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Reconfiguring Youth Transitions: Digital Spaces, Social Connections and the Role of Social Pedagogy

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∞ Youth transitions, once understood as linear progressions from education to work, independence and family life, are increasingly fragmented, prolonged and uncertain. Globalisation, individualisation, precarious labour markets and digitalisation have transformed the conditions of growing up, embedding transitions within hybrid social worlds in which online and offline experiences are deeply entangled. Digital spaces are not neutral tools but socio-technical environments that mediate identity, belonging and opportunity, while introducing new risks and inequalities. This theoretical article reconceptualises youth transitions through the combined lens of digital sociality and social pedagogy. It traces the shift from structured pathways to non-linear trajectories that may, in some contexts, take rhizomatic forms. It also examines the embodied, affective and networked nature of digital participation and considers how social pedagogy's relational, participatory and justice-oriented ethos can address the complexities of hybrid transitions. The proposed *Multidimensional Rhizomatic Transitions Framework* integrates four analytically distinct but dynamically connected dimensions: (1) rhizomatic pathways, (2) hybrid spatiality and sociomaterial entanglement, (3) relational-ethical orientation and (4) critical digital agency, including digi-grasping. Rather than simply placing these dimensions alongside one another, the framework explains how structural and platform conditions shape lived opportunities and constraints, how relational support influences their interpretation, and how digital agency may redirect subsequent pathways. The framework offers conceptual propositions for research, practice and policy. By situating social pedagogy within digitally mediated life courses, the article offers a future-facing approach to fostering agency, equity and belonging in contemporary youth transitions.

Keywords: digital spaces, hybrid social worlds, rhizomatic pathways, social connections, youth transitions

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Preoblikovanje prehodov mladih: digitalni prostori, družbene vezi in vloga socialne pedagogike

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Prehodi mladih, ki so bili nekoč razumljeni kot linearno napredovanje od izobraževanja k zaposlitvi, osamosvojitvi in k ustvarjanju družine, postajajo vse bolj razdrobljeni, podaljšani in negotovi. Globalizacija, individualizacija, prekarnost trga dela in digitalizacija so temeljito spremenile okoliščine odraščanja. Prehodi danes potekajo v hibridnih družbenih svetovih, v katerih se spletne izkušnje in izkušnje v živo neločljivo prepletajo. Digitalni prostori pri tem niso samo nevtralna orodja, ampak sociotehnična okolja, ki sooblikujejo identiteto, pripadnost in dostop do priložnosti, hkrati pa prinašajo nova tveganja in poglobljajo neenakosti. V teoretičnem članku prehode mladih na novo konceptualiziramo z vidika družbenih odnosov v digitaliziranem vsakdanu in socialne pedagogike. Osvetlimo premik od vnaprej začrtanih poti k nelinearnim življenjskim potekom, ki lahko v določenih okoliščinah privzamejo rizomatsko obliko. Digitalno participacijo obravnavamo kot utelešeno in afektivno prakso, vpeto v omrežja, ob tem pa preučujemo, kako se lahko socialna pedagogika s svojo usmerjenostjo v odnose, participacijo in v družbeno pravičnost odziva na kompleksnost hibridnih prehodov. Predlagani *večdimenzionalni okvir rizomatskih prehodov* povezuje štiri analitično ločene, vendar dinamično prepletene vidike: 1) rizomatske poti; 2) hibridno prostorskost in sociomaterialno prepletenost; 3) odnosno in etično usmerjenost; 4) kritično zmožnost delovanja v digitalnih okoljih, vključno s t. i. digigraspingom. Okvir teh vidikov ne obravnava samo vzporedno, ampak pojasnjuje, kako strukturni pogoji in značilnosti platform oblikujejo možnosti in omejitve v vsakdanjem življenju, kako odnosna podpora vpliva na njihovo razumevanje in kako lahko zmožnost delovanja v digitalnih okoljih preusmeri nadaljnje poti. Okvir ponuja konceptualna izhodišča za raziskovanje, strokovno delo in za oblikovanje politik. Z umeščanjem socialne pedagogike v življenjske poteke, ki jih vse bolj sooblikujejo digitalni mediji, članek razvija v prihodnost usmerjen pristop h krepitvi zmožnosti mladih za delovanje ter k spodbujanju pravičnosti in pripadnosti v sodobnih procesih prehajanja.

Ključne besede: digitalni prostori, hibridni družbeni svetovi, rizomatske poti, družbene vezi, prehodi mladih

Introduction

Youth transitions describe the processes through which young people move from childhood to adulthood, encompassing shifts in education, work, living arrangements and relationships. Once understood as linear and predictable, moving steadily from school to employment, financial independence and family life, these pathways have become increasingly fragmented, prolonged and uncertain (du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Harris et al., 2021; Woodman & Wyn, 2015). Precarious labour markets, digitalisation, individualisation and globalisation have reshaped the conditions of growing up (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Kalleberg, 2009; Ule, 2014), making the study of youth transitions timely and socially significant (Chesters, 2024).

In late-modern societies, this reconfiguration is inseparable from the transformations in digital communication and connectivity. A defining feature of contemporary transitions is their deep entanglement with digital spaces, which are often framed in policy discourse as universally beneficial solutions that obscure social and pedagogical complexities (Vivitsou, 2019). In today's digital society, a social formation in which everyday practices are organised through networked technologies, platforms and data flows (Castells, 1996; Orlikowski, 2007; Poell et al., 2019), the online and offline worlds are inseparably linked. Digital spaces mediate identity, belonging and opportunity (Boyd, 2014; Livingstone, 2011; Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016), offering new forms of connection and self-expression while introducing risks, inequalities and pressures to perform (Mesch, 2009; Oblak Črnič et al., 2023; Turkle, 2011; Twenge et al., 2019). They are not neutral tools but socio-technical environments that shape how transitions are experienced and navigated (Andreassen et al., 2017; Pink et al., 2022).

Social pedagogy offers a valuable lens for engaging with these dynamics. Grounded in the principles of relational care, participation and social justice (Eriksson, 2014; Härmäläinen, 2015; Storø, 2013), it views transitions as situated, relational processes shaped by structural conditions and everyday interactions (Dewey, 1986; Goffman, 2009). Its emphasis on dialogue, recognition and holistic learning is well suited to address the hybrid realities of young people's lives, bridging digital and physical contexts (Todorović et al., 2025; Winman, 2020).

Although youth transitions, digital sociality and social pedagogy have been extensively studied, they are rarely integrated into a coherent model of hybrid, digitally mediated transitions. Existing approaches tend to privilege either macro-structural conditions or micro-level identity practices, obscuring how sociomaterial entanglements and relational-ethical support shape young people's fragmented, rhizomatic pathways across online and offline settings. This

gap constitutes the article's central research problem.

To address this, the article synthesises relevant scholarship through a theoretical-conceptual approach combining an integrative narrative review with critical conceptual analysis. It identifies theoretical developments and tensions and proposes an interdisciplinary framework that reconceptualises youth transitions through digital sociality and social pedagogy. The framework is provisional: its concepts and proposed relationships are intended to guide empirical research and remain open to refinement or rejection.

The article first reviews key shifts in theories of youth transitions, then examines how digital spaces shape interaction, identity and belonging, before considering social pedagogy and presenting a multidimensional framework for contemporary digitally mediated transitions.

Conceptualising Youth Transitions

From Structured Pathways to Fragmented Trajectories

The concept of youth transitions has long been grounded in structuralist paradigms that conceptualise adolescence and early adulthood as a linear progression through clearly defined stages: education, employment, independent living and family formation, often referred to as a “normal biography” (du Bois-Reymond, 1998, p. 64). These models, including Tinto's (1988) theory of student integration, assumed normative, institutionalised routes to adulthood and success. Transitions were viewed as predictable and sequential, anchored in stable social institutions and economic structures.

However, by the beginning of the 21st century, this model began to lose its relevance. Scholars have increasingly questioned whether such frameworks can still account for the lived realities of young people navigating shifting social and economic landscapes (Chesters, 2024; Harris et al., 2021; Woodman & Wyn, 2015; Wyn et al., 2012). Traditional linear models are ill-equipped to capture the complexity and variability of contemporary youth experiences.

Disruption, Precarity and the Prolongation of Youth

The critique of classical transition theories gained momentum in the context of broader social transformations. In the 1990s, Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) introduced the concept of a risk society, highlighting how individuals increasingly bear responsibility for managing life transitions that were once overseen by social institutions. This shift is deeply intertwined with the processes of individualisation and globalisation, which not only expand individual choices but also create new forms of insecurity and disconnection (Bauman, 2000).

Individualisation, while offering new freedoms, places the burden of psychosocial integration on young people, often without adequate institutional support (Ule, 2014). Globalisation further erodes traditional social bonds and generates uncertainty, transforming perceived opportunities into sources of anxiety and risk. As Ule (2019) observes, the market often offers substitutes such as extended education, consumer goods and digital escapism, which may prolong adolescence and reinforce dependence rather than facilitate adult independence.

The traditional milestones of adulthood, completing education, entering stable employment, achieving financial independence and forming families, are increasingly delayed or disrupted (Eurostat, 2015; Furlong, 2016; Ule, 2019). Youth transitions have become increasingly complex, non-linear and prolonged. Concepts such as yo-yo transitions (Biggart & Walther, 2006; du Bois-Reymond & Blasco, 2003) capture the reversibility of contemporary pathways, while returning to the parental home illustrates how changes in education, employment and intimate relationships can reverse apparently completed transitions (Stone et al., 2014).

The labour market plays a key role in this shift. Stable, long-term employment has been replaced by precarious, flexible and often insecure work (Chesters, 2023; Kalleberg, 2009; Mortimer & Moen, 2016). Simultaneously, technological developments are eliminating traditional jobs while raising the skill threshold for new employment (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Furlong, 2016; Lavrič & Deželan, 2021). These economic shifts delay financial independence and contribute to psychological stress, particularly among those lacking family support networks (Alberti et al., 2018; Eckersley, 2011).

Contemporary Approaches: From Individualisation to Rhizomatic Thinking

Contemporary scholarship has moved towards a more nuanced understanding of youth transitions. The linear model has been challenged by frameworks that highlight the individualised, fragmented and non-linear nature of modern life courses (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). In this context, researchers have called for holistic and situated approaches that acknowledge the diversity of young people's trajectories (Bennett, 2015).

One key development is the recognition of digital technologies as not merely contexts but constitutive and mediating elements in youth transitions. Digital platforms now mediate identity formation, social interactions and future aspirations (Livingstone, 2011; Theodoridis et al., 2019). However, they also introduce new vulnerabilities, such as online harassment and persistent digital

footprints, which complicate identity stability (Livingstone & Bober, 2006). Lupton's (2016) concept of a digital risk society captures how digital environments both enable and endanger young people's self-projects.

Building on Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991), recent theories explore how youth engage in reflexive biography-making amid uncertain, risk-saturated conditions. Leccardi (2005) notes that young biographies are increasingly shaped by an understanding of the unpredictability of the future and the constant flexibility that it requires.

This shift has prompted a turn towards rhizomatic and assemblage theories (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Semetsky, 2011), which conceptualise transitions as entangled, emergent and relational rather than as movement along a pre-determined sequence. The term *rhizomatic* is used here more specifically than *non-linear*. Non-linearity describes a pathway that includes delays, reversals or unexpected turns; a rhizomatic perspective seeks to explain how those turns are generated through changing connections among institutions, relationships, material resources and digital platforms. Gravett (2021) critiques dominant metaphors of bridges and gaps and proposes rhizomatic transitions as movements with multiple entry points, exits and possible directions across social, institutional and digital terrains. The concept is therefore analytically useful when a change in one domain creates possibilities or constraints in another. It does not imply that transitions are random or free from structural inequality, and where this relational mechanism is not evident, the more established language of fragmented or non-linear transitions may be sufficient.

One of the most profound influences on these contemporary non-linear trajectories is the integration of digital spaces into young people's everyday lives. Digital environments connect areas of life that were previously more clearly separated, and both expand and constrain opportunities for interaction, belonging and learning, a theme explored in depth in the following section.

Digital Spaces and Social Interactions

Embodied and Experiential Dimensions of Digital Life

Digital spaces are embodied and affective environments through which young people interact, form identities and make meaning. Dufva and Dufva (2019, p. 20) introduce *digi-grasping* as active sense making at the interface between digital and physical worlds, encompassing embodied, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of engagement with digitalisation. Although it overlaps with embodied and embedded cognition through its focus on tacit, situated knowledge, it specifically connects experience with creativity, ethical judgement and

participation in shaping digital environments. This article therefore treats digital-grasping as one component of critical digital agency, not as a replacement for established cognition theories or a label for all digital participation.

Theodoridis and Miles (2024) further explore the experiential dimension of digital life, conceptualising *the experiential realm* as a sensory and emotional space intensified through digital media. Visuals, interactivity and real-time feedback amplify this realm, while temporal and spatial boundaries are blurred by the continuous and remixable nature of digital content. Youth engagement in this hybrid, digital-physical space is therefore deeply affective and immersive, shaped by the affordances of the technologies they use and the cultural meanings they create in the process. Robards (2012) argues that online and offline lives are increasingly intertwined. The description of an *always-on* culture refers to this continuous availability and overlap: personal, social and educational demands may remain present across times and places rather than ending when a young person leaves a particular physical setting. This does not make digital and face-to-face interaction identical; bodily, spatial and contextual cues may be altered or reduced online, even when digitally mediated interaction remains meaningful.

This transformation reflects the broader restructuring of social life. Castells's (1996) theory of the *network society* describes how power, identity and cultural participation are reconfigured through global digital networks. In this context, digital access remains an important axis of inclusion and exclusion, but inequality also concerns the quality of access, autonomy, support and visibility. As Mesch (2009) notes, it is particularly youth with greater financial resources who are often better positioned to engage with new technologies, which are at the forefront of digital transformations, raising concerns about widening inequalities. The platformisation of daily life (Poell et al., 2019) adds a further layer of complexity, as algorithmic systems now mediate visibility, participation and value. In this article, *sociomaterial entanglement* refers to this mutual shaping of social practices and technological arrangements: relationships and opportunities are jointly influenced by people, material resources, devices, interfaces and platform rules. Such framings reflect what Vivitsou (2019) describes as the myth-making around digitalisation, where technological change is naturalised while its socio-political implications remain obscured.

Social Interactions, Identity Performance and Networked Publics

Digital spaces have reshaped social interactions among young people, mediating presence, accessibility and intimacy. Although Berger and Luckmann (1966) have positioned face-to-face interaction as the most authentic

form of communication, there is no consensus on whether digital interaction enhances or diminishes social life. Some argue that it weakens relational depth and fosters loneliness (Pittman & Reich, 2016; Turkle, 2011; Twenge et al., 2019), while others highlight its capacity to complement offline relationships, promote connectedness and empower those with fewer social skills (Ahn & Shin, 2013; Hampton et al., 2011; Oblak Črnič et al., 2023). For adolescents limited by suburbanisation, restrictive schedules or a lack of physical gathering spaces, social media supports friendships and belonging (Boyd, 2014).

However, digital connection is not synonymous with relational depth. Turkle's (2011) *tethered self* describes individuals who are constantly connected yet increasingly isolated. Adolescent interaction often centres on control, image management and performative presence rather than authentic dialogue or vulnerability, creating connection without closeness that can exacerbate loneliness and relational fragility.

Within these contexts, young people navigate multiple audiences. Boyd's (2014) notion of *networked publics* and *context collapse* illustrates how youth perform identity across converging peer, family and institutional contexts. These performances are vital acts of self-construction shaped by platform affordances such as visibility, persistence and scalability. Gabriel (2014) emphasises the intentionality, noting that youth constantly negotiate visibility and projected identity. The pressure to curate a coherent and acceptable online self can produce anxiety when visibility is linked to social status or inclusion. Theodoridis et al. (2019) suggest that self-presentation can offer agency and control while helping to manage anxiety and assert stability amid everyday uncertainty.

Freedom, Surveillance, Belonging and Learning

The tension between freedom and surveillance is central to many youth experiences in digital space. Platforms can serve as *parent-free zones* (Lincoln, 2012), allowing experimentation, content sharing and exploration of taboo subjects without adult supervision. Yet, platform structures also reinforce exclusionary rules of visibility and belonging (Lincoln, 2014; Theodoridis & Miles, 2024), marginalising those who lack the resources or skills to navigate them. Boyd (2014) highlights how digital inequality extends beyond access and involves disparities in support, autonomy and social capital. Platform preferences are often racialised, reflecting broader segregation and cultural stratification.

These dynamics shape identity formation, belonging and learning. Youth engage in what Bennett (2018) calls a *do-it-yourself identity*, using digital media to assert independence and self-expression, but public identity construction also brings vulnerability to social feedback. Hällgren and Björk (2023) argue

that digital technologies collapse the boundaries between school and leisure, private and public, and analogue and digital, thereby producing complex, fluid identity practices often misunderstood by adults. Building on existential and relational theories (Bauman, 2000), they understand digital identity not merely as representation through profile images or selfies, but as lived experience shaped by peer validation, algorithmic visibility and emotional investment.

This is particularly true for marginalised or minority youth. Digital spaces can provide belonging for those exploring gender and sexuality (Pattaro, 2015) and enable authenticity where offline constraints limit it (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2016). Yet, harassment, surveillance and exclusion threaten those already vulnerable (Boyd, 2014). Livingstone (2011) captures the tension between opportunity and risk: the Internet offers both connection, creativity and civic participation as well as harmful content, privacy violations and emotional strain.

Digital practices are increasingly intertwined with learning and development. Young people use the internet to socialise, produce content, seek information and engage with political or cultural issues (Livingstone, 2011). These learning processes are not limited to formal education but span in- and out-of-school contexts. Research on remote craft education during the COVID-19 pandemic shows how digitally mediated learning is shaped by students' material and relational home conditions, revealing creative possibilities and inequalities in access to tools, materials and meaningful interaction (Kouhia et al., 2021). However, research often isolates technology use from the broader youth experience. Hällgren and Björk (2023) call for holistic, youth-centred methodologies that recognise how identity, learning and digital participation are fundamentally entangled.

Social Pedagogy and the Role of Educators

Responding to Hybrid Youth Transitions

Structural transformations, digital-interactional dynamics and the shift from structured, linear pathways toward fragmented, prolonged and non-linear trajectories create conditions in which social pedagogy becomes particularly relevant. As young people navigate life courses marked by precarity (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992), individualisation and globalisation (Giddens, 1991; Ule, 2014), pathways to adulthood have become more complex, hybrid and uncertain. With its emphasis on relational care, participation and social justice, social pedagogy responds to transitions as situated, relational and mediated processes rather than fixed developmental stages, addressing structural inequalities and the affective, embodied realities of digital life.

Digital spaces have become central arenas for identity formation, belonging and learning. Boyd's (2014) notion of networked publics captures how young people express autonomy, seek recognition and perform identity through affordances such as visibility, persistence and scalability. These affordances can empower or constrain, reproducing inequalities in digital literacy, autonomy and social capital along lines of class, race and geography. Social pedagogy's commitment to inclusion and recognition (Honneth, 1996) supports equitable participation online and offline. Boyd's (2014) example of racialised platform migration from MySpace to Facebook further reflects broader patterns of segregation, underscoring the need for culturally responsive pedagogies that view digital participation as both a social practice and a political terrain.

Theoretical and Practical Orientations for Hybrid Transitions

The theoretical orientations of social pedagogy offer flexible responses to these challenges. Eriksson's (2014) typology of adaptive, mobilising and democratic models provides tools for engaging with rhizomatic, non-linear transitions (Gravett, 2021). The adaptive model supports integration into existing structures but is limited under disruption and uncertainty. The mobilising model emphasises structural critique and empowerment, resonating with digital activism and marginalised voices, while the democratic model centres on dialogue and mutual recognition within trust-based relationships (Storø, 2013). Together, these orientations address transitions as emergent, context-bound processes shaped by offline structures and online practices.

Integrating digital theory into social pedagogy is essential. Winman (2020) argues that digitalisation restructures participation, identity and community, requiring social pedagogy's theoretical foundations to be reconfigured. Drawing on Dewey's (1986) experiential learning, Goffman's (2009) interactionism and Hämäläinen's (2015) understanding of social pedagogy as a response to societal transformation, Winman addresses both infrastructural and relational dimensions. A *sociomaterial* perspective recognises that participation is jointly shaped by relationships, physical settings, devices, interfaces and platforms, while *digital intimacy* refers to trust and vulnerability cultivated online (Andreassen et al., 2017; Pink et al., 2022). These concepts are useful when they clarify concrete relational processes. Similarly, Perla et al. (2025) emphasise relational, reflective and context-attuned practice, positioning educators as co-constructors of supportive, ethically grounded learning environments.

Livingstone's (2011) critique of instrumental ICT integration in formal education, detached from young people's lived realities and participatory practices, parallels the limitations of traditional transition models. In contrast,

peer-based practices such as blogging, fan communities and collaborative projects allow identity, collaboration and learning to intersect. Todorović et al. (2025) examine how youth work relationships can be extended into digital spaces through platform-based interactions such as reactions, short messages and shared media. Although easily dismissed, these micro-interactions sustain social bonds and affirm identity amid precarity and change. Digital spaces are therefore not separate from real life but vital terrains where young people navigate transitions, belonging and becoming.

Todorović et al. (2025) provide concrete examples of this approach. Hybrid participation models that combine face-to-face engagement with online presence have emerged, in which educators act as digital companions rather than solely as monitors. This can extend relational presence through reactions, short messages and shared media and may allow support to develop gradually within the rhythms of young people's digital lives. However, digital companionship should not be endorsed uncritically. Digitally mediated contact may offer less access to tacit, embodied and contextual cues than face-to-face interaction and raises questions concerning privacy, safeguarding, professional boundaries and unequal expectations of availability. It should therefore be understood as a context-dependent complement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face engagement, and its usefulness should be assessed from the perspectives of both young people and practitioners.

From Digital Literacy to Digi-Grasping

The move from functional digital literacy towards what Dufva and Dufva (2019) call digi-grasping offers one useful extension of established approaches. It frames digital engagement as an embodied, ethical and aesthetic practice, moving beyond safe use towards critical, creative and participatory involvement. This aligns closely with the holistic and reflective ethos of social pedagogy, which supports young people not only to navigate digital spaces but also, where possible, to question and reshape them. Within the proposed framework, digi-grasping is located under the broader dimension of critical digital agency. It therefore functions as a sensitising concept for examining how technical skills, feelings, creativity and ethical reflection interact, rather than as a claim that all forms of digital agency must take this form.

Janer and Úcar's (2017) eight dimensions of social pedagogy provide a comprehensive framework for extending these practices into digital contexts. These dimensions are as follows: contextual, historical, epistemological, functional, professional, methodological, normative and ethical-political. Their model accommodates the vulnerabilities introduced by blurred public-private

boundaries, constant connectivity and shifting support structures while keeping participation, social justice and relational engagement at the core. By applying this framework to hybrid transitions, educators can address both traditional forms of exclusion and the new inequalities generated by digital mediation.

In summary, social pedagogy connects structural transformations with affective and sociomaterial dynamics, providing a relational, critically aware and future-oriented approach. By fostering trust in digital intimacies, enabling collective agency and cultivating the skills to navigate and shape digital environments, it equips young people not merely to adapt to changing conditions, but to actively participate in reimagining the pathways into adulthood.

Reconfiguring Transitions: Towards a New Theoretical Framework

Synthesis of Key Insights

The preceding analysis shows how youth transitions have shifted from structured, linear life-course models to fragmented, prolonged and rhizomatic processes shaped by precarious labour markets, digitalisation, individualisation and globalisation. They are negotiated in hybrid physical–digital spaces, where belonging, identity and learning are mediated by platforms, algorithms and socio-technical norms. Social pedagogy offers a relational, justice-oriented lens for ethical, dialogical and participatory support. Although these strands remain divided across macro-structural and micro-level frameworks, the framework connects them by explaining how structural inequality and platform governance shape everyday visibility, recognition and opportunity, while relational support and critical agency may reproduce, buffer or redirect these effects.

Rationale for a New Framework

A reconfigured model must encompass structural inequality and the lived, affective realities of digital sociality. Youth transitions are digitally stratified through unequal social capital, algorithmic visibility and supportive adult engagement (Boyd, 2014). As digital spaces combine opportunity and risk (Livingstone, 2011), young people are neither inherently competent digital natives nor passive victims, but situated actors whose agency is enabled and constrained by platforms, infrastructures and social inequalities.

Turkle's (2011) concept of the *tethered self* captures the paradox of constant connection alongside difficulties with solitude, vulnerability and sustained relational presence. Digital interactions enable visibility, belonging and self-expression, but may reduce affective depth to performative exchanges.

Social pedagogy therefore requires relational responsibility and ethics of care that foster critical reflection, participatory agency and dialogic presence across online and offline contexts.

Winman's (2020) integration of digitalisation into social pedagogy supports a multi-layered, relational and digitally inclusive model. Drawing on Goffman's (2009) and Orlikowski's (2007) concept of sociomaterial entanglement, it locates participation within platforms, networks and algorithmic systems. Poell et al. (2019) further show how platform infrastructures, markets and governance shape visibility, identity, peer networks and community access, connecting macro-level structures with lived experience.

Finally, Dufva and Dufva's (2019) concept of *digi-grasping frames* digital engagement as embodied, ethical and aesthetic rather than merely instrumental. By emphasising doing, feeling and making, it complements rhizomatic models and conceptualises digital competence as relational, situated and transformative.

The Multidimensional Rhizomatic Transitions Framework

Bringing these strands together, this article proposes the *Multidimensional Rhizomatic Transitions Framework*, a model that conceptualises youth transitions as *digitally mediated becomings*: non-linear, affective and co-constructed processes shaped by the interplay of structural forces, sociomaterial contexts and relational support. The framework is multidimensional because no single level adequately explains transitions, and it is rhizomatic where changing connections create new entry points, exits or directions. Its dimensions are not intended as parallel categories but as parts of a recursive process through which conditions are experienced, interpreted and acted upon.

The framework comprises four interlinked dimensions:

- **Rhizomatic Pathways**
Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of the rhizome and Gravett's (2021) re-theorisation, pathways are potentially networked and emergent, with multiple entry and exit points. They evolve through interactions among institutions, relationships, material conditions and digital environments. A pathway is rhizomatic when shifting connections generate its direction, not merely when a conventional sequence is delayed or reversed.
- **Hybrid Spatiality and Sociomaterial Entanglement**
Informed by Orlikowski (2007) and Winman (2020), transitions unfold across connected physical and digital settings. Platform rules, devices, resources and institutional environments shape access, visibility,

belonging and exclusion. This dimension links structural conditions to lived experience by showing how broader arrangements create everyday opportunities and constraints.

- **Relational-Ethical Orientation**
Rooted in social pedagogy (Hämäläinen, 2015; Storø, 2013), this dimension emphasises dialogue, mutual recognition and ethics of care in navigating uncertainty. Although relational support cannot remove structural inequality, it shapes perceptions of opportunities and risks, experiences of recognition and trust, and access to resources and connections. Therefore, it mediates between hybrid conditions, subsequent agency and pathways.
- **Critical Digital Agency and Digi-Grasping**
Building on Poell et al. (2019) and Dufva and Dufva (2019), this dimension frames digital agency as the capacity to navigate, question and, under some conditions, influence platform structures. Digi-grasping captures the embodied, creative, ethical and collective practices through which such agency may develop. Agency is neither assumed nor unlimited but depends on resources, recognition and platform conditions. When exercised, it can open, close or redirect pathways, feeding back into the first dimension.

How the Dimensions Interact

The framework follows a recursive sequence: macro-structural conditions and platform governance shape hybrid opportunity environments experienced through visibility, participation, belonging and exclusion. Relational-ethical support influences interpretation and access to resources, while critical digital agency shapes responses that may preserve, interrupt or redirect pathways. Collective participation can reshape relationships, organisations and, less often, platforms or policies.

For example, precarious employment may increase reliance on platform-mediated work, where ranking systems affect visibility and opportunity. Support from educators or peers may help young people interpret conditions, access alternatives or contest unfairness, creating new pathways without implying that support or agency alone can overcome structural constraints.

Implications for Research, Practice and Policy

The framework links macro-structural analysis with lived experience. Research should examine infrastructures, everyday practices and their relationships; practice may extend support into digital settings only with explicit

ethical boundaries and safeguarding; and policy must recognise that platform governance shapes visibility, participation and resources. Empirical studies can trace rhizomatic branching across life domains; examine access, devices, platform rules and exclusion within hybrid spatiality; explore recognition, trust and boundaries within relational-ethical support; and study navigation, production, refusal and collective action as critical digital agency. Class, gender, ethnicity, geography and disability should be treated as intersecting conditions that shape access, risk, support and agency.

Moving beyond deficit-based or purely linear models, *the Multidimensional Rhizomatic Transitions Framework* positions youth not merely as adapting to changing conditions, but as active co-creators of their futures, navigating, shaping and at times resisting the sociomaterial landscapes through which their transitions unfold.

Assessing the Framework's Validity and Usefulness

The framework is most useful when transitions span life domains and digital relations shape access, support or opportunity; it is less applicable to stable institutional sequences or incidental digital conditions. Applications should specify the population, domain, platform, timeframe and relevant inequalities.

It proposes that platform and institutional conditions shape pathways through visibility, belonging and networks; relational-ethical support determines whether digital conditions become resources or constraints; critical digital agency depends on access, recognition and participation; and changes in one domain may open pathways in another. These propositions can be tested through longitudinal, comparative, ethnographic and participatory research.

The framework has limited value if its dimensions lack identifiable relationships, simpler concepts explain the evidence equally well or its key factors do not differentiate pathways. Research must also consider whether digital companionship weakens relational depth, structural precarity outweighs support or rhizomatic patterns are context-specific. These alternatives position the framework as a contestable research programme rather than a normative manifesto.

Conclusion

Building on the Multidimensional Rhizomatic Transitions Framework, this article conceptualises youth transitions not as linear, standardised sequences but as fragmented and prolonged, digitally mediated becomings across entangled digital and offline spaces. Integrating rhizomatic transitions, digital sociality and social pedagogy, it shows how sociomaterial entanglements shape

identity, belonging, learning and agency, as well as encounters with opportunity, risk and structural constraints. It positions social pedagogy as a relational, participatory and justice-oriented response to structural inequality and the affective and embodied realities of digital life.

The framework remains conceptual and limited by its scope, abstraction and untested relationships. Its dimensions may vary in relevance, while rhizomatic language may add little where delayed, reversible or non-linear trajectories provide sufficient explanation. Digital connection cannot be assumed to create relational depth, nor can social-pedagogical support compensate for structural insecurity, discrimination or unequal platform power. Its usefulness must therefore be assessed in relation to class, gender, ethnicity, geography and disability.

Future longitudinal, participatory, comparative and multimodal research should test the framework's relationships, its value beyond existing non-linear models and the implications of educators acting as *digital companions*. It should also examine disconfirming cases in which relationships, agency or platforms do not have the proposed effects.

In practice, support should combine relational presence, digital awareness and critical digital agency while remaining context-sensitive, ethically bounded and responsive to young people's preferences and unequal access. Equitable transitions require structural change, relational support and individual and collective agency, recognising that these operate at different levels and cannot substitute for one another.

Ethical Statement

The research did not involve human and animal subjects. The reviews on which it was based aggregated studies that had already received ethical approval. Consequently, no additional ethical approval was necessary.

Data Availability Statement

Since the present study is a literature review, it does not involve the collection or analysis of primary empirical data.

Disclosure Statement

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

When preparing this article, the author used ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Sol in August 2026; earlier model versions were not retained), Paperpal, and Jenni

AI (web applications; versions not recorded) in July, August, November and December 2025, and January, July and August 2026. As the exact historical prompts were not retained, the following reconstructed prompt summarises their use: “Edit the supplied text for clarity, coherence, accessibility, concision and academic style, while preserving the author’s arguments, terminology and citations. Do not introduce new evidence, references, claims, interpretations or conclusions.”

The tools were used solely for language editing and revisions, not to generate or analyse data, create references or make scholarly judgements. The author reviewed and edited all outputs and accepts full responsibility for the publication’s content and integrity.

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