

Creative Motion

D2.1 – Needs Assessment Report

Date of Delivery – May 2026

Authors – Ioanna Liossi, NAMASTE

Eleni Anoyrkati, Tero

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Acronym	Creative Motion
Project Title	Enhancing Active Ageing Through Theatre and Movement
Programme	Erasmus+ Sport (Small-scale Partnership)
Starting Date	January 2026
Duration (in months)	18 months
Call (part) Identifier	Erasmus-Sport-2025-SSCP
Grant Agreement No	101243742
Due date of Deliverable	31/05/2026
Actual Submission Date	07/04/2026
Responsible/Author	Ioanna Liossi, NAMASTE
Dissemination Level	Public
Status	Final

DELIVERABLE DETAILS

Deliverable Title	Needs Assessment
Work Package Number	WP2 – Foundations for Movement: Research & Design for Creative Motion Duration
Deliverable Number	D2.1
Lead Beneficiary	NAMASTE
Authors	Ioanna Lioffi, Eleni Anoyrkati (Tero)
Due Date	31/05/2026
Actual Submission Date	07/04/2026
Type of Deliverable	Report
Dissemination Level	Public

REVISION TABLE

Version	Name	Date	Description
V 0.1	Eleni Anoyrkati, Ioanna Lioffi	30/03/2026	First Draft
V 0.2	Eleni Anoyrkati	07/04/2026	Final Version of submission

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

1. Background - About the Creative Motion Project	4
2. Introduction	5
2.1 Purpose and Scope of the document	5
3. Methodological Framework	6
3.1 Overall Approach	6
3.2 Research Design	7
3.3 Data Collection Tools	8
3.4 Ethical Considerations	9
4 Participant Profiling & Needs Assessment	9
4.1 Participant Characteristics and Context	10
4.2 Physical Condition and Functional Needs	10
4.3 Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions	11
4.4 Social Engagement and Participation Preferences	11
4.5 Barriers to Participation	12
4.6 Motivations and Expectations for the Programme	13
4.7 Key Insights for Programme Development	13
5 Review of Good Practices	15
5.1 Review of Good Practices from Projects and Initiatives	15
5.2 Literature Review Based on Academic Research	18
5.3 Implications for Programme Design and Co-Design Matrix	19
6 From Needs Assessment to Co-Design: Operational Framework and Guidance	19
6.1 Synthesis of Key Findings	19
6.2 Suggested Practices and Activity Approaches	20
6.3 Guidance for Step 2: Programme Development and Customisation	21
References	23
ANNEX 1- INDICATIVE ACTIVITY CONCEPTS FOR CO-DESIGN	24



1. Background - About the Creative Motion Project

The **Creative Motion** project is an Erasmus+ Sport Small-scale Partnership that promotes active ageing through theatre, expressive movement, and physical activity. The project integrates gentle exercises, storytelling, and improvisation to support accessibility and engagement among older adults, enhancing physical health, cognitive function, and social well-being.

Creative Motion strengthens community capacity by training sports facilitators, senior-care professionals, and community leaders in Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus. A Creative Movement Guide provides structured methodologies and adaptable exercises, enabling organisations to implement theatre-based movement activities. Train-the-Trainer Workshops equip professionals with the skills needed for exercise adaptation, safety management, and impact assessment.

The project includes public performances where participants demonstrate their progress through movement-based theatre, engaging policymakers, healthcare professionals, and cultural organisations. A dissemination event in Cyprus, an Expressive Theatre & Movement Toolkit, and a digital awareness campaign support wider adoption across European networks.

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Promote active ageing through creative movement.
- Enhance physical health, cognitive function, and social well-being.
- Address barriers that limit older adults' participation in traditional fitness programmes.
- Build community capacity through training of professionals and local leaders.
- Provide structured methodologies via the Creative Movement Guide.
- Support long-term programme integration through Train-the-Trainer workshops.
- Engage relevant stakeholders through public performances.
- Facilitate broader dissemination and uptake through dedicated tools and digital actions.

The Creative Motion consortium brings together partners from Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria. Through their collaboration, they support the development and implementation of theatre-based movement activities that promote active ageing and strengthen community engagement. Working together, the partners contribute to the creation of an accessible and sustainable model that encourages physical activity, social inclusion, and wider awareness across European communities.

2. Introduction

The present deliverable constitutes a foundational component of the Creative Motion project, providing a comprehensive overview of participant characteristics, needs, and contextual factors that inform the design and implementation of the Theatre-Based Physical Activity Programme for Older Adults under Pillar 1.

As the project aims to promote active ageing through an innovative integration of theatre, movement, and cognitive stimulation, it is essential to ensure that all programme elements remain grounded in evidence and tailored to the specific profiles of the target group. In this context, the deliverable brings together three key elements: participant profiling, baseline interviews, and a structured review of good practices in theatre-based movement for older adults.

The report adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with a desk-based analysis of existing literature and relevant practices. This approach enables a holistic understanding of the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions that influence older adults' participation in movement-based activities.

Through the synthesis of these insights, the deliverable establishes a solid evidence base that supports the development of an inclusive, adaptable, and effective programme. Furthermore, it ensures alignment with established methodologies and contributes to the overall quality, relevance, and impact of the Creative Motion intervention.

2.1 Purpose and Scope of the document

The primary purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the target group and the existing knowledge base in order to inform the design of the Theatre-Based Physical Activity Programme developed under Pillar 1 of the Creative Motion project.

Specifically, the report aims to:

- Profile the characteristics of participating older adults across the partner countries, including their physical condition, cognitive and emotional needs, and social context.
- Analyse findings from baseline semi-structured interviews, identifying key needs, expectations, motivations, and barriers to participation.
- Review and synthesise existing good practices and scientific evidence related to theatre-based movement, expressive physical activity, and embodied cognitive stimulation for older adults.
- Identify key success factors, methodological approaches, and transferable elements that can be integrated into the programme design.
- Establish clear links between identified needs and the three core activity streams of Pillar 1, ensuring that the programme remains evidence-based, inclusive, and responsive to participant diversity.

The scope of the document covers data collection and analysis activities conducted during the initial phase of the project, including interviews carried out in each partner country and a structured review of relevant literature and project-based practices. The findings presented in this report directly support the subsequent development and implementation of the Creative Motion programme, ensuring that it remains tailored, effective, and aligned with both participant needs and recognised good practices.

3. Methodological Framework

This section outlines the methodological approach adopted for the implementation of Pillar 1 of the Creative Motion project, as well as the research design and tools used to conduct the needs assessment and inform the development of the Theatre-Based Physical Activity Programme for Older Adults.

The framework integrates both empirical data collection and evidence-based research, ensuring that the programme design is grounded in the real needs, preferences, and capacities of the target group, while also reflecting established good practices in theatre-based movement and active ageing.

3.1 Overall Approach

Pillar 1 adopts an integrated methodological approach that combines physical activity, creative expression, and cognitive stimulation through three interconnected activity streams. These streams collectively form the foundation of the Creative Motion programme, addressing the multidimensional needs of older adults.

Physical Theatre & Movement Training

This stream focuses on enhancing physical mobility, coordination, and overall fitness through adapted theatre-based exercises. Activities begin with gentle warm-ups, including mobility exercises, breathing techniques, dynamic stretching, and posture alignment. These are progressively developed into structured, low-impact movement sequences that incorporate balance training and resistance-based exercises aimed at improving posture and reducing the risk of falls.

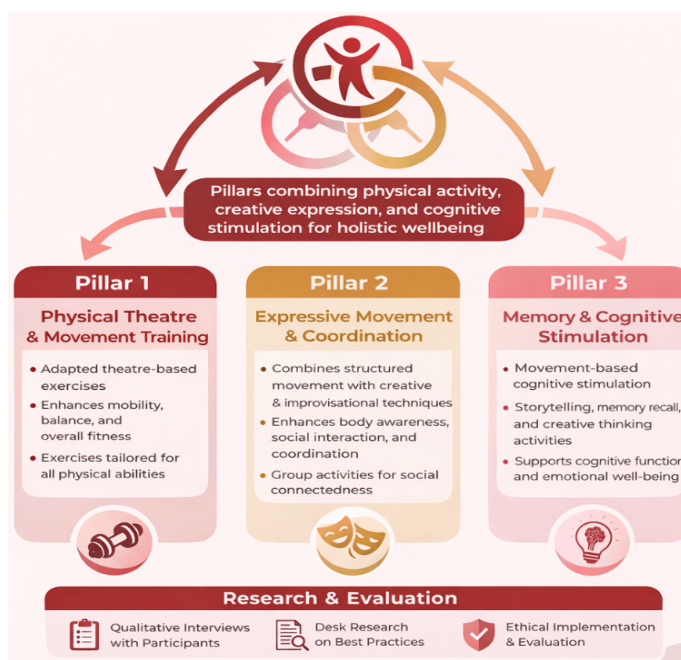


Figure 1: Overall methodological approach



A key feature of this stream is adaptability. All exercises are designed to accommodate varying levels of physical ability, including participants with limited mobility, ensuring accessibility, safety, and gradual improvement in physical confidence and resilience.

Expressive Movement & Coordination

The second stream represents the core of the Creative Motion approach, combining structured movement with creative and improvisational techniques derived from theatre and dance practices. Participants engage in expressive movement activities that enhance body awareness, coordination, and emotional expression.

Partner and group-based exercises play a central role, promoting social interaction, cooperation, and engagement. Activities such as mirrored movements and collaborative improvisation sequences support both physical coordination and social connectedness, contributing to increased motivation and sustained participation.

This stream also incorporates progressive mobility development, supporting improvements in strength, flexibility, and endurance over time.

Memory & Cognitive Stimulation

The third-stream addresses cognitive and emotional well-being through movement-based cognitive stimulation. It integrates storytelling, memory recall, and embodied cognition techniques into physical activities.

Participants are encouraged to express narratives and personal experiences through movement, which supports memory activation, spatial awareness, and creative thinking. These activities strengthen the connection between physical movement, emotions, and cognitive processes.

In addition, breathing and relaxation techniques inspired from mindfulness and theatre practices are incorporated to support stress reduction and emotional regulation, contributing to a holistic approach that integrates physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions.

3.2 Research Design

The methodological approach follows a mixed-method design, combining qualitative data collection with desk-based research to ensure a comprehensive understanding of participant needs and relevant practices.

Qualitative Data Collection

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with older adults aged 60 and above across the partner countries. Each partner conducted ten individual interviews, resulting in a total of thirty interviews across the consortium.

The interviews aimed to explore participants' physical activity levels, movement limitations, motivations, preferences, and perceived barriers to participation in movement-based activities. This qualitative approach allowed for in-depth insights into personal experiences and expectations, which are essential for designing a user-centred programme.

Desk Research on Good Practices

In parallel, a desk-based review of literature and existing practices was conducted. This included scientific publications, Erasmus+ Sport project outputs, and relevant methodologies related to theatre-based movement and active ageing.

The purpose of this component was to identify validated approaches, successful intervention models, and key principles that could inform the development and adaptation of the Creative Motion programme.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Semi-Structured Interview Design

The primary data collection tool consisted of a structured questionnaire designed to guide semi-structured interviews with participants. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing for a combination of quantitative indicators and qualitative insights.

The interview tool covered the following key areas:

- **Participant profile and activity background**, including age group, gender, and current level of physical activity
- **Physical capacity and safety perceptions**, including comfort with movement, balance improvement, and concerns related to falls
- **Expressive movement preferences**, including willingness to engage in creative, group, or partner-based activities
- **Cognitive and emotional dimensions**, including interest in storytelling, memory-based movement, and relaxation techniques
- **Barriers and motivations**, identifying factors that may hinder or encourage participation
- **Open-ended feedback**, allowing participants to provide additional input for programme design

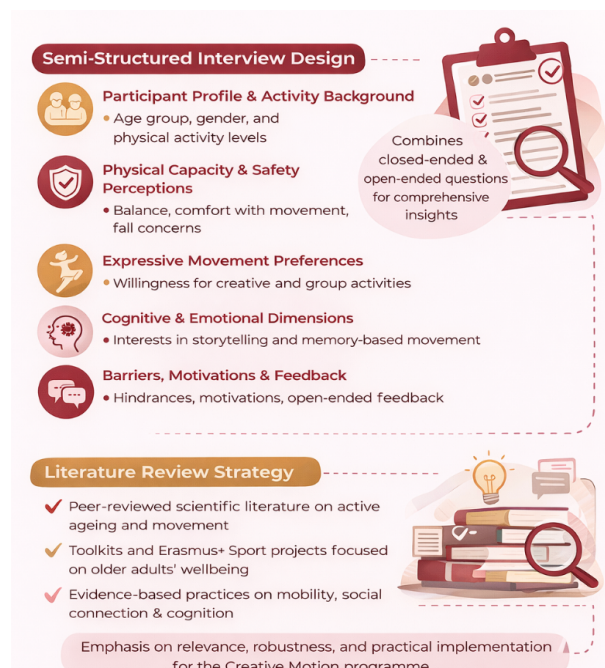


Figure 2: Data Collection tools

Responses were recorded in a standardised format to ensure consistency across countries, while maintaining flexibility to capture individual perspectives.

Literature Review Strategy

The desk research followed a structured approach, focusing on:

- Peer-reviewed scientific literature on active ageing, theatre-based movement, and embodied cognition
- Existing Erasmus+ Sport projects and toolkits related to physical activity and older adults
- Evidence-based practices addressing mobility, social engagement, and cognitive stimulation

The selection criteria emphasised relevance, methodological robustness, and applicability to older adult populations. The review aimed to extract key principles, effective exercise types, and implementation strategies that could be adapted within the Creative Motion framework.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the implementation of the needs assessment process, particularly given the involvement of older adult participants.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the project and the use of collected data prior to the interviews. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained either in written or verbal form before proceeding with the interview process.

Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection and analysis phases. No personally identifiable or sensitive medical data was collected, and responses were recorded in a way that prevented the identification of individual participants.

Special attention was given to ensuring a respectful, inclusive, and accessible interview environment. The duration and format of interviews (10–20 minutes, individual format) were designed to minimise fatigue and ensure participant comfort.

Overall, the methodological approach adhered to ethical principles of respect, voluntary participation, data protection, and sensitivity to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of older adults.

4 Participant Profiling & Needs Assessment

This section presents the results of the needs assessment conducted through semi-structured interviews with older adults across the partner countries. A total of 30 interviews were carried out (10 per country: Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus), following a common methodology and questionnaire to ensure consistency and comparability across contexts.

The analysis combines descriptive profiling with thematic interpretation, providing a comprehensive understanding of participants' physical condition, cognitive and emotional needs,



social context, motivations, and barriers to participation. The findings directly inform the design and adaptation of the Theatre-Based Physical Activity Programme under Pillar 1.

4.1 Participant Characteristics and Context

Demographic Profile

The participant group reflects a diverse cross-section of older adults aged 60+, with representation across three age categories (60–69, 70–79, and 80+).

- Bulgaria is characterised by a predominantly younger cohort (60–69)
- Greece presents the most balanced distribution across all age groups
- Cyprus includes a higher proportion of older participants (70+ and 80+)

The sample is predominantly female, which aligns with typical participation patterns in community and cultural activities, while also highlighting the need to consider strategies to engage more male participants in future programme implementation.

Activity and Social Background

Participants demonstrate varying levels of engagement in physical and social activities:

- A large proportion are moderately or highly active, particularly in Bulgaria and Cyprus
- A smaller group, mainly in Greece, reports low or no activity levels
- Many participants are already involved in social, cultural, or community-based activities, while others report limited engagement

This diversity indicates that the programme must accommodate both active and less active individuals, offering flexibility and progressive adaptation.

4.2 Physical Condition and Functional Needs

Participants generally report none to mild movement limitations, with a smaller proportion indicating moderate or significant limitations. This suggests that while most participants can engage in movement-based activities, there is a clear need for adaptability and safety-oriented design.

A key insight emerging across all interviews is the importance of functional physical improvement, particularly:

- balance and stability
- mobility and flexibility
- safe and controlled movement

Balance is consistently identified as a priority, closely linked to concerns about falling and injury. This indicates that physical activity is perceived not only as a means of improving fitness, but also to maintain independence and confidence in daily life.

Participants show a strong willingness to engage in physical activity, if exercises are:

- low-impact and accessible
- adapted to individual ability levels
- gradually progressive

This reinforces the need for a programme that emphasises **safety, gradual progression, and confidence-building**, rather than intensity or performance.

4.3 Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions

The findings highlight a strong demand for activities that support both cognitive stimulation and emotional well-being.

Cognitive Engagement

Participants express clear interest in activities that integrate movement with:

- memory recall and storytelling
- attention and mental engagement
- creative and meaningful tasks

This reflects an understanding of movement as a tool for maintaining cognitive function, rather than solely physical fitness.

Emotional Well-being

Emotional needs emerge as a central factor influencing participation. Participants consistently emphasise the importance of:

- relaxation and stress reduction
- enjoyment and positive experiences
- feeling comfortable and confident

Relaxation techniques, including breathing and calming exercises, are particularly valued. Many participants highlight the importance of “combining useful with pleasant”, indicating a preference for activities that are both beneficial and enjoyable.

Confidence also plays a significant role. Some participants express hesitation towards unfamiliar or expressive activities, suggesting that the programme must create a **supportive, non-judgmental environment** that gradually builds confidence.

4.4 Social Engagement and Participation Preferences

The social dimension is a key driver of engagement. Most participants express a strong preference for:



- group-based activities
- interaction with peers
- shared and collaborative experiences

Group settings are associated with increased motivation, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging. Social interaction is not perceived as an additional benefit, but as a core component of the activity experience.

At the same time, individual differences must be considered. Some participants report discomfort with:

- speaking or performing in front of others
- highly expressive or unfamiliar activities

This indicates the need for a **flexible and inclusive approach**, allowing participants to engage at their own pace and comfort level.

4.5 Barriers to Participation

The analysis identifies several categories of barriers that may influence participation.

Physical Barriers

- Health concerns
- Fear of injury or falling
- Existing mobility limitations

These factors highlight the importance of visible safety measures and appropriate exercise adaptation.

Psychological Barriers

- Lack of confidence
- Fear of failure or embarrassment
- Hesitation towards new or unfamiliar activities

These findings underline the need for a supportive and encouraging environment.

Practical and Accessibility Barriers

- Time constraints
- Location and transport limitations
- Compatibility with daily routines

Participants emphasise the importance of:



- accessible locations
- manageable session duration
- alignment with existing schedules

4.6 Motivations and Expectations for the Programme

Participants demonstrate strong motivation to engage in activities that provide both personal and social value.

Key Motivations

- enjoyment and pleasure
- relaxation and stress relief
- social interaction
- improvement of balance and physical condition

Preferred Activity Characteristics

Participants expect the programme to be:

- safe and low risk
- adaptable to different ability levels
- engaging and enjoyable
- socially interactive
- supportive of emotional well-being

There is a clear preference for activities that combine:

- movement with storytelling or conversation
- music, rhythm, and creative expression
- simple, accessible, and easy-to-follow structures

Participants also highlight the importance of:

- including seated or low-impact options
- ensuring activities are not overly time-consuming
- creating a respectful and inclusive atmosphere

4.7 Key Insights for Programme Development

The findings converge on several overarching insights that are critical for the design of the Creative Motion programme:

- Participants seek a **holistic experience**, not a traditional fitness programme
- **Safety and confidence** are prerequisites for engagement
- **Social interaction** is a primary motivator

- **Enjoyment and creativity** are essential for sustained participation
- **Adaptability and inclusivity** are necessary to address diverse needs

Overall, the results strongly support the integrated approach of Pillar 1, confirming the relevance of combining physical theatre, expressive movement, and cognitive stimulation into a unified programme that addresses the physical, emotional, and social dimensions of active ageing.

The following table summarises the key findings from the Participant Profiling and Needs Assessment, based on interviews with older adults across Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus. It synthesises insights related to physical condition, cognitive and emotional needs, social engagement, motivations, and barriers to participation.

Dimension	Key Findings	Implications for Programme Design
Sample Overview	30 participants (Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus), age 60+, diverse profiles	Cross-country consistency, adaptable to different contexts
Demographics	- Balanced age distribution (GR), younger (BG), older (CY) - Predominantly female	Need strategies to engage men, tailor to age diversity
Activity & Social Background	- Mixed activity levels (active + inactive groups) - Many already socially engaged	Programme must suit both active and less active individuals
Physical Condition	- Mostly none to mild limitations - Key needs: balance, mobility, flexibility	Focus on low-impact, safe, progressive exercises
Safety & Confidence	- Strong concern about falls and injury - Confidence affects participation	Safety-first design, confidence-building approach
Cognitive Needs	- Interest in memory, storytelling, mental engagement	Integrate movement + cognitive stimulation
Emotional Needs	- Need for relaxation, enjoyment, comfort - Preference for positive experiences	Include relaxation, breathing, enjoyable activities
Social Engagement	- Strong preference for group activities - Social interaction = key motivator	Design collaborative, group-based experiences
Participation Preferences	- Some discomfort with performance/expression - Need for gradual engagement	Ensure non-judgmental, flexible participation
Barriers (Physical)	Health issues, fear of injury, mobility limitations	Adapt exercises, ensure visible safety measures
Barriers (Psychological)	Lack of confidence, fear of embarrassment	Supportive, inclusive environment
Barriers (Practical)	Time, transport, accessibility	Keep sessions accessible, short, and convenient

Motivations	- Enjoyment, relaxation, social interaction - Improve balance & health	Combine fun + functional benefits
Preferred Activities	- Low-risk, adaptable, social - Include music, storytelling, creativity	Integrate creative + simple + engaging formats
Key Programme Expectations	- Safe, inclusive, enjoyable - Emotionally supportive	Holistic, participant-centred design
Core Insight	Participants want a holistic experience , not just fitness	Reinforces integrated methodology (Pillar 1)

Table 1: Participant Profiling & Needs Assessment – Summary Table

5 Review of Good Practices

The review identified a range of practices that integrate movement, creativity, and cognitive engagement. These practices share a common characteristic: they move beyond traditional exercise models and adopt a holistic, experience-based approach.

Key types of practices include:

- Dance and movement therapy programmes
- Theatre-based social engagement interventions
- Storytelling and narrative movement approaches
- Mindfulness-based movement and breathing techniques

These practices demonstrate strong potential to:

- improve physical function
- enhance cognitive performance
- reduce social isolation
- support emotional well-being

Research confirms that dance and movement interventions positively affect cognitive function, memory, and quality of life in older adults, while also supporting psychological health and well-being

5.1 Review of Good Practices from Projects and Initiatives

Several European and international initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of combining movement, creativity, and social engagement in programmes targeting older adults. These practices share a common emphasis on accessibility, adaptability, and experiential learning.

One prominent example is the “**Sharing Dance Seniors**”¹ programme, developed by Canada’s National Ballet School. This initiative provides structured dance sessions specifically adapted for older adults, including those with limited mobility. The programme focuses on gentle, low-impact movements that can be performed seated or standing, ensuring inclusivity. Beyond physical

¹ <https://www.nbs-enb.ca/en/community/share-dance>



benefits, it promotes social interaction and emotional well-being, creating a supportive group environment that encourages sustained participation.

Similarly, the work of the **American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA)**² highlights the role of dance movement therapy in improving both physical and psychological outcomes. Their approach integrates movement with therapeutic objectives, supporting balance, coordination, and emotional expression. This model is particularly relevant for older adults, as it combines physical exercise with cognitive and emotional engagement in a non-clinical, accessible format.

In the European context, organisations such as **People Dancing (UK)**³ have developed inclusive dance programmes that emphasise creative participation rather than performance. These initiatives encourage improvisation, group interaction, and personal expression, making them highly adaptable to diverse participant profiles. Their approach aligns closely with non-formal education principles commonly applied in Erasmus+ projects.

In the European context, the **“Dance Well – Movement Research for Parkinson’s”**⁴ **project (Italy)** represents a highly relevant practice that combines artistic movement with health-oriented outcomes. Delivered in cultural settings such as museums, the programme integrates dance, improvisation, and guided movement to support physical mobility, balance, and emotional expression. Its methodology emphasises dignity, inclusion, and creative participation, making it particularly adaptable for older adults beyond clinical populations.

Another strong example is the **“SilverFIT”**⁵ **and active ageing programmes implemented across several EU countries**, which integrate interactive movement, gamification, and physical engagement tailored to older adults. These initiatives demonstrate how structured, yet engaging movement activities can improve physical function while maintaining high levels of motivation and enjoyment

In addition, the **“Age & Opportunity” programme (Ireland)**⁶ provides arts-based interventions for older people, including movement, dance, and theatre activities. The programme emphasises active participation, creativity, and social inclusion, demonstrating how artistic practices can contribute to both physical and emotional well-being in later life.

Another relevant initiative is **“Dance for Health”**⁷ **programmes implemented across Europe**, often supported through community health and cultural organisations. These initiatives combine music, rhythm, and guided movement to improve mobility, coordination, and mood, particularly among older adults at risk of social isolation. They highlight the importance of integrating cultural elements into physical activity programmes.

² <https://adta.org>

³ <https://www.people-dancing.org.uk>

⁴ <https://www.dancewell.eu>

⁵ <https://www.silverfit.com>

⁶ <https://ageandopportunity.ie>

⁷ <https://www.danceforhealth.nl>



Also, initiatives focusing on **dance and dementia**, such as those promoted by Alzheimer Europe⁸ and national Alzheimer associations, illustrate how movement combined with music and storytelling can support memory, identity, and emotional well-being. These programmes often rely on familiarity, repetition, and personal relevance, creating a safe and engaging environment for participants.

Finally, practices incorporating **mindful movement and breathing techniques**⁹ have gained increasing attention. Platforms such as Mindful.org promote approaches that integrate gentle movement with breathing and relaxation exercises, supporting stress reduction and emotional regulation. These practices are particularly relevant for older adults, as they address both physical and psychological needs in a holistic manner.

In addition to the initiatives described above, several Erasmus+ and EU-funded projects provide relevant examples of how movement-based, inclusive, and socially engaging approaches can be successfully implemented in community and sport contexts. While not all of these projects focus exclusively on theatre-based movement, they offer transferable methodologies that align closely with the objectives of Creative Motion.

The **Dance Across Borders project**¹⁰ promotes social inclusion and intercultural dialogue through dance and movement activities, demonstrating how creative expression can foster participation, engagement, and community cohesion among diverse groups.

The **IN COMMON SPORTS**¹¹ project, funded under Erasmus+ Sport, focuses on the use of non-competitive and inclusive physical activities to engage individuals who are typically underrepresented in sport. Its emphasis on accessibility, participation, and community-based formats provides valuable insights for designing programmes targeting older adults.

Similarly, initiatives such as **Move for Life**¹² highlight the importance of structured physical activity programmes for older adults, particularly in promoting mobility, balance, and overall health. These programmes demonstrate how accessible and adaptable interventions can support active ageing in different community settings.

Finally, although funded under Horizon Europe, the **SENSE-GARDEN**¹³ project offers a highly relevant approach by integrating storytelling, sensory stimulation, and emotional engagement for older adults, particularly in care environments. Its methodology reinforces the importance of combining cognitive, emotional, and experiential elements within movement-based interventions.

Across these initiatives, several common characteristics can be identified. Successful programmes are typically group-based, adaptable to different ability levels, and designed to be enjoyable

⁸ <https://www.alzheimer-europe.org>

⁹ <https://www.mindful.org>

¹⁰ <https://www.danceacrossborders.eu>

¹¹ <https://incommonsports.eu>

¹² <https://www.moveforlife.eu>

¹³ <https://sense-garden.eu>

rather than performance-oriented. They integrate physical movement with creative expression and social interaction, offering a multidimensional experience that supports both engagement and long-term participation.

5.2 Literature Review Based on Academic Research

The academic literature provides strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of movement-based, creative, and embodied approaches in promoting active ageing. Research consistently highlights that interventions combining physical, cognitive, and social elements produce the most significant and sustained benefits.

Dance and movement interventions have been widely studied. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that such activities can significantly improve balance, mobility, and functional capacity, while also reducing the risk of falls. At the same time, they contribute to improvements in cognitive function, including memory, attention, and executive functioning (Huang, C., 2023).

Beyond physical and cognitive outcomes, dance-based interventions are also associated with enhanced psychological well-being. Studies indicate reductions in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, as well as increased levels of enjoyment and life satisfaction (Podolski et al., 2023). These findings are particularly relevant for older adults, for whom emotional well-being is a key determinant of participation and quality of life.

The concept of embodied cognition provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding these effects. According to this perspective, cognitive processes are closely linked to bodily movement and sensory experience. Activities that combine movement with storytelling or symbolic expression can therefore enhance memory and meaning-making processes, making them especially effective for older populations (Karkou and Glasman, 2019).

The literature also highlights the importance of social interaction as a mediating factor. Group-based movement activities have been shown to reduce loneliness and strengthen social bonds, contributing to improved mental health outcomes (Kontos et al., 2017). This reinforces the importance of designing programmes that prioritise interaction and shared experiences.

Furthermore, research emphasises the role of adaptation and accessibility. Interventions that are tailored to participants' physical abilities and delivered in a supportive environment are more likely to achieve positive outcomes and sustain long-term engagement. This includes the use of low-impact exercises, flexible formats, and gradual progression (Franco et al., 2015)

Mindfulness-based movement approaches also demonstrate significant benefits. These practices, which combine breathing, awareness, and gentle movement, have been shown to improve emotional regulation, reduce stress, and enhance body awareness and overall well-being (Zafeiroudi et al., 2025).

5.3 Implications for Programme Design and Co-Design Matrix

The literature review allows the identification of a set of core design principles and intervention components, which can be directly translated into the development of the Creative Motion programme and the co-design process.

Across the reviewed studies, four key dimensions consistently emerge as essential:

- Physical dimension: emphasis on balance training, mobility enhancement, low-impact movement, and fall prevention
- Cognitive dimension: integration of memory recall, attention-based tasks, and storytelling elements
- Emotional dimension: inclusion of relaxation, enjoyment, and confidence-building activities
- Social dimension: prioritisation of group interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences

In addition, several methodological characteristics are identified as critical for success:

- activities should be progressive and adaptable to different ability levels
- exercises should be simple, structured, and easy to follow
- sessions should integrate creative and expressive elements rather than focusing solely on repetition
- environments should be safe, inclusive, and non-judgmental

These elements form the basis for the development of a co-design matrix, where participant needs (identified in Section 4) are systematically matched with evidence-based practices and activity types derived from both literature and project examples.

As such, the literature review does not only provide theoretical validation but also contributes directly to the operationalisation of the Creative Motion methodology, ensuring that the programme is both scientifically grounded and practically applicable.

6 From Needs Assessment to Co-Design: Operational Framework and Guidance

The analysis conducted in this deliverable brings together three complementary sources of knowledge: participant needs identified through baseline interviews, insights derived from existing good practices, and evidence from academic literature. This combined perspective provides a solid foundation for the next phase of the Creative Motion project, namely the development and customisation of the Theatre-Based Physical Activity Programme.

6.1 Synthesis of Key Findings

The needs assessment revealed that older adults do not approach physical activity as a purely functional or fitness-oriented process. Instead, participation is strongly influenced by a combination of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social factors. Across all partner countries,



participants expressed a clear preference for activities that are safe, enjoyable, socially engaging, and meaningful.

From a physical perspective, balance, mobility, and safety emerged as primary concerns. Participants are particularly motivated by activities that can help them maintain independence and reduce the risk of falling, provided that these activities are adapted to their abilities and delivered in a gradual and accessible manner.

At the same time, cognitive and emotional dimensions play a central role. Participants showed strong interest in activities that stimulate memory, attention, and creativity, especially when these are combined with storytelling or expressive elements. Emotional well-being, including relaxation, enjoyment, and confidence-building, was identified as a key driver of sustained participation.

Social interaction is equally important. Group-based activities that foster a sense of belonging, cooperation, and shared experience are consistently preferred over individual or performance-oriented formats. Participants value environments that are supportive, inclusive, and non-judgmental.

These findings are strongly reinforced by both the review of good practices and the academic literature. Existing programmes demonstrate that the most effective interventions are those that integrate movement with creativity and social interaction, while maintaining flexibility and accessibility. Similarly, scientific evidence confirms that approaches combining physical activity with cognitive stimulation, emotional engagement, and group interaction lead to improved physical function, mental well-being, and quality of life.

Taken together, the results highlight the importance of adopting a **holistic and multidimensional approach**, where physical theatre, expressive movement, and cognitive stimulation are not treated as separate components, but as interconnected elements of a unified experience.

6.2 Suggested Practices and Activity Approaches

Based on the combined analysis of needs, practices, and literature, a set of suggested activity approaches can be identified to guide programme development. These are not prescriptive exercises, but rather categories of practices that can be adapted during the co-design phase.

A first category includes **adapted physical theatre exercises**, focusing on mobility, posture, and balance. These activities should incorporate gentle warm-ups, controlled movement sequences, and progressive balance training. Emphasis should be placed on safety, stability, and gradual improvement, ensuring that participants feel confident and secure while engaging in movement.

A second category involves **expressive and improvisational movement activities**, which combine physical coordination with creativity. These include partner-based exercises, mirrored movements, and simple improvisation tasks that encourage participants to explore movement in a playful and non-structured way. Such activities support both physical coordination and social interaction, while also enhancing engagement and enjoyment.

A third category relates to **narrative and memory-based movement**, where storytelling and personal experiences are integrated into physical activity. Participants can be encouraged to express memories, emotions, or everyday situations through movement, thereby strengthening cognitive engagement and creating meaningful connections between body and mind.

In addition, **mindfulness-based practices and breathing techniques** should be incorporated to support relaxation and emotional regulation. These activities can serve both as introductory and closing elements within sessions, helping participants to feel comfortable, focused, and at ease.

Across all categories, it is essential that activities remain simple, adaptable, and inclusive. The aim is not to develop technically complex exercises, but to create accessible and engaging experiences that respond directly to participant needs.

Category	Description	Purpose
Physical Exercises	Mobility, posture, balance training, warm-ups	Improve safety, stability, confidence
Theatre	Improvisation, partner work, mirrored exercises	Enhance coordination, creativity, social interaction
Expressive Movement	Storytelling through movement	Strengthen cognition and emotional engagement
Narrative & Memory-Based Movement	Relaxation and calming techniques	Support emotional regulation and comfort
Mindfulness & Breathing		

Table 2: Suggested Activity Categories

6.3 Guidance for Step 2: Programme Development and Customisation

The next phase of the project, Step 2 – Programme Development and Customisation, will operationalise the findings of this deliverable through a structured co-design process.

Creative Engagement Labs

The Creative Engagement Labs will serve as the main platform for translating insights into practice. These facilitated workshops will involve sports facilitators, theatre practitioners, and participants, ensuring a participatory and collaborative approach to programme development.

During these sessions, partners will:

- present and discuss the key findings from the needs assessment and good practice review
- explore and adapt suggested activity approaches in a practical setting
- test preliminary exercise concepts through guided experimentation
- gather feedback from participants to refine and improve activities

This iterative process will allow for continuous adjustment and validation, ensuring that the resulting programme is both engaging and contextually relevant. The involvement of approximately 10 participants per country will further support the co-creation of activities that reflect local needs and cultural specificities.



Adaptability Framework Development

In parallel, the project will develop an adaptability framework that enables facilitators to tailor activities to different participant profiles. This framework will be based on principles of adapted physical activity and inclusive design.

The adaptability framework will provide guidance on how to:

- adjust the intensity and complexity of exercises
- offer alternative versions of activities (e.g. seated vs standing)
- respond to different mobility levels and physical limitations
- ensure safe progression over time

This approach ensures that the programme can be applied across diverse contexts and participant groups, while maintaining a consistent structure and methodology.

References

- Franco, M.R., Tong, A., Howard, K., Sherrington, C., Ferreira, P.H., Pinto, R.Z. and Ferreira, M.L. (2015) 'Older people's perspectives on participation in physical activity: A systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative literature', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 49(19), pp. 1268–1276
- Huang, C.S., Yan, Y.J., Luo, Y.T., Lin, R. and Li, H. (2023) 'Effects of dance therapy on cognitive and mental health in adults aged 55 years and older with mild cognitive impairment: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *BMC Geriatrics*, 23(1), p. 695
- Karkou, V. and Glasman, J. (2019) 'Arts, dance and embodied cognition: A review of theory and practice', *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 63, pp. 1–8
- Kontos, P., Miller, K.-L. and Kontos, A.P. (2017) 'Relational citizenship: supporting embodied selfhood and relationality in dementia care', *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 39, pp. 182–198
- Podolski, O.S., Whitfield, T., Schaaf, L., Cornaro, C., Köbe, T., Koch, S. and Wirth, M. (2023) 'The impact of dance movement interventions on psychological health in older adults without dementia: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *Brain Sciences*, 13(7), p. 981
- Zafeiroudi, A., Tsartsapakis, I., Trigonis, I., Kouli, O., Goulimaris, D. and Kouthouris, C. (2025) 'Embodied mindfulness through movement: A scoping review of dance-based interventions for mental well-being in recreational populations', *Healthcare*, 13(17), p. 2230

ANNEX 1- INDICATIVE ACTIVITY CONCEPTS FOR CO-DESIGN

This annex presents an indicative set of activity concepts derived from the needs assessment, the review of good practices, and the academic literature. These concepts are not intended as fixed exercises, but as flexible formats to be explored, tested, and adapted during the Creative Engagement Labs.

The purpose of these concepts is to provide facilitators with a structured yet adaptable starting point for experimentation, ensuring that all proposed activities respond to the identified physical, cognitive, emotional, and social needs of participants. The list is not exhaustive and is expected to evolve through the co-design process.

1. Balance and Confidence Movement Sequences

These activity concepts focus on improving balance, posture, and overall movement confidence, directly responding to participants' concerns regarding safety and fall prevention.

They typically include slow and controlled movements, weight shifting, and guided walking patterns. Activities may incorporate directional steps, posture alignment, and simple coordination tasks, performed individually or with light support where needed.

The emphasis is on creating a safe and supportive environment in which participants can gradually build physical confidence and stability.

2. Partner-Based Mirroring and Coordination

These activities are designed to strengthen coordination and social interaction through collaborative movement.

Participants work in pairs or small groups, engaging in mirrored movements, simple synchronisation exercises, and guided interaction sequences. One participant may lead while the other follows, encouraging attentiveness, responsiveness, and connection.

This approach supports both physical coordination and social engagement, fostering trust and a sense of shared experience among participants.

3. Storytelling and Narrative Movement

This category integrates movement with storytelling and personal expression, addressing both cognitive and emotional needs.

Participants are encouraged to represent simple narratives, everyday activities, or personal memories through movement. Activities may involve guided prompts, symbolic gestures, or group storytelling sequences expressed physically.

Such approaches stimulate memory, creativity, and meaning making, while strengthening the connection between physical movement and cognitive processes.

4. Music-Supported Improvisation

Music-based activities aim to enhance enjoyment, spontaneity, and expressive movement.

Participants are invited to explore movement through music, either freely or following simple rhythmic patterns. Activities may include individual improvisation, group rhythm exercises, or guided sequences inspired by musical cues.

These activities help reduce performance-related pressure, increase motivation, and encourage creative exploration in a relaxed and engaging setting.

5. Breathing and Relaxation Practices

These activities focus on emotional well-being, stress reduction, and body awareness.

They typically involve guided breathing exercises, slow and mindful movement, and relaxation techniques that can be performed in seated or standing positions. Elements of visualisation or gentle stretching may also be incorporated.

These practices support emotional regulation, enhance body awareness, and help participants feel calm, comfortable, and prepared for engagement in movement activities.

6. Integrated Multi-Dimensional Activity Formats

In addition to individual activity types, emphasis should be placed on combining different elements into structured yet flexible session formats.

A typical session may begin with a gentle physical warm-up, followed by a partner-based or expressive activity, a narrative or memory-based component, and a closing relaxation phase. This integrated approach reflects the multidimensional nature of participant needs and aligns with the overall methodology of the Creative Motion programme.

Such formats enable facilitators to address physical, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions within a single session, enhancing both effectiveness and participant engagement.

7. Use within the Creative Engagement Labs

During the Creative Engagement Labs, these indicative activity concepts will be used as a basis for co-design and experimentation.

Facilitators are encouraged to adapt, combine, and refine these concepts in collaboration with participants, considering local context, cultural factors, and individual preferences. The process should remain iterative, incorporating feedback and observations to improve and adjust activity formats.

The objective is not to validate predefined exercises, but to co-create meaningful, accessible, and engaging activity formats that reflect both participant needs and evidence-based principles.



The outcomes of this process will directly inform the development of the Theatre-Based Physical Activity Programme and contribute to the formulation of the Creative Movement Guide.