^[28] The NSW Government's Safer Cities Survey Report (2023) revealed that women were twice as likely (59%) to feel unsafe in public spaces after dark than men (31%).^[29] Furthermore, some groups of men and women were likely to feel less safe, including women and men with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTIQ+ women, and women under 25. Many of these groups are present in Sydney's street dance community. The report also found that people feel safest in activated spaces with other people around, an important consideration given the popularity of sites of street dance in public space.

One study in the UK that looked at the gender dimension to security and wellbeing in public space found that technological monitoring systems did not appear to increase a sense of safety for women participating in the study, instead giving a sense of policing and control.^[30] Design factors centered on natural surveillance, such as landscaping and lighting, enhanced perceptions of equal access and safety when navigating public spaces.

With street dance attracting a diverse array of people, particularly from marginalized backgrounds, this report offers important insights into the considerable issues of safety for street dancers in the City of Sydney, as well as recommendations for mitigating instances of abuse, harassment, and theft.

Dance and Wellbeing

A recent systematic review of dance research, which included 109 research papers over a twenty year period, outlined the positive impacts of dance to health and wellbeing.^[31] Regardless of gender, age, or fitness, dance classes or dancing socially improves our wellbeing and health across our life span, particularly in terms of our confidence, creativity, and sense of self. More specific research on youth mentoring through street dance showed an increase in mental wellbeing, positive future outlook, desistance from antisocial behaviours, and greater awareness of life opportunities.^[32]

With the 2020-2022 National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing finding that 38.8% of people aged 16–24 years had a 12-month mental disorder,^[33] it is more important than ever to invest in activities that support young people to develop better social, psychological and physical health outcomes. This study contributes the first research on the positive impacts of street dance on wellbeing in the City of Sydney.



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
INNOV8TION - Invitational 8v8 Battle (DSDA Inc.)
Leichhardt Town Hall
2021

METHODOLOGY

There were three research methods used in this study to understand street dancers' experiences and uses of public space. This includes:

- [Surveys](#)
- [Focus group](#)
- [Interviews](#)

The methodology used was a grounded approach, which allowed earlier findings to guide the questions in the subsequent focus group and interviews. The methodology was also informed by the authors' own street dance experience and practice. All participants were over 18 years of age. Participation was voluntary. This survey was approved by the Macquarie University Human Ethics Research Committee.



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
4A x DSDA Dance Battle: Open Styles (DSDA Inc.)
Pier Street Underpass
2022

Surveys

The survey provided a quantitative overview of the Sydney street dance community, including demographics and trends in participation. Building a record of the number of practicing street dancers in Sydney will help to inform and support future projects and programs. It also provided qualitative insights on street dancers' experiences using public space. These responses helped to inform the questions in the subsequent focus group and interviews. Participation in the survey was anonymous.



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
Oceania Breaking Championships (AusBreaking)
Sydney Town Hall
2023

Focus Groups

One focus group was held with dancers of diverse street dance styles. Focus groups are an effective and efficient way to gain in-depth insights into the attitudes, opinions, and behaviours of a key group. Participants were asked how they use public space for street dance, their experiences, motivations, challenges, and ideas for enhanced use.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key individuals. These interviews addressed specific themes or questions that emerged from the other research. Interview participants were selected to ensure any missing perspectives from the focus group could be included in the research.

SPACES FOR STREET DANCE

RESULTS

679

SURVEY
RESPONSES

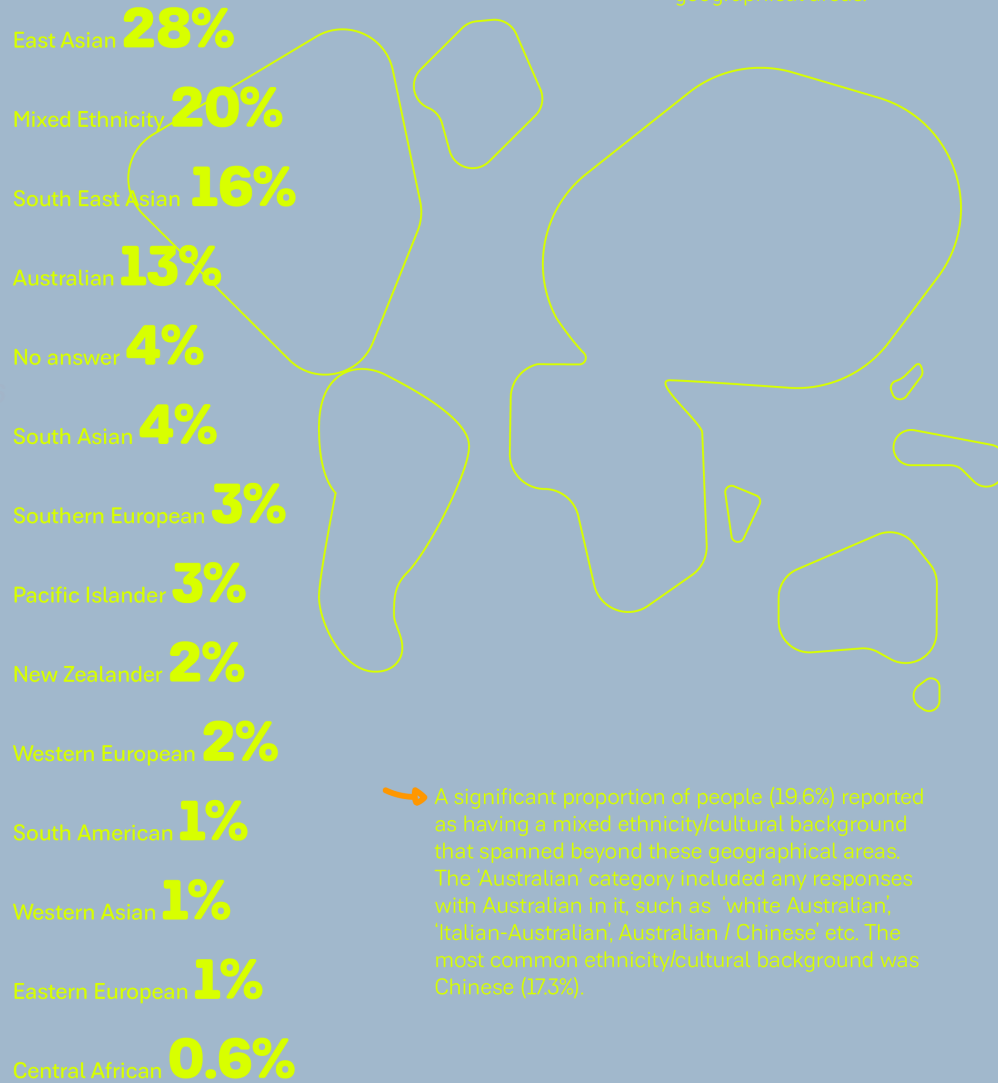
+ Focus group (13 people),
Interviews (2)



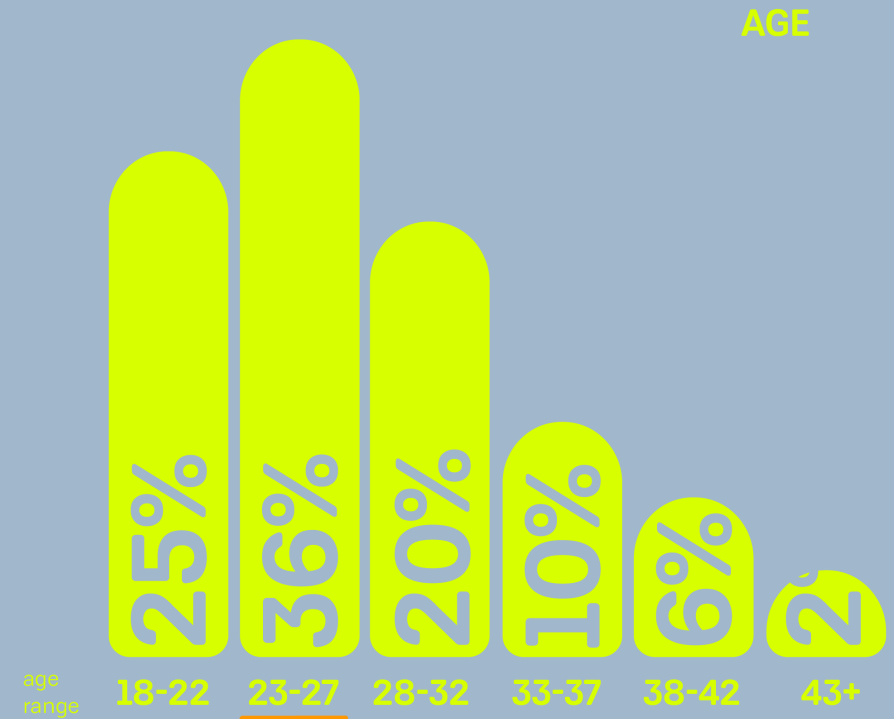
Respondents identified the following ethnicity/cultural backgrounds:

There were 90 unique identifiers used by survey participants to describe their ethnic/cultural background.

These were roughly grouped into key geographical areas.



A significant proportion of people (19.6%) reported as having a mixed ethnicity/cultural background that spanned beyond these geographical areas. The 'Australian' category included any responses with Australian in it, such as 'white Australian', 'Italian-Australian', 'Australian / Chinese' etc. The most common ethnicity/cultural background was Chinese (17.3%).

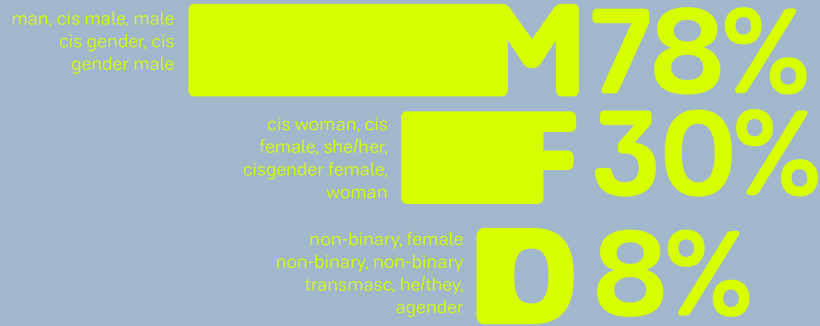


age range

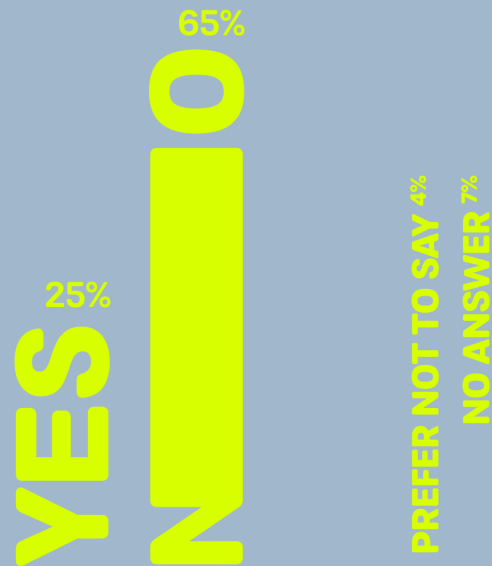
Only dancers over the age of 18 were eligible to participate in the study, however there is a growing number of dancers under the age of 18 that practice in public space.

In response to the question what is your gender identity:

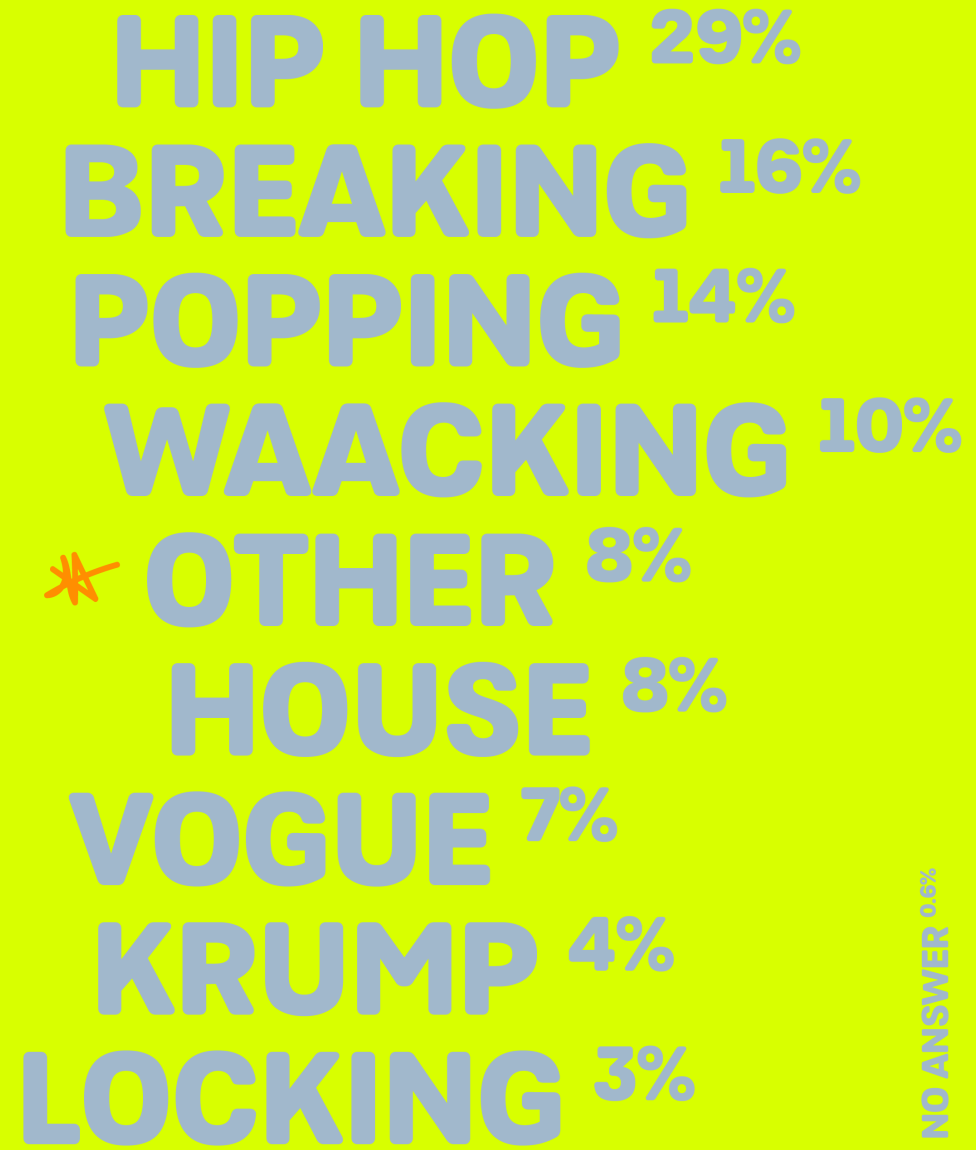
In response to the question what is your gender identity:



Participants that identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community:

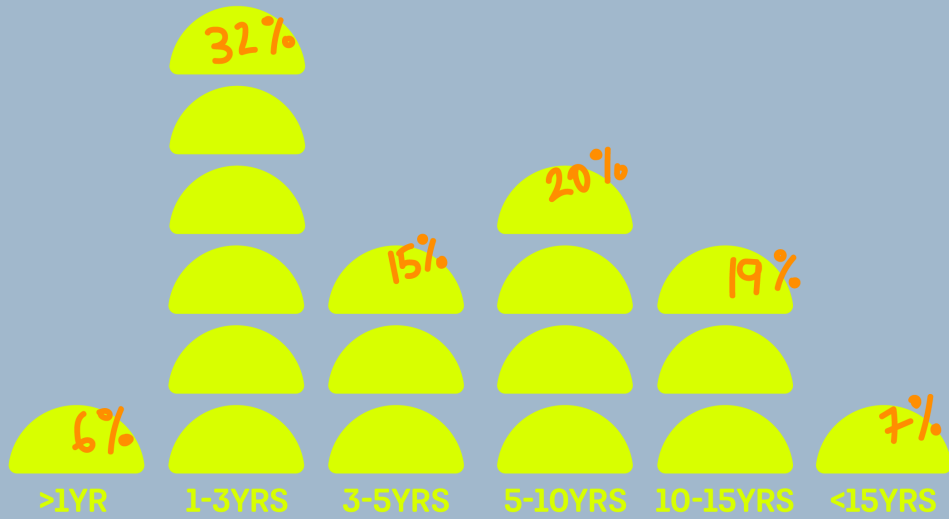


Main styles of street dance in Sydney:



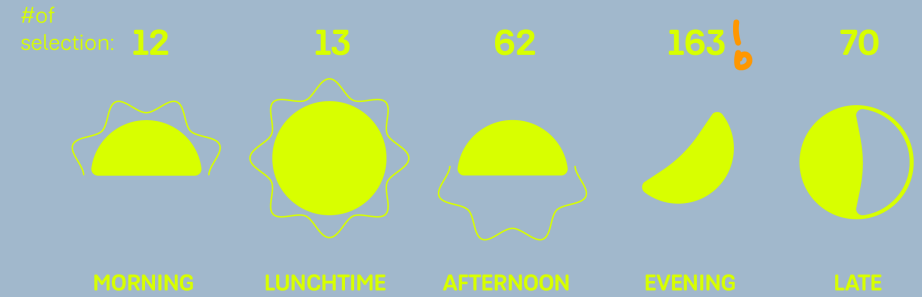
* Street dance is an umbrella term used to identify various dance styles each with their own respected culture and needs. Due to the large variations of styles in Sydney, we have included an 'other' option that does not fall in the listed styles. Other styles responses: Kpop, Jpop, Lirfeet, Allstyles, Latin Styles - Salsa, Samba, Forró, Bachata, Afro, Amapiano Afro, Dancehall, Choreo, Freestyle, Partnering, and Parkour.

Years involved in street dance:



Time of day participants practice:

▶▶ Respondents could select more than one answer.



What days do you usually train?

EVERY DAY!

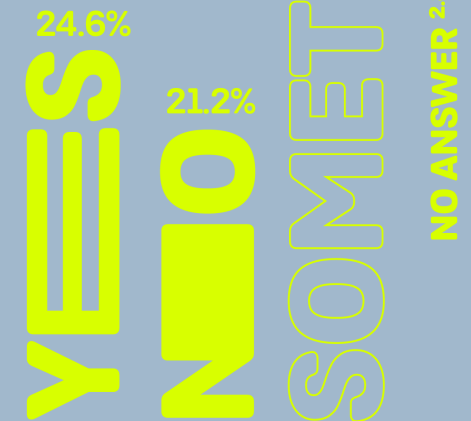
→ Respondents could select more than one day, and every day of the week had at least 37%.

Practice frequency:



↳ THIS SHOWS THAT 96% OF RESPONDENTS PRACTICE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK.

Is your current schedule limited by the current availability of spots for training/practice/jamming?



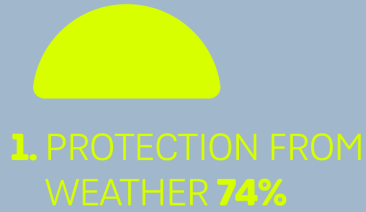
What do street dancers in Sydney want?

In analysing the **top 8** choices by respondents, the results are as follows:

10



Missing from this list was accessibility, including close to public transport and parking. This should have been one of the suggested options as it was frequently mentioned in the follow up question ('what else') and mentioned in the focus group.



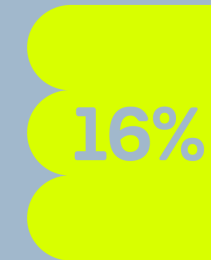
Preference regarding public space:



Multiple spaces across City of Sydney where the resources are split and spaces are smaller but still open for everyone to train/practice/jam.



One centralised space in the City of Sydney that is fully resourced where everyone goes to train/practice/jam.



Multiple spaces across City of Sydney where the resources are split and spaces have different focuses (such as style / activity etc).



NO ANSWER 2%

Positive Experiences

There were many themes identified across the survey data and in the open-ended discussions regarding the positive experiences of dancing in public space. These have been broken down below, alongside a quote that is emblematic of each theme.

→ Social

- Community
- Friendships
- Heterogeneity

→ Self development

- Skills/artistry
- Confidence
- Wellbeing

→ Interaction

- Public
- Collaboration

Social

Community:

“So simple, just meeting new people through dance, creating connections and building your own community.” “This is where we help each other to learn and respect one another, even though we don’t speak the same language we can understand the language of dance”

Friendships:

“I usually make friends and spontaneously meet other dancers when there are events that are held in public spaces or when training/jamming. Public open spaces are really good for building community”

“Making new friends and working with new people based on a connection to the shared space”

Heterogeneity:

“Meeting people from outside my bubble and interacting with them through jams/etc” “I have had so many experiences that I met and jammed with dancers from all over the world in our public training spots. We could share our skills and knowledge even we have different languages.”

Self Development

Skills/artistry:

“I love to see what everyone is up to and what they are working on. Feels a lot more casual and supportive training in public/on the street than in a studio with all the other people and groups training beside you.”

“Meeting people I never would have that have no problem sharing insights into techniques and training, but also just generally being around people and sharing/dancing is also in itself a really positive experience.”

Confidence:

“The community is so welcoming and nurturing of new people. The Wednesday Mixtape Jams at the ICC is an especially pleasant experience for establishing connections whilst improving your confidence. It’s also so nice to know that every time I go to the ICC, there will most likely be someone I know there, so it really feels like a safe and communal space.”

Wellbeing:

“I was feeling down and my mood suddenly went up after jamming with those wonderful dancers”

“Before getting into street dance, my goal was to have the confidence to practice in parks because I think its such a beautiful experience in comparison to being in a classroom or inside. Being able to move and breathe in fresh air, or near trees takes the practice to a different level. I’m also always confronted by how easy it is for people to stay

at home these days, we have so much entertainment and comfort that i think its easy to stay isolated but content. I love dance in public spaces because i think it really gets people back into the public space with a goal and is an amazing way to connect with others and communities with purpose and joy."

Interaction

Public:

"Seeing the joy on people's faces when they pause their night to just watch us, and then respectfully clap our dancing - not interrupting us or awkwardly filming us. People have been inspired to learn more about street dance and have started dancing. We've also had collaborations with filmmakers, photographers, and other artists just from them seeing us dance in public."

"Meeting other dancers in jams (building community), being encouraged/reinspired by seeing others practicing even when i am not, i have had little kids come up to me while im practicing and just want to dance along which was awesome, some positive interaction with the public where they clearly are enjoying seeing someone dancing in the space"

Collaboration:

"Photographers and videographers wanting to work with us or document us. Organisations, businesses and individuals approaching us for gig opportunities. General enthusiasm and encouragement from the general public."

"Simple friendly encounters, connection with other artists and dancers, job offers."

Negative Experiences

There were several themes identified across the survey data and in the open-ended discussions regarding the negative experiences of dancing in public space. These have been broken down below, alongside a quote that is emblematic of each theme.

→ Safety

→ Abuse/harassment

→ Assault

→ Theft

→ Disrespect

→ Right to Privacy

→ Use of space

Safety

Abuse/harassment:

"Been yelled at, threatened, catcalled, deliberately disrupted, made to feel unsafe when dancing by myself as a woman (mostly men not taking no for an answer)"

"Transphobia, homophobia, racism, fetishisation of women, mockery, recording inappropriately, intimidation"

"People/drunk people from the general public have approached me in an intrusive way while I was training, which made me feel very uncomfortable."

Assault:

"I was at ICC Dancers Alley when some members of the public climbed to the roof and dropped glass bottles onto the dancers below."

"Some youth came up to our freestyle circle where we were feeling vulnerable, and they made fun of our styles, yelled out slurs and threw beer at us."

"Sexual assault, uncomfortable interactions, intrusion, no sense of personal space."

Theft:

"I have also witnessed and heard of members of the public steal speakers/ wallets/ laptops from dancers."

"Random people coming up to disrupt and taunt us. Reducing this could be having spaces that are more enclosed and safe, away from public eyes. Also others have had their belongings stolen"

Disrespect

"There are times where I have felt very unsafe due to public members, often drunk, or just looking to ridicule or cause trouble when dancing in a public space. Just two weeks ago, while training for a team battle and creating routines and jamming at ICC with a few other members at around 9:30PM, a group of 5-6 men approached us and insisted we dance for them in a very aggressive manner to which we said no. They were likely drunk or had been drinking. I've had multiple not very uncommon experiences like this through out the years. I find that out of many other creative endeavours, dance is one of the least respected, especially in terms of street dance, and this leads to ridicule and arrogance from the public at times."

"People (who know nothing about dance) « joining » mid-training, imitating and making fun of us/me. Had someone film that and post it online. I also witnessed people getting their speaker stolen."

Right to Privacy

"When training in places such as the ICC, strangers I don't know have filmed me without my consent on multiple occasions. Even after asking them to kindly stop, they continue to film which is not ok and ruins the overall energy of the jam/training session I have seen and also been subject to harassment by intoxicated party goers and also by men who are passing through the space. This makes me feel unsafe as a woman who is quite small in stature and also sometimes self-conscious about my dancing. I have also seen personal items be stolen and fights break out as a result of unsafe individuals and groups who think it is amusing to interrupt our space."

"Just some people from the public not really taking us seriously and interrupting or not entirely respecting our space and privacy (e.g. videoing us). Additionally, there might be some members of the public that linger around which makes people feel unsafe."

Use of Space

"Unclear and often conflicting rules that let the rangers ask us to leave and encounter random bypasser that intrude our practice and make fun of us"

"Harassment from strangers and security (when we are not breaking rules). Being filmed at inappropriate angles and times."

"Harassment from security guards to move along."



image credit: **photography.JNY**
International Convention Centre (ICC)
2024

What Else Do Street Dancers Want?

Other Spaces:

"I think while ICC is a great space to jam, it is worth noting it may not necessarily be the most accessible to everyone. Moreover it may not always be available, especially during showcase season. Other public spaces for dancing are slowly popping up (in City of Sydney and outside), but I think more work is needed to develop/promote said spaces." "I feel like the ideal space would be in a building (undercover and away from public) and large with lots of mirrors. Something that even large spaces like ICC struggle with is competing music from different speakers."

Increased Safety:

"Some level of CCTV, security to protect the dancers" "They should be monitored, well-lit, open, and have enough people walking by for safety reasons."

Spaces Across Greater Sydney:

"Would like to see more spaces out in western sydney. Most places are closer to the city or in the CBD. There is a big dance community in the West as well."

Clarity Around Events and Busking:

"Awareness of the grey area of busking vs just using the public space for practice is nil. Legality of holding events and possibly using the power from public spaces is uncertain. Feel like events within city of sydney and wanting to hold something yourself is held by specific people/groups."

Respect:

"I find it quite frustrating that if I want to go out and train at the park, I'm very rarely respected in the same way as someone who is at the park to run/workout etc. Even people who gather to do boxing classes don't seem to receive the same amount of attention as dancers. Even at my local park back home, although no one ever approached me I always felt uncomfortable unless the park was completely empty. And not because I'm uncomfortable dancing in public at all."

DISCUSSION

Discussion

This section provides a more in-depth look at some of the key findings from the research. These findings inform the recommendations made in the next section.

Diversity of Street Dance

The survey found that street dance is a highly diverse activity, with a significant proportion of respondents from East Asia (28%) or with a mixed ethnicity/cultural background (20%). This makes street dance more diverse, higher than the national average which found that 17% of CALD respondents participated in dance (compared to 6% of non-CALD respondents). It also revealed that dancers are not limited to the City of Sydney area, and are travelling into City of Sydney spaces from all over Greater Sydney and beyond (including interstate). This shows the importance of City of Sydney spaces for Australia's street dance culture and artistic sector.

The survey also revealed the diversity of street dance in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation. 25% of respondents identified as part of the LGBTIQ+ community, and 8% as non-binary/agender. Furthermore, 61% of survey respondents are between the ages of 18 and 27, and these high rates of youth participation shows how street dance is an important site for youth peer support, community, and development.

Dancing Trends

The survey found that hip hop is the most popular style of street dance for new dancers (under 5 years). This may be due to the Hip Hop Nation event at the time of the survey. Leaders within the other styles noted the poor take up of survey responses, such as in krumping and breaking.

The low numbers in the early years for some of the other styles, such as popping and breaking, may also be due to the different views on what qualifies as a participant or a member of that community. Often this may be a level of skill or battle experience that can take more than 1 year. Due to the steep learning curve of breaking it often takes a few years for people to not only identify as a breaker, but also be

called a breaker. This may impact the numbers of beginners who complete the survey and tick breaking.

It's also worth noting that the survey asked for the main style that a person was doing, and it is not uncommon for people to start in one style and move to another, or do multiple styles. The survey did not capture this data.

The dance styles with more experienced dancers, including breaking and popping (more than 15 years experience), is likely due to their more established styles and cultures.

Experiences

Positive experiences

The research (survey, focus group, interviews) highlighted the breadth of positive experiences associated with dancing street dance styles in public spaces. This includes opportunities for new friendships, community-building, improved confidence, artistic development and exchange, and opportunities for new collaboration and employment.

Opportunities to meet new people, to become part of a community, and to build new skills and confidence were the key themes that emerged from the research. These positives are compounded when taken into the context of the diversity of street dance, including the opportunities to connect with people outside a dancer's usual circle, and the vulnerable groups within street dance. Of particular interest are the opportunities for further artistic collaborations and paid employment – opportunities that otherwise would not have been available had the dancers been practicing in an enclosed studio.

Many of these positive experiences were specifically connected to ICC, which is likely due to the largeness of the space at ICC and the numbers of people that regularly jam and train there. The range of street dance styles and people provide a unique opportunity for artistic development and collaboration. The research also highlighted the significance of this space as a site of cultural, social, and historical significance. That dancers not only have a shared connection to this space, but have also been using this area since the early 2000s, shows the lasting significance of this space. Yet repeated issues with security reveal the precarity of their use of this space. Greater clarity is needed regarding how the space can be used.

Negative experiences

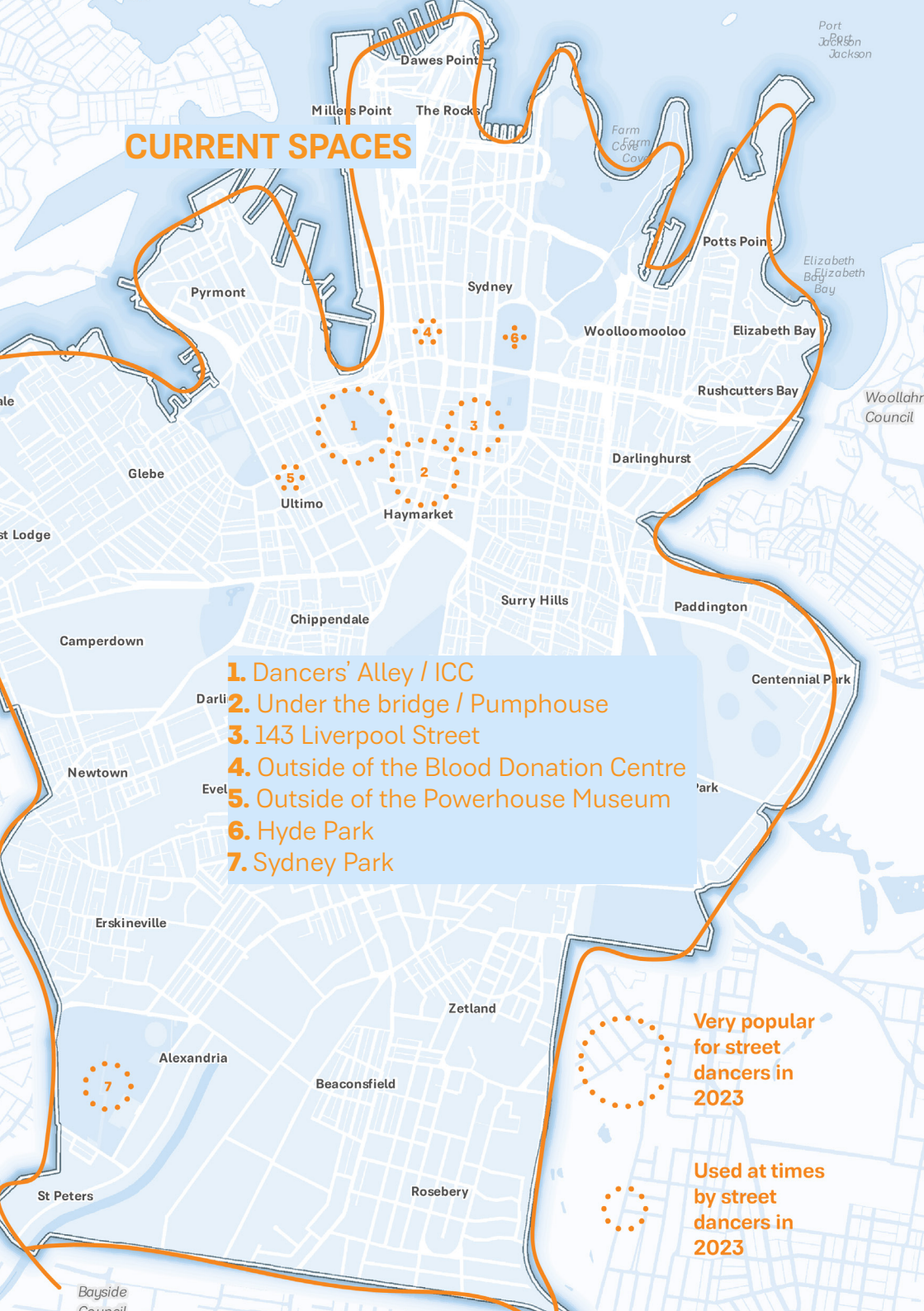
One of the key issues that emerged from the research was safety. That is, being able to dance in public without being harassed, abused, assaulted, or without your belongings being stolen. Dancers described countless instances of the general public calling out names or slurs, approaching dancers in an intrusive way, invading their personal space and making them feel uncomfortable, or throwing things at them. Often vulnerable dancers were targeted, such as LGBTIQ+ folks or younger female dancers. This has the potential to lock out vulnerable groups from accessing the positive outcomes of dancing in public space.

Compared to other spaces like 143, there was an over-reporting of negative experiences at ICC. The key differences between these two spaces are the accessibility and openness to the public. Being in public should not diminish a right to privacy or personal space, and yet this was a recurring experience at ICC, with members of the general public filming without consent (even after being asked to stop). While dancers can experience the positives of community and confidence, they can quickly experience a loss of autonomy via the negative reactions and interactions with the public.

Despite these negative experiences, people are still drawn to practice and jam at ICC, and so it is worthwhile considering ways to minimise these risks. Perhaps the lack of clarity around the space means the general public feel they have a right to engage with the dancers. It may be that having a designated space might mitigate some of these risks, such as other public spaces like skate parks.

A total of 76% of respondents said that their current schedule is limited by the current availability of spots of training/practice/jamming at least sometimes. This shows that there is significantly more potential in activating public spaces with street dance. With a preference for training/jamming in the evening, these spaces could have other purposes during the day, and then be activated after business hours (such is the case for 143). There was strong support for more public spaces for dancing, specifically all-weather spaces with a smooth, flat floor that are easily accessible via public transport/parking.

CURRENT SPACES



1. Dancers' Alley / ICC
2. Under the bridge / Pumphouse
3. 143 Liverpool Street
4. Outside of the Blood Donation Centre
5. Outside of the Powerhouse Museum
6. Hyde Park
7. Sydney Park

Very popular
for street
dancers in
2023

Used at times
by street
dancers in
2023

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SPACES

This section highlights the advantages and limitations of current spaces in the City of Sydney so as to inform the recommendations in the following section.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE (ICC)

Advantages

- Mirrors installed (important for some styles)
- Some permission granted
- Wide open space
- Large availability
- Free to use
- Close to parking and public transport
- Ventilation (studios can get too hot with lots of people dancing indoors)

Limitations

- Not weather proof
- Floor is not smooth
- Very public – some harassment from public
- Some issues with security
- Not enough space at particular times of the year (such as when events are on or during showcase season)

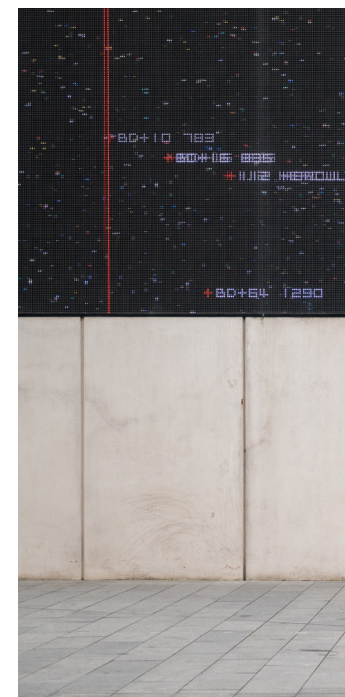


image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
International Convention Centre (ICC)
2024

143 (PRONOUNCED 'ONE FOUR THREE')

Advantages

- Weather proof
- Permission granted
- Floor is smooth and flat
- Less public - infrequent harassment from public
- Close to parking and public transport
- Free to use
- Ventilation

Limitations

- Limited availability (weeknight evenings)
- Small - limited number of ppl
- No mirrors (important for some styles)



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
143-147 Liverpool Street
2024

General Sites

While this is a study on uses of public space, it is still important to compare the advantages and drawbacks to other types of spaces.

Dance Studio

Advantages

- Floor
- Mirrors
- Weather proof

Limitations

- Cost
- Limited availability
- Smaller size
- Ventilation
- Sometimes need public liability insurance

Community Hall

Advantages

- Floor
- Size
- Weather proof

Limitations

- Cost
- Limited availability
- Ventilation
- Sometimes need public liability insurance

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results of the research regarding the experiences of dancers, their preferences, and the issues and limitations of current public spaces, this section outlines the three possible recommendations for improvement. These are: relationship-building, signage, and structural modifications. While these initiatives provide greater safety and assurance to dancers who prefer a dedicated space, it should not be the only option available to dancers wanting to jam/train in public space. Spontaneous public space activations are part of street dance culture, and by providing a dedicated space this initiative should not discourage or limit those activations elsewhere.

The following prototypes are created as an initial concept to help visualise the ideas we have gathered. Further research, consultation and prototyping is needed before any development. Each of these concepts require a different level of commitment. Some can be executed with a small amount of resources while others require greater investment.



CONCEPT 1: RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

There are two elements to this concept. The first is building stronger relationships with the stakeholders of existing spaces. The second is to build relationships with organisations to establish and activate potential new spaces for dancing.

ICC

Due to the over-reporting of abuse and harassment experienced at ICC, a key recommendation is to build a stronger relationship with the operators and security of ICC. It is important that there is greater clarity in how the space can be used, so that there is consistency in the managing of the space.

Another recommendation is to install a clearly visible CCTV camera to watch over the space, which may work to dissuade the general public from harassing and intimidating the dancers. However, this may create the negative affect of policing and control, so must be installed in conjunction with stronger relationships being built between security and the ICC dancers. Also, there is a need for clarity on how the monitoring will ensure dancers are provided with timely support.

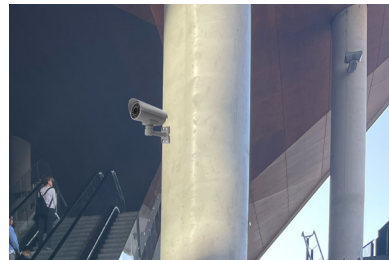


image credit: *Feras Shaheen*
International Convention Centre (ICC)
2024

Potential New Spaces

The survey revealed that a majority of dancers preferred the option of multiple spaces across the City of Sydney where the resources are split and spaces are smaller but still open for everyone to train/practice/jam. With this in mind, there are a number of potential venues and spaces that could be suitable for street dancers, however more consultation and relationship-building is needed. Current spaces are also clustered around the CBD. There is room to develop spaces more spread out across the City of Sydney.



CONCEPT 2: SIGNAGE

This concept is a visual indication of the commitments made between the organisations involved. The signage is designed to clearly articulate the potential uses of public space, working in a similar way to a skatepark. This offers a level of legitimacy in how the space can be used, and should prevent the general public and security from harassing dancers and forcing them to leave the space. It also offers a way for the general public to learn more about street dance culture and its history in Sydney.

This concept builds upon concept one - building relationships with security in the area and installing CCTV.

1. Small Add-on Sign

The brightly coloured sign can clip onto existing signage, and indicates that this may be a space for movement.

Features:

- A QR code that offers more information about Sydney's street dance culture and this initiative
- An icon with text explaining that there are security cameras active in the area



image credit: **Feras Shaheen**
South Eveleigh
2024



image credit: **Feras Shaheen**
Central Station
2024

2. Large Standalone Sign

The brightly coloured standalone sign clearly designates these spaces as an area for movement, which will prevent the general public and security to harass and push away dancers. Works in a similar way to a skatepark.

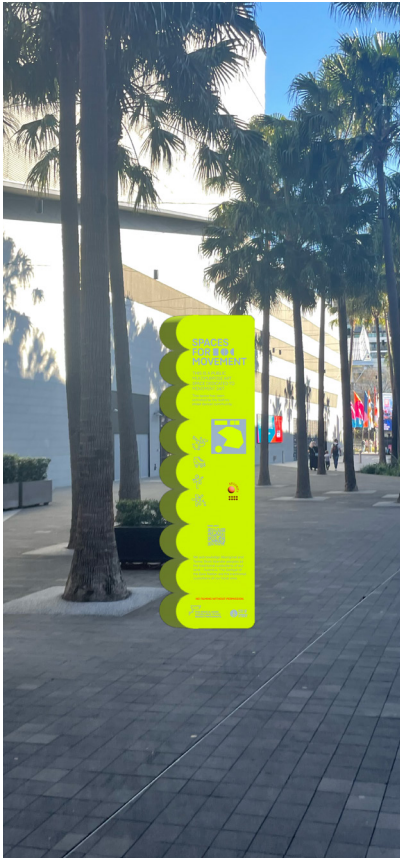


image credit: **Feras Shaheen**
International Convention Centre (ICC)
2024

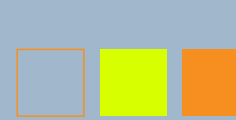
Features:

- Icons of movement marking what kind of activities can be undertaken in this space
- A map of the designated area
- A security emergency button for people to call if they are being harassed or in danger
- A QR code that offers more information about Sydney's street dance culture and this initiative
- An icon with text explaining that there are security cameras active in the area
- An icon with text explaining that there is no filming allowed without permission
- An acknowledgement of country
- Glow in the dark feature so that the information is clearly visible at night when the space is predominantly used

Collaboration needed:

- Stronger relationship with security in the area
- Add CCTV to the area
- Direct line to security for the emergency button

VISUAL LANGUAGE

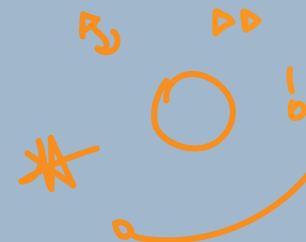


A base colour used mainly as a background colour alongside a highlighting vibrant yellow/green and a bright clear orange. It's important to keep the visual communication simple, clear and youthful to cater for the energetic street dance community and general public. These colours are commonly used in many sports such as football (soccer) and tennis but also contemporary art platforms such as galleries, theatres and studios.



- ▶▶ Abstract shapes are used to represent the city influence and the implementation of spaces for street dance within existing architecture. The shapes simultaneously reference cyphers, movements and formations of street dancers.

These distinctive shapes can be used as a tool to physically indicate that the spaces allocated are connected to this initiative/project. They are also used in the communication to the audience (ie website + social media and reports... like this one).



A hand drawn type of line work used to highlight certain information or imagery. Used to lead the audience to the main points.

CONCEPT 3: STRUCTURAL MODIFICATIONS

This final concept builds upon concept one and two, in that it relies upon relationships with relevant stakeholders and incorporates signage. The concept is structural modifications, and would require the largest amount of investment and further development. This concept is in response to the survey results which put protection from the weather as the number one priority for dancers, and the second priority which was having a flat, smooth surface for dancing.

60



image credit: **Feras Shaheen**
South Eveleigh
2024

Features:

- Protection from weather
- Provides a flat, smooth surface for dancing
- Offers smaller more focused areas for different jams and practice sessions
- Signage that provides all the features in concept two



image credit: **Feras Shaheen**
South Eveleigh
2024

Features:

- Protection from weather
- Amount of space
- A larger open space
- Signage that provides all the features in concept two

CONCLUSION

This report has provided an overview of Sydney's street dance community, including demographics, patterns of participation, and experiences of dancing in public space. It has revealed the many positive outcomes of street dance activities in public space, including building confidence, artistic exchange, job opportunities, community-building, and wellbeing, helping us understand why street dance is so popular in the City of Sydney. However, it also called attention to the limitations and safety concerns of existing spaces, highlighting the need for further support, investment, and relationship-building. As such, this research report has provided an insight into how to support key groups, like young people and vulnerable groups.

This project is the first in-depth research conducted on a street dance community in Australia, and sets the foundation for further research, consultation, and development. It is a reminder of the importance of public space in terms of the vibrancy of a city, showing the diverse ways public space can be used in culturally and socially significant ways. The versatility of street dance should not preclude it from further investment or support. This report has revealed the top priorities in a public space for street dance activities. More support will enable street dance to continue to be practiced on the street in a safe way, thus ensuring it remains grounded in community values and stays accessible to a diversity of people. Investing in street dance is investing in the cultural fabric, wellbeing, and vibrancy of the City.



FROM RACHAEL AND FERAS

We want to take a moment here to highlight the importance of this project for us, personally, as members of Sydney's street dance community. This research has not simply been about investigating a topic or a hobby, street dance is a life force for us and for many in our community.

This project has provided a space to document, for the first time, the richness of the street dance scene in Sydney. It has revealed to us what we already knew and could see – that street dance is a highly diverse activity attracting people from all over Sydney, from different cultural backgrounds, ages, gender identities, and sexual orientations. This is the first step in documenting a significant part of Sydney's cultural identity and history.

We understand and see street dance as a new world where the rules, codes, and values are community-driven. In this way, it is more of an equaliser than other sports and dances, which largely privilege white people and culture from the point of entry. Greater support is needed for street dance so that it can continue to be shared and expressed publicly, at no entry cost.

For many, street dance is an adopted culture – it's the culture people can live and experience while part of their own culture might not be accessible to them. And thus it becomes a space for people to build new communities and connections within a heterogeneous space. Providing more support to street dancers and street dance activities can only serve to strengthen those social connections and communities.

Yet street dance offers more than just the capacity for social cohesion, and the physicality of it of course is a great way to stay fit, but there is also the confidence it builds. Street dance offers a site through which people can learn about themselves and find their identity. The confidence required to dance in front of others, to find new movements and expressions, and share knowledge, not only brings people out of their comfort zone, but brings people together.

These new expressions founded in street dance, however, are rarely recognised beyond street dance spaces. Australia is decades behind countries like France in terms of providing a space for street dance artists in contemporary theatre spaces. Grants and institutions are geared towards classical repertoire while street dance is grounded in improvisational practices.

Fluctuations between ignoring and exploiting street dance in artistic and commercial spaces needs to stop. The lack of respect for street dance styles in these dominant spaces provides context for the stories of abuse and harassment facing dancers at ICC. If street dance is not respected in dominant spaces, why should it be respected in public spaces.

This project is merely the start. It has given us the means to hear from people within the community, to provide a platform for their voices to be heard, to share their experiences – both good and bad – and an opportunity to be officially recognised and represented within the City of Sydney.



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
Destructive Steps: A Celebration of
Australia's Street Dance Community
Opera House
2023



image credit: [photography.JNY](#)
Destructive Steps 10 (DSDA Inc.)
Ultimo Community Centre
2018

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Methodology

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APPENDIX

A list of some of Sydney's street dance organisations.

→ [AusBreaking Association](#)

www.ausbreak.org

@ausbreaking

→ [Crampers Inc.](#)

@officialcrampers

→ [Destructive Steps Dance Association](#)

www.dsda.destructivesteps.com

@dsdainc

→ [Four Walls](#)

www.fourwallsculture.com

@fourwallsculture

→ [Kapow FTW](#)

@kapow.ftw

→ [Popping Nation Association](#)

@poppingnation

→ [Ryugi](#)

<https://www.ryugi-official.com/>

@ryugi.battles

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