

Call for Papers Issue 1 | 2025

Crisis and then? Adult Education Research after Societal Crises

*Guest Editors
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Crises are a subject that educational science in general (e.g. DGfE Congress 2024) and adult education in particular (e.g. Annual Conference 2022) are intensively engaged with. Both adult education practice and continuing education research usually focus on acute crisis management. This makes it all the more urgent to focus on the aftermath: If the acute crisis is perceived as an existentially threatening state of emergency that triggers immediate pressure to act – what happens after the (acute) crisis? To what extent has the crisis permanently changed the conditions of adult and continuing education practice or research? To what extent has it stimulated adult learning in the context of individual, organisational or other collective learning processes? What role does adult and continuing education play in the negotiation and perpetuation of a 'new normal'? How are lessons learnt from the crisis and for future crises in the post-crisis period?

The forthcoming issue aims to bring together contributions that deal with the aftermath of societal crises in different ways. A wide variety of crises can be considered: for example, a crisis can be perceived as overcome (e.g. financial crisis), as latently ongoing (e.g. Covid-19-pandemic) or as a permanent new reality (e.g. climate catastrophe), it can extend to all members of society or rather affect certain groups or functional systems (e.g. in the education sector with PISA and LEO shock, teacher shortage), it can be categorised as a crisis by consensus or be highly controversial and then become part of the crisis itself (e.g. refugee 'crisis') or it can completely escape broad public perception as a 'forgotten crisis' (e.g. in Myanmar). These different characteristics determine not least whether and in what form an aftermath can be constituted. Adult education (science) is involved in the social fabrication of crises in many ways – often, but not necessarily, as the protagonist of a solution.

Against this background, a broad spectrum of questions can be addressed:

Continuity and discontinuity: What changes in the aftermath of the (acute) crisis, what remains unchanged or is restored – especially with regard to structures and practices in adult and continuing education and adult learning? Where is change merely taking place on the surface and remains decoupled from historically grown, powerful structures? Where is crisis used as an opportunity for change and transformation? What role do adult and continuing education, their professional actors and organisations play in this?

Temporality of the crisis: What does 'after' mean, how can it be determined? How is the end of a crisis socially produced and in what (temporal) relation is the aftermath placed in relation to the crisis (e.g. 'after the crisis is before the crisis' or 'after the crisis is in the crisis')? How is the central significance of crises for social diagnoses of the present presented from the perspective of the aftermath (new and different)?

Conventionalisation, institutionalisation, normalisation: How are practices that were tried and tested during the crisis made permanent or adapted to the needs of the aftermath? Under what conditions can collective or organisational learning processes be perpetuated? How does specialised knowledge acquired during the crisis find its way into the generally available social stock of knowledge? Which knowledge and which practices are displaced or forgotten in the course of establishing new normalities ('new normal')?

Effects and consequences: How will its (sometimes unforeseen) effects be dealt with after the crisis? How are (negative) consequences of the necessary crisis reactions addressed, e.g. the changed teaching/learning routines following the Covid-19 crisis? How are exclusions and structural disadvantages caused by the pressure to act during the crisis negotiated? What development processes are triggered by the crisis-like state of emergency at an organisational level?

Responsibility: How do people reflect on, come to terms with and attribute responsibility after the crisis – both for the course of the crisis itself and for dealing with it (including secondary effects)? How do responsibilities (e.g. in adult education organisations) shift between the acute crisis and the aftermath? How are changed actor constellations that were effective during the crisis renegotiated in the post-crisis period? How is the boundary between duty and responsibility adjusted in the aftermath?

Both empirically and theoretically accentuated contributions are welcome; evaluative questions and reflective approaches are also considered in connection with crises if they offer potential for generalisability. The thematic focus is also an invitation to all researchers who have conducted research in (acute) crises and have already published results or presented them, e.g. in the context of the Section Conference 2022 or the DGfE Congress 2024, in order to now build on this, e.g. by re-analysing existing data or through follow-up surveys, to focus on the question of how things continued after the crisis.

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