

Call for Papers

SEE Aging Graz 2025

Transforming Representations of Aging in Southeast European Literature and Film

International Conference

September 25–27, 2025 | University of Graz, Austria

In Southeastern Europe, cultural perceptions and personal experiences of aging and old age, although ambivalent and multifaceted, are embedded in a general discourse of catastrophe: The region is at the forefront of a global trend in population aging. Southeast European countries are also among those EU member states with people's lowest life expectancy. While increasing longevity is one of the main drivers of demographic aging in Western Europe and North America, a key factor in Southeastern Europe is the high out-migration of younger people. This development fuels fears and leads to what critical gerontologist Stephen Katz refers to as "alarmist demography."

Fiction and film may partake in this ageist discourse, yet also offer alternative, more positive and empowering visions. Literary and cinematic representations or theater performances – as well as their interpretations – not only reflect but also challenge dominant narratives about older people as a burden and aging as threat, loss, and decline. The SEE Aging Graz 2025 conference seeks to investigate this kind of *transforming representations* (in the double sense of the word): We intend, on the one hand, to trace and analyze how artistic representations of aging and old age have evolved and transformed over time and, on the other hand, to examine the potential of these representations to transform individual attitudes, cultural mindsets, and social practices.

The conference will focus on South Slavic – Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Slovenian – literature and visual arts from the 1960s, when demographic concerns began to shape communist policymaking, up to the present. Papers delivering insights into Albanian, Hungarian, and Romanian literatures and cinema of this period are equally welcome, as are pertinent explorations of transcultural literature. We invite paper proposals that provide in-depth analyses of narratives and images of (Southeast European) aging, allowing to discern continuities and breaks in the contents and forms of representing old age. Papers adopting a comparative approach are particularly encouraged.

Specific topics include, but are not confined to:

- Narrating the aging self
- Narrating the aging body
- Performing age, "doing aging"

- Intersectionality (notably, age and gender)
- Generations, intergenerationality, notions of kinship
- Care regimes, caring relationships
- Age and memory, memory loss, dementia
- Perceptions of age-related diseases, disability
- Old-age imagery, allegorizing age
- Age/aging and narrated space
- Age/aging and mobility, migration, displacement, exile
- Age/aging and forms of social, political, and artistic resistance
- Aging and creativity, late style
- Rejuvenation and immortality
- Trans- and posthuman aging, AI visions.

The conference language will be English.

We envisage publishing an open-access edited volume with extended versions of selected papers.

Deadlines:

Abstract submission: by February 15, 2025

Notification of acceptance: by March 15, 2025

Submissions (in Word or PDF format) to see.aging@uni-graz.at should include:

- an abstract (max. 300 words)
- a short CV (max. 150 words) indicating your institutional affiliation
- your contact details.

Organizing committee:

Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl & Tatjana Petzer, Department of Slavic Studies, in cooperation with Ulla Kribernegg, Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Aging and Care (CIRAC), University of Graz.

Contact:

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This conference is organized within the framework of the research project “**Transforming Anxieties of Ageing in Southeastern Europe: Political, Social, and Cultural Narratives of Demographic Change**,” Volkswagen Foundation (2023–2027).