

Temporal navigation in academic work: Experiences of early career academics

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ABSTRACT:

The paper explores temporal complexities and inequalities in academic work and career building. Drawing on focus group discussions with early career academics in Finland, the paper discerns different qualities of time which are collectively shared but unevenly distributed: scheduled time, career time, body time, timeless time and private time. The temporal experiences of individual participants are examined through four stories, which represent distinctive intersections of the qualities of time. Each story resonates with the notion of social acceleration but in a different way and with its own temporal struggles. The results show that the temporal starting points for the career building differ radically among the early career academics, some offering much more advantageous and favourable positions than others. This inequality contradicts the deep-rooted values of the Finnish culture that emphasises, in accordance with the Nordic welfare state ideology, equal opportunities for all. The results are discussed from the perspective of politics of time, arguing that temporal inequalities create social inequalities and reproduce academic hierarchies.

KEYWORDS:

1. career building
2. focus group
3. politics of time
4. social acceleration
5. stories
6. work-life balance

Introduction

In the current managerial university environment, academic work has become increasingly competitive, metrics-based, insecure and stratified. These changes have important temporal implications. Several empirical studies have reported that academics are overloaded and pressed for time in their work (e.g. Curries et al. 2000; Fanghenel 2012; Henkel 2010; Menzies & Newson 2007; Vostal 2016; Ylijoki 2013). Accordingly, they live in fast time (Guzman-Valenzuela & Di Napoli 2015) in the fast lane (Vostal 2015) with the h-index (Burrows, 2012) and feel that they have no time to think (Menzies & Newton 2007), no time to sleep (Acker & Armenti 2004) and no space for thought-time (Noonan 2016) or timeless time (Ylijoki & Mäntylä 2003).

These temporal changes in academic work resonate well with Rosa's (2009; 2010a) theorising on social acceleration. Rosa argues that we 'are tightly regulated, dominated and suppressed by a largely invisible, de-politized, undiscussed, under-theoretized and unarticulated time regime' (Rosa 2010a, 8), which follows the logic of social acceleration. He identifies three forms of social acceleration that can be identified in the current nature of academic work. First, technological acceleration, especially the Internet, ever-new computer applications and quicker instruments, speeds up the rhythm of academic work and enables/enforces constant connectivity. Second, the fast rate of social change, such as incessant reforms and university mergers, is commonplace in most higher education systems. Finally, the acceleration of the pace of life is evident in academics' constant experiences of hurry and a lack of time. Thus, there seems to be an ongoing process of speed-up of academic work, captured by the Accelerated Academy Project.

However, the focus of the criticism of social acceleration is not on speed per se. Speed includes positive features that have always attracted people. This is exemplified by the appeal of the motorcycle (Rosa 2010b) and automobile (Wajcman 2015), both belonging to the key cultural imaginaries emphasising the pleasures of fast movement, excitement and thrills. In a similar manner, Adam (2004) argues that the valorisation of speed has deep roots because humans have always wanted to do things faster. In terms of academic work, Vostal (2016) underlines the meaningfulness and pleasure of heated and hectic moments of discovery and inspiration. Thus, instead of speed itself, the critique is directed at the exponentially accelerating pace combined with increasing productivity and efficiency. Living and working

becomes too accelerated and overloaded, creating threats to people's well-being (e.g. Leccardi 2007; Spurling 2015) and leading to paradoxical consequences – for instance, the control of time through increasing compression leads to a loss of control because speed exceeds all possibilities for temporal synchronisation and integration (Adam 2004).

Furthermore, social acceleration is not an all-embracing process (e.g. Adam 2004; Rosa 2009, 2010a; Wajcman 2015). There are natural speed limits, as many physical processes cannot be accelerated. Moreover, there are countertrends, including various slow movements, such as slow science and the slow professor. Rosa and Scheuerman (2009, 13) also point to the desynchronisation of different processes by remarking, 'even if most spheres of social life are now speeding up, it seems unlikely that they are all doing so at the same pace'. Moreover, social acceleration does not affect all social groups alike. For instance, based on time-use diary surveys in the UK, Sullivan and Gershuny (2017) state that the professional/managerial class is more likely to be under time pressure than the classes with a lower occupational and educational status. In this respect, Adam (2004, 127) makes a distinction between the groups that are 'time-poor–money-rich' and groups that are 'time-rich–money-poor'.

In this paper, I explore the dynamics and complexities of social acceleration in early career academics' work experiences in Finland. Although all academics are busy and work hard, their temporal starting points for academic career building are radically different and involve, for instance, temporal safety and autonomy for some but temporal vulnerability and subordination for some others. I first distinguish between the different qualities of time and then explore their uneven distribution among the early career academics. Finally, I discuss the results from the perspective of politics of time and reflect how temporal inequalities create social inequalities and reproduce academic hierarchies.

Data and method

This paper is based on focus group discussions with early career academics who work in the fields of sociology, social policy and social work at two research-intensive universities in Finland. In total, 12 (nine female and three male) junior academics participated in the discussions. They all had recently completed their doctoral studies and worked full-time in temporary positions ranging from a couple of months to four years. Eight participants worked as fixed-term researchers and four as temporary lecturers. They all aimed to stay in the university and strived to build their career in academia. The themes discussed include the

participants' work history, current working patterns, future aims and the best aspects and potential threats in work. The sessions lasted for about 90 min. The discussions were recorded and transcribed. The quotes presented in this paper are translations from Finnish to English. To protect the participants' anonymity, the names given are pseudonyms, but the gender of the speaker is unaltered.

Academic career building in the Finnish national context has some important distinctive features. The Finnish higher education system is rooted in the Nordic welfare state ideology, emphasising equal opportunities for and the pursuit of the common good. However, in recent years, a series of market-driven reforms have taken place at a fast pace. For instance, the former civil-service employment relationships have been transformed into contractual ones, and the funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture to universities has become dependent on a performance-based formula. From the perspective of academic career building, it is crucial that the Finnish system represents a tournament model (Musselin 2005) in which many candidates apply for an open post against heavy competition. This means that obtaining a permanent position is a long-term and highly risky process. The recent introduction of the tenure-track model has further tightened competition and created an elitist group that is admitted to a tenure-track (Herbert & Tienari 2013; cf. Acker et al. 2012). All these changes have made the Finnish higher education system as one of the most competitive ones and thereby radically remoulded the institutional conditions under which academics work.

The data was grounded in interpretive close reading, in which all references to time pressure and hurry were first discerned to map the diversity of experiences of social acceleration. In the next step, all other kinds of temporal expressions were identified. Then, the temporal descriptions were classified into five categories, aiming to cover the key temporalities through which the participants made sense of their work: scheduled time, career time, timeless time, private time and body time. The first four categories basically capture the same temporal dimensions that were found in an earlier study (Ylijoki & Mäntylä 2003) but with more nuances and partly changed terminology. The fifth category, body time, is new.

Next, drawing on the focus group discussions, I will introduce the five categories and investigate their interconnections and complexities in the daily practices of academic work. This analysis traces the culturally shared temporal qualities in the data. After this, I will delve

into the lived experiences of individual participants by presenting four stories, each of which tells about social acceleration but in a radically different manner.

Accelerated Academia

The dominant temporality in the focus group discussions is called *scheduled time*. All participants say that they are constantly very busy and pressed for time. They are engaged in all sorts of activities, and to a large degree, the schedules for performing their duties are externally imposed. Teaching hours, administrative meetings, student supervision and managerial reports as well as deadlines for funding applications, conference papers and article manuscripts, among others, all have their specific rhythms, cycles and deadlines that allow little temporal flexibility or autonomy. In addition, there are often unpredictable, sporadic requests and demands that must be quickly responded. As a result, time becomes compressed, fragmented and fast, as illuminated in the following quote:

At the moment, I have some sort of teaching relationship with about 70 students. It necessarily chops up my time. Therefore, I partly have all sorts of odds and ends. I have an awful lot of various processes going on all the time; they all have deadlines. And since I have so much to do, I just cannot anticipate them. (...) And all this administrative work and the meetings have their own timetables. If you are appointed to these committees, you cannot change their timetables. You just need to float among these different schedules. (Tiina, temporary lecturer)

Living in fragmented and fast scheduled time, the junior academics strive to gain control over their time use and be as efficient as possible. In particular, they make careful plans and priority lists and try to follow them to gain control over time. In this way, external schedules are internalised as one's own scheduled time. External time control or time cards are not needed because academics control themselves and exercise constant temporal self-governance.

Apart from scheduled time, social acceleration is manifest also in the participants' reflections on their future prospects in academia. This time perspective is called *career time*. All participants have fixed-term employment; therefore, the end of the current contract is an impending horizon in their career time. They are aware of how much time they still have left

and worry about their future employment. Thus, the need to constantly apply for funding plays a key role in career time, increasing the overall workload and time pressure.

This kind of chaos is inbuilt in this work in a special way. You cannot do research in peace since you must all the time apply for the next funding. This is built-in to this work. I don't know whether or not I have learnt to cope with this better. I think quite often that oh no, so what, I can't cope with this anymore.

(Veera, contract researcher)

To secure career continuity, the fixed-term academics work hard to fulfil all their expectations and to distinguish themselves. This becomes all the more important when they consider career progression. The participants are at the beginning of their career building, but they know perfectly well the rules of the academic game: the competition for permanent positions in academia is increasingly tough, and all that really matters in career advancement is research merits. This creates a strong push for attaining an impressive publication record and attracting major research grants, which then consolidate a hectic working pattern. In this way, career time together with scheduled time speeds up work practices, strengthens the attempts to use time as efficiently as possible and increases experiences of time pressure, hurry and strain.

However, work that is constantly hectic, fast-paced and overloaded may clash with physical and mental limits. This happens when social acceleration encounters *body time*. In the focus group discussions, the participants frequently talk about their own or their colleagues' experiences of burnout, mental breakdown, severe backache and other illnesses that force them to slow down or sometimes even completely stop for a while. Thus, striving for maximal control in time use may end up in a total loss of control, turning efficiency into inefficiency.

Being aware of the constraints set by body time, the junior academics emphasise the importance of finding a proper work-life balance. Balancing involves boundary work: one needs to keep a watch on how much one can work and recognise where the boundary lies. This requires the skills to listen to oneself and the messages of one's bodily processes so that this delicate boundary is not crossed. Thus, the internalised time discipline is supplemented by a sort of internalised therapist and well-being controller that attentively monitors one's

time use from the perspective of body time. In accelerated academia, it is the responsibility of individual academics to keep themselves fit for work not only intellectually but also mentally and physically. One needs the skills to guard oneself against overexertion and to reduce work time if necessary, as pointed out by Paula:

You can be shattered so easily in this work. Therefore, you must control and restrict yourself and your work. You must know when you are capable of working and when you must have some rest. (Paula, temporary lecturer)

However, maintaining the balance between work and rest is a tricky and complex issue that involves contradictory elements. Hectic work and long hours arise not only from externally imposed schedules and strict career requirements but also from academics' own enthusiasm and passion for immersion in work and willingness to devote their time to it. This time perspective is called *timeless time*. It transcends time awareness owing to affective, cognitive and physical absorption in the ongoing activity motivated by the love for this activity (see Mainemelis 2001). One forgets the passing of time in a sort of flow experience and is able to completely concentrate on work. Timeless time is the luxury time that the junior academics strive for, dream about and remember once having in their doctoral studies with nostalgia. It is especially linked to research work: reading, thinking and writing in peace and quiet without any external limits. Sometimes it is also related to intense and captivating interactions with colleagues or students but never to administrative tasks.

Timeless time is said to be necessary for obtaining high-quality outcomes, but foremost, it is personally appealing and alluring. Therefore, boundary work between work and non-work becomes extremely complicated. It seems obvious that the junior academics would happily sacrifice rest and endanger body time if only access to timeless time was available. In timeless time, work is not really work but rather a way of life. Accordingly, the accelerating pace and long working hours do not mean coercion, trouble and difficulties but mean delight, thrill and fun:

In a way, I'm always at work. Although I'm not at work, I still am. If I am enthusiastic about something, I will surely write in the evening or do something in the evening. It's really fun. (Teemu, temporary researcher)

Balancing working time, or the lack of it, becomes all the more complicated because academic work does not take place in a social vacuum disconnected from life in its entirety. Although academic work may well be a way of life, it is not the entire life. The junior

academics repeatedly speak about their non-work commitments in various kinds of activities and associations and about the social relationships and significant others that they want and need to take into account in their use of time. This time perspective is called *private time*. It is intermingled with caring relationships, mostly with those closest to oneself and especially small children; however, partners, elderly parents and friends are also mentioned in this context. Private time also concerns caring for oneself by carefully arranging time, for instance, for yoga lessons, shopping and hairdresser and café visits during office hours.

Because overtime culture (Torp et al. 2018) and an ideal of total commitment (e.g. Ylijoki 2013) are deeply rooted in academia, protecting private time is challenging. Family obligations are of help here. In particular, the responsibility of small children acts as a good shield against excessive work. It is a socially and personally legitimate reason to work less, irrespective of how busy one is or how captivating it would be to continue working. However, in these cases, private time is seldom purely an oasis of rest and peace but, in accordance with the notion of Taylorised family life (Hochschild 1997), tends to be as accelerated and hectic as working time. Sari explains why she does not work as long hours as is the norm and expectation in her research team:

I have a big family and I have a lot of children's transportation. In my dream day, I come to work at nine, or half past nine, then I work extremely intensively for six hours and then I get off. I allow myself to do this; I don't need to work longer hours. I have worked really well; now I can leave and go home and pick up one child from here and the others from there. (Sari, contract researcher)

All in all, scheduled time, career time, body time, timeless time and private time represent the collective shared temporalities through which the participants in the focus group discussions speak about and reflect on their work practices. All these temporalities are related to social acceleration but in different ways and at different degrees. However, apart from the culturally shared qualities of time among the participants, each of them has a unique relation to time depending on their specific work and life history conditions. Next, I will move on to scrutinise how the five time perspectives are interrelated at the level of personal experiences and what forms social acceleration takes in them. I will do this by presenting four narratives: the stories of Minna, Anne, Matti and Heidi.

Minna: Caught in a temporal trap

I have had an awfully intense teaching period for the whole early part of this year. In fact, I should now be on holiday, but I just cannot go on holiday; I'm so over-excited. Somehow, I feel it would be wasted time; I feel I should accomplish more. On the other hand, I know I should slow down and that I cannot manage this all, but then again, I feel guilty for not achieving enough. I just feel that I should be more efficient. (...) I have been diagnosed with burnout twice. I really don't learn.

Minna is a temporary lecturer but has also worked as a contract researcher in a large, externally funded research project. She is a single parent with two small children. By and large, her story follows the plot of a misery story, telling about 'pathological acceleration' that Rosa (2010a) writes about.

Minna's work is dominated by scheduled time. She has a heavy teaching load with a considerable amount of time spent on lecturing to undergraduates, preparing lectures, marking exams, counselling students and taking care of teaching-related administrative tasks. Therefore, she is extremely busy and works very long hours. Moreover, to a large degree, her time is controlled from the outside, thus steering what to do, where, when and how long. This leaves little space for temporal autonomy and flexibility. Because there are also various kinds of suddenly appearing odds and ends to attend to, time also becomes unpredictable and fragmented into disconnected units. This means that she is unable to make long-term plans as the other participants in her focus group do and her future horizon is short:

It comes from the outside so that my time is very much controlled by what teaching I have in each period. It would be really lovely to be able to plan my work until the end of the spring, for instance; but for me, well, I have to-do lists to follow.

Minna does not complain about teaching itself. In fact, she enjoys teaching and interacting with students. The problem stems from career time considerations. Teaching merits do not have much weight in academic career building and therefore she would need to focus more on research. She has a passion for research too, but in her current work situation, she is unable to find much time for it, let alone timeless time for comprehensive immersion in reading and writing. Timeless time is present only in Minna's memories of the time of her doctoral studies. Besides, her private time, including the custody of two children, restricts how much time she is able to put into work. Nevertheless, she is unwilling to compromise on

the quality of her teaching either. This creates a dilemma, which is all the more severe because, as a single parent, career continuation and steady salary are particularly acute for her.

In fact, teaching should only be a side business. My ex-boss criticised me for investing too much in teaching, saying that I should not do so and that it should be treated only as a side business. But I like to teach, I want to invest in it and I do invest in it. I get extremely good feedback from students. But this is a risk. If I think about my future and applying for open posts, I really should improve my publication record and get more research done. In those situations, it does not matter if students are satisfied.

Minna tries to solve the dilemma by working extra hard and using her time in a maximally efficient way. She exercises constant temporal self-control and struggles to avoid all occasions for wasting time. Time is a scarce resource that she utilises with extreme efficiency. Unfortunately, this creates health problems. She has been diagnosed with burnout twice. In this way, body time sets limits for excessive working. This makes her feel guilt. Caught in self-accusation, she blames herself not only for not being sufficiently productive but also for not being able to set temporal boundaries and keep herself fit to work.

As a consequence, Minna feels like she is stuck in a temporal trap. In her story, scheduled time, career time, body time and private time are tightly interlocked, keeping her in a sort of vicious circle in which timeless time has no room. This creates temporal vulnerability in which her agency is very bounded. Moreover, she does not criticise the temporal terms and conditions under which she is working but considers the problems as a personal failure. According to Minna, she should learn the right kind of attitude:

It would be wonderful to be able change my way of thinking. Now I think that I must do these things by this deadline but somehow if only I could change this into a possibility or something.

Anne: Searching for timeless time

These are empty days, peaceful days. I have begun to organise such days for every week. Then I don't have any meetings that would break the day. When I immerse myself in something, it is awfully difficult for me to interrupt my

work. So, then I don't eat, I don't drink and I don't speak to anybody. Those are good days; there is no other life. They are the best thing in the world.

Anne is a temporary researcher. She has both a personal grant and funding from a research project. In addition, she has some minor teaching duties. She is single but has a dog. Her story is in many respects opposite to Minna's story. Although she too is busy and in hurry, she has much more temporal autonomy. For her, the key temporal question concerns how to achieve timeless time.

Anne is committed to her duties; she works hard and often feels heavy time pressure. However, her experiences of social acceleration substantially differ from those of Minna. Anne's work is not dominated by tightly binding teaching and administrative schedules, but as a researcher, her schedules are rather loose and long-term, such as deadlines of research bids, conference papers and article submissions. To a significant extent, she has control over her use of time, which brings temporal flexibility and autonomy to her work and life. Anne tells, for instance, that she often stays at home until noon so that her dog does not need to be alone for so long. In this way, she is able to smoothly reconcile private time with work.

Anne tries to make the most of her temporal autonomy and organise her work in a way that would allow timeless time. For her, profound research work requires long-term concentration without interruptions. Timeless time mostly concerns reading and writing alone, but sometimes it also involves collaboration with close colleagues, such as the one case that Anne recalls with warmth: a joint data analysis session that lasted for an exceptionally long time and in which everybody felt that something really good will come out of it. To create these kinds of experiences of timeless time, Anne makes careful plans and skilfully arranges her calendar so that she has free and empty days devoted to writing. Paradoxically, then, scheduled time does not stand in opposition to timeless time but supports and facilitates it. Anne explains her method:

I have what I call clearing days. Then I try to clear space so that the next day I wouldn't need to work on those one hundred and forty little things, which in the end take all the time even if they are not particularly demanding tasks. I have noticed that when I have focused on a long series of different kinds of small things, then it is quite difficult to concentrate on anything anymore that day.

However, a problem may arise. Although Anne manages to organise free days, this does not guarantee the experience of timeless time. She may experience neither flow nor immersion in work despite favourable working circumstances. In this sense, timeless time entails unpredictable and unforeseen elements and therefore cannot be completely controlled. Rather, timeless time resembles the proper time ('Eigenzeit', see Nowotny 1994) of the work process itself that takes the time it needs.

I dream about flow days for writing; they are the best thing in the world. But even if you can organise such days, you cannot order them. They come when they come. Pretty often, writing days are something totally different from flow days.

Anne is frustrated when experiences of timeless time and flow do not arise in spite of arranging special time for them. The periods of standstill, waiting for the ripening of ideas and enduring the recurrent ups and downs of creative work may even pose threats to body time. Anne says that for her, academic work has bipolar elements and the low moments have sometimes led her close to a breaking point:

In January–February, I had one month which was awfully tough for me. I felt that I'm really at a breaking point. It was rather fully packed anyway, but then I had one paper that was irritatingly late. Whatever I tried to do, the parts didn't click together in a way I wanted.

All in all, in Anne's story, the five time perspectives are not in a fundamental conflict with each other but blend together reasonably well owing to Anna's possibility to negotiate and craft the temporal conditions of her work. Social acceleration is clearly evident in her story too, but its pathological elements have no significant role in it. For instance, she hardly touches upon the worries of career time in her own case, probably because she is doing well and has achieved the right kinds of credits. In her privileged work position, temporal problems turn into intellectual struggles within the timeless time.

Matti: Temporal safety in a research team

I must say that this has gone very easily. My contract is for four years and I didn't even apply for this position. I got this opportunity straightaway after I had defended my doctoral thesis. I really can't complain. I have a flexible boss. I can pretty well settle things with him and always make rearrangements of the goals, when a manuscript is expected and what else is expected from me and when. There is much flexibility.

Matti is a researcher in an EU-funded research project. Besides research duties, he has a small amount of student supervision. He has a partner who is non-academic. They do not have children. Matti's story tells about the temporal safety and flexibility provided by his research group and especially the principal investigator (PI), which make his work relaxed and easy-going.

Matti has been lucky from the very beginning. His first university contract is for four years, which is seen as exceptionally long-term and fortunate among the other focus group participants. He works in a well-structured and well-funded team with members from different disciplines, countries and sectors. Matti enjoys working in this group and appreciates the PI, who is a good boss. He oversees that research duties are fairly distributed among the members; thus, Matti's workload is moderate and easily rearranged if needed.

The work situation leaves a considerable amount of temporal leeway to Matti to arrange and negotiate his schedules as long as he performs the expected tasks. He is skilful in taking advantage of this opportunity and balancing his work with private time for hobbies and other non-work activities. Good balancing also concerns body time. Matti is able to set the limits and keep them. For instance, the feelings of guilt, which are an acute problem for Minna, do not personally affect him.

I have noticed that other people discuss about guilt; some of my colleagues tend to speak about this. I personally don't. I know how to ease up when needed; I'm pretty good at that.

In this way, Matti is not overwhelmed by externally imposed scheduled time. Nevertheless, he too is busy and in hurry, and sometimes, depending on the team's work rhythm, the work gets particularly hectic and strained. For instance, he tells about an ongoing data gathering process bounded by a strict schedule that takes up his entire time and does not allow any delays or changes. However, this is a special work period that does not last for long. In

general, he has much more say in scheduling and organising his work. He emphasises the need to organise one's time and have a clear-cut priority list, which defines the duties on which focusing is reasonable. Being a researcher in an externally funded research project enables him to ignore many external demands, especially from the university administration:

It depends on how well you plan your calendar. You need to watch out for not taking too much work; you need to organise things and (...) remember that the key issue is to write and publish. There are things you need to do, and then there are all sorts of administrative stuff which I put at the end of the list and then, luckily, they suddenly vanish away. These annual work plans and others—many people are so stressed with this useless paperwork which takes so much time. I won't touch on it unless somebody concretely comes to my door to demand it.

This kind of prioritising has career implications. Matti can concentrate on the duties that are in line with the requirements of academic career building. Thus, he has no specific worries about career time, especially because his research group and its wide international networks offer support and career opportunities. For Matti, timeless time is no problem either. Contrary to Anne, who writes alone and struggles with timeless time, Matti writes joint articles with the project members. The articles may have several authors from different countries and the text circulates between them. This may cause some problems in synchronising the process, but it does not require any specific time with flow experiences. However, Matti speaks in a tone of timeless time about the face-to-face meetings of his research group. He enjoys long and vivid discussions in a stirring atmosphere wherein ideas just keep on flying and everyone has high spirits.

Overall, Matti's story shows how a good research group and its PI may act as a buffer against the detrimental effects of social acceleration. This, of course, does not necessarily occur in all large and well-funded research projects. In Matti's case, however, the group provides temporal protection, safety and flexibility. He is never on his own and can always trust that the other members and especially the PI are available as backup. Owing to the temporal leeway, he is able to achieve a good balance between the different time perspectives. Moreover, as a junior member of the team, he is not responsible for the project outcomes and timetable. In a way, he has outsourced temporal control especially to his boss, who oversees that the deadlines are adhered to and outcomes are reached. Matti just does his part in the group, and, at least for the time being, this is sufficient for him.

Heidi: Non-stop networking

I have lots of projects which I coordinate, I write columns and popular articles, I give consulting training and, in the autumn, I'll teach one course and give thesis supervision. I have all kinds of networks and many things going on. (...) I have decided to succeed in this business and do whatever it takes as long as the price is not too high.

Heidi has a research grant from a foundation; moreover, she has a mixture of varied, small fee-paid jobs within and outside academia in Finland and abroad. She is married and has no children. Heidi's story tells about academic freelance work, which involves the complex intermingling of temporal autonomy and temporal dependency.

Heidi works in networks as an academic freelancer. She is enthusiastic about many things and enjoys gathering together people with the same kinds of interests and aims across sectors. To some extent, wide-ranging networking is also an economic necessity because her research grant alone does not cover her cost of living. This working pattern means that her ties to the local university are rather loose; the university is just one, albeit important, nexus of working. As a consequence, Heidi has considerable temporal autonomy from the institutional requirements of the university, and she can very freely organise and schedule her work. The other side of the coin is that she does not have institutional backup and support. Because networks by nature are fluid and unsteady, she is very much on her own in temporal terms as well.

Social acceleration is manifest in Heidi's story in several ways. She herself is very energetic and busy. She has many irons in the fire all the time, as she puts it. Other network members too are very busy and may sometimes have even more irons in the fire than she does. Therefore, Heidi needs to carefully synchronise her time with others' timetables and be patient and persistent to keep the networks alive and to achieve her desired outcomes. In addition, being dependent on the networks, Heidi has to be always on and always alert to new collaborative projects and opportunities for marketing her ideas. She says, for instance, that she frequently attends cocktail parties, not only because they are fun and she enjoys meeting people but also because her job requires socially mixing, looking for new connections and strengthen the old ones. So, although Heidi has considerable temporal autonomy, she also has considerable temporal dependency.

Because Heidi is very active in many issues and tightly schedules her time, she feels she is in danger of working too much. Furthermore, her work tends to be fascinating and alluring; therefore, it is easy to become immersed in it and forget the passing of time. Thus, both scheduled time and timeless time have an important role in Heidi's story. This threatens body time. Heidi has confronted her limits and suffered from mental fatigue and severe backache. These experiences taught her that she must continuously be on guard and exercise temporal self-control. Heidi is proud to say that she is capable of doing this well:

I have so many networks, and sometimes I become over-excited. This is a damn difficult job. You must be a real master of life so that you can keep to the limits and be productive too. It requires self-governance. (...) If I'm exhausted, I very quickly take three days or a week of sick leave. And if I get in a panic situation because there are too many things to do, then I leave in the middle of the day to go to a café or cinema. Then, oddly enough, the next day I know how to organise my work. I don't rush or fuss around.

Career time is also a tricky issue for Heidi. She works on very varied and uncertain funding and her position in academia is vulnerable. Still, she is self-confident and convinced that she will succeed in career building because she is good, does the right things and has already shown her skills to attract external funding. On the contrary, she keeps watching that the cost of competing for success will not rise too high in terms of her health, social relations and income level. In that case, she has a plan B.

Finally, combining academic work with private time is not a concern for Heidi. On the contrary, she underlines that academia is a cosy place for her in every aspect. Her partner is also an academic and they share together the low and high moments of work. For Heidi, academic work is not only paid work but also a part of her personality and lifestyle, which suit her well.

My work is in no bottomless contradiction with my own life. I mean, I'm married and my partner is also an academic. When we come home, we share the daily news, like damn it, I did not manage to accomplish anything today, or yes, now it's going. It supports my work. But then again, we protect our free time too.

All in all, Heidi's story has two conflicting sides. On the one hand, she has considerable autonomy to organise her time in a harmonious way; on the other hand, she is temporally

dependent on her networks and partners. This can potentially lead to temporal dissonance; therefore, Heidi needs to constantly be on guard and protect her temporal balance. In this aspect, Heidi's story is in a deep contrast to Matti's story. Whereas Matti can always rely on his group and the PI, Heidi carries all the temporal responsibility herself.

Discussion

By and large, the notion of social acceleration has good resonance in the experiences of the early career academics investigated in this study. They all are busy and in hurry, work hard and often experience time pressure. The result of this study is in line with several empirical studies that report fast pace, work overload and temporal tensions in academic work (e.g. Acker & Armenti 2004; Gornall & Salisbury 2012; Guzman-Valenzuela & Di Napoli 2015; Menzies & Newton 2007; Spurling 2015; Torp et al. 2018; Vostal 2015; Ylijoki 2013; Ylijoki & Mäntylä 2003; Ylijoki et al. 2014).

Yet, the notion of social acceleration gives an unnuanced overview, hiding the crucial differences in qualities of time among the early carer academics of this study. Social acceleration has radically different meaning and a distinctive shape in the four stories, each characterised by its own temporal struggles. Minna is overwhelmed by the accelerating pace of work and stuck in a temporal trap, Anne struggles with the emergence of timeless time and Heidi exercises constant self-governance to keep a proper temporal balance, whereas Matti has outsourced time control to his boss and follows his research group's work rhythm. Thus, the stories point to 'the heterogeneity of time' (Spurling 2015) and show that at the experiential level, time is always complex and multi-layered (Adam 2004).

Moreover, in line with Spurling (2015, see also Osbaldiston et al. 2016), the uneven distribution of the qualities of time can be claimed to have severe implications for future career prospects. All the early career academics who participated in this study aim to stay in academia. They all are similarly qualified, are at a similar career phase and work in similar disciplinary fields in two similar institutional contexts in the same small country. Yet their temporal starting points for career building are remarkably unequal. Hence, the polarisation among the academic staff does not take place only at the later career stages when some reach more advantageous and favourable positions than others; it is already evident at the very beginning of the academic career path. This inequality of starting points contradicts the deep-

rooted values and ideals of the Finnish culture that emphasises, in accordance with the Nordic welfare state ideology, equal opportunities for all. Based on this study, these cultural foundation pillars need to be revisited in the case of Accelerated Academia.

Adam (2004) emphasises that one of the key goals of time studies is to make visible what is invisible in our current temporal practices. This is interrelated with the politics of time: how different qualities of time create and reproduce social inequalities and hierarchies. A core question is what kind of temporal politics the university applies in its recruitments and human resource management and how much the temporal perspectives and implications are taken into consideration. In this study, the early career academics feel that the university as an employer leaves them to individually struggle with their temporal problems. The managerial university striving for cost-efficiency can, for instance, set a temporal trap but is unwilling to see the consequences for those who occupy these precarious positions because temporal problems are considered as individuals' personal problems and not social or institutional problems. According to Currie et al. (2000), the university is a greedy institution that requires passion and commitment, but the more one works for the university, the more one needs to make personal sacrifices. Making the hidden temporal sacrifices visible would contribute to a better understanding of how academics and academic work are steered and monitored by tacit temporal politics and, in certain cases, to raising the impetus for changing them.

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