

We have time for that...

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Lateness and delay cases are two sides of the same coin. But how different sides! However, let us start from similarities. Both lateness and delay cases are related to time. But what is the time? As St Augustine of Hippo would say: 'I perfectly know what the time is, when they do not ask me – but when they do – I cannot explain.' Also the adopted time perspective happens to be misleading – certainly in longer (time) perspective we all will die, to remind *bon mot* of eminent economist, John Maynard Keynes. After all, let us leave immense reflections on time to great thinkers. Let us start from that, which is obvious: that punctuality is the reverse of lateness and delay.

Sometimes the punctuality is proverbial, and it happens to be also practical, like when decades ago people would say that seeing a leaving train you could have set correctly the watch hands. But in such illustration the point is our understanding of time – this is European, Western time, with the dial of a watch or the display of seconds, minutes, and hours. Ryszard Kapuściński was telling, that when he asked a question, when the bus leaves, in Africa he heard an answer: 'When people gather'. That is in the morning, or perhaps in the evening... Is it not true, that it sounds very exotic in the world, in which messages over the PA system inform that a train is delayed by that many minutes and that the delay can increase or decrease? And delays? Sometimes they adopt the form of metaphor, like when in spring 1939 the prime minister of United Kingdom, Neville Chamberlain made – as it was to turn out – an extremely unfortunate remark, that 'Herr Hitler was late for the bus'. But there are more trivial cases of lateness – on an individual scale also costly. 'A plane is not

a tram' – I heard long, long time ago being late for a flight from Frankfurt to Krakow. There was no discussion. Boarding was closed. It was necessary to get the wallet and fly the next plane. But, but... What is actually the point in this comparison? A tram would not wait either, the driver can be kind seeing someone running to catch the tram and delay the departure from the stop for a moment, nothing more. And perhaps the point is the flights timetable, which the airlines are not willing to compare with the ground transport timetables? Yes, yes, I have experienced that myself, that some



Despite starting the journey in the morning, at such a delay the arrival on the same day was under a question mark. My annoyed wife asked the guard, what the 'railway' would think that she, travelling all day long, will not reach the destination. – But we are obliged to deliver you by the midnight, do not worry, Madam – he replied quite calmly. And after a short phone conversation he informed my wife, that in Toruń the last train to Grudziądz will wait for her. And – imagine that yourself – the train was waiting, as it has turned out, as long as half an hour for the last passenger.

airlines prefer to give up packing all suitcases and then deliver them to the passenger's house, just only not to delay the flight. We all know that plane delays are quite frequent, however sometimes – wonders never cease! – planes wait for us. When with my wife we were returning from Bergen, the transfer in Amsterdam was waiting for us. The point is, that we had one hour for the transfer. Everybody, who has experienced any transfers, knows how the time shortens then and what is the accompanying stress. And you make it or not. Like in many other

cases – the devil is in the detail. In the case of transfer it is worth to fly the same carrier. Then it will take care, to make it. That was our case. My wife worried 'probably they will not manage to transfer the luggage'. I thought the same. However, we were very surprised, that we arrived together with our luggage without any delay. 'It is most important to be lucky' – commented my wife and told me her story of a railway transfer a few years ago, when she was on a business trip by train from Katowice to Grudziądz. She had to go with a transfer in Toruń, and at that time it was fastest to get to Toruń via Warsaw. Unfortunately, the Intercity train to Warsaw was 90 minutes late. Despite starting the journey in the morning, at such a delay the arrival on the same day was under a question mark. My annoyed wife asked the guard, what the 'railway' would think that she, travelling all day long, will not reach the destination. – But we are obliged to deliver you by the midnight, do not worry, Madam – he replied quite calmly. And after a short phone conversation he informed my wife, that in Toruń the last train to Grudziądz will wait for her. And – imagine that yourself – the train was waiting, as it has turned out, as long as half an hour for the last passenger. The praise of railway? So perhaps finally a fly in the ointment – the escalators leading to the bus station in the Katowice PKP railway station for many weeks are decorated with a piece of paper with a note 'Failure'. You see, a failure by definition is something having time confines – because you cannot notice anybody trying to repair the escalators, so a temporary situation became a permanent component of the station decor. As one can see – in the Katowice railway station the time passes differently... ■



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