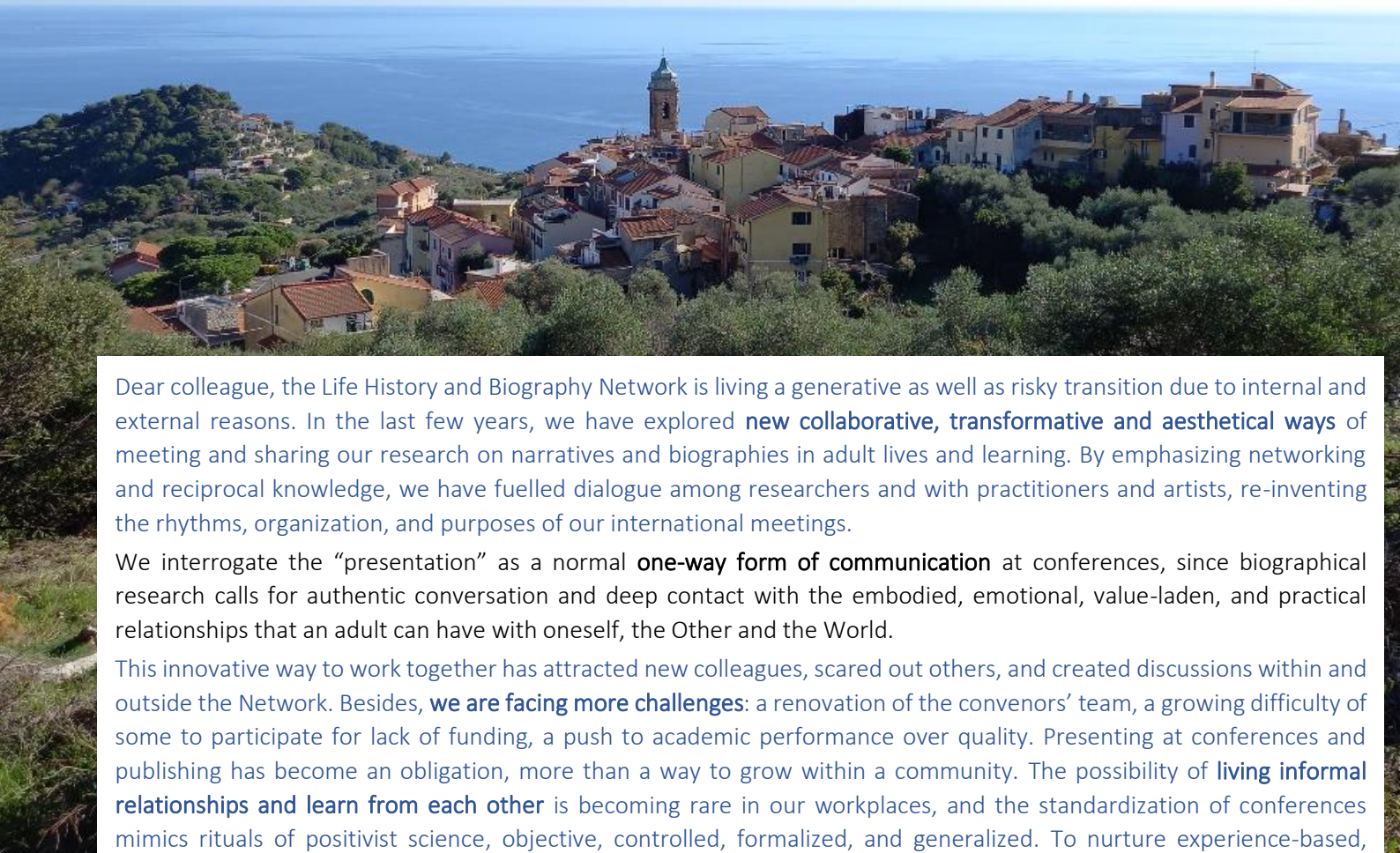




Dept of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano Bicocca  
ESREA - European Society for Research on the Education of Adults  
Life History and Biography Network  
4-7 march 2025 - Costa Rainera (IM) – Italy

## Participation, beauty, and meaning

A research retreat on the past, present and future of biographical inquiry



Dear colleague, the Life History and Biography Network is living a generative as well as risky transition due to internal and external reasons. In the last few years, we have explored **new collaborative, transformative and aesthetical ways** of meeting and sharing our research on narratives and biographies in adult lives and learning. By emphasizing networking and reciprocal knowledge, we have fuelled dialogue among researchers and with practitioners and artists, re-inventing the rhythms, organization, and purposes of our international meetings.

We interrogate the “presentation” as a normal **one-way form of communication** at conferences, since biographical research calls for authentic conversation and deep contact with the embodied, emotional, value-laden, and practical relationships that an adult can have with oneself, the Other and the World.

This innovative way to work together has attracted new colleagues, scared out others, and created discussions within and outside the Network. Besides, **we are facing more challenges**: a renovation of the convenors’ team, a growing difficulty of some to participate for lack of funding, a push to academic performance over quality. Presenting at conferences and publishing has become an obligation, more than a way to grow within a community. The possibility of **living informal relationships and learn from each other** is becoming rare in our workplaces, and the standardization of conferences mimics rituals of positivist science, objective, controlled, formalized, and generalized. To nurture experience-based, biographical human knowing and learning, we are seeking for good relational spaces where to grow and share critical feedback, and fuelling feelings of belonging and community.

This is why **we are proposing for this year a research retreat**, i.e. a community of practices where participants discuss their work, gain deeper knowledge, learn from each other, and develop further collaborations, not least writing together if the participants agree to put their efforts into it.

**Participation, beauty, and meaning**, then, are both the topic and method. If you are interested to know more about these words, if your research has anything to do with them, or simply you want to share biographical research in such a context, **you are welcome**. We will set up the conditions to work with you, over 3 days, far from home and institutional spaces. The site is a small village in Italy on the Liguria coast, that can host a group of around 20 people, living close to each other for the time of the retreat. Informality will be the rule: we will prepare some of our meals, have biographical walks, explore artistic languages, and meet the physical and social context around us. Everyone will have a chance to “present” their research, react to others, and go beyond that.

The organisers, Rob Evans and Laura Formenti

## Preparing the research retreat

A RR requires preparation and previous knowledge of the proposals, to allow the co-design of the program with the participants. This is why we will have 5 on-line seminars leading up to the meeting, and ask for an essay from each of the participants to be delivered by the end of January. Before meeting in Liguria, everybody will have a chance to read each other's work and participate to the organization of the 3 days.

## Online meetings

The participants to the RR will be involved in its preparation and co-design of the program. Five online seminars from November to February will be organized in the following dates:

Thursday 14.11.24	17.30-18.30
Thursday 12.12.24	17.30-18.30
Thursday 09.01.25	17.30-18.30
Thursday 30.01.25	17.30-18.30
Thursday 20.02.25	17.30-18.30

**Signal your interest to participate:** Write an email to: [rob.evans@t-online.de](mailto:rob.evans@t-online.de)

The deadline for this is 10 November, but since receptivity is limited we need to know in advance and we will create a waiting list in case of an exceeding number (first comes, first served!).

Be prepared to **upload an essay** (up to 1000 words) by January 9, 2025. The form of the essays is free: they may be traditional abstracts or short papers, autobiographical, biographical, multimedia life histories and narratives, poems, etc. Each essay will be read by different colleagues and get feedback by the end of January. Their final version will be collected in a book of abstracts.

A regular certificate of participation and presentation will be provided by the Department of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano Bicocca.

## Costs and practicalities

The RR does not entail organizational costs, so there is no fee. We will provide information about the costs for lodging (calculate around 40 euros per night, if you are sharing an apartment with others) and the food. The village is very small, a list of apartments with number of beds will be sent to the participants for their own self-organization. Travel is at the expenses of each participant. We will organize transportation from the coast to uphill, if needed.

## Important dates:

- 10.11.2024 – Deadline to signal your interest
- 14.11.2024 – First online meeting – Please take note of the dates
- 09.01.2025 – Deadline to submit the essays
- 30.01.2025 – Feedbacks deadline from reviewers
- 17.02.2025 – Final submission of the essays
- 04-07.03.2025 – Research retreat