

**Unlocking the transformative potential of culture and the arts**  
**Innovative practices and policies from social enterprises and third sector organizations active in the cultural sector**

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**Movimento DansasAparte, by CERCIMA**

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**Organisation/project**

Movimento DansasAparte,

CERCIMA - Cooperativa de Educação, Reabilitação, Capacitação e Inclusão de Montijo e Alcochete, C.R.L.  
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**Picture/illustration**



**Historical background (incl. when, whom, why, how it was created)**

Movimento DansasAparte, inclusive dance company, was created in 2005, as a therapeutic project inside an organisation, a social cooperative of people with physical and intellectual disability, driven by a professional on rehabilitation, Joana Santos, which saw in dance the possibility to overcome limitations of conventional therapies for students with physical and learning disabilities with aggressive and negative behaviour instigated by adverse contexts and trajectories in family and schools, and the persisting difficulty of society to deal with disability, particularly that where the organisation is set up.

The change in the characteristics of the publics of the cooperative due to the modifications in the institutional frameworks for supporting children with disabilities, namely their inclusion in regular schools, the organisation support to broader issues of “students with special needs” and more complicated problems, instigated the need for innovative approaches to new problems.

Through artistic expression and body movement the project worked with potential instead of need, intended to improve self-esteem and respect for others and to value the self and the

abilities. Dance was a way of showing to the participants that body contact needed not to be aggressive and negative. Dance was also a way to value what people with disability can do instead of the usual negative representation of society of what people with disability cannot do.

The project evolved to a primarily artistic focus in 2011 when it realised that it had potential to open up and to reach the local community and render visible what the local community prefer not to see. So they began hiring dance teachers and choreographers and present shows with artistic quality to be viewed not only by the families but by the whole community. In 2015 *DansasAparte* celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a dance festival (*MuDansas*) consisting of workshops for the and with the community and premiered a celebratory performance. Since 2015 *Movimento DansasAparte* premieres a new show every year.

In 2016 the project stretched its ambitions and opened auditions for people with and without disability to prepare a dance performance starting with a Creative Dance Laboratory. That year 2 people of the community applied. The next year (2017) they launched a Creative dance laboratory II and opened auditions again. This time most of the people applying had disabilities from other social cooperatives. Also in 2017 it promoted the project *DansArtes* with another open call, receiving many participants at the audition, mainly dance students from the Faculty of Human Motricity and Higher School of Dance, resulting in a stunning performance the premiered in 2018. From then on, the success of these calls spread so that in 2018 there were 50 applicants for the Creative Dance Laboratory III, having a final group composed of people with and without disabilities from various regions of the country.

In the meanwhile, there were several training projects to improve the dance skills of people with disability. So, ambitions didn't stop here as in 2018 the dancers of the company, a core group of 14 people, all with intellectual disability, certified in level 1 contemporary dance, by the International Dance Council of UNESCO

They launched a project of dance workshops with local schools (*MuDansartes nas Escolas*), with the moto "Dance for Change", for classes that have students with special education needs working with the whole class (students and teachers), to promote inclusion and equal opportunities. They worked with 8 classes (150 students) with workshops based on "me", "the other", "improvisation" and "space composition". These workshops have the same philosophy of the project that originated *DansasAparte*, to shift the focus on what children cannot do to what children can do, to value difference and individuality.

The dance company *DansasAparte* is now increasingly recognised by the community as an artistic project, recognised by their artistic quality, being invited to perform in other that solidarity events, such as dance festivals locally and in other cities (ex. Lisbon Dance Festival) and in cultural moments of conferences or other events. The municipality treats the company as one of the cultural agents in the city.

The company wants to evolve towards an artistic structure with dedicated space open to everybody in the community although it finds it more difficult the conditions for the evolution from a social to artistic project than the evolution from artistic to social project as there are examples.

## **Mission and objectives**

Mission: to show the value of difference through artistic expression and to change personal and community attitudes regarding difference: "not everybody needs to do everything the same way".

Objectives: artistic production in the field of dance and body expression; valuing body potentialities, stimulating creativity and improvisation; promoting self-esteem and self-confidence; foster relationships with the community and raise awareness about the capacities of people with disability; enable people to exercise their citizenship by enjoying resources and activities in their community.

## Main current activities

DansasAparte has several projects so they self-describe more as a movement (Movimento DansasAparte) than a project or a service. These projects are the DansasAparte inclusive dance company, Creative Dance Laboratory's (I to IV) (*Laboratório Criativo de Dança*) the school workshops, (*Mudansartes nas Escolas*) and Parents/children movement workshops (*Mudansas IV – Laços de Família*).

**DansasAparte, inclusive dance Company** is composed of 14 dancers, divided 50/50 between people with and without disability. Dancers with disability are both from CERCIMA and from other organisations, and their disabilities are as challenging as cerebral palsy and trisomy, and non-disabled people include the coordinator of the project, now also trained in dance, and a variety of people from the community, including retired dancers.

**The Creative Dance Laboratory**, with yearly open calls, since 2016, for people with and without disability with and without dance experience, includes a 3-5 day artistic residency to set up a street parade or urban intervention (2017 and 2018), or/and weekly rehearsals to set up a performance (2016 and 2019). It uses improvisation, contemporary dance and the DanceAbility® method, taking advantage of the evolution of contemporary dance to overcome limits imposed by classical dance which skills and bodies were competent to dance ("everybody can dance"). Auditions are aimed at seeing who how people connect and complement each other so that body movement of the group flows naturally to create a show with artistic quality.

The technical team includes a professional choreographer and the DansasAparte coordinator as rehabilitation professional, teacher and dancer certified in the international DanceAbility method. The shows are co-created by the choreographer and the artists.

It has both social inclusion objectives through mixing dancers with and without disability, artistic objectives of promoting expression and creativity to set up a dance show, and outreach objectives promoting inclusive dance in the community.

**MuDansartes in schools**, now working with 10 pre-school to secondary school classes with students with special education needs in local schools, using as methods improvisation, DanceAbility, creative and contemporary dance. Teachers include 13 dancers of the DansasAparte company, and three professionals also from the Company, specialized in rehabilitation, dance and choreography and socio-cultural animation. It aims at help schools promoting social inclusion of students with special needs, improve students social and personal development as well as creativity, expression, individuality and autonomy. Also, working with young children is a way of reaching out to parents and changing minds about the place of people with disability in society. These classes establish a long-term relationship between the children and the teachers, as they become known in the community as artists.

This approach is also used in small informal groups in CERCIMA to work with older students that after failing in (or being failed by) the regular school system and are sent to the social cooperative for professional training, some of whom with problems of violence and pet criminality.

**MuDansas**, workshops for parents and children with/without disabilities from CERCIMA/community are aimed at improving family relations and, together with other activities show these parents that their children are more able than they tend to think.

## Legal form and legal status

DansasAparte has no legal form and is described as being more like a movement than a project or a service at CERCIMA - Cooperativa de Educação e Reabilitação do Cidadão Inadaptado do Montijo e Alcochete. C.R.L. It is part of the social solidarity cooperative, CERCIMA, a large organisation set up in 1976 as part of the movement of social cooperatives

of professionals and parents of children with disability set up after the Portuguese Democratic Revolution.

### **Mode of governance, stakeholders and forms of participation**

Since it has no legal form, DansasAparte is under the governance mechanisms of the cooperative CERCIMA. The coordinator of the project makes proposals to the board of CERCIMA and is in close contact with the president of the board. The president and the board of CERCIMA are very supportive of DansasAparte as it helps meeting the organisation mission to promote the social inclusion and wellbeing of people with disability (“when they are on stage they are artists, even the parents respect their children more”, says the president). It also has been changing the knowledge and the image about CERCIMA in the community.

Inside the DansArtes company decisions on the inclusion of new members are made by all and there is a philosophy of co-creation throughout the Laboratory and Mudansartes in schools.

### **Resources structure (monetary and non-monetary)**

DansasAparte draws from a variety of sources and resources. Since the beginning It has developed through grant funding for its different projects, which allows paying choreographers and professional dancers and other expenses.

Being based in CERCIMA DansasAparte uses both the technical staff, two people (the coordinator and a monitor), and some of the dancers and the infrastructure of CERCIMA.

Through partnerships with local organisations such as the Regional Arts Conservatory, the Gymnasium, the Theatre, and the Municipality they borrow spaces for classes and shows to reach out to the community.

The partnership with the Conservatory and the Faculty of Motricity also means that dancers in training may participate in DansasAparte activities as dancers or in qualification projects.

There is a group of 3 to 10 dancers which work with DansasAparte sometimes in a voluntary basis and sometimes paid, when there are grants.

The shows sell tickets although the income generated is still not enough to go from just covering expenses to paying the dancers, an ambition present in the idea of increasing professionalization of the company.

### **Economic and financial sustainability**

DansasAparte development has been made possible and evolved through grant funding, both of private corporate philanthropy and public funding for small projects in the field of disability. Two major project funders have been the national institute *Instituto Nacional de Reabilitação*, the public body oriented working with policies and programmes in the field of disability and the philanthropic Prémio BPI Capacitar 2017

The embeddedness of DansasAparte in the organisation CERCIMA and the commitment of some external collaborators such as dancers, allows its survival throughout project funding fluctuations.

### **Main connections with the social and solidarity economy and the cultural or arts sectors**

DansasAparte is both a way to provide personal development and full access to citizenship for people with disability and to change society views about disability and difference. It is described by CERCIMA president as a way the organisation can reach out to the community beyond the stigma of disability and the relative isolation of the organisation beyond their clients. It became a flagship of the image of CERCIMA in the community. It not only helps to

overcome the negative image of disability and difference but also the prevailing idea of social organisations as poor, unprofessional, small and charity oriented.

### **Transformative potential statement**

More than art as therapy, DansasAparte is a tool for creating links between an institution and people with disability with society at large, overcoming boundaries, bringing people to visibility, overcoming stigma and promoting the value of difference in society. Dance values difference and shows that people don't need to do the same things the same way.

### **References**

Interviews to Joana Santos, coordinator of DansasAparte and Cristina Dias, President of the Administration Board of CERCIMA, in 16 July 2019.

Webpage of DansasAparte: <http://www.cercima.pt/pt/55/dansasaparte>

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