

Public Transport: Surprises

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I admit that when during my visit to Düsseldorf my German hosts suggested an excursion to nearby Wuppertal, I thought it to be a form of a „filler”. Well, there is a free half of day – let us manage it somehow. I did not know anything about Wuppertal, I had almost no associations with this place/city. Well, perhaps only this that a local football team played – and that was in really remote times – with Ruch Chorzów.

As I was told, a tram ‘above the river’ was to be the main attraction of Wuppertal. I admit, that this way of touting the idea of visiting a small German town seemed extremely far-fetched to me. Because by my mind’s eye I saw a tram, which is moving... across a river. And besides – albeit I have left the Silesian Technical Scientific Establishment – however original would be the technical solution of passing across the river, then for a minute (at most) journey across the river, should we bother with the travel to Wuppertal? Ultimately, we went. And – truly – I did not regret that, because the tram route in Wuppertal does not go across, but along the river. And that changes everything. Both the time of travel and its attractiveness. Those, who would like to taste such travel by Schwebbahn I encourage to find a video on YouTube. And as a side comment – I was very much surprised, when I learned that this unconventional transport solution is more than one hundred years old. Such location of the city along the Wupper river brought someone to mind an unconventional way of urban transport organisation.

Not all unconventional ideas must be of technical nature, there is a lot (and perhaps a great lot) to do with respect to so-called human factor. And I will immediately emphasise, that the fact that there is a lot to do does not mean that it is easy to do. It is just

the opposite. The established habits and culture (not only personal) are limitations of modernisation actions only apparently easy to overcome or bypass.

I will start with a recollection. Many years ago, I was a teenager then, I visited a city in Eastern Germany. More precisely – I will praise myself – I represented our voivodeship in a chess tournament. Walking round the neighbourhood I got with a few of my colleagues to the area of the bus station. What we saw, really astonished us. When a bus was arriving, passengers queued to the door situated next to the driver. What did surprise us in this seemingly quite banal situation? You see, the fact that although all other doors were open, nobody was entering through them. People in the queue to the bus behaved, like such a possibility – to enter through another, obviously open door – would entirely not exist. The situation like from Luis Bunuel film ‘El Angel exterminador’, but there guests for reasons not understandable for themselves and for the cinema viewers, could not leave the apartment, where they had a good time before, although the door was open. Let us continue – go back to the bus queue. The queuing people did not push each other, did not quarrel, did not try to jostle for position in front of the neighbour. And finally – at a moment the driver told ‘stop’. And what? And, although as for the then Polish standards there was a lot of place in the bus, those who heard that ‘stop’ did not row, although they had to wait for the next bus.

In Katowice a similar habit – entering the bus only through the door next to the driver was (is?) in force – at least on certain bus lines. For example it was in force on bus line 13 - the bus travelling a few years ago between Katowice PKP railway station and Ruda Śląska. And what? At the station the drivers quite strictly allowed passen-

gers in only through the front door, they prudently did not open the others. Obviously there was no ordered queue to ‘13’ – the rule ‘the first come, first served’ was in force. But OK, someone would say, that was just the first time, we need to start from something. Well, the point is that everything ends on this – not very striking beginning. Because on the next stops all doors are opened (it is natural – certainly some passengers will be willing to get out) and already nobody thinks about entering only through the door next to the driver. The chaos and tip rule. It was rather deceptively similar to situations from the PRL times, e.g. crowds jostling in queues for rationed cigarettes.

For a few years such pandemonium on stations or stops has been very rare. More space, almost certainty of travelling in nearly comfortable conditions – we can see this soothes the habits. Like a loud played funny music calmed in the past ice hockey players fights during the world championships; ‘music soothes the savage breast’ reminded themselves (and others) the event organisers. Habits can be, not easy at all, not fast at all, but can be changed. That they change not easy and not fast I became convinced watching reactions of bus line 657 passengers in the section between Katowice Ligota and the Wolności square. All the way the driver in a pleasant voice informed e.g. about transfer possibilities. Part of passengers reacted as if they heard a Martian, or behaved as if they thought they were the object of an experiment filmed with a candid camera. Well, as you can see one should know how to get used to normal (abnormal?) courtesy. ■



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