Abstract

The thesis follows the research stream focused on changes to the academic environment in the recent decades and their impact on academic professional paths and identities. Specifically, it is concerned with the phenomenon of attrition from academic profession which is pursued through a perspective of professional identity. We understand academic identities as an integral part of current changes to the academic environment and their study thus may help us better understand the changes as well as their influence on the development of academic ambitions. The aim of the thesis is to ascertain what kind of people and with what kind of professional identities enter and leave academia and for what reasons, and on this basis to identify barriers to the development of academic identities and paths. Special attention is paid to research field and gender aspects of the development of professional identities in order to explore the possible influence of specific structural factors (mainly field specific organization of academic production and gender specific biographies) and gain information needed for appropriate policy measures aimed at supporting professional development of early-career researchers. The analysis is based on narrative interviews with people who left academic professional path. The outcome of the analysis is a typology of trajectories of development of professional identity of early-career researchers and identification of factors which contribute to this development and the decision to leave academic career. The fields of social sciences and humanities (SSH) and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are shown to offer different opportunities for the development and sustaining of specific types of academic identity which relates to different organization of academic production and PhD training, and different attitudes toward formal rules of academic careers and discourse of excellence. Field specific requirements seem to be more important for the construction of academic identity than requirements connected with gender roles. However, the way in which researchers relate to the field specifics points to different impacts of gender dynamics in the given field. SSH and STEM fields create different degrees of inclusivity and exclusivity of collective academic identity which is gendered. The actual form of collective identity relates to different structural conditions of academic paths in the two fields and points to different impact of current reforms in academia on the construction of academic identities in these fields. In the STEM field, the reforms support the rigidization of academic identity while in SSH field the opposite is the case – academic identity is rather blurred there. The rigidization is connected with distinct genderedness and contributes to women's drop out from academia. The blurred collective identity in the SSH field has no such distinct genderedness and the reasons for drop out of women and men do not differ and are mostly not related to the collective academic identity. In the STEM field, the normative academic identity is one of the barriers to women's academic paths, while in the SSH field the barrier seems to lie in less intensive integration of women into the academic community as compared to men. The thesis shows that the SSH and STEM fields create different conditions and obstacles for the development of academic identities and careers of men and women and this finding is reflected in the formulated recommendations for policy measures at the end of the thesis.