



Berlin Declaration on Senior Theatre

Theatre work with seniors requires ...

...a courageous engagement with topics relevant to old age

Theatre work with seniors requires the persistent courage to deal with topics far from the mainstream. Illness, death and dementia, war and violence, sexuality and eroticism, dignity and self-fulfillment during old age are timeless and ever-present concerns.

...taking a clear stand on social issues

Theatre work with seniors requires constant interventions in current debates on social issues. It should not skirt controversial ideas, but neither should it court controversy merely for its own sake. It should not merely give in to a blind form of indignation, but should deal with the topics of the day in a substantive way. It should strive for more than the mere outward appearance of “relevance”.

...continuous and sustainable personal interactions

Theatre work with seniors requires a careful and measured approach in order to take meaningful advantage of the newly found freedoms of old age. Sustainable theatre work and lasting improvements in the social situation of older adults can only take place within a framework of intense and continuous training and rehearsal – and not in the context of a one-off production, as is the norm in publicly subsidised theatre companies.

...directors who are highly trained and empathetic

Theatre work with seniors requires directors who are well-qualified, capable of empathy and willing to experiment and improvise. Concepts and principles from the field of theatre pedagogy (such as strategies for dealing with dementia) need to be taken into special consideration. Training programmes for directors, workshops and forums for sharing and discussing experiences need to be offered in greater numbers.

...a diverse range of performance spaces

Theatre work with seniors requires both protected spaces as well as the possibility of performing in front of a public audience – whether within a private rehearsal space, on a theatre stage or in public spaces such as shopping malls, city streets or marketplaces. The scale of the performance should always be determined by the needs of the players involved.

...varied modes of expression

Theatre work with seniors requires highly varied modes of expression. It should not confine itself to the performance of short “sketches” but should engage with the full range of theatrical forms (biographical theatre, adaptations of literary works, dance theatre, performance). Additionally, the opportunities afforded by so-called “new media” technologies should be taken into account.

...firm and extensive roots in local communities

Theatre work with seniors requires widespread implementation in both urban and rural areas. Currently, senior theatre takes place mainly in larger cities. The possibilities for cultural participation and the artistic forms of expression available to older adults need to be expanded and strengthened, particularly in rural communities.

...dedicated lobbying and sponsorship

Theatre work with seniors requires dedicated supporters and sponsors at all levels of society and politics. It especially requires the financial resources necessary for the establishment of long-term organisational structures, training programmes and performance projects.

...effective networking efforts and a strong media presence

Festivals for seniors, theatre forums and professional conferences are important sources of innovation for the field of senior theatre. In addition, they facilitate new forms of dialogue and the extension of personal networks both at the national and the European level. Cross-border projects and collaborations should be expanded, put on a permanent basis and supported by a professional public relations effort across all media channels.

...empirical studies on the benefits to health and well-being

In the future, the preventive and therapeutic aspects of participating in senior theatre work should be substantiated and certified by scientific medical studies, so that theatre work can be recognised and financially supported as a health care measure by public and private insurers.

...a knowing wink

Theatre work with seniors requires a sense of humour and a certain levity in order to maintain a healthy distance to the tragedies of real life. "As refreshing as a bath can nonsense be, stripping off all meaning from what torments you!" (Erika Pluhar)

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