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PLANNING TIME

Structuring of the Everyday among Young Adults in Non-Traditional Jobs

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Abstract

Unstructured time and “wasted” time is often shunned and unwanted in today’s society focused on productive and progressive use of time. In this essay, I examine how planning of everyday activities gives structure and purpose to the day with the help of tools such as personal calendars and to-do lists. When having an excess amount of unstructured time, it needs to be filled somehow to make it a valuable use of time. By planning activities and what needs to be done beforehand, the day becomes purposeful. The participants of the study generally have an excess amount of time needed to be filled and through my research I try to gain an understanding on how they make sure they spend their time well through planning tools like calendars and to-do lists. I argue that the creation of purposeful social time requires structuring and planning of daily meaningful activities. I also push that planning is a crucial part in structuring of time. The study is heavily based on the concept and theory of time, specifically social time and the creation of meaningful time through activities. How time is constantly produced in everyday

practice and activities according to larger sociocultural structures. The methods used in the study have mostly consisted of semi-structured interviews, both in person and on Zoom. I also, together with the participants, went through their calendars and to-do lists to get a greater understanding of how they use the tools in their daily planning.

Key words: social time, middle class youth, planning, Germany, activities

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Introduction

“After breakfast with my husband I like to get out of the house to run an errand or get whatever needs to be done for the day. Since I don’t have a typical job where I go work at a company, so it is kind of important that I build that in to my daily routine.”

Charlotte, a 26 year-old stay at home wife situated in the middle of Munich explained to me, “If I don’t have a purpose or something to do, or... Then I feel lost and do not know what to do with myself”. Charlotte decided to close down her eco-friendly bag company when she got married and to be the dedicated caregiver for the household and future family. This has resulted in her having a lot of time on her hands that she needs to somehow fill with activities to make her everyday purposeful until she becomes a mother. Having an excess amount of time in the everyday, meaning having more time during the day than one can fill up, usually is a result of not having a traditional job to go to. This is Charlotte’s situation, she no longer has a traditional job by choice, and now she must structure her days to have something to do every day.

The people I have interviewed for my research, and who I focus on in this thesis, are all middle class young adults in their 20s in the German region of Bavaria, with non-traditional jobs which gives them an excess amount of time in their everyday that they have to structure. Those untraditional jobs were stay at home wife, microbial biotechnology PhD student positions, and unpaid content creator on Instagram. The PhD students were the only ones with an actual paid salary, although underpaid for the amount of work they do. Middle class people have the privilege of choice, choosing what job they do or do not want to have, what products they consume, where they want to live, and how they find meaning in their everyday lives (Heiman, Liechty & Freeman, 2012). Being financially stable and secure, and as well as having the privilege of choosing what kind of job to hold leaves room for the ability to get a non-traditional job, meaning a job which does not have fixed hours or a non-paying job, and more freedom of what to do with the extra time. These individuals are then accountable to plan their time and to make it worthwhile. This leaves them to have to structure that excess of time somehow to avoid it going to waste. Why is it essential for them to structure their time at all?

As Charlotte expressed, she feels lost when she does not have something to do or when she does not do something with a purpose. For her purpose is found in activities, and those activities need to be structured. Structured time means time which is planned out and activities established in advance. In contrast, unstructured time means that there is nothing on the schedule, that activities happen at random or not at all. A structured day is a day well spent for Charlotte and the other people in this thesis.

The purpose of my research is to demonstrate how the everyday is structured through planning and performing of activities to create valuable use of time. Valuable use of time is subjective and depends from person to person. An activity Pierre, a PhD student in microbial biotechnology, sees as using time well, could be seen as a complete waste of time for Charlotte. He likes gaming and sees it as bringing value to his life, while Charlotte sees it as time that could be spent better. What they do have in common is the need to plan their time, to decide and do their activities of value on purpose by structuring the day.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of my research is to demonstrate how the everyday is structured through planning and the performing of activities to create valuable use of time. I do this by studying young adults in the German middle class holding non-traditional occupations. I am showing what planned time means for young adults and why it is important to structure the everyday with purposeful activities. I am also exploring how planning tools like the digital personal calendar as well as to-do lists are used to give structure and purpose in everyday life. This is interesting to gain an understanding of because time has been a debated topic within anthropology. However, there is a clear gap in research around time and planning of everyday life in western society. I believe this topic is both relevant and worth looking into as more and more people are going into non-traditional jobs due to the current reconfigurations of the capitalist system. This means people in this position becomes responsible and accountable for their own time management.

Research questions:

- How does young adults in Germany with non-traditional jobs structure their time through planning?

- How do they make sense of and conceive that planned time?

Previous Research and Theoretical Connection

Background on Time as a Theory and Concept

Time is a concept which humans cannot truly grasp, yet it touches every aspect of our lives and everything around us and is in every way inescapable. In anthropology and sociology, time has been widely theorized by Emile Durkheim (1915), Henri Hubert (1999), Clifford Geertz (1966), and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), just to mention a few. It often comes back to sociologist Emile Durkheim's (1915) theory of "social time" as human temporal awareness and the concept of time stems from the social world. He showed that humans, individually but more importantly in social groups, create time as a phenomenon and reflect how reality is perceived. The social world among humans creates a meaningful use of time, mostly through social relationships and activities. Time is thus also a shared experience between people in the same cultural groups in rhythmic and ritual activities (Durkheim, 1915; Hubert, 1999). One of his intellectual descendants, anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940) builds on the concept of time as a social construct and that it becomes living when activities are performed. He states in his monograph *The Nuer* (1940), that time is structured by activities and lived social time. Lived social time means the individual and shared social activities of everyday life. In this way time is what we do with it, how it is actively spent. For Evans-Pritchard, time is also consisting of "rhythms" where activities go in cycles and are linked to the natural cycles like seasons and in this way time is perceived as being in motion (Munn, 1992).

In contrast, Geertz (1966) discusses how the Balinese culture "detemporalizes" time. This is done through how time is conceived through persons and not really through temporal expressions or concepts. The past is thus linked to ancestors or persons alive when something happened, the future is linked to the descendants and successors. Time is then seen as a "motionless present" with no beginning or end (Geertz, 1966). So according to the Balinese, the current rainy season is the same rain as the last rainy season because time does not move forward, it is always the same rain returning.

For my research, I am mostly interested in social time in relation to action/activity and actors in the present and immediate future. This is because I am focusing on the activities done to plan

and fill time. In anthropologist Nancy D. Munn's article *The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay* (1992), she discusses and reviews some of the main theories from early anthropologists and sociologists like Durkheim, Hubert, Leach, Geertz etc. around sociocultural time, and conceptualize time as a social phenomenon. She explains the state of time in our lives in the following way: "We and our productions are in some sense always "in" time (the socioculturally/historically informed time of our activity and our wider world) and yet we make, through our acts, the time we are in." (Munn, 1992, p. 94).

We are in time but we also make the time we are in individually, which means that time needs to be structured, and this is the aspect of time my own fieldwork is based on. I study how time is structured in the everyday through planning. Through this I see how time is constantly produced in everyday practice and activities according to larger sociocultural structures. According to Munn this kind of time creates a meaningful lived space of activity (1992). Being "in" time means that time is allowed to be created on an individual consciousness through doing something, but also at a social level. This is similar to Durkheim's concept of "social time" and creating time in social groups by doing, and performing meaningful activities (1915). Planning of the mundane is therefore a part of being "in" time and making it meaningful with purpose. These mundane everyday activities change between cultures, and what one group of people do as a process of creating and being "in" time, might not be part of or even exist in another groups created time. Time moves forward for all of us, but it is perceived and looks completely different among different social groups, and even between individuals.

The daily activities which structure the day is then in a sense structuring time, so time is not just lived, but it is constructed in the living. When doing this structuring, deciding which activities to do when, time-telling or measurements of time, then tells that there is a specific time to do it, a right or wrong time for certain activities. Munn describes it this way: "Thus the time being told relates to the time of one's purposes: to the sense that one is not (in our own expression) 'on time.'" (Munn, 1992, p. 104). Being on time with an activity is as Munn says, relating to the time of one's purposes, what is supposed to be done during that time. This is a kind of hurried way, where if something is done which is not supposed to be done at that time, then we are "behind" and time is going on without us. Time is in a way embodied in purposeful

activity and experience, which I see from my fieldwork as well, where people plan their day based on the activities they are going to do.

Creating time through meaningful activities can be seen among my participants when they structure their days in order to make progress and to avoid ending up wasting their time. The activities they chose receive meaning because they are purposely chosen and not because they are seen as meaningful by a general consensus. What is meaningful is a very subjective feeling, thus time is created and perceived differently. What one person perceives as valuable time and a meaningful activity, can be a complete waste of time for another. Both perceptions are neither right nor wrong, they are just based on different personal and cultural values. This is why time may be perceived differently from culture to culture and why the theories and concepts of time differ among the classical works based in different parts of the world. There is currently a clear gap of knowledge within anthropology on how Western middle-class young adults with non-traditional jobs structure and conceive of their time. Therefore it is especially interesting to study how time, social time in particular, is perceived among the middle class in the western digitalized world.

Time in Contemporary Ethnographies

Time in contemporary ethnographic work range between a wide selection of topics such as economic, cultural, calendric, and violence but what I found interesting was time in relation to boredom and “wasted” time. Daniel Mains (2007) and Craig Jeffrey (2010) studied young unemployed educated young men and how they experience boredom in their unstructured time. Unstructured time means time which is not spent in a purposeful way, time which does not lead anywhere. The young men in both studies did not have any purposeful activities to structure their days, they were merely “killing time”. Mains conducted his research in urban Ethiopia, and the young men he studied were unemployed, lived at home, and were supported by their parents until they could get a respectable job in government and get a family of their own. As long as they were unemployed, their days were long and the time had to be “passed” or “killed”, too much unstructured time led to them feeling stressed about their situation (Mains, 2007, p. 666). Mains means this stress came from the lack of time used for meaningful activities leading to the progress that they were expecting from themselves (2007, p. 667).

In Jeffrey's (2010) research on unemployed students in India and their concept of "timepass" which simply means passing an excess of time. These unemployed men were unemployed because they could not find respectable jobs, therefore they stayed at university and studied several degrees because then they would have something to do. The problem was that the studies did not fill up much of their time or gave their days any structure. Here, as well as the men in Ethiopia, they referred to time having to be "passed" or "killed" and that time did not contain any value because of the activities they engaged in (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 470). These activities of "timepass" consisted of chatting with friends, "sitting about", and going to the tea stall. They were engaging in social time in order to suppress their boredom, even though that social time lacked value or purpose. The value of the activity decides if the time is well spent, and in order to spend time well, the day needs structure. In contrast to these unemployed men and their boredom with time, my participants try to fill their social time with activities of value. This is in order to avoid engaging in "timepass". "Timepass" is unwanted because it is essentially wasting time, no value is created and activities performed during "timepass" does not lead to progress. It is merely to make time pass when there is nothing else available to do. In the case of the participants in my research, they engage in "timepass" when procrastinating, they have things to do, but choose not to do them. What is of value is a very subjective thought to each individual, so activities vary from person to person. What I take from these studies of time and boredom is how the participants in my research create their own structured time. They have a lot of unstructured free time and they structure it with activities that brings purpose to their everyday.

Parker (2021), discuss the idea of busyness in his research among recovering addicts in Puerto Rico. From this he finds that busyness has more to do with finding an alternative way of living when not being part of the labor market than with capitalist subject formation. For these recovering addicts, keeping busy was a way to find meaning in their lived time from having an excess of time on their hands. Busyness is thus not only linked to labor and productive commodification of time, but it also creates meaning in time outside of labor. Busyness means having something to do, quite the opposite of Jeffrey's (2010) "timepass" where there is nothing to do. Keeping busy, is a way for the men in Parker's research to recover, even though some of the activities they engage in leads to no individual progress, it does keep them from procrastination and falling back into their addiction.

I have based a lot of my research on the planning of time through the use of personal calendars. This is because I find it interesting how we in western society oftentimes plan and structure the day, both in leisure time and work time, with the help of a calendar. And because my participants did exactly that as well, they exemplify this trend. The leisure time part of the personal calendar is of particular interest since it is essentially completely created and structured by the owner, through planning of social activities. Much of the calendric research is based not on the western and individual use of a calendar, but more on other cultures use of community calendars. The calendar I have based my research on is the Gregorian calendar, and especially the personal calendar of young individuals, which just so happened to be digital calendars. A calendar is a form of temporal orientation, a guide for time as past, present, and future, which does not so much measure time as give it a rhythmic form (Munn, 1992, p. 95). A calendar pinpoints certain “appointed times” which emphasizes what kind of time it is. In a personal calendar this shows the appointments made and activities which are planned for a certain time on a certain day. Calendars help planning time during a day, keeping track of their past as well as planning for their future (Mughal, 2017, p. 264). It is a social organization of time where the scheduling of that time is of the essence. I think this is what makes calendars so important in structuring life as it helps planning the future in activities. Then we know what we need to do at certain time of day and can then adjust the rest of the daily activities accordingly. Muhammad Mughal (2017), in his research about daily and weekly rhythms in rural Pakistan, demonstrates how a typical family’s daily lives are structured in time allocations based on activities for each member of the household. Even here we see that certain activities are for certain times of the day, these everyday activities include prayer times throughout the day, work, household duties, social time, and entertainment consisting of watching TV (Mughal, 2017, pp. 274-275). The activities happen in rhythms, similar time and activity every day.

In my own research, it was apparent to me that the rhythms are present and they are planned and purposely chosen by the person. The activities do not happen rhythmically naturally, but are planned to happen at that time. Even here the activities themselves may vary, but they can be allocated into categories like work, social time, and household duties. When discussing boredom, some parts of these rhythms are missing, which could lead to boredom in the everyday and a feeling that something is missing. For my participants, the rhythms of work is low or non-

existent, and the other rhythms have to be created by the individuals. Charlotte and Elise, a social media content creator on Instagram, has to create their own work rhythms with their own projects and activities since they do not have an external work to go to like those in traditional occupations. For them it is then essential to carefully plan out their days to be able to get the feeling of work rhythm during the weekdays. Otherwise the time blends together, Charlotte told me how every day is a weekend for her, meaning leisure time, unless she actively makes it feel like a weekday through structured activities which differ from her weekend activities.

Theoretical Delimitations

I have chosen not to discuss my research from other temporal theories and constructions such as seasonal calendars and phases of the moon or community calendars such as local holidays, since I am focusing on the personal calendar based in western society. The calendars are structured the same with year, month, and day, but it is the one planned and structured by individuals and how they personally create their time in that calendar which I am interested in. Therefore, literature based on identifying and marking time from natural phenomena have not been used or reflected over. This is mostly because this kind of perception of time is very community based and often based in cultures where not a lot of leisure or “chosen” activities are performed, but mostly based on community and agricultural rhythms as seen in Kerry Hull’s (2017) research on the Cho’orti’ Mayans and how they mark time. I am also not touching upon economic theories in relation to time and productivity. I did not see it being of great importance in the data gathered. I also do not go into depth on paid labor or “external” work, mostly because it is occupied time where one cannot make plans of ones own choice. Instead I focus more on the unstructured free time which needs to be structured which people holding non-traditional occupations usually have access to.

Material and Method

The field for this research was situated in the Bundesland (region) of Bayern, Germany, during a three month period in the beginning of 2022. Bayern is the largest Bundesland by area out of 16 in Germany, with a population of 13 million. Bayern is predominantly rural with most people living in rural areas, but young adults mostly live in urban areas (Institute of Rural Studies, n.d.). Bayern’s population largely consists of middle class and middle-income households, who

work in middle and high-skill jobs (OECD & Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2021). The amount of people in non-traditional jobs are still fairly low among the middle class in Germany, but it is slowly growing (OECD & Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2021).

A typical middle class lifestyle is to work at a business or public sector as a full-time employee, the participants in my study does the opposite of that. Although the middle class still tend to go for the traditional job, it is getting more attractive and more widely available for young people to take non-traditional jobs (OECD & Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2021). It is from financial stability from family or partners which enables the young people in my study to take on these non-traditional occupations. Having financial stability to a certain degree is also typical for the middle class. Middle class people also often indulge their time in activities like travels, upholding social relationships, hobbies, and consumption for pleasure, which the working class might not have available time for (Heiman, Liechty & Freeman, 2012). This time and financial stability extends to those with traditional and non-traditional occupations, non-traditional job holders usually have unstructured time, which makes them interesting for this study.

In this research I decided to rely heavily on interviews as a main method. The reason for this was because my fieldwork initially focused on productivity and social media, so a big part of my research was also conducted online, but as the fieldwork progressed, I realized that planning of social time was a clear and reoccurring theme, and that my whole research was steering towards that instead. I relied on my interviews as method and going through planning tools like calendars and to-do lists together with the participants. In addition to this, I also corresponded with the participants through text and voice messages when I had further questions about a topic we had talked about during the interviews.

My participants were two men and five women in their twenties and without children. The way I got in contact with the participants were first from my own contacts in Germany and a slight snowball effect. I also contacted three of them on Instagram after seeing them mention their calendars, to-do lists, and occupation in their posts. I conducted 10 individual sit-down semi-structured interviews, ranging from around 50 minutes and up to three hours. I had reoccurring interviews with three of the participants, these were the key persons in my research. While I have only presented four persons, Charlotte, Elise, Anna, and Pierre in this thesis, I have drawn

information from all interviews. The four persons, and especially Charlotte and Elise, were chosen to be heavily presented because of the reoccurring interviews, contact, and amount of useful information they provided.

The reason I chose semi-structured interviews was because I wanted it to feel relaxed and more like a conversation than an interview. I had several pre-planned open-ended questions to be able to get as personal and varied answers as possible. As I gathered data over time and conducted interviews, I noticed that certain interesting common themes and words appeared among the different people and so then I adjusted the interview questions to go more into that territory. This is how I got into structured social time, planning, calendars, and to-do lists. The place of the interview was always the choice of the interviewee, and it was mostly in a public place or over zoom. Two were conducted in a university building, one was at a café, and the rest were on zoom. The only good thing about a zoom interview was, in my opinion, that it was undisturbed by external elements and I could easily record it. Recording was always with the interviewees permission, but it did make my job easier because I could pay more attention to what they were actually saying and their facial expressions, and not only on writing down notes. What I missed in the zoom meetings was the personal connection, it is much harder to get it from a stranger when not being in the same room and being able to read body language and such. It also makes the interview feel more like an interview and not as relaxed and spontaneous as it was with the people interviewed in person. The reason why the majority was on zoom was mostly because of the presence of Covid-19 and the interviews being moved to zoom just to be able to have them at all since I had a finite amount of time to conduct the fieldwork. One part of the interviews focused on calendars, to-do lists, and planning. To gather this kind of data I asked the participants to tell me about their different methods of planning and then also show them to me. I got to see their calendars and to-do lists while they explained to me what was on there and why it was on there. They also went through the whole process of planning their day with me. This way I got to see their tools and also understand the meaning of them. But mostly, it gave me an idea of how they plan their time, what things are important or prioritized, what can be rather spontaneous and flexible, and also how they spend their time.

Ethical Considerations

My research on planning of the everyday activities and time is quite ethically unproblematic. The participants in my study has an excess amount of unstructured time on their hands outside of work-life. They are all from a similar socioeconomic position and background, educated, are financially well, and living in urban areas. Because of this, time and structuring of time is not something which could be particularly sensitive to them or their societal position. I explained my topic and disclosed intentions with the research to all participants before they agreed to do interviews. They are also aware of it being completely anonymous and that I am not using their real names. This is for their own comfort and to not feel exposed on certain statement they have made that I may use in this work. I do not think my own position in the research had a noticeable effect on the participants, I rather think it might have been to an advantage that we were from the same age group and similar socioeconomic position. It might have made the interviews feel more relaxed and made me look less like a researcher in their eyes. I recorded most of the interviews with the participants permission. Only one participant was not comfortable of me having a recording of our conversation, but I was still allowed to use the material I gathered during the interview.

Ethnographic Discussion

Calendars and planning of time

During our zoom interview, Charlotte, a 26 year-old stay at home wife, explained to me how she plans her days by using five digital calendars divided into different categories based on her projects and interests along with a normal appointment calendar, on her computer. “So the websites I use are called Planoly and Notion, you can like build calendars into it so it is easy to keep track of everything” Planoly is a website used specifically to plan and schedule posts for social media platforms. While Notion is a website where any kind of customized organization is available, such as calendars, tasks and checklists, and notetaking. Charlotte then describes the purpose of her different calendars to me:

“So the one in front of me right now is ideal task completion for the week, and then I’ve listed each day, and then I’ve listed what projects I’d like to complete that day. So that would be like one – uhm, it mostly might just be like the date and then in order, I try to do it in chronological order of everything I want to do. I have my creation and content schedule, this one shows what content I need to create on each day. Then I have a filming outfits calendar which shows what outfits I need to photograph and film each day. Then I have a creation sewing schedule, so this is the calendar showing what items I need to sew that day. And then I have a posting Instagram schedule on Planoly which is, as I mentioned, what I need to post for that specific day.”

Charlotte is a well-educated young woman who lives in an apartment in the center of Munich. She has a medical degree but chose not to pursue a career in it and decided that she is going to focus on family more and to be a stay-at-home mother for her future children. She lives with her husband who financially supports her and works from home as a business owner. Charlotte herself does not have a paying job and is thus not working in a traditional way, but works on personal projects for her ecofriendly fashion accounts on Instagram and TikTok, which she posts on every day. These projects are mostly sewing clothes, DIYing, and creating content around these activities for her social media accounts. She does not earn any money from her Instagram or TikTok accounts and she told me that she does not really intend to do it either. For her, staying organized and planning her time is essential to feeling in control of her day as she is not bound by external responsibilities like a job or studies. Planning her days in detail and keeping them structured gives her day a purpose and a sense of responsibility. She has taken full responsibility over managing the household, so she is the one cooking, cleaning, and makes

sure that they have everything they need at home. But this does not take the whole day and she has a lot of free time on her hands until they start a family. This kind of free time requires discipline and careful planning, for this, Charlotte has built up a routine that she says is very close to her ideal day. She says she has done this by schedule blocking her time:

“I kinda schedule block, or well, it’s kinda like a makeshift method of it or something, not at all as strict as some people, I have certain times during the day blocked out for stuff like I work on my projects between 7am to 11am and after breakfast, I usually take the time to leave the apartment, cause I don’t have a typical job where I go work at a company, so it is kinda important that I build that in my daily routine.”

Schedule blocking is a well-known way of time management where blocks of time are dedicated to accomplishing a task and nothing else is to be done except that specific task, this is to help minimizing distractions and get things done efficiently. There are many variations of time blocking, and Charlotte has adapted her own version to fit her lifestyle the best, and getting things done.

This chapter is focusing on the use of calendars as time management and planning of everyday lives. I am discussing how planning of the everyday gives structure to the day and produces purposeful use of time from activities done. Calendars make sure we know what happens in our lives on a specific day at a specific time. The use of calendars and to-do lists are common tools used when planning the days. I am first going to discuss the use of digital calendars, not the physical paper calendars, and how they help structure time in the everyday. I discuss only digital calendars because they are readily available in electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers, which are multi-functional items used every day and often carried on the person throughout the day. Secondly, I am going to discuss to-do lists and their way of listing activities needed to be done during a day and how they structure the day as well as giving it a purpose. Lastly, I am going to discuss what is considered a “waste” of time, in this section I will bring up activities which are not part of the planning, and which are considered to be “time not well spent”. I will discuss how wasted time is the opposite of planned time which is considered purposeful.

Today, digitalization is taking over many daily items and practices, and the calendar is not an exception. Every smartphone and computer nowadays comes with a built in digital calendar

and there are countless of apps and websites created for time management and calendars, both for personal and professional use. All of my participants exclusively use digital calendars in their phones and computers. Anna, a PhD student of microbial biotechnology, used to have a physical calendar and she used it a lot and wrote down most things in it, I asked her why she stopped using it and she answered, “I don’t know why I stopped, because I liked it a lot. I guess it was just easier with the computer because of work, and it is really good for reminders since it gives me a notification and I use the computer every day so I would never miss it.”. The reminder function in the electronic calendars was key for every person. It makes it easier to remember without having to constantly look in the calendar and see if there are any appointments coming up. Another PhD student of microbial biotechnology, Pierre, told me about how he completely relies on the reminder system on his phone calendar:

“Stuff like events, here it is to remind me to look up a seminar that opens up on the 28th, like the registration, so I put it in to remind me that I have to look it up. That’s what I mean, it will pop up when I put it on the 28th now. That’s for all the stuff what I have to do at a specific time. What I also do for things I have to do, but I don’t really have a set time for that because I have to integrate it somehow in my schedule however that works, then I have just notifications, not actual days. Uhm, so like right now, here is the date for today and it says here three notifications, and then I can go on there and it tells me like, Easter tickets, which reminds me that I have to book my tickets to go home on easter holiday and then something for work that I have to do whenever I can do it, and to remind me to look up the password for my finance account because I wrote it down somewhere and I forgot it. These are the stuff that just... I have here on the top a finger, this just means there is a notification, and then it just shows me what it was.”

The digitalization makes it easier and okay to forget planned activities because the electronic device is relied upon to remind us of it in good time. Pierre said, “But, uh, like when we went to Regensburg I put a two hour reminder that I don’t forget and I get ready soon enough that I get to the train station. Just if I lose track of the time, but I didn’t expect that I would forget the event like at all.”. Loosing track of time, like being completely absorbed into a book or work, losing the perception of how much time has passed, the reminder, a vibration of the phone or a *ping* on the computer can be enough to snap back and be aware of the time.

External reminders of time of day have long been around, such as chiming of church bells in Christian countries and Adhan call for prayer in Muslim countries. Mughal (2017) found in his study about time and daily rhythms in Pakistan, how they schedule meetings by taking the prayer timings, *pahars*, as reference (p. 272). This way time can be structured through obligatory activities, like prayers, at an already pre-determined time. The electronic devices, especially the phone which is often close to hand, makes it okay to forget something important because the responsibility is put on the device to remind the person of it on time. Forgetting plans to meet a friend for a coffee for example can lead to a strained social relationship with a friend, while forgetting a booked appointment can lead to a small fee needing to be paid. A person is responsible for their own time but also for the other person's time when their times overlap in a shared activity. Because of the digital calendar's reminder function, it could be expected that a person will stick to, remember, and show up for a commitment. This way more responsibilities are created and the person is held more accountable because it is much harder to forget when the notification is there to remind of the planned activity or appointment.

Perceived time does not have a purpose until it is given a purpose by the person experiencing it. If an activity is planned to be executed during a certain time decided by either external sociocultural factors, such as religious or community practices, or by the individual person, then there is a "right or wrong time to do it" (Munn, 1992, p.105). Charlotte has roughly divided her and her husband's time into what she calls "productive hours" and "relaxing hours", she explains:

If I'm doing productive things during relaxing hours then I would consider that a waste of time. Like I get really annoyed when my husband works past six for example, because that's no longer working time, it is relaxing time. So I guess doing the things that you're meant to be doing in the time you allocated to do them is really important. So like if I'm watching a movie and it's at night before bed and I'm just relaxing or it's a Sunday then it's like rejuvenating. But if it's like Monday morning or in the afternoon on a weekday, then that's a waste of time because those are my productive hours, the time I should get something done, so I would feel anxious about doing that.

She has allocated the activity of watching a movie to only be appropriate during relaxing hours, which for her is during evenings and weekends. She sees it as important to keep activities within their allocated time frame. Even if working may be a productive and progressive use of time, it

loses its purpose when conducted at the “wrong time”, during relaxing hours. Digital calendars pinpoints time which is appointed to something special, as well as giving reminders about what is going to happen when. This shows that there is a “right time” for something, the time is allocated for a purpose and if something else is done at that time, then it is the “wrong time”.

To-do lists and accountability

While calendars are dependent on fixed times and often related to external factors such as appointments and involves other people, to-do lists are mostly tied to the person who made the list and only that person feels the effects if it is not completed. All of the participants plan what needs to get done on each individual day through activities, these activities can vary from appointments, work, cleaning, workouts, literally any activity that needs to get done. For this specific planning of the day, it was preferred by each participant to make a list over using a calendar. Some have it mentally and just remembers to do their things during the day, others write a list of what they need to get done either on paper or in their phone notes and then checks it off when the task is complete. The to-do lists can look different depending on the person and preferences. From my research, I have seen different methods to the to-do lists, some use the notes function on their phone, some use paper, some rely on a mental list in their head. Pierre keeps his to-do list mentally and he told me about his process of going through the list of the day, “I don’t have a real list but just mentally I check it off the list like ‘I’ve done that, I achieved that, I finished this task’”.

The importance of checking something off a to-do list is something which has become quite apparent to me. Pierre does not physically check off a completed task from his list, but even a mental check off has the same effect as a physical check off for him. Elise, a social media content creator on Instagram, is normally a medical student, but decided to take a sabbatical year from medical school to dedicate her time to her passion for fashion while also working at a medical emergency center during weekends to finance it. She spends her weekdays working on growing her fashion account where she mixes vintage and modern feminine fashion, and as of now she has 38.2k followers. She does not yet earn any money on her Instagram account, but she hopes to be able to do it in the future. As she does not have an external job or studies during the weekdays, she has to fill her days somehow and she does it by creating daily to-do

lists. Elise has what she calls a “big to-do list” and then her daily to-do list. She told me how she structures her day from the activities on the big to-do list:

“my to-do list on my phone is just everything I have to do within now and a couple of weeks’ time, and I just pick things from there every single day. I always work with my big list, always, just the daily to-do list is the one I delete at the end of the day, even if I haven’t done everything on it, it’s deleted. Fresh day, completely new list. It gives me some kind of flexibility and I like that. That it is not set in stone, only the things you really have to do you’ve got to do, and the other things is if I wake up and feel like doing administration, I just pick some administration things from my big list and if I feel like cleaning my closet, then I put that on the list and do that. It really works for me”

By working from a to-do list, she decides what her day will look like, but it differs from the calendar in the way that it does not have any fixed timeslots during the day. The things need to get done but the time when it is done does not matter, even the day it gets done can be flexible. It is more personal and the completion and check off of the list gives a satisfactory feeling of accomplishment. This feeling can then further motivate to continue doing the activities just to be able to check them off of the list (Hubbard, 1999). Even though it might seem like an unstructured way to plan a day without fixed times and to do the things to “check them off the list”, it still gives guidance to what to do during the day, especially for those who do not have a normal 9-5 job at an office. For Elise having a non-traditional job, she has to stay busy in order to keep the motivation going and to have a structure to her day so she does not end up procrastinating what she has to do, ultimately engaging in “timepass” (Jeffrey, 2010). Having a guide or structure in the shape of a list with items to check off to follow to get through the day, prevents procrastinating what needs to be done. But it also gives the day a purpose, without having a plan of what to do it is very easy to get lost in things which we perhaps want to do, but should not necessarily do all day because it is unproductive or does not provide progress.

Charlotte uses her to-do lists to plan the day around fixed times in her calendar, she described it like this:

“So if I have like let’s say a doctor’s appointment in one part of the city, then I will just do all the things I have to do which is also in that area, like there is a great fabric shop close to the clinic so then I will get all the fabrics I need at the same time, because then I don’t

have to run around the whole city and spend lots of time on traveling. It's just more effective that way".

Her day and her to-do list is then built around one fixed time in her calendar, and thus making use of her time in an efficient way by completing errands in accordance to the appointment. In this way the structure of the day is based on the calendar and not the to-do list. This kind of structuring can be seen in the Benedictine use "appointed time" and how the calendars emphasize "what kind of time it is" (Munn, 1992, p.105), showing that certain activities are planned and conducted from another appointed activity and the success of those activities are determined from how well they fit into that time.

Elise often posts her daily to-do list on her Instagram stories, she says it is mostly to engage with her followers and showing them her real life activities outside of the perfectly curated Instagram feed. She usually posts her to-do list in the morning and makes it match the rest of her Instagram brand of elegant feminine fashion, so the colors of the to-do lists are white, pink, and beige, everything matching the aesthetics of her whole account. The actual to-do list is written out in a little white box and ordered vertically with either a small empty checkbox or a dot before each item on the list. Towards the middle or end of the day she reposts this to-do list but with the items she has completed either checked in the box or with a line going over the words indicating that it is done. She told me that the reasons she posts an update of her to-do list later in the day is because she wants to be transparent with her followers and showing that some days she is very productive and gets things done, while other days she is not as successful with completing her to-do lists. Another part of posting it is also because it keeps herself accountable, Elise said:

"I keep it very organized on my Instagram and so when I have it there it definitely reminds me of doing all those things and it also pushes me to do it, for sure. When I don't do the things on the list it makes me feel really bad, but since I have it on Instagram where people can see it, it pushes me to really do it anyways."

Keeping herself accountable for the activities which Elise decided to do during a day is a way to motivate and actually do it in order to avoid the feeling of not having done what she was supposed to have done. Charlotte also uses to-do lists to structure her day in addition to her five calendars. "I never just have one to-do list I have like a million" she says and laughs as she hold up several pieces of paper ripped out from a notebook, "it's a bit of a mess but it is still fairly

organized, like an organized mess, and as I go throughout my day I love referring to these lists just to like keep myself accountable”. These lists keep her on track in addition to her calendars as they indicate what needs to be done at a specific time and the to-do lists specify what is going to be done during that time, like what project she is going to work on during the project timeslot in her day. She also keeps errands and housekeeping on her to-do lists, these activities are not timebound but should still be done during the day. A to-do list is a reminder of what needs to be done, but it is also a way to guide the days structure and get things done without being time bound (Mughal, 2017; Parker, 2021).

Both Elise and Charlotte, who does not belong to the traditional job market or engage in waged labor, has to stay busy on their own account. For them, keeping busy is a way of forming a basis of an alternative livelihood and belonging in a labor driven world (Parker, 2021). They keep themselves busy by performing chosen tasks throughout the day which in one way or another leads to individual progress (Mains, 2017).

A to-do list helps to be productive during the day and the feeling of accomplishment after checking the activities off the list is like a reward. The feeling of accomplishment is important here to keep the motivation up to keep ticking off the things from the list. The list represents the persons goals for the day, and the feeling of accomplishment when it is completed, shows that something of purpose has been done during the day. The day was not plagued by feelings of disappointment or wasted on unprogressive activities. The lists are also a tool for accountability to actually do the activities stated. For Charlotte the list itself is keeping her accountable, and for Elise, the list she posts on Instagram stories and her followers keep her accountable to complete it. These accomplishments also contribute to larger goals the person might have. In Elise’s case, her structuring the day and getting things done means she is not only working through the small daily goals and chosen activities, but is also progressive in the way that she works towards her larger goal of being able to monetize her Instagram page. The small accomplishments of finishing structured activities on a to-do list therefore drives motivation and progress towards larger goals.

Waste of time and progress

In contrast to planning, calendars, to-do lists, and spending one's time well, is the notion of a "waste" of time. Wasted time is time that is not spent well, time which is not used in a progressive manner or something that brings joy. Calendars and to-do lists are used by the participants in order to avoid wasting time. Charlotte for instance, consciously tries to keep herself from wasting time scrolling mindlessly on social media by limiting it to an activity. She explained: "I really try not to do it or I try to limit at least like 'okay while you're drinking your coffee, but once it is done you got to finish' I try to keep it like timed". She means that if she would continue just scrolling without a purpose, then it would keep her from doing the planned activities in her to-do list. This would then result in wasted time, a feeling of "falling behind" in her plans, detachment from her daily activities and progress (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 477; Parker, 2021, p. 307).

For Charlotte, the activity of scrolling on Instagram is not a planned activity, and on its own it is a waste of time, but in combination with another activity, like drinking coffee or travelling with public transportation, then it is not considered a waste of time. It then becomes something to do until the meaningful activity or social event can start and it is wasted time to pass the time until then (Ralph, 2008, p. 97). Unstructured time does not necessarily mean wasted time, time can still be spent well, albeit it is harder to do so. Elise, in contrast to Charlotte, sees time as being wasted if it does not lead to progress, even if the activity itself might be meaningful, it does not receive its status of meaningful until progress is made and she has the desired results:

Sometimes I get a collaboration request, and they ask me to send all the information, they want an updated media kit and they want my rates and they want my insights, everything. And I spend an hour making everything and taking screenshots of everything and it is productive because updating your media kit is always a great thing to do, you have to do it at some point. But then if the brand says "oh thank you so much, we said we wanted to pay you but we do not have the budget after all, goodbye" and that's what brands do 90% of the time. So it's still good to have worked on that media kit, but it still feels like a complete waste of time. So for me it is more about the end results, not so much about the process.

Updating her media kit is an activity which needs to be done and it might result in progress, but if it does not lead her anywhere different or support her goals, then it was essentially a waste of time. Parker (2021) discuss the importance of feeling progress in one's daily activities. Some

activities may “fill the time” but they may not enable a person to progressively change their life (Parker, 2021, p. 309). In Elise’s case, her structured purposeful time turned into wasted time because it ended up not leading to progress, ultimately because of someone else’s decision.

Feelings of progress as meaning is “created or denied through experiencing time” (Musharbash, 2007, p. 312). Social time and progress often go hand in hand as social time creates progress from meaningful activities in the everyday. An activity leading to progress means that it leads the person to something better or different compared to before the activity was performed (Parker, 2021, p. 309). Pierre mentions progress in regard to playing tennis during his free time. Tennis is for Pierre progressive in the sense that exercise makes him better at the sport, it contributes to maintaining and bettering his general health, and lastly it also helps him sustain social relationships since tennis is an interactive sport. When he sometimes skips his tennis sessions, because of being tired or lazy, Pierre states that he often feels bad for not doing it and that he instead is just wasting time in bed watching YouTube when he should be exercising, which then takes away the enjoyment of watching the videos. This leads to “a sense that the passage of time and day-to-day experience are not meaningful because they do not conform to expectations of progress” (Mains, 2017, p.114). Progress is something which is needed in order to keep life moving forward and having a sense of accomplishment in several areas of life. Certain everyday activities contributes to progress and ultimately reaching accomplishment. When the daily activities does not provide any form of progress, life and the experienced time becomes stagnant and feelings of stress, worry, and boredom occurs (Jeffrey, 2010; Mains, 2007, 2017; Parker, 2021). Progress does not need to be felt in every activity during every day, but it should be present in the general planned day-to-day activities in order to keep disappointment about one’s life at a distance (Mains, 2017).

Conclusion

To deal with their excess of free-time, Charlotte, Elise, Pierre, and Anna all use digital calendars and to-do lists to plan activities so that they can have a structured and purposeful day and minimize wasting time. They all have time over to waste, but they feel a need and want to make it progressive in order to bring meaning to their lives. In this essay, it is shown how digital calendars and to-do lists have been the preferred planning methods to structure the day. The favored use of digital calendars over the traditional paper calendar is a sign of the digitalized modern world. Digital devices are replacing everyday items to make our lives more efficient and convenient by making them multipurpose and easy to keep at hand at all times. This makes planning easier and quicker, but also convenient in the way of them being able to notify and remind when it is time for an appointment. The to-do lists on the other hand, were not always digital, or in fact, even physical. It is the satisfaction of checking off a performed activity during the day that keeps motivation up and to stay on track and not “getting behind” on time, but also avoiding being sidetracked and ending up wasting time.

Middle class people with non-traditional jobs tend to have more time outside of their daily work than working-class people. They have more time to spend on what they choose to spend it on, but it also means they have more time to waste. This is where the planning and structuring of this time comes in. The everyday of the middle class requires more planning and structure outside of work in order to make it meaningful. This is a privilege the working-class might not have because their time outside of work is very limited and is used for the most essential things instead. For the middle class, there is no shortage or lack of time for activities, but this time needs to be planned with purpose for it not to be wasted on mindless activities without progress or purpose for their everyday lives. With this extra time, I found that there is a desire among the participants, who are young and do not have responsibilities outside themselves and the capital to work in non-traditional jobs, to use that time well and for it to be used with purpose.

The concept of time and especially theories around social time, can be seen in the research by the creation of well-spent time through planning of activities to make the day structured. The activities gives meaning and value to everyday life and the time spent on them. Charlotte, as a stay at home wife without an external occupation, thus creates and perceives her time and use of time through the value of the activities she plans and executes during her day. Pierre as a

PhD student and researcher, has to produce his time by planning and structuring both his work time and leisure time extensively to make it something of value and make sure to be “in” time (Munn, 1992, p. 94) and avoiding creating wasted and empty time.

For further research, it would be interesting to take a deeper look at stay at home wives, like Charlotte in this research, without children in western society and how they fill their time with meaningful activities. Today, work is an essential part of the daily routine and in their case, it is completely absent by choice. As a stay at home wife without children, they do not have the job of motherhood either, but they have all the time for themselves and in most cases, financial stability from a working husband. Here it would be interesting to see how they perceive their time as valuable in a fast-paced labor-centric world, and how they make use of that time to “fit in” in that world without being part of it. This could be done by conducting participant observation together with interviews. Seeing what they do during the day, how they plan their days and how they perform their activities. I believe it would be worth pursuing this kind of research as more and more people are gaining more free time, and time needs to be spent somehow.

Through an analysis of time and planning, I have demonstrated that structuring of the everyday happens through planning with the help of digital calendars and to-do lists in order to make the day purposeful. Structuring the day through activities leads to a valuable use of time which is important for all of the participants. They feel their time is used well and of value when the activities conducted throughout the day leads to progress. Time structured with purposeful activities provides a sense of meaning and progress, while unstructured time creates feelings of unease and frustration among the participants. Planning the everyday helps alleviate the sense of time being wasted as well as boredom. By studying how time is planned, we get a clearer understanding of how meaning is created in the everyday through purposeful activities.

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