

Editorial

The Role of Social Pedagogy in Addressing Contemporary and Emerging Challenges of Youth Transitions

This focus issue concentrates on some specific challenges of contemporary society, especially from the point of view of youth transitions. In recent years, many changes connected with different types of crises and their social consequences have arisen. Challenges that existed even earlier became clearer, and inequities between those with sufficient resources to cope with the complexities and consequences of multiple social crises and those who lack such resources became even more polarised. In addition, the importance of social background and the limited possibilities of certain social groups to support their children in their transitions to adulthood needs to be reconsidered. In this focus issue, we discuss those topics from several perspectives. Through different focuses, a primary line of thought will also be developed: what is the role of social pedagogy regarding newly emerging social challenges?

The opening article of the issue, by Ana Bešter Zupančič, sets the conceptual framework within which the rest of the contributions can be read. Reconfiguring youth transitions through the lens of digital sociality, the theoretical paper *Reconfiguring Youth Transitions: Digital Spaces, Social Connections and the Role of Social Pedagogy* argues that transitions are no longer linear pathways from education to work and independence, but fragmented, hybrid trajectories shaped as much by digital environments as by offline institutions. The author's *Multidimensional Rhizomatic Transitions Framework*, which brings together rhizomatic pathways, hybrid spatiality, relational-ethical orientation and critical digital agency, offers social pedagogy a vocabulary for addressing agency, equity and belonging in transitions that are increasingly non-linear and digitally mediated.

The second contribution moves from the conceptual to the institutional. Nataša Mojskerc and Darja Zorc-Maver, in *Manifestations and Effects of Everyday Resistance in Student Dormitories*, examine how young people in Slovenian residential institutions respond to disciplinary control through everyday acts of resistance. Drawing on interviews with dormitory counsellors and on a critical-emancipatory social-pedagogical framework, the authors show that such resistance can function ambivalently – at times reproducing institutional norms, at other times reshaping them – and argue that these micro-practices constitute genuine pedagogical opportunities for reflexive negotiation of institutional life amid intersectional inequalities.

From Austria, Martin Auferbauer, Arno Heimgartner and Thomas Lederer-Hutsteiner contribute *The Participatory Development of the Styrian Youth Strategy With an Action Plan*, a paper that shifts the focus from the individual and institutional to the level of regional policy. Combining interviews, a professional survey and participatory workshops with adolescents, professionals and administrators, the authors trace how a strategic framework for improving young people's living conditions in Styria was co-produced and subsequently anchored in provincial legislation. The article demonstrates how participatory governance and data-informed planning can translate the critique of existing conditions into constructive institutional change – an important reminder that responses to youth transitions are not only pedagogical but also political and administrative.

Returning to the school as a site of protection and risk, Nina Amon Podobnikar and Jana Rapuš Pavel investigate *Teachers' and Counsellors' Views on School Protective Factors for Children With Complex Needs*. Based on interviews with teachers and school counsellors, the article identifies trusting relationships, collaboration with parents and external institutions, and systematically integrated preventive activities as key protective factors, while also naming the obstacles – including the (mis)use of formal disciplinary measures – that undermine timely support. The findings translate directly into recommendations for teacher education, supervision and coordinated support networks.

Kristina Debenjak's contribution, *Psychosocial Distress and Community Support: Students' Perspectives and the Role of Social Pedagogy*, brings the perspective of young people themselves – in this case, social pedagogy students – to the fore through an arts-based, photovoice methodology. The images and narratives collected reveal the emotional, social and structural dimensions of psychosocial distress during the transition to adulthood, and the author argues for a social pedagogy informed by the pedagogy of liberation: one that resists the individualisation of distress in favour of collective, community-based responses.

The focus section closes with a contribution from Spain. Laura Farré-Riera, Núria Carrete-Marín, Mar Beneyto-Seoane and Esther Fatsini-Matheu, in *Pedagogical Renewal and the Role of Teachers in Secondary Schools: Insights From Five Case Studies in Spain*, examine how secondary schools move beyond short-lived innovation toward transformative teaching practices. Based on observations, focus groups, document analysis and in-depth interviews across five schools, the study highlights educational leadership, personalised learning, community engagement and the reorganisation of resources, spaces and time as the pillars of pedagogical renewal that fosters inclusion, belonging and meaningful learning.

Taken together, the six contributions approach youth transitions from complementary vantage points – theoretical reconceptualisation, institutional everyday life, regional policy-making, school-based protective factors, students' lived experience of distress, and whole-school pedagogical renewal – while converging on a shared conclusion: that social pedagogy's relational, participatory and justice-oriented orientation offers a necessary counterweight to the fragmentation, individualisation and inequality that increasingly characterise the transition to adulthood.

The varia section brings together four further contributions. In his submission, *Primary School Teachers' Attitudes, Perceptions and Self-Efficacy Regarding Students With Special Educational Needs: A Comparative Study of the Education Systems in Slovenia and Kosovo*, Arben Keka offers a comparative study of primary school teachers' attitudes, perceptions and self-efficacy regarding students with special educational needs in Slovenia and Kosovo, revealing that in both countries negative sentiments toward inclusive education coexist with comparatively high self-efficacy.

Yuna Puteri Kadarisman, Moh. Rifqi Rahman, Suyanto, Cepi Safrudin Abd Jabar and Ahmad Umar propose a *School Improvement Framework for Indonesia*, derived from a systematic literature review and organised around teaching and learning, leadership and management, assessment, and community and culture.

Christian Ameseder, Iztok Devetak and Darija Skubic investigate incidental learning from science journalism, showing that narrative writing styles improve Austrian non-experts' comprehension of and situational interest in health-science topics, compared with the traditional inverted-pyramid structure, in their submission, titled *Incidental Learning From Science Journalism: The Effects of a Narrative Writing Style on the Comprehension and Situational Interest of Austrian Non-Experts in Health Sciences*.

Finally, in the article titled *Croatian Teachers' Perceptions of Available Support and Barriers to Preschool Inclusion of SEN Children*, authors Sanja Skočić Mihić, Matea Butković and Snježana Sekušak-Galešev examine Croatian preschool teachers' perceptions of the support available for, and barriers to, the inclusion of children with special educational needs, linking perceived support to teachers' attitudes and competencies for inclusive teaching.

The issue concludes with a book review by Bojan Dekleva of Sami Timimi's *V iskanju normalnosti: Nov pristop k razumevanju duševnega zdravja, stiske in nevroznolikosti* [*Searching for Normal: A New Approach to Understanding Mental Health, Distress and Neurodiversity*] (Chiara, 2025). The review connects directly to the issue's focus theme: Timimi's critique of the individualising and

pathologising tendencies in contemporary approaches to mental health and neurodiversity resonates with the volume's recurring argument – voiced across institutional, policy and community contexts alike – that the difficulties young people face in their transitions to adulthood cannot be adequately understood, let alone addressed, in isolation from the social and structural conditions that produce them.

Read as a whole, this issue makes the case that youth transitions can no longer be understood as an individual passage to be managed by the young person alone, but must be read as a social process, shaped and constrained by digital environments, institutional regimes, policy frameworks, schools and communities. Across theoretical reflection, empirical research and policy analysis, social pedagogy emerges as the connecting thread running through the contributions: a discipline that insists on the relational and participatory quality of support, that reads distress and resistance as socially produced rather than as individual deficits, and that seeks to strengthen, rather than replace, the everyday relationships and communities within which young people grow up. In this sense, the issue is not only a survey of contemporary challenges, but also an argument for what social pedagogy has to offer in response to them: a consistently relational, justice-oriented and context-sensitive practice capable of holding together structural critique and everyday support in the accompaniment of young people through increasingly uncertain transitions to adulthood.

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