

Now what? How time perspective and university context shape final-year students' life projects

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The completion of university studies is considered a critical event for young people. In this article I investigate how final-year university students experience temporality by researching their cognitive and relational frameworks. By “cognitive” frameworks I mean how students frame their temporal orientations and by relational frameworks I mean their social involvement with their object of study and their employment status. My research provides a sociological understanding on the explanatory value of these two frameworks as to how agentic the students' life plans are. Data are theorised through a sociological perspective according to which youth temporalities regarding agency can be approached as a sign of a standoff temporality. I argue that standoff temporality is a viable framework for making sense of cases of youth transitions for which the decision-making process and future thinking are fuelled by the temporality of the “present future” and of staying in place.

Introduction

There are two main research and epistemological traditions through which youth temporalities have been approached, the cognitive and the relational. Within the cognitive tradition, time and temporality are seen as a cognitive construct through which various social behaviours (for example, health behaviours, job aspirations) could be explained and predicted (Johnson et al, 2014; Schmid et al, 2011). According to this line of thought, the first-person experience of past, present and future is represented in the mind of the person as a composing of events which are more or less desirable. Of the three temporal dimensions, the future has attracted most of the scholarly attention because it is the cognitive construct bearing evaluative and affective connotations. The uncertainty of the future may provoke either positive emotions (some might see uncertainty as a challenge or as expecting rewarding events) or negative emotions (others might be afraid of a dissatisfying future event). The evaluative aspect of the future orientation concerns how humans assess the relative rewards and costs of choosing possible future courses of action. How humans evaluate future events could be analysed in terms of when these events will occur and how long they may last. It is along this line of thought that time perspective and in particular future orientation has been theorised as a sign of agency. Persons who are future oriented and committed to a schedule and who realise future projects, are more likely to believe that they have the power to affect their environment so that they achieve their goals. In that sense, by investigating the time perspective one can highlight the motivational structure of one's personality (Konidari, 2021). Agency and motivation are interrelated because if one feels responsible for one's future outcomes, then he/she is presumably more motivated to invest in activities for preventing undesired outcomes or attaining desired future events.

As far as the relational approach is concerned, youth temporalities are created within institutional frameworks, biographical relations and time-spatial contexts. Within this tradition, youth temporalities can be understood at the micro level as a “feel” for the immediate future (“protentions”), as culturally shared narratives through which young people embed their projects (“trajectories”) or as plans which people conceive of as universal and as taken for granted such as “nation time”, “industry time” or “calendar time” (Tavory & Eliasoph 2013). Sociological approaches to time acknowledge that how social systems structure sequences of events, change and duration through peculiar institutional devices is one thing and that how humans experience time in their everyday lives is quite another (Lahad, 2012). Finally, studies relating time perspective with social class differences have shown that gratification delay, problem solving, and planning characterise middle-class children. Class differences regarding time perspective are dependent upon how students are involved in school knowledge in the sense that the educational level makes someone conceive of his/her future as internally controlled and rather positive, if higher achievement leads to higher income and more interesting and satisfying positions (Xu, 2021). These findings point to the fact that socialisation and educational experiences are powerful shapers of humans’ time perspective.

The research problem

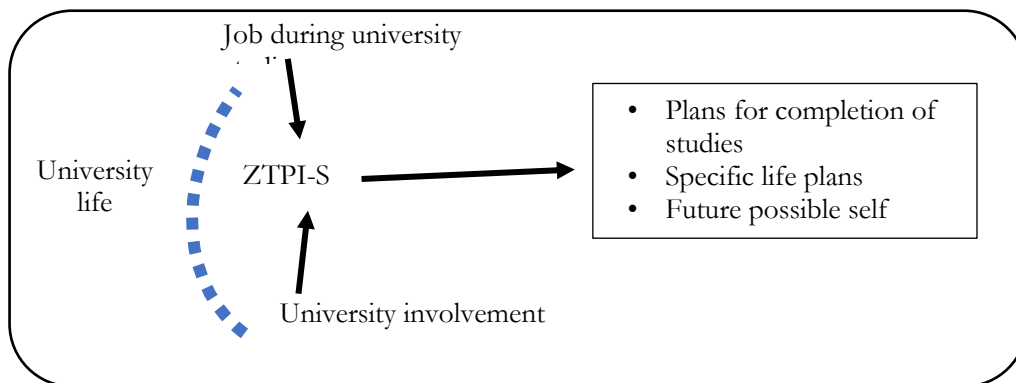
This article seeks to emphasise the interplay of the cognitive and the relational perspective by researching the social situations in which youth temporalities during university life are shaped. A methodological gap prevails regarding the research designs of these two perspectives. Most of the studies within the cognitive perspective are quantitative while qualitative research designs dominate the relational perspective (Mische, 2009, p.698). In this research I do not aspire to link the two perspectives through a mixed method design, but to bring to light the relational grounding of temporality by implementing quantitative research. This will try to provide an example of how these two scholarly traditions could cooperate in a bid to make sense of how final-year students take decisions concerning their life after graduation. To that end, I investigate the relation between a psychometric scale (the *Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory* (ZTPI)) and final-year students’ involvement in their object of study and their life projects. It needs to be underlined that this does not aspire to test ZTPI’s psychometric properties, given that a great many researchers have served this purpose.

On the contrary, my aim is to investigate its explanatory strength for making sense young people’s temporal orientation during a critical biographical moment, the time of completing university studies. Created by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), ZTPI is a construct which treats temporality as an individual trait through which individual outcomes are explained. Even though they recognise that temporal biases are determined by many learned factors, such as culture, education, religion, social class and family structure, time perspective has been used mostly as an independent variable (located in one’s cognitive structure) which predicts or explains individual differences, as far as specific outcomes are concerned. However, how ZTPI is affected or shaped by concrete social situations is missing and it is this gap that my research tries to bridge. In particular, this will implement

the ZTPI in the field of youth sociology and show how ZTPI is shaped by final-year students' involvement in their field of study. I argue that the extent to which final-year students engage with their field of study is a relational phenomenon shaped through relational contexts related to final-year students' peer groups, academic engagement, or participation in student activities.

Research purpose and questions

The main purpose was to bring to light how time perspectives are shaped by how students live during their time at university. In other words, I did not use it as an independent variable leading to an outcome but as a dependent variable which takes form in a context which can inform us about how final-year students make life plans for their life after graduation. In one sense, time perspectives in this research are treated as an intermediate variable between how students live during their university life and how they imagine their future or make decisions about it. The "university life" has been operationalised through two dimensions, first, taking into account whether final-year students were employed during their studies, and second, the level of their involvement in academic life and "life plans" has been assessed through questions related to whether they are planning to delay the completion of their studies for various reasons or not, whether they had specific life plans after graduation, and how they imagined themselves in five/seven years from now. Scheme 1 depicts the line of reasoning of my research purpose.



Scheme 1: Outline of the research purpose

Having in mind this research purpose, I posed the following research questions for carrying out the analysis.

- First, which of the five factors on the ZTPI-S scale account for final-year students' life plans and future selves?
- Second, is university involvement correlated with ZTPI-S scale?
- Third, how mobile is the future imagined by the final-year students?

Temporality, agency and mobility during university life

In the literature review I focus on how university students experience temporality during a critical biographical moment, the completion of a university degree, and the extent to which their temporal orientations is a marker of agency. A line of research connecting temporality, mobility and agency draws upon the “individualization of risk” thesis, a major fruit of which is that “choice biographies” are becoming more and more salient for university students in the last twenty years in comparison to what was happening before the 90s when “normal biographies” were the rule (Brannen & Nilse, 2002). Recently, the notion of “collaborative individualism” (Cuzzocrea & Collins, 2015) has come to complement the “choice biography” argument by taking into account the contradictory and structural determinants of youth transitions. In this framework, it is claimed that although the notion of ‘risk’ enables researchers to bring to light the details of young people’s reflexive habitus, the importance of socioeconomic class is not erased (Threadgold & Nilan, 2009). Stable and secure professional employment is a high priority for young people who invest in higher education as a means for achieving it (Walsh & Black, 2021).

By identifying agency with mobility in the sense that imagining (and dreaming) mobility might be seen as a sign of navigational capacity and as an agentic feature, Cuzzocrea and Giuliana (2016, p.4) analysed written material taken from a sample in Sardinia, a typical working-class area in Italy. They concluded that imagined future condenses needs that would otherwise remain unexpressed. Imagining future mobility is (a) a sign of agency in the sense that to move means to be able to cope with a social condition (by leaving), especially for disadvantaged groups; and (b) responds to the need for self-experimentation (2016, p.12). In his excellent study on young adult workers’ future orientations, Devadason (2008) pointed out that vague planning is not a property only of those who lack resources but also of those who are satisfied with their work situation in life. This means that when wishes are aligned with personal priorities people may produce vague plans for futures, but this should not be taken as a sign that agency is lacking. The key to understanding this complexity, Devadason argued, has to be searched for in how welfare regimes handle social inequities and articulate cultural ideologies regarding the meaning of “normal life”. Instead of the obscuring planning/not planning dilemma, Woodman (2011) held that future thinking may be seen as a short-term coping strategy focused on how to live day to day. Even though the contemporary world does not facilitate planning, young people try to keep all possible options open. In that sense, in so far as future thinking may take various forms, often mixed with presentist temporalities, researchers have to rethink the ways in which planning or not planning implies agency. This argument is close to Clegg’s (2010) argument that identifying planning with agency is a masked way of imposing the discourse of “employability” on university life and, consequently, of erasing the multiple modalities of agency which students may articulate according to their ultimate concerns.

Similarly disadvantaged is the group investigated by Bryant and Ellard (2015), whose research participants had extensive and ongoing experiences with homelessness, incarceration and addiction. The main finding was that participants articulated a view of

their future through which their aspirations expressed a 'normal' life comprising a job, a safe home and a family. Within this future thinking, hope includes the potential for transformation and therein engenders agency in the sense that hope is practised as a form of intervening in structural disadvantage. By researching "futuring" (how individuals anticipate and make plans for the future) in a sample of students finishing high-school and first-year university, Sica et al (2016) argued that futuring is tied up with how individuals project identity alternatives, both of which are dependent on family networks and support from peers. Maybe this is a sign that young people feel anxious about the future because of the "generational rupture" and that geographical mobility is not experienced as a happy adventure occurring in the future (Walsh & Black, 2021, p. 9). As Skrbis et al argued (2014), imagining mobility is not an equally distributed resource but depends upon gender, geographical location, cultural capital and age patterns. One should not overlook differences between provincial and urban areas as they are dependent upon national contexts. As Heggli et al. (2013) pointed out, differences regarding the vocational preferences and academic aspirations between Tunisian, Norwegian and Czech final-year high school students are striking.

Three points deserve to be highlighted from the above literature. First, that the "individualisation of risk" thesis has to be enriched by conceptual contexts which bring to light the complexity of factors affecting young people's temporal orientations and agentic actions in various ways (Brannen & Nilsen, 2005). Second, these conceptual contexts must be grounded on sound methodological operationalisations and clear research procedures in order to avoid over-theorising. Third, most of the research surveyed on youth temporality and agency concerns high-school students approached by qualitative research designs. It is to this third point that my research aims to contribute by implementing a quantitative cross-sectional design in which the sample is composed of final-year university students. In addition, I focus on a homogenous group of young people who are close to finishing university studies, while in the literature presented, most of the samples concerned working-class youth and/or high school students completing secondary education. Even though there is a huge amount of work regarding the interplay of agency and temporality in higher education, most of this work is qualitative. In my research, by bringing in dialogue by the quantitative-oriented cognitive with the qualitative-oriented relational perspective, I aim to highlight the social determinants of how young people are experiencing time when they finish university studies.

Methodology

The sample

Data were collected through a questionnaire delivered to students enrolled in departments related to social sciences and humanities from the two central universities in Greece. Most of the departments were philosophy, educational sciences, economics, social work, philology, history, sociology, psychology and theology. The questionnaire was delivered as a Google form because the research took place during Covid-19 (February to June 2021), managing to collect 254 questionnaires. As a consequence, the sample procedure I implemented was not the standard random or stratified sampling technique but data

collection was guided by a purposive sampling logic. In that sense, it was like what qualitative researchers call homogeneous sampling, as far as the field of study followed by the sampled students and their class background were concerned. In addition, given that the interest was in final year students, the sample was composed only of students who were in their fourth year of study (in Greece, the duration of undergraduate studies is four years in most scientific subject areas, except for medicine, polytechnic studies and some of the engineering departments) and the age range of the sample was from 22 to 28. In that sense, there were a few students in the sample who had delayed the completion of their studies for some reason, which I tried to tap in the questionnaire.

The construction of the data collection tool

In this research I implemented the ZTPI-S version comprising 20 items which are distributed in a 5-factor structure (Table 1).

Table 1: Cronbach alpha for the 5-factor structure of the ZTPI-S (20 items)

ZTPI-S factors	Past positive	Past negative	Present hedonistic	Present fatalistic	Future
Cronbach alpha	.80	.87	.76	.70	.77

According to this operationalisation, the concept “university life” concerns (a) whether students were employed during their studies and (b) their educational involvement. Employment concerns three answers participants could choose in relation to the statement “during my university studies...”: “I got a full-time job”; “I got a part time job”; “I was not working”). Items for educational involvement are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Items for educational involvement (Cronbach alpha = .70)

What I studied has affected a lot how I think
During my university studies I made new friends based on common scientific interests
My university diploma is a strong asset for the job market
During my university studies I got involved in the scientific literature of my field, even if it was not obligatory
I can address my teachers for guidance either by providing me with a recommendation letter or by giving me information on postgraduate studies or on the job market
I will do my best so that my future job is directly related to my university studies

Whether final-year students are planning to delay the completion of their studies for various reasons or not, whether they had specific life plans after graduation and how they imagined themselves in five to seven years from now, are measured through the items which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Operationalisation of “completion of studies”, “future action possibilities” and “future self”

Concept	Dimensions	Items	Variable values
Completion of studies	Reasons for delaying completion of studies	“If you have delayed the completion of your studies, this happened...”	1 because of health reasons 2 because I got a job 3 because of financial problems in my family 4 because I got married 5 because I needed time to better plan my future 6 because I did not study what I wanted 7 because the academic demands were tough for me
	Expectation for completion	“I will finish my studies...”	1 in six months 2 in a year 3 not too soon
Future action possibilities		How likely is it you will follow postgraduate studies after graduation?	1 very unlikely 2 unlikely
		How likely is it you will take a break and then follow postgraduate studies?	3 likely 4 highly likely
		How likely is it you will search for a job after graduation?	
		How likely is it you will follow an academic path (MSc and then PhD) after graduation?	
		How likely is it you will do your military service after graduation?	
		How likely is it you will follow postgraduate studies after graduation and at the same time search for a job?	
Future self	I believe that in the next five to seven years I am most likely...	To be married To be unemployed To be studying To cohabit with my girl/boy friend To have a job I like To have a job I do not like Don't know	1 slightly likely 2 fairly likely 3 very likely 4 don't know

The research was conducted in Greek and the translation of the research tool into English for publication purposes was undertaken by the author. The data analysis used (a) the Kruskal-Wallis Test in order to tap statistically significant mean differences and (b) Spearman's rho correlation coefficient for the identification of correlations between the scale variables (Field, 2018, p. 616). In addition, the explanatory value of the ZTPI-S scale and “university life” has been assessed by logistic regression analysis.

Results

Descriptive statistics

As mentioned before, this is a homogeneous sample composed of more females (78.7%) than males (21.3%) who study social sciences and humanities. Homogeneity permeates the sample participants' social class background (Table 4). The main information shown in Table 4 is that most of the final-year students' parents are well educated and that their work conditions are secure even though they have no decision-making power in the job hierarchy.

Table 4: Sample's social class background

Social class variables	Dimensions	%
Mother's educational level	Middle (senior high school/vocational high school)	46
	High (university diploma, MSc, PhD)	40
Father's educational level	Middle (senior high school/vocational high school)	30
	High (university diploma, MSc, PhD)	40
Father's employment status	Full time employment (30 hr per week or more)	47
	Part time employment (less than 30 hr per week)	3
	Self-employment	18
	Employer (more than 9 employees)	7
	Retired	25
Mother's employment status	Full time employment (30 hr per week or more)	50
	Part time employment (less than 30 hr per week)	8
	Self-employment	6
	Employer (more than 9 employees)	1
	Retired	24
Father's position in the job hierarchy	Decision-making director with subordinates	20
	Director with subordinates, no decision-making power	7
	Director with decision making power, no subordinates	6
	No directorial position	46
Mother's position in the job hierarchy	Decision-making director with subordinates	6
	Director with subordinates, no decision-making power	6
	Director with decision making power, no subordinates	4
	No directorial position	58
	Don't know	26

Although most of the students were in their final year before completion (4th year, 74.4%), there are some who had delayed their studies for one year (5th year, 15.7%) and some of them for two years (6th year, 3.1%), three years (7th year, 3.9%) or four years (8th year, 2.8%). As to the reasons for delaying the completion of their studies, the most dominant reason concerned the fact that "the academic demands were tough for me" (31.7%), "because I got a job" (21.2%), "health reasons" (16.2%), that they "needed time to better plan my future" (17.3%) and that they "did not study what they wanted" (8.7%). The one variable non-parametric test chi square showed that these differences were statistically significant (chi square=103.879, df=6, p=.000<.05). Even though financial

difficulties for delaying studies did not figure as a reason, it is interesting to note that nearly half of the students were working during their university life (47%) and the rest of them were not (53%). One could suppose that this indicates a tendency for autonomy from the family and not an urgent need to contribute to its income.

Regarding the students' level of educational involvement (see Table 2), it seems that most of them are in the middle of the range of the scale ($M=2.74$, $SD=0.69$) (Figure 1) indicating that students express an ambivalent stance towards the academic part of their social identity. This finding is close to another finding which shows that even though students would like to follow postgraduate studies, they are not sure about the knowledge area which interests them. The reason that they provided for this choice is "because it will help them to find a job" (82%) and "because they liked the object of knowledge they studied" (70%).

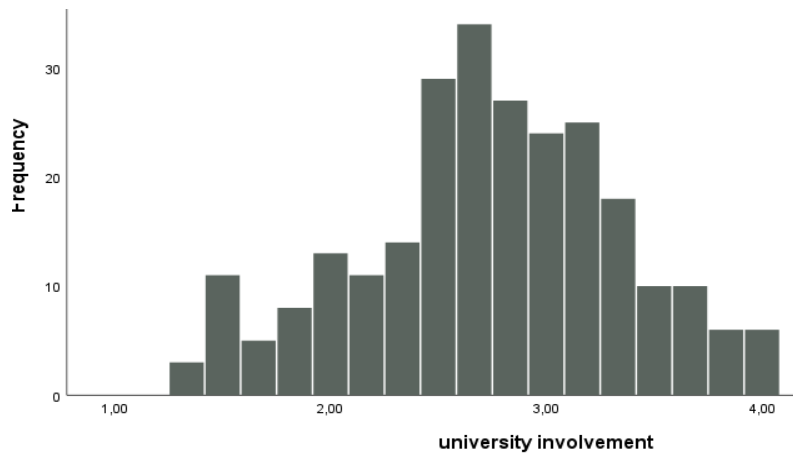


Figure 1: Frequency histogram for students' educational involvement

Table 5 shows a high percentage (81.1%) are not even thinking of traveling abroad for postgraduate studies is extremely high ("It does not apply to me").

Table 5: Students' plans for postgraduate studies (N=254)

	It does not apply to me	It applies to me
I have decided to follow PG studies but I am not sure about the knowledge area which interests me	37.4%	62.6%
I have decided to follow PG studies in the knowledge area of my undergraduate studies and in the same department	69.3%	30.7%
I have decided to follow PG studies in a Greek university related to the knowledge area of my undergraduate studies regardless of the town location	64.9%	35.4%
I have decided to follow PG studies abroad in the knowledge area of my undergraduate studies	81.1%	18.9%

It seems that what is of primary importance for students is the combination of entering the job market with the following of postgraduate studies, even if they are not sure about their scientific interests (Table 6).

Table 6: Students' likely actions after graduation (N=254)

	Highly likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely
How likely is it you will follow postgraduate studies after graduation and at the same time search for a job?	44	29.1	12.2	14.5
How likely is it you will do your military service after graduation?	9	4	7	80
How likely is it you will follow an academic path (MSc and then PhD) after graduation?	5	17.3	37.4	40.6
How likely is it you will search for a job after graduation?	54.3	29.5	12.6	3
How likely is it you will take a break and then follow postgraduate studies?	20.8	30	32.2	17.7
How likely is it you will follow postgraduate studies after graduation?	42.5	32.6	20.8	4

Taking into account the next finding, one could hypothesise that the students' willingness to enter the job market and follow postgraduate studies regardless of what attracts their scientific interests, is a guard against their fear of unemployment (37.4%) or having a job they would not like (32.6%). Students consider these two negative outcomes to be the most likely things that will happen to them in the years to come (Table 7).

Table 7: Students' future selves (N=254)

<i>I believe that what is most likely to happen to me in the next five/ seven years is...</i>	Don't know	Much possible	Possible	Slightly possible
To have a job I do not like	12.2	21.6	33.4	32.6
To have a job I like	11.2	64.5	19.2	5.0
To cohabit with my boy/girlfriend	14.5	52.3	17.3	15.7
To study	7.0	22.1	29.5	36.6
To be unemployed	13.3	12.6	36.6	37.4
To be married	17.7	22.4	24.8	35.0

One could suppose that the final-year students' future image of cohabiting with their girl/boyfriend (52.3%) indicates that they construct a future life for themselves which will be characterised by emotional and job security. Finally, 55.1% of the students plan to complete their studies in six months, 37.8% in a year and 7.1% believe that the completion of their studies will be delayed (Appendix, complete my studies question).

The descriptive information provided by the above presentation can be summarised as follows. Final-year students are ambivalent towards the extent to which they are involved in their studies. This ambivalence is expressed in their willingness to follow postgraduate

studies regardless of the subject area covered by a postgraduate program. One could hypothesise that this is explained by the insecure and undefined job opportunities offered by university diplomas related to social sciences and humanities. Searching for a job and studying at postgraduate level are the most likely courses of action for these university students after graduation. In addition, future mobility is not what final-year students care about as the percentages regarding plans to study abroad or in another town attest. What matters for these motivated but undecided students is their concern to live not a flexible life in which they will pass from one short-term job to another but to live a secure life regarding their emotional and work conditions.

Correlations of the ZTPI-S and university involvement with life plans and future selves

The first correlation tested concerned the concept of university involvement and the five factors of the ZTPI-S (Table 8).

Table 8: Spearman rho correlation for “university involvement” and ZTPI-S

University involvement	The five-factor structure of the ZTPI-S									
	Past positive		Past negative		Present hedonistic		Present fatalistic		Future	
	rho	sig	rho	sig	rho	sig	rho	sig	rho	sig
	.206	.001	-.110	.080	.188	.003	-.209	.001	.408	.000

Table 8 shows that although the correlation coefficient is statistically significant for most of the five factors structuring the ZTPI, it is only the “future” factor which matters because of the strength of the correlation (.45) and its statistical significance ($p=.001<.05$). This correlation can be read as “the more intense the educational involvement, the more committed the students are to future goals and rewards”. The “future” factor of the ZTPI-S was the only factor for which the mean differences across the items of concepts “Future action possibilities” and “plans to finish studies” were statistically significant (Table 9).

Table 9: Spearman rho correlations of the “Future” factor of the ZTPI-S to “Future action possibilities” and “Plans to finish studies”.

The “future” factor of the ZTPI-S	It is likely for me to follow PG studies after graduation	It is likely for me to follow an academic path (MSc and PhD) after graduation	I will finish my studies in 6 months
	rho(3)=19.949 p=.000	rho(3)=14.243 p=.003	rho(2)=15.455 p=.000

Table 9 shows that the more final-year students think that it is very likely that they will follow postgraduate studies after graduation and plan to finish their studies in six months, the higher their score on the future ZTPI-S scale in the sense that they are committed to future goals and rewards. In addition, this is corroborated by the opposite correlation, that is those who consider it is impossible to follow an academic path, score low on the future ZTPI-S scale. Another ZTPI-S factor which is correlated to the final-year students' plans

is PF. It seems that those who think that it is very likely that in the future they will have a job tend to have a fatalistic stance to their life in comparison with those who think that such a possibility is unlikely. Besides the future factor of the ZTPI-S, university involvement accounts for most of the final year students' future selves (Table 10).

Table 10: Kruskal-Wallis test for the mean differences between university involvement and “future possible selves” items

University involvement	To be unemployed	To study	To have a job I like (very likely)	To have a job I do not like	Plans of pursuing an acad. path after grad.	Plans of extending studies	To study in 5-7 yrs from now
	H(3)= 9.200 p=.02	H(3)= 21.102 p=.000	H(2)= 22.288 p=.000	H(3)= 11.758 p=.008	H(3)= 23.452 p=.000	H(2)= 13.219 p=.001	H(3)= 21.103 p=.000

In Table 10 several correlations are made explicit. In particular, it seems that students who are involved with their subject area to a large extent believe that it is very likely that in the future they will have a job they like, while those who are less involved believe that it is only slightly likely that they will have a job they like in the future. In a similar way, students who are involved with their subject area to a large extent, believe that it is very likely that they will be studying in five-seven years from now. The opposite holds for those who are less involved. In addition, university involvement is correlated in a statistically significant manner with the project of pursuing an academic path after graduation and with the extent to which final-year students plan to extend their studies. For instance, those who think that it is very likely that they will follow an academic path after graduation have a higher mean on the “university involvement” scale in comparison to those who think that the same future project is unlikely. Finally, those who are to a large extent involved with their field of study, plan to finish their studies in six months while those who are not so involved plan to extend their studies for more than a year. So far, the findings show that “university involvement” is a much more inclusive concept for explaining students' temporal orientations than the ZTPI-S scale. Evidence for this can be found by looking at the results of binary logistic regression analysis. Table 11 depicts the predictive value of “university involvement” and the “future” factor of the ZTPI-S in relation to most of the students' future selves and projects.

Table 11 verifies that, by using the Wald criterion, “university involvement” predicts the dependent variables better than the “future” factor. In particular, it seems that there is a positive correlation between “university involvement” and the possibility that students believe:

- that it is slightly likely they will be married in the next five/seven years;
- that it is very unlikely they will be studying;
- that it is highly likely they will be living with their girl/boy friend;
- that it is very unlikely they will have a job they don't like; and
- that it is highly likely they will follow PG studies and at the same time search for a job.

Table 11: Binary logistic regression analysis for the “university involvement” and the “future” factors

	To be married		To be studying		To cohabit with my girl/boy friend		To have a job I don't like		Likelihood of following PG studies and at the same time search for a job	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
University involvement	0.701	2.016*	1.102	3.011**	0.615	1.849*	-0.847	0.429**	0.575	1.777*
The “future” factor	0.008	1.008	0.014	1.014	0.003	1.003	-0.081	0.922	0.105	1.110

*= Pearson chi square level of significance of less than .05

** = Pearson chi square level of significance of less than .005

The “future” factor is not related in a statistically significant way with these variables. To sum up the findings, regarding research question 1, it seems that it is only the future factor of the ZTPI-S scale which is related to students' university involvement. As for research question 2, the results show that the “future” factor is related only to a few of the items concerning students' projects and future selves and, as for research question 3, that mobility is not a dominant theme in their life plans. Finally, “university involvement” has a much more predictive strength than the “future” factor for most of the dependent variables.

Discussion

The first two findings point out that the cognitive dimension of youth temporalities cannot account for young people's life projects, without considering relational contexts such as whether they are involved with their object of study. The analysis confirmed my guess that approaching temporality only as a cognitive construct researched by quantitative measures has limited explanatory strength and that involvement with the field of study is correlated with how young people imagine their future. The explanatory power of both the involvement with the study area and of the future factor is much more inclusive than when considering them separately. These findings are a sign that the exploration of the cognitive grounding of final-year students' temporal orientation must take into account the relational context of how they are involved with their field of study. Involvement in the object of study is an integral part of the relational grounding of experiencing temporality during university studies, as this can be shown when students are called on to present their academic capability within pedagogical relationships in which the handling of time is seen as a marker of “failure” or “success” (Bennett & Burke, 2018, p. 920).

The finding that final-year students are motivated to follow postgraduate studies even though they are undecided about their deeper scientific interests which might direct the choice of a masters degree program is consonant with the research of James et al. (2021). These authors argued that the discourse of authenticity is used by young people, both to

navigate career uncertainty and to justify their choice of a degree that is often portrayed in contemporary popular culture as being risky and full of dubious career prospects. Also, the ambivalence the final-year students in my sample feel in relation to involvement with their field of study perhaps reflects their uneasiness in reconciling the demand to follow a pathway that is both authentic as well as materially beneficial.

My research results differ from Cairns' (2008) argument that young people from Northern Ireland feel that they would benefit personally and professionally from undertaking geographical mobility. Via the use of mobility, young people can be liberated from the limitations of place of origin, particularly in terms of available opportunities for jobs and lifestyles. In contrast to these findings, in the university sample in my research the theme of geographical mobility for study or work is absent and in that sense this finding is close to Juvonen & Romakkaniemi (2019) who underline the impact of locality on young people's mobility aspirations and to Thomson & Taylor (2005) who posited that youth temporalities are torn between the competing forces of mobility and locality. In a similar manner, my findings are at odds with the literature positing the "yo-yo-ing" transformation of youth transitions (Walther, 2006), according to which young people tend to favor "choice biographies", expressed in the tendency of more people to deviate from conventions, collectively held norms and traditions, and to make more personal decisions. However, for Elchardus and Smits (2006) this is an empirically indefensible position because external constraints are mistaken for normative expectations as expressed in young people's rationalisations/justifications. Their research findings stemming from a random sample of 4666 persons pointed out a strong consensus concerning (a) the ideal ages at which the various transitions should take place in the population under study, and (b) the sequence of these transitions. Evidence does not change even if one inserts the parameter of educational level. Cohabitation, marriage, home ownership and childbearing are now situated close together in time and the transition age is close to 30, even for higher education students. These findings are close to the finding of my sample, in which completion of undergraduate studies, getting a liked job and cohabitation – that is a "normal biography" or a traditional life-cycle – prevail as possible selves under the age of 30 for most final-year students.

Although I align with the heart of their arguments, I do not see young adults' willingness to combine postgraduate studies with holding a job as a sign of "yo-yo" transitions. An alternative hypothesis could be that in the overlapping of these two temporalities (study time, work time), the impact of structural conditions affecting temporal experience is masked. The fact that almost half of the sample (47%) had jobs while at university indicates that the effective management of two different temporalities is seen by the students as a sign of autonomy against the flexibility and precariousness of "work time" and the university time which demands the quickening of the completion of the university studies (Brooks et al, 2021). It is this autonomy that they would like to enjoy, even when they enter a flexible job market (Bunn, 2018). In other words, it is a kind of "avoiding the evil" of job insecurity or of downward social mobility that it is expressed in this possibility, much less a "choice biography". This is made even more obvious by the fact that, for the final-year students in the sample, prolonging their studies either through a "time-out" logic or by choosing a *par excellence* path signaling the cosmopolitan young

adult (who is traveling abroad for postgraduate studies), is not an option they would choose.

By that I do not mean that their subjective expectations as expressed in their habitus are adjusted to their objective possibilities, as defined by their position in the field of the hierarchy of university diplomas (Zipin et al, 2015), because this would have to be researched through qualitative methods and a comparative research design. I just want to point out that the opposite assumption does not hold, either. In particular, the fact that the final-year students in this sample are not future oriented in the cosmopolitan or “choice biography” sense of the term should not be taken as proof that they lack agency. Investing in the subject area of their studies in order to avoid precarity is crucial and agentic for the final-year students in my sample. However, it is one thing for final-year students to put in motion agentic actions in order to achieve respectable social roles when they enter the job market, and it is quite another to say that their courses of action lack agency because they end up reproducing themselves.

Most of my research findings point to the fact that how students experience temporality has been affected by the discourse of employability in which a particular disposition towards the future is diffused (continuous improvement and self-promotion) but cultural capital inequalities persist (Adam & Groves, 2007; Clegg, 2010). Being employable means continuous self-monitoring by attempting to bring the future into the present. Facing such temporality demands fosters a kind of reflexivity that Archer (2007, p.158) calls “communicative reflexivity” which makes students socially immobile or “stay put”. “Staying put” means that students aspire to contextual continuity by searching for advice from peers and relatives but, given that contingency rules their lives, a growing uncertainty then permeates decision taking. In other words, when individuals are imbued with this modality of reflexivity their agency is blocked and is based upon similar others in order to navigate in the world.

Obviously, in such cases the non-intended effect is social reproduction to the extent that individuals who are communicatively reflexive (or identifiers) tend to embrace their natal *modus vivendi* as their own or as something that leads their life. This should not be confused with the fact that students are mere “copy pasters of their parents in so far as the production of social immobility as an outcome entails just as much effort and deliberation. I argue that the temporality of “staying put” can be framed by what Wagner-Pacifci (2000) calls the “standoff temporality”, that is temporalities sustaining contingency. Those imbued by the standoff temporality spend a good deal of time just waiting, waiting to see what the “enemy” will do and the “enemy” for the final-year students in this sample concerns (a) their ambivalence towards their field of study, and (b) that being a teacher in Greece is permeated by precarity. Fluidity and precarity are the most important shapers of the transition to adulthood. As Wagner-Pacifci (2000, p.10) put it:

A standoff may be viewed as the “eye of the storm” of a conflict in two ways. First, this image suggests the idea of calm before, during, or after a storm [...]. The second way in which the standoff is the “eye of the storm” is in the sense of vision, of revelation, of

shedding some light on a situation that has temporarily been frozen fast (Wagner-Pacifici, 2000:7)

It seems that the conflictual meanings and the non-standardised alternatives faced by those who carry the burden to decide, as is the case with my sample, are captured by the standoff temporality. Sometimes, the temporality of “deferred gratification” and the “temporal restructuring” are deployed as strategies to resist market time (Xu, 2021, p.15). Final-year students in my sample may use the standoff temporality of staying in place in to deal with the temporality of “anytime” or “project time” (Ylijoki, 2015, p.96) diffused by the neo-liberal flexibility. I noted that the extent to which final-year students are involved with their field of study is tied up with how they are going to handle the fact that while their possibilities for action are getting even wider, they feel a continuous pressure to make choices and take decisions and, in that way, decision-making is not experienced as freedom but as a necessity, that is as a burden. My analysis showed that the extent to which students are involved with their area of study is a key factor for understanding how they are going to deal with this burden.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear students

This questionnaire is addressed to final year students aged up to 30 years old attending humanities departments and aims to capture your post-degree plans about your career projects. We would be grateful to you if you could devote 10 minutes to complete it, bearing in mind that the information, as you will see, is anonymous and its use is for purely research purposes.

Thank you and I wish you all the best in your post-university choices.

Michalis Christodoulou

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Age

22-23 24-25 26-27 28-29 30

Name the department you are attending

Year of study

4th 5th 6th 7th 8th

If you have delayed the completion of your studies, this happened...

- for health reasons
- because you were working
- because of financial problems in your family
- because you got married
- because I wanted some kind of "time out" to better plan my future

- because I didn't study what I wanted to study and I was thinking about what I was going to do in my future
- because I was struggling with the academic requirements of the courses

I will complete my studies

- In six months from now
- In a year
- Not too soon

Mother's educational level

Junior high school	Vocational high school	General high school
Vocational training	University diploma	MSc PhD DK/NA

Father's educational level

Junior high school	Vocational high school	General high school
Vocational training	University diploma	MSc PhD DK/NA

Father's employment status

Full time employment (30 h per week or more)		
Part time employment (less than 30 h per week)		
Self-employment	Employer (more than 9 employees)	Retired

Father's position in the job hierarchy

Executive director	Free lancer	Technician	Office worker
Salesman	Farmworker	Skilled worker	Machinist worker
Unskilled worker			

Mother's employment status

Full time employment (30 h per week or more)		
Part time employment (less than 30 h per week)		
Self-employment	Employer (more than 9 employees)	Retired

Mother's position in the job hierarchy

Executive director	Free lancer	Technician	Office worker
Salesman	Farmworker	Skilled worker	Machinist worker
Unskilled worker			

The following card is a scale which groups income. We would like to know which group your household is in (before the coronavirus pandemic).

Please determine the group you belong by taking into account all wages, salaries, pensions and other income coming into your household.

1. 0-500 Euro
2. 501-1000 Euro
3. 1001-1500 Euro
4. 1501-2000 Euro
5. 2001-2500 Euro
6. 2501-3000 Euro
7. > 3000 Euro
99. no answer

Have you ever participated in Erasmus mobility program?

Yes No

During my studies

I got a full time job

I got a part time job

I was not working

Read each statement and answer the question as honestly as you can:

"How uncharacteristic/characteristic is this statement for you?" Mark with an X the appropriate cell which expresses your answer, using the scale: 1=very uncharacteristic, 2=uncharacteristic, 3=characteristic, 4=very characteristic

		1	2	3	4
1	Familiar childhood sights, sounds, and smells often bring back a flood of wonderful memories				
2	Happy memories of good times spring readily to mind				
3	I get nostalgic about my childhood				
4	I like family rituals and traditions that are regularly repeated				
5	Painful past experiences keep being replayed in my mind				
6	I've taken my share of abuse and rejection in the past				
7	It's hard for me to forget unpleasant images of my youth				
8	I think about the bad things that have happened to me in the past				
9	I believe that getting together with one's friends to party is one of life's important pleasures				
10	Taking risks keeps my life from becoming boring				
11	I take risks to put excitement in my life				
12	I like my close relationships to be passionate				
13	Since whatever will be will be, it doesn't really matter what I do				
14	You can't really plan for the future because things change so much				
15	My life path is controlled by forces I cannot influence				
16	It doesn't make sense to worry about the future, since there is nothing that I can do about it anyway				
17	When I want to achieve something, I set goals and consider specific means for reaching those goals				
18	Meeting tomorrow's deadlines and doing other necessary work come before tonight's play.				
19	I am able to resist temptations when I know that there is work to be done				
20	I keep working at difficult, uninteresting tasks if they help me get ahead				

Please answer whether the following statements apply to you or not, using the scale 1=it does not apply to me, to 4=it applies fully to me (mark with an X)

		1	2	3	4
1	What I studied has affected a lot how I think				
2	During my university studies I made new friends based on common scientific interests				
3	My university diploma is a strong asset for the job market				
4	During my university studies I got involved in the scientific literature of my field, even if it was not obligatory				
5	I can address my teachers for guidance either by providing me with				

	a recommendation letter or by giving me information on postgraduate studies or on the job market				
6	I will do my best so that my future job is directly related to my university studies				

Answer how likely it is that each of the following will happen after you finish your studies, using the scale 1= completely impossible to 4=highly likely (mark with an X)

		1	2	3	4
1	How likely is it you will follow postgraduate studies after graduation?				
2	How likely is it you will take a break and then follow postgraduate studies?				
3	How likely is it you will search for a job after graduation?				
4	How likely is it you will follow an academic path (MSc and then PhD) after graduation?				
5	How likely is it you will do your military service after graduation?				
6	How likely is it you will follow postgraduate studies after graduation and at the same time search for a job?				

If you have opted for postgraduate studies (MSc), to what extent do the following statements apply to you? (mark with an X)

		It applies to me	It does not apply to me
1	I have decided to follow pg studies abroad in the knowledge area of my undergraduate studies		
2	I have decided to follow pg studies in a Greek university related to the knowledge area of my undergraduate studies, regardless of the town location		
3	I have decided to follow pg studies in the knowledge area of my undergraduate studies and in the same department		
4	I have decided to follow pg studies but I am not sure about the knowledge area which interests me		

To what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements?

1=TD, 2=D, 3=N/N 4=A, 5=TA (mark with an X)

I decided to follow PG studies...	1	2	3	4	5
1 because I like the object of knowledge I studied					
2 because there were professors I admired					
3 because my close friends affected me positively					
4 because of my family's financial sources					
5 because my family's financial sources are not enough but I will search for a PG program in my city					
6 because it will help me to find a job					
7 because of my Erasmus experience					

In case you take a “time out” in order to look for a job, which of the following persons will help you to find a job (mark with an x in the appropriate cell or cells)

1	my friends	
2	my parents	
3	my relatives	
4	my university teachers	
5	none of the above	

Please provide an answer for the following statements describing future possibilities for you

I believe that in the next five/seven years I am most likely...		Slightly likely	Fairly likely	Very likely	Don't know
1	to be married				
2	to be unemployed				
3	to be studying				
4	to cohabit with my girl/boy friend				
5	to have a job I like				
6	to have a job I do not like				

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