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**PROJECTIFICATION  
AND CONFLICTING  
TEMPORALITIES IN ACADEMIC  
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION**

**Abstract:** *The project format has become a standard and self-evident way to organize research work in today's accelerated university context, leading to the projectification of science. This paper argues that the project format is not a mere technical organizational tool, but that it challenges and reshapes research practices and ideals. The project format is embedded in a specific temporality which is called project time. The key characteristics of project time are scrutinized by distinguishing it from process time, which refers to the internal organizational logic of research. In addition, project time is examined through Barbara Adam's theorizing on the commodification, control, compression and colonization of clock time. In the last part of the paper, temporal conflicts in project-based research are examined empirically by drawing upon interview material with Finnish academics working in the social sciences.*

**Keywords:** *academic research; project time; process time; social acceleration*

**OILI-HELENA YLIJOKI**

Research Centre for Knowledge, Science, Technology  
and Innovation Studies (TaSTI)  
School of Social Sciences and Humanities  
33140 University of Tampere, Finland  
email / [oili-helena.ylijoki@uta.fi](mailto:oili-helena.ylijoki@uta.fi)

**Projektifikace a konfliktní  
temporality v produkci  
akademického vědění**

**Abstrakt:** *Projektový formát se stává standardním a zcela zřejmým způsobem organizace vědecké práce v dnešním kontextu zrychlené univerzity a ústí v projektifikaci vědy. Tento článek tvrdí, že projektový formát není pouze organizačním nástrojem technické povahy, ale že zároveň postihuje a přetváří vědecké praktiky a ideály. Projektový formát je zakořeněný ve specifické temporalitě zvané projektový čas. Článek zkoumá hlavní rysy projektového času a odlišuje jej od procesuálního času (process time), který představuje vnitřní organizační časovou logiku výzkumu. Nadto je projektový čas analyzován pomocí teoretického modelu Barbary Adamové, ve kterém zkoumá komodifikaci, kontrolu, kompresi a kolonizaci hodinového času. Na pozadí rozhovorů s finskými sociálními vědci studie v závěrečné části pojednává o časových konfliktech ve projektově orientovaném výzkumu.*

**Klíčová slova:** *akademický výzkum; projektový čas; procesuální čas; sociální zrychlení*

## Introduction

The project format has become a standard way to organize research activities in today's managerial university. The image of the lonely scholar who is dedicated to advancing his (seldom her) intellectual pursuits in the peace and quiet of academia's ivory towers has given way to tightly organized teamwork on fixed-term projects with competitive external funding from various national and international sources. It could be said that university research has moved from individual craftsmanship to mass production involving the efficient distribution of labour. This general trend applies to some extent to all disciplinary fields, including the humanities and social sciences, where an individual working style has been common. As a consequence, disciplinary differences have become increasingly blurred. While traditionally the university could be seen as a community of academic tribes with distinctive ways of organizing research,<sup>1</sup> the rise of the project format steers them all towards the same pattern.

The "projectification of science"<sup>2</sup> is not a separate phenomenon, but the project format has become a common way to organize different kinds of activities in different kinds of organizations, thereby creating also an increasing number of working roles as project workers and project managers. Some authors<sup>3</sup> even speak about the projectification of the whole of society as project-related principles, rules, techniques and procedures penetrate all aspects of living. This includes our private lives and social relationships, as "life is conceived as a series of projects",<sup>4</sup> creating "a new iron cage of project rationality".<sup>5</sup>

The triumph of the project format springs from its apparently seamless fit with the needs of today's unpredictable and turbulent "high-speed soci-

<sup>1</sup> Tony BECHER, *Academic Tribes and Territories*. Milton Keynes: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Niki VERMEULEN, *The Projectification of Science*. Paper for the 5th making projects critical workshop 21–22 January 2010. Bristol Business School, University of the West of England.

<sup>3</sup> See Harvey MAYLOR – Tim BRADY – Terry COOKE-DAVIES – Damian HODGSON, "From Projectification to Programmification." *International Journal of Project Management*, vol. 24, 2006, no. 8, p. 663–674.

<sup>4</sup> Johann PACKENDORFF – Monica LINDGREN, "Projectification and Its Consequences: Narrow and Broad Conceptualisations." *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, vol. 17, 2014, no. 1, p. 13 (7–21).

<sup>5</sup> MAYLOR et al., "From Projectification," p. 664.

ety” characterized by social acceleration.<sup>6</sup> Rosa<sup>7</sup> distinguishes three forms of social acceleration that thoroughly shape our lifeworld: technological acceleration (the speeding up of transportation, communication and production); the acceleration of social change (the decline in the stability and permanence of social institutions and practices); and the acceleration of the pace of life (subjective experiences of the fast tempo and rhythm of living). As a result of all these aspects of social acceleration, life inside and outside organizations becomes increasingly unstable, transient and volatile. In this turbulent context, the project format offers a temporal, fixed-term, fast and flexible way to achieve specific one-off goals. It is a targeted tool for a targeted function, which matches well with the suddenly emerging and rapidly changing needs of organizations.<sup>8</sup> The project is established for a fixed task for a fixed period: it begins and it ends, without promising continuity, permanence or commitment. Doing this, the project format entails “a promise of a hyper-efficient organizational form free from any organizational slack”.<sup>9</sup>

In this paper, I will examine the project format in academic knowledge production from a temporal perspective. My argument is that the project format is embedded in a specific temporality, which I will call project time. Furthermore, I will suggest that this temporality has important implications for research practices and academics’ work experiences, resulting in several temporal conflicts and paradoxes.

The structure of the paper is as follows. I will start by characterizing some of the key changes in the current higher education context to explain why the project format has become so popular. After this background sec-

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Barbara ADAM, *Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2004; Robert HASSAN, “Network Time and the New Knowledge Epoch.” *Time & Society*, vol. 12, 2003, no. 2/3, p. 225–241; Carmen LECCARDI, “New Temporal Perspectives in the High-speed Society.” In: HASSAN, R. – PURSER, R. E. (eds.), *24/7. Time and Temporality in the Network Society*. Stanford: Stanford Business Books 2007, p. 25–36.

<sup>7</sup> Hartmut ROSA, “Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society.” In: ROSA, H. – SCHEUERMAN, W. E. (eds.), *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power and Modernity*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press 2009, p. 77–111; Hartmut ROSA, *Alienation and Acceleration. Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*. Malmö: NSU Press 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See Gernot GRABHER, “Temporary Architectures of Learning: Knowledge Governance in Project Ecologies.” *Organization Studies*, vol. 25, 2004, no. 9, p. 1491–1514; Damian E. HODGSON, “Project Work: The Legacy of Bureaucratic Control in the Post-bureaucratic Organization.” *Organization*, vol. 11, 2004, no. 1, p. 81–100; MAYLOR *et al.*, “From Projectification,” p. 663–674; PACKENDORFF – LINDGREN, “Projectification and Its Consequences,” p. 7–21.

<sup>9</sup> GRABHER, “Temporary Architectures,” p. 1491.

tion, I will move on to the temporal analysis and scrutinise what I mean by project time. First, I will present the core features of project time by distinguishing it from process time, and then I will apply Barbara Adam's theorizing on clock time to elaborate further the specific dimensions of project time. In the last part of the paper, I will concretise my arguments by way of empirical material gathered among Finnish academics working in social sciences.

### **Academic knowledge production in transition**

Academic knowledge production is a good example of the general trend of projectification and social acceleration. In the current knowledge-intensive economy, higher education policies and science policies in most Western countries perceive universities as nodes in the national innovation system, thereby emphasizing their economic contribution. Since scientific knowledge is seen to be the core factor in achieving the economic growth and competitiveness of businesses, regions and nations in global markets, the key challenge is to speed up the flow of knowledge and high-skilled workforce from academia into society and to accelerate the commercialization of scientific knowledge into new products and processes.<sup>10</sup>

This transformation of the science-society contract has been theorized and conceptualized in several ways. One of the most influential views is the so-called Mode debate.<sup>11</sup> It claims that academic knowledge production has changed from the traditional Mode 1 into the new Mode 2. The Mode-1 type of knowledge production is disciplinary, curiosity-driven basic research, carried out in stable institutional structures and assessed by criteria set down by the scientific community. Gibbons and his co-authors argue that this traditional model has been overtaken by externally funded, transdisciplinary, problem-oriented Mode-2 type research, which is conducted in an applied context and evaluated by its economic and social utility. The sharp dichotomy and straightforward transition embedded in this view have been criticized as simplistic, exaggerated and insensitive to disciplinary and

<sup>10</sup> David. C. MOWERY – Phaven N. SAMPAT, “Universities in National Innovation Systems.” In: FAGERBERG, J. – MOWERY, D. C. – NELSON, R. R. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Michael GIBBONS – Camille LIMOGES – Helga NOWOTNY – Simon SCHWARTZMAN – Peter SCOTT – Martin TROW, *The New Production of Knowledge*. London: Sage 1994.

organizational differences.<sup>12</sup> For instance, in many technological fields research has always been problem-oriented, aimed at commercial benefits and conducted in close collaboration with industry. In these cases Mode 2 does not represent anything new, but is the traditional way of doing research. Yet in spite of these reservations, the Mode debate helps to make sense of the recent changes in academic research and the growth of the project format within it, which is especially apparent in the EU science policy initiatives and programmes. The project format is the organizational response to the drive and demand for transdisciplinary, fixed-term, solution-oriented research on specific phenomena that are defined as problems at a given time.

The rise of the project format in academic knowledge production can also be explained by the concept of academic capitalism introduced by Slaughter and Leslie.<sup>13</sup> Academic capitalism refers to various efforts to attract external funding at all levels of academia, both direct profit-seeking market activities such as patents, licences and spin-off companies, and market-like activities in which academics, research groups, departments and universities compete for external funds without the intention of making a profit. Academic capitalism is driven by the needs of businesses and universities alike. On the one hand, in order to become and remain competitive in the market, businesses are increasingly dependent on knowledge produced in academia; on the other hand, universities need new sources of income as state funding for higher education has been diminishing. As a result of these interrelated interests, academic research is increasingly conducted with external funding for fixed-term projects.

Due to these kinds of changes in the science-society relationship, the project format has become a standard, self-evident way to organize research work in academia. The temporal, fast and flexible project format is a perfect match with the need to conduct solution-focused, one-off research in transitory interdisciplinary teams with competitive external funding. Research work is project work, involving writing project applications, finding project partners, competing for project funding, recruiting project researchers, running project management, meeting project deadlines and reaching the goals defined in the project contract.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Laurens K. HESSELS – Harro van LENTE, “Re-thinking New Knowledge Production: A Literature Review and a Research Agenda.” *Research Policy*, vol. 37, 2008, no. 4, p. 740–760; Oili-Helena YLIJOKI – Anu LYYTINEN – Liisa MARTTILA, “Different Research Markets: A Disciplinary Perspective.” *Higher Education*, vol. 62, 2011, no. 6, p. 721–740.

<sup>13</sup> Sheila SLAUGHTER – Larry L. LESLIE, *Academic Capitalism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1997.

In this project-based and competitive context of academic capitalism, academic knowledge production has become increasingly stratified and polarized. The science system has always been hierarchical, but it seems that the divide between those who win and those who lose, those who have and those who have not,<sup>14</sup> is sharpening. Individual academics and research groups have different amounts of bargaining power on the funding markets, and accordingly, the academic profession has been found to be increasingly diversified, fragmented and stratified,<sup>15</sup> even between colleagues on the same university corridor.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the project format itself is built on an internal hierarchy. On the one hand there are project leaders and managers; on the other there is the growing mass of project researchers. The projectification of science is dependent on a workforce of flexible project workers who can be employed on short-term contracts and who are willing and able to move from one project to the next. Their work involves constant circular repetition as they go through the same project cycle again and again. This kind of circularity is also characteristic of career-building in short-term academic employment. In tight project work it is difficult to have a linear career advancement; rather, careers tend to move horizontally from one project to another.

The stratification of academic research concerns also disciplinary fields.<sup>17</sup> Some fields operate in several research markets, while others have substantially more restricted access to funding sources. The opposing disciplinary groups in this regard seem to be the technological fields and the humanities. For instance, it has been found in Finland<sup>18</sup> that technological fields attract research funding from a wide variety of sources: from public funders such as research councils, the EU and government ministries, and from private businesses and industry worldwide. At the other end of the

<sup>14</sup> SLAUGHTER – LESLIE, *Academic Capitalism*.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Joelle FANGHANEL, *Being an Academic*. London: Routledge 2012; Mary HENKEL, "Introduction: Change and Continuity in Academic and Professional Identities." In: GORDON, G. – WHITCHURCH C. (eds.), *Academic and Professional Identities in Higher Education*. New York: Routledge 2012; Lynne GORNALL – Jane SALISBURY, "Compulsive Working, 'Hyperprofessionalism' and the Unseen Pleasures of Academic Work." *Higher Education Quarterly*, vol. 66, 2012, no. 2, p. 135–154; Svein KYVIK, "The Academic Researcher Role: Enhancing Expectations and Improved Performance." *Higher Education*, vol. 65, 2013, no. 4, p. 525–538.

<sup>16</sup> Oili-Helena YLIJOKI – Jani URSIN, "The Construction of Academic Identity in the Changes of Finnish Higher Education." *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 38, 2013, no. 8, p. 1135–1149.

<sup>17</sup> SLAUGHTER – LESLIE, *Academic Capitalism*.

<sup>18</sup> YLIJOKI et al., "Different Research Markets."

continuum are the humanities, which are essentially dependent on funding from research councils and some foundations – that is, academic funding for basic research.

However, even within the same disciplinary field, individual projects differ in terms of how much money is available, where the money comes from and what kind of money it is. It is not only a question of the quantity of money, but also its quality. There is good money and not-so-good money, depending on how much autonomy it allows and to what extent it resonates with one's own research interests. In cases of exceptionally abundant and long-term funding from highly valued sources, academics may reach a really elite position with luxury time and autonomy. They bring in money and prestige, which tend to be the most valued capital since they can be converted into better ratings in rankings and performance assessments. Thus, academic capitalism interrelated with the projectification of science tend to sharpen and intensify hierarchies and power relations within academia.

To conclude, the project format is not a mere technical or neutral organizational tool. Instead, it challenges, shapes, alters and rebuilds research practices and working conditions. The argument put forward in this paper is that a temporal analysis can offer new insights into the implications of the project format and the changes of research practices and academics' work experiences. The paper claims that the project format is embedded in a specific invisible, self-evident temporality, called project time,<sup>19</sup> which gives rise to temporal tensions and conflicts in research work. Next I will discuss in more detail what kind of time project time is.

### **Project time versus process time**

In order to clarify the specific features of project time, I will distinguish it from process time. These two times represent opposite organizational logics: process time is grounded in the internal logic of research activity, whereas project time refers to the inherent temporality of the project format. Both times are ideal types. In other words, they do not have any direct empirical counterparts, and they cannot be found in pure form in daily research activities. I will discern six key differences between them, each shedding light

<sup>19</sup> Oili-Helena YLIJOKI, "Conquered by Project Time? Conflicting Temporalities in University Research." In: GIBBS, P. – YLIJOKI, O.-H. – GUZMÁN-VALENZUELA, C. – BARNETT, R. (eds.), *Universities in the Flux of Time*. London: Routledge 2015, p. 94–107.

on the temporal specificity of the project format in academic knowledge production.

First, project time entails a strictly defined time frame. Every project starts and ends at given dates agreed in the research contract. In this way, project time has fixed, preset temporal boundaries which separate one project from other projects that may be successive or overlapping. Each project is an entity of its own, involving a unique life cycle and identity which are often cemented in the project's logo, acronym and web pages. Process time, on the other hand, has no strict temporal limits. Its boundaries are unclear and fuzzy. Research is an ongoing creative process, as ideas keep evolving and thoughts ripening irrespective of project boundaries and funding periods. Therefore it is impossible to say when exactly a project starts and when it ends.

Second, in addition to the clearly defined beginning and end, project time entails preset milestones which regulate activities. Each project has an internal clock according to which time is measured and outcomes produced. The internal clock requires a constant awareness of time, dictating how long research can take, what stages there are and what results need to be achieved by certain dates. Process time does not follow the logic of scheduled time but is embedded in proper time (*Eigenzeit*),<sup>20</sup> the internal logic of research activity. Research and its phases take as much time as is needed to achieve results. Research process has its proper time, which cannot be submitted to predefined schedules but has to be cherished and respected.

Third, project time and process time also differ with respect to how the passing of time is understood. Project time is linear, cumulative and progressive. Guided by schedules, research moves forwards steadily towards the goals that have been defined in the contract. Each new phase is based on the previous phase so that the results are produced in a cumulative chain. While the temporal arrow of project time always points forwards, in process time it may point in any direction. Process time entails periods of standstill, acceleration and deceleration. Research may proceed linearly, but it may also be cyclical and go round in circles when, for instance, a given problem appears again and again. There may be routine phases when nothing much happens, there may be setbacks when it is necessary to go backwards, and there may be phases when research makes big leaps rapidly. Hence, whereas project time is one-dimensional, always heading forwards, process time moves in various directions on neither a regular nor a predictable basis.

<sup>20</sup> Helga NOWOTNY, *Time. The Modern and Postmodern Experience*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1994.



Fourth, project time is invariant and independent of context. It is based on dates, timings, durations and sequences which can be quantified, measured and evaluated by the clock and calendar without taking into account the particular work conditions under which research is carried out. In project time, all time is equal. One hour is always one hour, and variation means only that there is an error in measurement.<sup>21</sup> In sharp contrast, process time is dependent on a given work situation. The context matters: under different conditions and situations time is qualitatively different. For instance, one hour is quite a different thing when the deadline is about to expire than when it is still a long way off. Therefore it is crucial what specific hour is in question.

Fifth, project time and process time rest on opposing conceptions of the relationship between the present, past and future. Project time is predictable so that the end is known at the beginning. The future is included in the present and can be anticipated on the basis of present knowledge, which in turn is the outcome of past results. The predictability of the future is already manifest, for example, in the research proposal, in which it is necessary to articulate what the results will be and what scientific and social impact they will have. This is reversed in process time. Process time is unpredictable: the future remains open and potential, involving a space for emergence. From the angle of process time, it would be irrational to define the results before the research is actually conducted. Research produces unexpected outcomes, the appearance of something totally new which cannot be identified and known in advance. It is this that makes research work meaningful and significant.

Lastly, project time is a typical example of fast time and time pressure, while process time allows experiences of “timeless time”,<sup>22</sup> which means immersing affectively, cognitively and physically in work and thereby transcending the passing of time.<sup>23</sup> Project time is tightly scheduled according to fixed timetables, involving a constant awareness of the time available for the completion of each phase of the project. The aim is to achieve the goals in the most cost-efficient ways without wasting time, which promotes fast time.

<sup>21</sup> ADAM, *Time*, p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> The concept timeless time was elaborated in my earlier work, see Oili-Helena YLIJOKI – Hans MÄNTYLÄ, “Conflicting Time Perspectives in Academic Work.” *Time and Society*, vol. 12, 2003, no. 1, p. 55–78.

<sup>23</sup> See Charalampos MAINEMELIS, “When the Muse Takes It All: A Model for the Experience of Timelessness in Organizations.” *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 26, 2001, no. 4, p. 548–565.

In addition, because competition for funding is tough, there is a tendency to promise in the application to do a lot, which further speeds up work and creates time pressure. Process time, by contrast, involves timeless time in which academics are absorbed in their work, have flow experiences and transcend time awareness.<sup>24</sup> The tempo of work is not defined by the schedule, but by the task at hand. It may be fast or slow, including both heated, hectic moments of discovery and inspiration<sup>25</sup> and slow, peaceful periods of reflection and thinking. The crucial thing is that the rhythm of work is internally determined, not externally imposed.

To conclude, project time and process time represent opposite temporal regimes. However, the dichotomy between them is merely analytical. Both times are ideal-typical constructions which cannot be traced in pure form in actual research practices. Even real luxury projects established for long periods of time with abundant opportunities for academic freedom and process time have to acknowledge some schedules, deadlines and preset objectives of project time. At the other extreme, particularly short-term and tightly scheduled projects with strictly predetermined targets need some temporal autonomy, sensitivity to contextual factors and breakaway from the overwhelming grip of project time in order to reach its objectives. Thus, project time is not an all-encompassing straightjacket but leaves room for process time and individual agency in research practices. Moreover, project time, offering temporal structuring, may even support process time. For instance, external schedules are not necessarily always coercive but they may also promote proper rhythm and tempo in work and create opportunities to process time. In this sense, project time and process time are not fundamentally mutually exclusive but they can co-exist, albeit in constant tension with each other.

Hence, the crucial question concerns the balance and power relations between project time and process time. It can be argued that due to the dominant, taken-for-granted status of the project format in knowledge production in the current academic context, project time tends to become the dominant, taken-for-granted timeframe in research work. Furthermore, the domination of linear, decontextualized, predictable and fast project time over multidirectional, context-dependent, emergent and timeless pro-

<sup>24</sup> Process time is a broader concept than timeless time; experiences of timelessness are one dimension of process time.

<sup>25</sup> Filip VOSTAL, "Academic Life in the Fast Lane." *Time & Society*, vol. 24, 2015, no. 1, p. 71-95.

cess time creates conflicts and paradoxes at the level of research practices. Therefore it is important to analyse further the nature of project time and its implications for research practices and academics' experiences. Next, I will unpack some of the key elements of project time by drawing on Barbara Adam's theorizing on clock time.

### **Four Cs of project time**

Adam,<sup>26</sup> one of the most influential theorists in time studies, has scrutinized the characteristics and implications of clock time. Clock time is the self-evident and common-sense understanding of what time is: time is what clocks tell us. Although clock time seems to be natural – time as such – it is actually a special kind of social construction, originating in medieval Benedictine monasteries. Adam emphasizes that clock time is standard, invariant, abstract, quantified, context-independent and measurable time, which can be analysed with four conceptual categories, constituting the four Cs: the commodification, control, compression and colonization of time.

In this paper I will argue that project time represents clock time *par excellence*, and accordingly, the four Cs elaborated by Adam apply to project time extremely well. Like clock time, project time is standard, invariant, abstract, quantified, context-independent and measurable time which has attained a self-evident status. By using the four Cs as a theoretical lens, some of the core underlying, hidden assumptions of project time can be unveiled and made visible.

The *commodification* of project time refers to the exchange of research time for money. Academics sell their work time, and funding bodies buy it. Thus project time is a commodity in research markets. Academics are on the market, follow funding opportunities and try to find buyers for their work. The commodification of project time also means that research is fragmented into separate, commodity-like projects, with or without continuity of content. The fragmentation of research is interlinked with instability and uncertainty, since the predictability of funding markets is weak. This is challenging for the quality of research, which as a norm would need a long-term perspective. This uncertainty is a special challenge for those whose living is dependent on project funding – i.e. the mass of temporary project researchers.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara ADAM, *Timescapes of Modernity*. London: Routledge 1998; ADAM, *Time*.

The second C in Adam's theorizing is *control*. Project time is controlled time, as academics are accountable for the use of their time to funding bodies and often also to university management. Time needs to be used effectively in order to achieve the outcomes specified in the research contract on schedule. Consequently, wasting time becomes a vice to be avoided and eliminated, for instance by time management and performance assessment systems. In this way, project time acts as a powerful control mechanism in academia, making academics accountable to their superiors and the buyers of their work time. What is more, external control is not necessarily needed, because time discipline is internalized as self-discipline.<sup>27</sup> Project time becomes one's own time and external schedules one's own schedules. Academics control and monitor their own activity in order to ascertain that their time use is efficient and productive, that they meet their deadlines and provide value for money. In this case, external control and self-control reinforce each other.

The *compression* of time refers to the speeding up of the tempo and pace of work. Project time is hectic, fast time which proceeds to predefined goals in the maximally efficient way. It involves constant competition for funding, recognition and visibility. Although competition in itself is in-built in the science system,<sup>28</sup> the current managerial context in academia strengthens it because of the growing dependence on external funding sources as well as the introduction of new audit, control and measurement mechanisms. To have success in this competition, it is vital to have an outstanding research record and a long and impressive publications list. This creates a strong pressure for academics to achieve continuously more and better outcomes in a smaller amount of time. Likewise the project schedules themselves tend to be tight, as the funders are not eager to pay for anything extra. As a result, project time is compressed time, characterized by tight schedules and time pressure.

Lastly, the *colonization* of time means that project time subordinates other time frames. Commodified, controlled and compressed project time penetrates various areas of life. It entails working long hours, including over weekends and holidays, potentially at the expense of one's health, family obligations and other important commitments in life. Furthermore, the logic of project rationality easily takes over how time is experienced and valued.

<sup>27</sup> See Judith WALKER, "Time as the Fourth Dimension in the Globalization of Higher Education." *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 80, 2009, no. 5, p. 483–509.

<sup>28</sup> Robert MERTON, "Science and Democratic Social Structure." In: *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press 1068.

In this sense, the colonization of project time means that one begins to see all time as an investment, and hence to calculate which temporal investments are the most profitable and therefore the most desirable. Time outside of this kind of rationality is then seen as what Adam<sup>29</sup> calls “shadow times”, times that have less value because they cannot be converted into money.

Viewed from the angle of the four Cs, project time glorifies new values such as economic rationality, instrumental orientation, efficiency, accountability, short-termism, flexibility and speed. Since the project format has become a standard and dominant way to organize academic research, the grip of project time has intensified, challenging process time and easily subsuming it. This has implications, not all necessarily intended or wanted, for research practices and creates tensions and conflicts in work.

### **Temporal conflicts in research practices**

Project time and process time are ideal types, but what happens in actual research practices? How does the domination of project time, which is inherently attached to the project format, reshape and remould research work and academics’ experiences of it? In this last section of the paper I will discuss these questions by exploring empirically the temporal conflicts in academic knowledge production in the today’s accelerated university context.

The empirical data comprise interviews with Finnish academics collected in the research project “Timescapes of knowledge production” financed by Academy of Finland (Finnish research councils). All interviewees were working in the social sciences: sociology, social policy and social work. In total, 15 individual interviews were gathered with professors and other senior, well-established social scientists at three Finnish research-intensive universities in which social sciences have a firm position. In terms of gender, 8 interviewees were male and 7 female. All these senior academics had a permanent university position, and their work entailed both research and teaching duties. In addition, three focus group discussions at two Finnish universities were arranged with altogether 12 junior social scientists (9 female, 3 male). They all had recently received their PhDs, but their age and work experience varied since some had worked for several years in the university along with their doctoral studies and some had had a more direct doctoral school path. All of them were working on temporary contracts, varying from a couple of months to four years. The majority of junior academics were

<sup>29</sup> ADAM, *Time*.

focused on research work. Only few had a more teaching-oriented position but also they were active in research. Both the individual and focus group interviews covered a wide array of themes related to research work, including changes in research, a typical working day, the best and worst aspects of research work, and hopes, fears and plans for the future.

In the following analysis of the interview material, I will utilize the four Cs – commodification, control, compression and colonization – as my analytical lens. By relying on these conceptual categories, I will explore how the academics interviewed navigate between project time and process time, and what kinds of temporal tensions and conflicts they encounter while doing this. The aim of this empirical section is to concretise what the conceptual analysis can mean at the level of daily work practices and experiences. The empirical grounding is small-scale, concerning only the social sciences in one country; hence, the findings do not necessarily apply to different disciplinary, institutional and national contexts. However, in this paper the function of the empirical part is not to present generalizable results, but instead to offer a nuanced feel for what it is like to live and work under the project format, and accordingly to catch project time “in action”. For this purpose, several quotes from the interview material are provided.

### ***Commodification of time***

One of the core temporal conflicts in the academics’ accounts originates from short-term funding cycles. Project time is a commodity on the market, and thus researchers need to seek buyers for their work time and time again. Thus, paradoxically, linear project time evolves cyclically as the exchange of work time for money is repeated again and again. It is a widely shared opinion among academics that research and researchers need longer-term concentration on their work instead of running at full speed on a “project treadmill”. Furthermore, project research is strongly dependent on the changing needs and expectations of funding bodies. Since funding markets are continuously fluctuating, it is not possible to know whether there will be continuity for the ongoing project. This makes research vulnerable and risky. The future becomes insecure and uncertain, which is especially stressful for early-career academics working on short-term contracts. Their employment is repeatedly threatened, which creates extra strain and anxiety. The following two quotes reveal the tensions caused by short-term funding:

This is a big problem especially for young researchers. The funding cycles have become so intensified that research projects tend to be irritatingly overlapping. We would really need more time so that we could get old projects finished, and only then move on to new ones. Many young researchers are working on a real project treadmill, the funding arrangements should really be steadier. (Professor, sociology)

I think that this kind of chaos is built into this work in a special way. You cannot do research work in peace because you must apply all the time for the next funding, this is built into this. I don't know whether I have learnt to cope with this better over the years, but quite often I think that oh no, so what, I can't cope with this any more. (Junior academic, sociology)

The insecurity and uncertainty of project research is linked with a waste-time problem. Writing research applications takes a lot of time and energy, but it is experienced as wasted time, since most applications will be unsuccessful because of the heavy competition. This creates a paradox: the project format, which was intended to produce maximal efficiency, creates waste-time and inefficiency. Moreover, since waste-time threatens to take an overwhelming hold, it diminishes motivation and meaningfulness in work, as is manifest in the following quote:

You need to write applications quite madly all the time. When a lot of my time and sometimes clearly the major part of my time goes into writing applications, the meaningfulness of work gradually disappears. Especially when you know that mostly it is wasted time, since we won't get the funding because the competition is so hard. (Junior academic, sociology)

### **Control of time**

Commodified, short-term project time is intermingled with the control of project time. EU-funded projects are often mentioned in this context. They represent a kind of paradigmatic example of externally controlled project time, including preset milestones which act as control points for successive work packages. The tightly scheduled timeframes along with external control lead to what is called "superficial work". In the following quotes two professors point to this by making a distinction between the superficial work of the EU projects and the ambitious, real research which they themselves appreciate:

I have never really wanted to participate in these EU projects. When the schedules are tight and teams big, the research easily becomes superficial. You just collect data and do some superficial analysis. But this way of working does not satisfy me. I would like to do research which has historical depth, for instance, research which is ambitious. You just cannot do it quickly because you need to think, reflect and rewrite your ideas several times. (Professor, social policy)

If you get funding from the EU, the work packages need to be defined in the application. It means that you must get those results on schedule, often quite fast. So it often happens that the results are quite superficial. (Professor, sociology)

Apart from the EU projects, the control of project time appears mainly in the form of self-control. Academics have internalized the demands for time discipline and accountability: they carefully monitor their own activity and keep watch that they work efficiently and reach targeted outcomes. This kind of self-control is emotionally laden, arousing negative emotions such as guilt and shame if one falls behind with the objectives.<sup>30</sup> The burden of self-control is particularly heavy for junior researchers who are taking their first steps in their academic careers and still need to establish themselves as fully recognized academics:

In fact I should be on holiday but I just cannot go on holiday. Somehow I feel it would be wasted time, I feel I should accomplish more. I know I should slow down, I cannot manage all this. But then again I feel guilty for not achieving enough. [...] I have been diagnosed with burnout twice. I really don't learn. (Junior academic, sociology)

This is a damn difficult job. You really must be a master of life so that you are able to stick to the limits and be productive. It really requires self-governance. Awfully many feel continuously guilty because of this, but luckily I don't feel that way any longer. (Junior academic, sociology)

### **Compression of project time**

In accordance with the notion of compressed time, a shared view among academics is that the rhythm and tempo of research work is fast, involving

<sup>30</sup> See also Charlotte BLOCH, *Passion and Paranoia: Emotions and the Culture of Emotion in Academia*. Farnham: Ashgate 2012.



heavy time pressure. This creates a conflict between fast time and timeless time. Apart from being personally the most desirable time for academics, timeless time is perceived as a precondition for high-quality research. Conversely, quality is seen to be compromised when the schedules are tight and the pace of work hectic. For instance, short-term funding cycles enforce the selection of topics and methods that are feasible within a given timeframe, and tight schedules push researchers to play safe and stay in the conformist mainstream. Therefore academics tend to long for timeless time, often in nostalgic tones:

Academic work is much more fragmented and fast-paced than it was when I started. But science would require laziness. Getting new ideas requires laziness, or quasi-laziness and idleness. At the moment I have no opportunity whatsoever for this. (Professor)

I don't believe hectic working improves the quality of research. We are not working in a sausage factory, after all. I really think the quality of research would be better if we could work more slowly. Doing less but doing better. (Professor, social policy)

A special case which is often mentioned is reading, especially reading books. It seems that time for reading has become exceptional luxury-time. There is a paradox: at the same as academics produce more and more publications, there is less and less time to read.<sup>31</sup> What is more, this is not only a question of time use; it concerns the basics of academic work and identity. Reading is seen as one of the core elements of being and working as an academic in social sciences. When this activity is threatened, it decreases the sense of meaningfulness in work and creates emotional distress. Two professors describe their experiences in the following ways:

I didn't dare to look at books. Although I enjoy reading books, I didn't even want to look at them because I knew that I would not have time to read them. I felt really anxious. (Professor, sociology)

If you want to accomplish something new you must have time, otherwise it's just rehashing old things. Time is pretty essential in this. There is too little time. I don't have time for reading books, nothing of the sort. (Professor, social policy)

<sup>31</sup> Thomas H. ERIKSEN, *Tyranny of the Moment*. London: Pluto Press 2001.

### **Colonization of time**

Academics' accounts also involve a temporal conflict between work time and non-work time, pointing to the colonization of project time. In itself, working long hours is nothing new since academic work has traditionally been perceived as a calling and a way of life where work is life and life is work.<sup>32</sup> Yet, in the current context, working long hours does not stem only from academics' internal motivation and passion but rather from externally imposed deadlines and performance requirements. When the demands of hectic project-based research penetrates all areas of life, one's health is at risk. Academics speak of experiences of burnout, severe backache, mental breakdown and other illnesses that they or their colleagues have suffered. Therefore one should protect oneself against working too long and intensively. In this way, internalized self-control and time discipline need to be supplemented by a sort of internalized well-being controller which monitors one's use of time and tries to prevent excessive working.

You get shattered so easily in this work. Therefore you must control and restrict yourself and your work. You must know when you are capable of doing something and when you must have some rest. (Junior academic, social policy)

When I was younger I tended to work too much. Although I didn't end up with any acute burnout, I certainly had clear signs of exhaustion a few times. When I think about it now I realise that you really must have some balance between work and life if you want to escape those sad consequences. (Junior academic, sociology)

In addition to endangering one's health, the colonization of work causes conflicts with other life commitments, such as caring for children, parents, partners and other significant persons. Since work time easily takes over non-work time, academics need to struggle to find and keep a balance – sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Some academics even ponder their work time in the light of existential time, contemplating what role work

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Johanna HAKALA, "The Future of Academic Calling? Junior Researchers in the Entrepreneurial University." *Higher Education*, vol. 57, 2009, no. 173, p. 173–190; Kamilla PETRICK, "Fast Times in Hallowed Halls: Making Time for Activism in a Culture of Speed." *Studies in Social Justice*, vol. 9, 2015, no. 1, p. 70–85; Oili-Helena YLIJOKI, "Boundary-Work between Work and Life in the High-Speed University." *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 38, 2013, no. 2, p. 242–255.

should take in their lives. The last quotes show how two sociology professors reflect on their use of time:

I have age-related health problems, and I take care of my baby and a teenager with teenage problems and my mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's. All at the same time, in my private life. I'm dreaming that for the first time in six years I might shove off in my boat and go somewhere, just to be quiet, in peace. (Professor, sociology)

If you are inclined to feel guilty, you always feel that you have done too little. I neglect students, I don't do enough admin, I don't see my partner enough, especially just the two of us, I don't spend enough time with my children, I don't sleep enough. [...] The time I have, the time of my life, it goes so quickly. (Professor, sociology)

## **Coda**

The project format is not only a technical organizational tool but it challenges and reshapes research practices and academics' work experiences. It is embedded in a specific temporality, which I have called project time. The dominance of project time over process time, the inherent temporality of research activity, creates tensions and conflicts. Paradoxically, the project format, which aims to improve efficiency, produces inefficiency; it has impacts that are not intended or wanted.

In this paper my empirical findings have concerned only the social sciences. Yet, I would suggest that in spite of disciplinary differences, the four Cs have resonance in other fields too. Many "hard" fields differ from "soft" fields since the project format – competitive and hectic teamwork – has been the traditional way to organise research activities in them, whereas in social sciences and humanities individual working style with long-term timeframe (often lifetime) has been the norm (see Becher's *Academic Tribes and Territories*), thereby making "hard" fields more compatible with the current project-based environment. However, my earlier studies<sup>33</sup> have indicated that academics working in natural and technological sciences tend to have similar kinds of experiences of temporal conflicts and tensions like academics in humanities and social sciences: short-term and insecure funding, increasing external requirements and time control, fast tempo, and work-life imbalance, all characteristics of the four Cs.

<sup>33</sup> YLIJOKI, "Boundary-Work."

The dominance of project time is not, however, absolute or inclusive. Both project time and process time are ideal types, and in actual research practices their relationship has a diversity of forms. Individual agency has its say – including in the context of accelerated knowledge production in which academics build their unique paths and career trajectories. Academics are not mere objects or victims of projectification, but active agents who appropriate, adapt, negotiate and shape the ways in which they navigate project time in their particular socio-material contexts.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, shadow times outside the commodified, controlled, compressed and colonized project time still exist, and practices, which cannot be converted into money or H-index – such as mutual support, mentoring and engaging in civic activities – have not totally lost their importance. The picture is not black and white, but has shades and variations.

All in all, the dominance of the project format interrelated with the rise of academic capitalism intensifies the grip of project time over process time in academic knowledge production and promotes the polarisation and stratification in research work. Together they also contribute to the increasing quantification and metrification of academic life. The amount of funding and person years offers exact numbers that can be utilized as a sign of the quality and success of academic research, with implications for the common-sense ways of understanding what counts in academia, what is valued and appreciated, and what being a real and successful academic means. In this sense, the tension between project time and process time raises ultimately a question about the basic idea and core values of academia and academic research.

<sup>34</sup> Judy WAJCMAN, *Pressed for Time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2015.