

There Is A World Without Urban Transport. And Just Next To Us

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For townies from great conurbations the existence of the urban transport is something obvious. The thought, that it could not exist, seems as preposterous as the idea to go for water to a well. How is that? After all we have the 21st century! And yet, this obviousness is no longer obvious beyond borders of big cities. In smaller centres – and even frequently in those well-known – the public transport is the dim and distant future. So it is worth to follow its development in such places with greater attention, the more so that recently a few interesting ‘cases’ popped up.

The trend for the urban transport introduction is noticeable in holiday places. A year ago the authorities of Zakopane decided to make such step, explaining it by ecological reasons (they assumed that a possibility to use public buses will result in a decreased traffic) and by the willingness to order the transport in the city (owners of private buses pay more attention to the level of their occupancy than to the timetable). Today representatives of the local government can talk about success. During 12 months of operation two city bus lines transported nearly 400,000 people, and the mayor of Zakopane (who himself also commutes to work by bus) tells that it is not the end. Because still in this year the offer of the municipal company is to be expanded by another two connections (including Kuźnice, where the lower station of the cable car to Kasprowy Wierch is situated).

As of 1 September Szklarska Poręba intends to follow the capital of Podhale. The connections financed from the municipal budget will link the lower and the upper part of this town in the Su-

detes. Also in this case the mayor hopes that it will reduce the local traffic and is convinced that despite the necessary expenditure it is worth taking the risk. – I reckon that such a pro-social move should be made – told in a conversation with me. These words make us think, because it results from them that the introduction of the urban transport is not the implementation of fancy (not necessarily right) ideas of the mayor, but a response to the social demand. Is this

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conclusion right? It will be soon verified by the occupancy of the city buses. I suspect that it will be followed not only by the media, but also by local authorities in many other places, which do not have their own transport yet.

Probably local governments in southern-eastern districts of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship will face the necessity to organise some form of public (although not urban) transport. After the announcement in February by the Arriva company, that starting on 1 July they are going to close their three branches in this part of Poland, the bus transport in a substantial part of the Bieszczady and the Beskid Niski Mountains will practically stop. Yes, the minibus owners will remain on the market, but they – and it is difficult to blame them for that – are interested in travelling only there, where there is a chance to earn. After the holidays or just there, where the num-

ber of potential passengers is too small to guarantee the transport profitability, people will have to rely on their own legs, bicycles or hitch-hiking. For tourists visiting this area occasionally, willing to rest from the hustle and bustle of the civilisation, this could be an ‘element of exotics’, but for the local populations this will be a real, severe problem. Such transport ‘blanks’ appeared already earlier in many regions of the country (usually there, where PKS-s went bust), but in this case its size seems to be absolutely unprecedented.

And all that happens at the same time, when the government announces the construction of the central airport for PLN 30 billion, big cities prepare themselves to enter the era of electromobility and Warsaw funds free of charge travels by the urban transport for pupils of the capital city primary and secondary schools. Yes, this is still the same time and the same country. It is worth remembering about those contrasts in the discussion on the condition of public transport in Poland. Its image seen from the streets of Warsaw, Krakow, the Tri-City or the Upper Silesia is drastically different from that experienced by residents of Ustrzyki Dolne, Wołosate, Szklarska Poręba or even Zakopane. ■

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