

## **Restricted participation in a participatory dance – tango argentino and its elite structure politics**

Paper presented by Kendra Stepputat at the 30<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology, Szeged (Hungary), 28 July – 1 September 2018

The internationally practiced, socially danced tango argentino, is a participatory dance culture. Tango dancers meet to dance socially in a closed environment, partners are regularly changed, everybody able to dance tango can participate, and there is no audience or any staged elements at milongas (tango dance events).

Yet that the dance is participatory does not mean that participation in a milonga is granted to everybody, or that every participant at a milonga has the same dance opportunities. Reasons for limited access are manifold: Experienced dancers often avoid to dance with beginners unless they are their students, dance teachers and their entourages might not dance with competing teachers and their students, closed tango dance events (encuentros) exclude dancers that do not qualify in terms of skill, style, and degree of scene integration, and so forth.

Such restrictions and intrinsic rules lead to a perceived and arguably thereby established hierarchy in local and international tango communities.

In my presentation I will mainly show how social structures and politics in a tango community, both on local and international level, are mirrored in the spatial organization of a milonga. This approach is used to exemplify how social structures and politics translate to behavior at a milonga, and how in turn social interactions at a dance event manifest hierarchical structures.