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# SYNOPSIS

WHAT ARE THE KEY RESULTS OF OUR  
TRANSNATIONAL REPORT?



ON STAGE IN THE GOLDEN AGE: THEATRE FOR HEALTHY AGEING



lecompagniemalviste



Éδρα  
social cooperative  
activities for  
vulnerable groups



ASOCIATIA HABILITAS  
SOCIETATEA ROMANA  
ALZHEIMER



SOCIETATEA ROMANA  
ALZHEIMER



RightChallenge

## Why AGE\_THEA?

The global elderly population is increasing, with an estimated 1.6 billion people aged 65 and over by 2050. This increase in age can lead to greater vulnerability to health issues such as chronic illnesses, mental health disorders, and dementia. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) and the European Commission advocate for active and healthy ageing, proposing **arts-based interventions** that link creativity to physical and mental health. Extensive research indicates that **incorporating theatrical activities** into creative interventions can significantly improve the physical and mental health, as well as the psychosocial well-being of older adults. This is because theatre serves a dual purpose in enhancing well-being, functioning as both a preventative measure and a healing or treatment approach for older persons with and without cognitive impairments such as dementia and Alzheimer's.

AGE\_THEA is a two-year project, co-funded by the European Commission, implemented by six European organisations: Romanian Alzheimer Society (Romania), Le Compagnie Malviste (Italy), EDRA (Greece), RightChallenge (Portugal), Habilitas (Romania), and the University of West Attica (Greece). The project aims to **raise awareness about the role and impacts of theatre** on the prevention and treatment of health and **psychosocial well-being of elderly people** who are living with or without Alzheimer or other forms of dementia.

Synergies between different fields (social, cultural, and health) will result in the development of a **high-quality training programme** for operators. Additionally, through **participatory theatre activities**, AGE\_THEA aims to promote active ageing, the elderly's psychosocial well-being, and their social inclusion.

# What is the transnational report?

The AGE\_THEA transnational report is the second (WP2) of the project's five work packages (WPs). The report emphasises the critical **role of theatre in improving the health and psychosocial well-being of the elderly**, including those living with dementia-Alzheimer, or other cognitive impairments. Based on the desk research (international and national literature reviews) and fieldwork (focus groups, theatrical activities) carried out in each ERASMUS+ partner country, the report provides guidance for developing a high-quality training programme and methodology based on theatre activities for operators.

The **report is divided into five sections**, each of which is based on data that was collected using a variety of methods: 1) An international literature review; 2) National literature reviews; 3) Focus group discussions with professionals, older adults, and their caregivers (informal or formal) in each of the ERASMUS countries; 4) Theatrical activities conducted by each partner organisation and 5) General and specific recommendations to help partner countries develop an appropriate methodology for implementing the training programme. Wherever feasible, information is given on public organisations and the private sector (profit, not-for-profit, and NGOs) that provide care and creative activities for older people in each partner country.

# What are the key results of the literature review?

The [international literature review](#) covers the etymology and brief history of theatre in Western societies from ancient times to the 20th century, where revolutionary artists and progressive pioneers (e.g., Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, J. L. Moreno, Augusto Boal) saw theatre as a space for the oppressed voice of the poor. Their radical ideas about breaking down the barrier between the performer and their audience, that theatre may be done outside of a traditional stage, and that anyone, such as older people, not only actors, can play theatre, laid the groundwork for the form of applied theater nowadays.

The review in our transnational report emphasises the importance of [theatrical interventions to meet individual needs and settings](#). These interventions may include specific types of theatre (e.g. Playback Theatre, Reminiscence Theatre, Readers' Theatre, etc.) or methods using a mix of sensory, dramatic, and aesthetic activities, as well as music-based experiential exercises inspired by and based on theatre and drama to elicit memories or encourage older people to use their imagination and creativity (e.g., The Veder Method, Recreational Drama, TimeSlips). The report also emphasises the [need for inclusivity and diversity in theatrical interventions](#), as ageist stigmatisation can hinder cognitive and physical performance, healthcare accessibility, and self-identity. The review suggests that theatrical interventions should prioritise inclusivity and ethical integrity to ensure success, safety, effectiveness, and benefit for all involved.

The literature review, [analysis of national reports](#), and data collection from multiple sources revealed a significant [gap in existing literature on creativity](#), particularly in the context of theatrical interventions for older adults and policies affecting them. This [gap is observed to vary across partner countries](#) and within their respective local regions. Despite this disparity, all partner countries do provide theatrical initiatives for older adults, including those with dementia-Alzheimer. However, it is important to note that these initiatives are predominantly part of short-term projects and are not carried out systematically. Such initiatives are designed to engage older adults and caregivers in a variety of programs, including training courses, community theater groups, therapeutic theater workshops, as well as cultural festivals and events.

## What are the key results of the focus groups?

AGE\_THEA conducted focus groups at ERASMUS partners' facilities, (Asociatia Habilitas and Societatea Romana Alzheimer in Romania, EDRA in Greece, Le Compagnie Malviste in Italy, and Rightchallenge in the Padre José Coelho Social Centre in Portugal). Participants were recruited from their organisations' pools, with the inclusion criteria requiring previous experience in creative, theatrical, or drama-based activities. A sample of [47 participants](#) participated in the four focus groups, [sharing their experiences, perceptions, and knowledge](#) about implementing or participating in theatrical activities from various perspectives (professionals, caregivers, and seniors).

The data analysis identified [four major themes](#): a) previous experience in implementing or participating in drama or theatrical activities with older adults (types of drama or theatrical activities), b) usefulness of the activities and skills developed through relevant experience, c) challenges or obstacles

encountered while attempting to implement drama or theatre-related activities, and d) enablers to put theatre or drama-related activities into practice: Areas of growth and improvement.

The study found that **previous experience** in implementing or participating in theatrical activities with older adults is essential for effective and comprehensive interventions. The findings also highlight the importance of **enabling caregivers** to put theatre or drama-related activities into practice, as well as areas for growth and improvement. Skills developed through experience include the ability to be **sensitive to group atmospheres** and mediate in bringing together the needs of different people, such as caregivers and their charges. Theatrical activities were deemed **beneficial** when applied to older people, but they were **sometimes insufficient** in motivating older people or promoting psychological well-being. To address this, the focus groups focused on the difficulties, benefits, motivation for participation, the importance of networking, and adaptation. The participants stressed the importance of adequate resources and adaptive strategies to overcome physical and financial limitations, as well as the need for motivation due to the ageing process and the availability of time for planning and executing stimulating activities.

# What are the key results of the theatrical activities?

The activities were led by two facilitators, with at least one having a [background in theatre/drama or creativity](#). The activities were designed to be quick, simple to plan, and suitable for individuals with and without cognitive impairments. Participants were selected from organisations' participant pools, including social, cultural, and health sector operators and artists, caregivers, and older people (65+) with legal capacity. The activities created a [safe and encouraging space](#) where participants felt understood and connected, underscoring the importance of support groups in managing the emotional and social issues of caregivers and people with dementia.

The results showed that most participants found the activities enjoyable and rewarding, with [creativity stimulation](#) generally positive. The activities were easy to follow, considered highly valuable, and comfort levels were high. Time management was viewed favorably, and overall satisfaction with the sessions was high. The feedback gathered from the participants overwhelmingly highlighted the [positive impact](#) of engaging in theatre activities. It was observed that active involvement in theatrical pursuits has the potential to empower older adults by promoting a sense of purpose, imbuing their daily lives with meaning, and nurturing a creative mindset for addressing challenges. Furthermore, the incorporation of these activities has been found to enhance the [effectiveness of caregiver interaction with older people](#), with or without cognitive impairments. This collaborative and creative approach has shown promise in [alleviating symptoms of stress and anxiety](#) among all involved parties, thereby creating an enjoyable and beneficial experience for everyone.



# Do you have recommendations for implementation?

Based on the findings of the desk research and fieldwork, several recommendations should be made for **better-using theatre as a performing art and a tool for improving the physical and mental health** and psychosocial well-being of older adults with or without dementia-Alzheimer or other cognitive impairments. These are grouped into two main groups: general and specific recommendations.

## General recommendations

- National Economic initiatives in partner countries that provide the **resources required** to run theatre programmes and interventions.
- Increased **support and collaboration** from local governments and NGOs can help expand the reach and scope of theatre programmes.
- **Cooperation Partnerships** between theatre, performing arts, NGOs, health and social science schools can create targeted programmes for vulnerable older adults.
- **Inclusive Programmes** should adapt to the diverse needs and interests of the older adult population, using digital tools for physical limitations.
- Regarding promotion and outreach, **efforts should be intensified**, through community leaders, healthcare and social care providers.
- Professionals working with older adults should **be trained in theatre** as an empowerment methodology.
- Ensuring that theatres and performance spaces are **accessible** to those with physical limitations is crucial.



## Specific recommendations

- Training programmes for professionals working with older adults should focus on theatrical activities with a process-oriented approach, **prioritising the experience** over the final product.
- Teaching a **variety of enjoyable, interactive activities** for older adults, focusing on cognitive skills, memory perception, and community interaction, is crucial, especially for vulnerable or lonely individuals.
- Engaging activities like **improvisation, theater play, and sensory memory exercises** can improve mental health and memory skills in older adults. These activities promote trust, respect, and communication. Proper **opening and closing exercises** prepare for creative activities, while easy-to-concrete exercises develop cognitive skills and psychosocial abilities (e.g., self-expression, confidence, self-esteem, imagination, creativity).
- Activities may have an **intergenerational function** and should be designed to promote engagement, socialisation, and overall well-being among older adults, while being flexible to accommodate individual preferences and abilities.
- Training programmes for professionals interacting with older adults through theatrical activities rely on **communication, humor, and emotional management skills**. Prioritising these skills ensures professionals are well-equipped to provide support and assistance to older adults, especially those with dementia-Alzheimer or other cognitive impairments.
- **Ethical practice** is crucial for trusting relationships with older adults, ensuring safe spaces for sharing stories. Practitioners must respect them to protect seniors' rights and maintain professional integrity.

# Where do I find more information?

You can find more information on our website and social media platforms, where the [final transnational report](#) is also available.



## “ON STAGE IN THE GOLDEN AGE: THEATRE FOR HEALTHY AGEING”

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### PROJECT WEBSITE

<https://age-thea.eu/>

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram

[age.thea2023](#)

Facebook

[On Stage in the Golden](#)

[Age: Theatre for Healthy](#)

[Ageing](#)

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