

Getting started course - essay 1 Aleksi Korhonen

Pauli Pakarinen – Essays on Economic Rationalities

<https://research.aalto.fi/en/publications/essays-on-economic-rationalities>

For this essay about writing a dissertation, I chose to interview Pauli Pakarinen. Pauli defended his dissertation in 2019 and is currently working as a post-doctoral researcher in Aalto Arts department. Pauli's supervisor on the dissertation was Henri Schildt.

Interview with Pauli

Pauli's journey as a doctoral researcher may maybe a bit different than a typical journey. Pauli had a clear idea that he wanted to do a doctoral degree after graduating from a master's degree in sociology. However, the first obstacle Pauli found was that in Sociology there were no paid doctoral researcher positions. He also didn't like the situation in which he could not apply for grants before being accepted as a doctoral researcher.

This led to the idea of doing the doctoral dissertation in a business school where there were paid positions. As a first step towards this goal Pauli aimed to find and connect with professors in business schools. Pauli first talked with Eero Vaara who was at the time in Hanken. Eero asked Pauli to come and do the doctoral degree in Hanken. Pauli was not however fully sold on Hanken or business schools in general since he thought that he would still aim to change to sociology later.

When Pauli started in Hanken he got Saku Mantere as a supervisor since Eero was at that time taking a sabbatical leave. Shortly later also Saku left Hanken. After Saku left for McGill Pauli felt left alone and decided to look for a new setting to continue his dissertation process. Around 2012 Pauli switched to Aalto when Henri Schildt was looking for doctoral researchers for a data-related project. Pauli liked the opportunity since he had grown interest, for example, to technology, to experts, and to rationality.

It can be said that his choice of switching supervisors and schools affected his journey a lot. When asked if his journey felt scattered or if he was able to bring anything he started in Hanken to continue in Aalto, Pauli brings the method of ethnography to the discussion. Pauli said that at the time he was interested in, how economic rationality is created in a specialist work or what kind of information/technology is used to do that. However, in Hanken Pauli had been focusing on management reward systems because of an initiative made by Saku. When Saku had brought this idea to Pauli, Pauli didn't really know what had been researched about the topic in a business context, but he found out that it was connected to agent theory and its arrival to Finland. He felt that it was also connected to a "breach in financial markets (in Finland)".

This introduced Pauli to topics such as regulation, financial markets, central banks, and changes in those. Pauli also grew interested in the economic depression of Finland that we had in the '90s. When Pauli arrived at Aalto he thought he would keep that as one

component since he had been familiarizing himself with it already. In Henri's project, Pauli says the idea was to use ethnography and to focus on how data is being used (algorithms, etc.) in management. As a result of the supervisor's connections, Pauli was introduced to a person who had connections and access to a University of Applied Sciences. The idea was that this University of Applied Sciences would be used as a setting for the ethnographic research focusing on data-driven leadership. In general, Pauli felt the case and setting could have been interesting, but that in the end, the data was not really being used to guide leadership in this setting and therefore researching it wouldn't make sense.

After that Pauli wanted to focus more on his dream to research central banks and how they make future predictions. Pauli's reasoning for why to study central banks was that if you want to research data-driven leadership, central banks would be the ultimate setting since their models are most likely one of the biggest and most advanced in the whole world. In the end, Pauli was able to follow up on his dream, and in his last essay in the dissertation, Pauli used ethnography to research the Finnish Central Bank.

Pauli says that his journey most likely wasn't optimal and that the way things were done was different back then. There was not that kind of structure and guidance that takes place nowadays. For example, research plans and such were not done the way they are done now. Pauli describes his dissertation to have "born from the circumstances". He says that if there is something to learn from this, is to be more systematic about the research designs and what to research overall. He says that the fact that nowadays doctoral researchers must defend their research proposals is a good practice to achieve this. He also says the method that is used in many universities, in which doctoral researchers use around two years to study, to learn, and to observe is a good thing. This in addition to writing together with supervisors brings this kind of systematic structure to the writing process.

Pauli and Henri both say that things could have been done differently. In ethnographic research, it is common to use the same dataset and write all the articles based on it. In Pauli's case, this wasn't possible since he only did the ethnographic part for his last essay and the period in the central bank was shorter than it should have been if it had been a base for multiple essays/articles.

Since of the scattered way of combining the articles the dissertation as a whole does not really answer a certain research question. On the other hand, Pauli states that all his research does follow a certain "agenda". He states that as a basis there is Weber's view of rationalization professions (as a concept), how technology is being used more and more, and how theoretical information is being used to diagnose and solve social problems (health, safety, economy, climate).

After defending his dissertation in 2019 Pauli has been in two post-doc positions around the world. He was first in Emloyon and recently in Scancor/Stanford University. Pauli says that he wasn't fully happy with the positions and that the pandemic also affected that. However, Pauli mentions that he got great connections because of these positions and suggests that doctoral researchers should look into also going abroad. He also said that going to another university abroad can give another perspective on things. As a negative side, Pauli says that moving around with the job positions can be taxing.

In the end, Pauli summarizes 3 things that he says are valuable. Firstly, there should be a focus on having a plan, structure, and design early on. This can be achieved by for example finding articles you like and then looking into what methods are used and what theories are referred and so on. Secondly, he mentions the networks and highlight the importance of finding people who have similar interests and are in the same wavelength around you. Lastly, Pauli says that it is useful to discuss with your supervisor early on how each one of you wants to communicate with each other. By doing that, it is clearer what are the expectations and how each one of you wants to work together. Pauli's self-summary of his journey of doing a dissertation summarizes the interview quite nicely; "a sum of coincidences".

Interview with Henri

Henri also mentions that Pauli's journey was not the most typical. Henri got Pauli as one of his first doctoral students around 2013 when he himself had started a year earlier in Aalto. Henri begins his answers regarding Pauli by saying that Pauli was very autonomous and liked to do things individually. Because of this Henri's job was more commenting than anything else. In this way, it resembled more a "European dissertation" that is typically very autonomous. Henri also says that Pauli had a clear method of choice and clear interests that he wanted to research (already early on). When reflecting back Henri says that maybe he even had too much trust in that Pauli knows what he is doing. In a way, Henri thinks that Pauli could have written two dissertations in the 6 years' time if he had wanted but the changes in topics made the process longer. In other words, Henri feels like Pauli had the skills needed but maybe didn't have the best focus. This kind of resulted in a situation where things needed to be wrapped up in the end. Henri also says that Pauli's situation with transitioning from another university and from another supervisor made things a bit more complex.

Henri says that after this supervision process, he has learned that a certain rhythm with the doctoral researchers is important. By that, he means that it is easier if for example articles are sent back and forth and maybe even written together. And that in general, there are some planned timelines and schedules for what is being done. This can prevent "swerve" in the dissertation. Henri concludes that "if there is a direction and speed to get somewhere, you are going to get somewhere but if either one is missing then you are not getting where you want". These comments align very well with Pauli's "tips" number 1 regarding planning, structure, and design and tip number 3 regarding communication and guidance.

From both interviews, I gathered that it was clear that Pauli wanted to stay in academia after doctoral studies. To achieve this two things, seem important for finding a job in academia, networks, and publications. In addition to these, sometimes interesting research ideas or existing datasets can open some doors. If I would summarize these interviews, I think the first important thing is to plan, design, and create a structure for the dissertation. Secondly, it is important to build networks and actively seek to benefit from them by having open communication. Lastly, regarding the dissertation itself, sometimes the most important thing is to get it done.