

**Thematic issue of RELA:****Spaces, times and the rhythms of transitional processes in adult education:  
Spatial, temporal, and rhythmic implications for adult education**

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**Lead editors for this issue:** Sabine Schmidt-Lauff, Michel Alhadeff-Jones,  
Fadia Dakka, Silke Schreiber-Barsch

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There is no debating that the current era is characterised by intractable, intersecting crises such as wars, climate catastrophes, migration flows, and the aftermath of the pandemic. These crises are not only reshaping global society as a whole but also impacting its various structures, socialities, living environments, and biographies. They reveal tensions that are often expressed through their temporal or spatial features. Navigating the intersection of social crises and their everyday spatial, temporal and rhythmic implications presents a unique challenge for adult education.

Space, time, and rhythm appear as key aspects and determinants in any human processes. References to those notions are therefore ubiquitous in current research in adult education. At the same time, the understanding of the spatial, temporal, and rhythmic dimensions of education often relies on taken for granted assumptions and does not necessarily capitalize on systematic inquiry - whether theoretical and/or empirically based - explicitly dedicated to the study of spaces, times and rhythms. During the last twenty years, many references have been published in the field of adult and higher education, revealing a momentum in contemporary research, focusing explicitly on the study of space, time, and rhythm in education (e.g., Alhadeff-Jones, 2017, 2023, 2024; Barnacle, 2016; Boutinet, 2008, Bright, Manchester & Allendykem 2013; Burke & Manathunga, 2020; Cole, Mirzaei Rafe, & Yang-Heim, 2024; Dakka, 2019, 2021, 2024; Lesourd, 2006; Maubant, Biasin, & Roquet, 2018; Maubant & Roquet, 2021; Roquet, 2018; Roquet & Biasin, 2023; Schilling, & O'Neill, 2020; Schmidt-Lauff & Schreiber-Barsch, 2019; Schmidt-Lauff, 2023; Vostal, 2021; Wilkinson, MacDonald, Diamond, & Sum, 2022; Wittorski & Hatano-Chalvidan, 2024). Recent developments in educational research have shown the significance of considering changes taking place in the policy, practice, empirical and theoretical study of education, considering the way people perceive, conceive and experience space and time. Both indeed represent critical lenses to describe and interpret phenomena through which autonomy, identity and inequalities are (re)produced in society. Focusing on the situatedness and the contexts of educational processes raises questions about how people (e.g., learners, educators, policy makers) determine the meaning, the relevance and the value associated with specific institutions, organizations, environments (including digital and hybrid ones) and situations, in relation to learning, transformational, and developmental processes. Closely related to the notions of space and time, rhythm is also increasingly acknowledged as a critical notion to conceive and analyse fluid, dynamic and complex phenomena, typical of those constitutive of culturally diverse educational processes (e.g., transformation, professionalization, emancipation, identity development). Thus, taken all together, the notions of space, time,

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and rhythm, provide researchers and practitioners with heuristic entry points to reflect on contemporary issues in the field of adult education.

### Transitions in adult education

Among critical issues, transitions appear as critical ones to consider in the field of adult education<sup>1</sup>: First, because the praxis of adult education is supposed to help people dealing with the experience of transitions that require learning to be managed or regulated. Second, because adult education is also expected to trigger changes that involve transitioning between different times and spaces in one's life (e.g., promoting continuing education to foster social mobility). Thus, adult education plays a critical role in helping people dealing with transitions, whether they involve adapting to a new environment (e.g., following social, political, cultural, technological or ecological changes), dealing with personal changes (e.g., migration, parenting, entering the workforce, changing career, retiring), or coping with embodied changes (e.g., illness, ageing). Transitions are often experienced as stressful periods (Miller, 2010), sometimes related to experiences of crises, characterised by events or perturbations carrying a significant load of uncertainty. Although such ordeals (Slowik, Rywalski & Clementino De Souza, 2019) are experienced differently by everyone, the meaning they carry is always socially constructed. Thus, between stability and change, transitions reveal and contribute to people's personal and professional development (Crafter, Maunder, & Soulsby, 2019), as much as they express discursive, institutional and social dynamics that participate to their understanding and that shape how transitions occur throughout the lifespan (Stauber, Walther, & Settersten, 2022). Accordingly, critical conceptualizations of transitions emphasize multiple, relational dynamics characterized by a continuous and iterative process of "becoming and unbecoming" challenging dominant linear frameworks (Colley, 2007). Transitions should not be understood as a substantial entity or a straightforward passage but rather as complex, interrelated processes shaped by temporal, spatial, and rhythmic dimensions.

### Spaces, times and rhythms of transitional processes in adult education

From a spatial perspective, transitions are revealed through the different "places" that people may occupy and the "mobility" that may be involved, for instance within a social circle, an institution, a cultural or geographic context (e.g., migration), a physical or a virtual environment. The tensions inherent to the experience of transitions also require to be contained, psychologically and socially, through good enough « transitional spaces » (Winnicott, 1971). The experience of transitional periods also influences how people learn to relate to specific places and spaces. From a temporal perspective, transitions appear for instance through the successive "states" or "stages" through which "development" or "transformation" are conceived (e.g., from "before" to "after", from being "less" to being "more" knowledgeable, skillful, critical, adaptive, mature). Transitions are thus inscribed in the temporalities of one's own existence, expressed as much by the daily gestures of

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<sup>1</sup> This special issue builds on a successful Research Symposium Series titled "*Spaces and Times of Transition. Re-calibrating the Multiple Scales of Change in Adult Education*" (<https://www.sunkhronos.org/stream2024>) launched in 2024, as part of the ESREA network Spaces, Times, and the Rhythms of the Education of Adults and its Movements (S.T.R.E.A.M.).

everyday life, as by the words used to evoke one's life history (Lesourd, 2009). The experience of transition also affects how people relate to time and how they eventually interpret the temporalities of their own personal and professional life. In contrast to the notions of "change" or "transformation", that tend to stress and take for granted identifiable "starting" and "arrival" points, referring to a transition emphasises the movement observed or experienced, as a liminal process in tension between the "already" and the "not yet", that is the "in-between". The dynamics and processes through which people experience transitions may be captured through the rhythms they display, as they reveal the fluidity that characterises people's ways of feeling, thinking, behaving and interacting with each other. Transitions involve indeed patterns and configurations, repetitions, variations and transformations, that shape how people evolve individually and collectively (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this special issue aims to question how we can access and describe the heterogenous spaces, temporalities and rhythms through which adults learn, transform, and develop themselves as they experience transitions throughout their lifespan. Its aim is thus to explore the multiplicity of spaces, temporalities, and rhythms that shape educational settings, processes and policies, involved in such transitional experiences. To this end, we offer some questions that may guide your contribution, without being exhaustive or limiting:

- What kind of spaces and temporalities are required to support specific transitional processes in adult education?
- What rhythms are involved and/or revealed by transitional processes? How are they experienced and regulated in adult education and learning?
- What kind of learning emerges during a transition phase? How does it develop in/through space and time?
- How does learning emerging during a transition phase change our experience of time and space?
- How can we envisage the material, social and psychological spaces that may help containing the tensions inherent to transitional experiences?
- How can we make sense of, and represent the complex temporal dynamics through which transitional processes unfold?
- How does the adoption of a spatial, temporal or rhythmic perspective contribute to better anticipate and cope with transitional processes in adult education and learning?
- How can we theorize transitional processes as learning processes, from a spatial, temporal, or rhythmic perspective?
- How can transitions, intended as processes rather than 'states', be used to advance a processual understanding of (adult) education?

We hope that the proposed Special Issue will offer the chance to foreground spatial, temporal and rhythmic aspects of the learning experience in adult education that are less or only implicitly addressed in the existing literature. We look forward to receiving original contributions in the form of papers of 4000-8000 words (including endnotes and references).

Paper should be submitted by 30 May 2025 via the RELA journal online system.

The Special Issue is expected to be published in February 2026.

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