



Leibniz-Junior Research Group

Urban human-nature resonance for sustainability transformation

Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER)



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Plea for more affection in politics –

An experiential essay on the 9-Euro-Ticket

July 22nd, 2022, 12 p.m. – News on Deutschlandfunk:

According to the German Federal Minister of Finance Lindner and the opposition parties of the CDU/CSU, the 9-Euro-Ticket should not be extended because "the concept is not convincing".

The above quoted statement is about as convincing and appropriate as men explaining menstrual cramps or birth pains to me: Not! A politician who is frequented by colleagues like Friedrich Merz by [private jet](#) (even though he'd like you to forget that he's rich, but [really only "middle class"](#)) discredits himself from philosophizing and ultimately deciding on the appropriateness of an initiative like the [9-Euro-Ticket](#). The 9-Euro-Ticket was introduced across Germany in response to the massive increase in the cost of living, energy and fuel prices, and mobility resulting from the Russian attack on Ukraine. However, owners of private jets will hardly be affected by this crisis and won't need to use public transport to go to work or even on holiday. Given their callous statements, it is doubtful these policy-makers have the necessary empathy for the situation of those affected and are able to resonate with them, and in turn respond to the needs of their fellow citizens (because, according to the [sociologist Rosa](#) and his resonance theory, empathy and resonance arise from empathizing with the emotional situation of another person or other living being and resonating with them). So while Mr. Merz is travelling partly on a private jet and presumably did not buy a 9-Euro-Ticket, [studies](#) show that in the first month of the scheme (June), around 21 million 9-Euro-Tickets were sold, and together with the existing and inclusive subscriptions such as monthly and student tickets, there are about 30 million users so far – over a third of the entire German population. More than half of those surveyed used it for their daily mobility behavior, 14% for holiday trips as well. In addition to the quantity of passengers, the satisfaction values are also constantly at a high level.

Experiential trial: Critiques on personal social, cultural and regional resonance

But in order to really be able to judge a policy instrument, understanding the lived experience of those who rely on it is key. This is why I undertook a self-experiment with my student 9-Euro-Ticket, travelling from Karlsruhe (Baden-Württemberg) to Dresden (Saxony). Planned travel time: 10:06 hours. Number of trains taken: 6 (Stuttgart main station (Hbf) - Würzburg Hbf - Erfurt Hbf - Weimar Hbf - Leipzig Hbf - Dresden Neustadt).

Disclaimer:

I don't usually have to travel this long distance with this ticket, as I am privileged to have a secure and well-paid job that allows me to afford a ticket on the ICE, Germany's high-speed trains, which are not covered by the 9-Euro-Ticket.

Map of the route and student ID (Screenshot via Deutsche Bahn – App; Photo: S. Müller)



To experience also means to overcome dares and difficulties in order to learn. In English, this is evident from the same word root per: Experience, expert, or perilous. [As the sociologist and philosopher Ortega y Gasset noted in 1963](#), experience also means encountering something new, opening up, being emotionally vulnerable, and failing (the more frequent reader of Rosa may notice the similarity of the psychological dimensions to resonance). And experiences do indeed imply an experience of the world - and in this case of a policy instrument - with all senses and especially feelings, not just a mental pondering in an air-conditioned office and persistence in old path-dependent thought patterns.

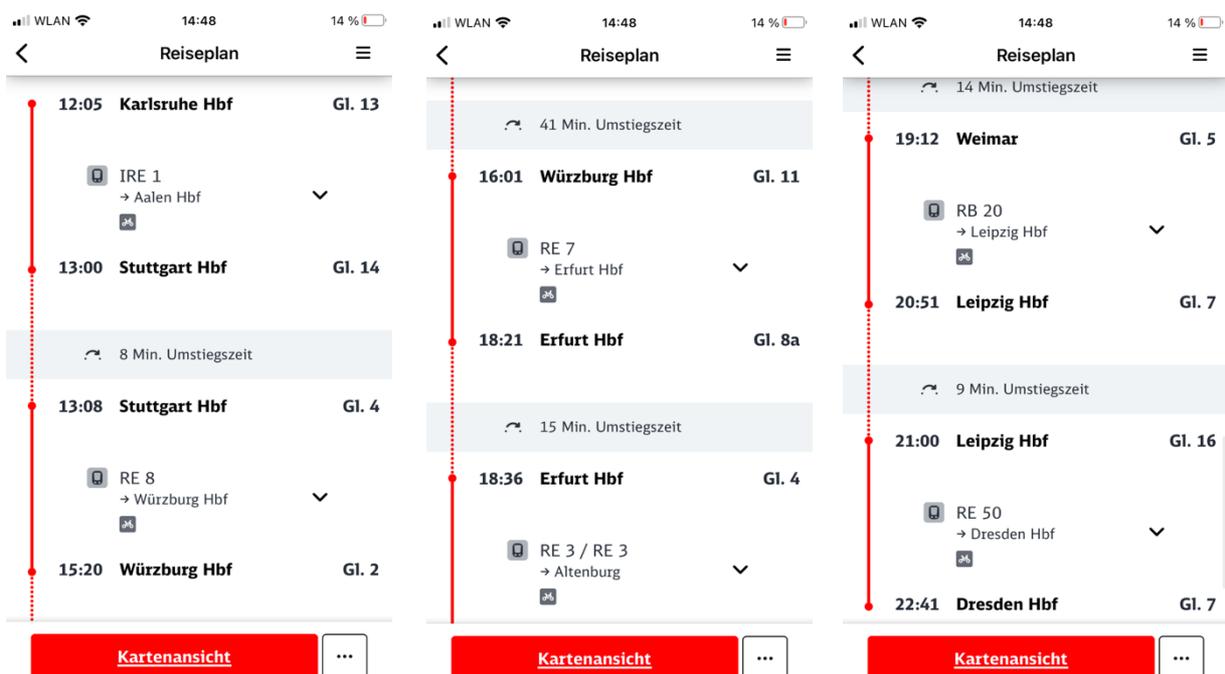
No sooner said than done: With my 9-Euro-Ticket, I set off from Karlsruhe to Dresden at 12:05 on July 18. It is 36 degrees. The climate emergency affects all of us on the way to the station; people stand on the platform, cramped and sweaty. After an interesting conversation about lighting with my seat neighbor, an architecture professor who is preparing his next lecture, I arrive fairly punctual at Stuttgart's main station – which, after more than twelve years of construction on a new underground terminal, is still above ground, I am amazed to discover – and sprint to my connecting train to Würzburg. One of ten hours of travelling has been mastered! On the subsequent route to Franconia, I get to listen to two young Swabian teachers conversing in heavy dialect on their way home. Everything here seems orderly, structured, and well protected. Cultural prejudices say hello – even though it is not so far away from my hometown where many people identify themselves as natives of Baden!

At Würzburg main station, a diesel train bound for Erfurt awaits me, along with an irritable conductor, whose foul mood is an understandable result of the summer heat and unfriendly travelers. Due to the lack of openable windows and failed air-conditioning, my entire compartment then spends the next few hours discussing window-tilting strategies, debating mask rules, and collectively arguing for headphones when listening to music. I guess this is my

most socially communicative and resonant railway experience with people of an entire carriage. But I also get to observe a lot of culture up to this point - from the aforementioned Swabian dialect to Franconian conductors in Würzburg and old diesel locomotives, I soon get to know the railway station of the Thuringian capital, which I had only known from legendary German TV crime series “[Tatort](#)”. Weimar, a cultural stronghold, is also part of my trip. However, the greatest resonance I experience is with the landscapes I pass. Neither did I know about the beauty of the Würzburg vineyards nor about the Saale as a bathing paradise lined with castles in Thuringia. The deceleration of travelling through the landscapes by regional train makes it possible to be touched by them, to get to know their different characters and to generate interest. Rushing past them in an ICE at 320 km/h would not permit me these resonances – this does not mean, however, that deceleration per se is to be preferred, [as Rosa also emphasizes again and again](#). Especially the area around the Naumburg Cathedral on the Saale surprises and impresses me, and thus the 9-Euro-Ticket inspires me not only socially and culturally but also scenically and shows me new destinations and places.

At 10.40 pm I arrive tired and exhausted at Dresden-Neustadt station. This was an adventure full of different resonances with people, German history, rivers and also myself. I had a lot of time between 12:05 and 22:41 to reflect, discuss and open up to other narratives on a route crossing the federal states of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Thuringia, Saxony-Anhalt and Saxony.

Itinerary Karlsruhe – Dresden (Screenshots: S. Müller via Deutsche Bahn – App)



Plea against alienated („middle class“) politics and for more affection

Back to the opening words of Federal Finance Minister Lindner, "the 9-Euro-Ticket is not convincing": How is it supposed to convince someone who is not open to trying it out, indeed, probably does not have to? The lack of empathy is reminiscent of the famous statement – falsely [attributed](#) to Marie Antoinette – that starving peasants struggling for their right to food

should simply eat cake. One cannot expect anything else from absolutist rulers, but how can democratic politicians make good policies and to stand up for the concerns of the citizens, if they cannot understand them or even put themselves in their place? Those politicians who are alienated from the reality of many citizens' lives usually go to the Bundestag by limousines; they are not affected by the everyday life in Berlin with delays, increasing numbers of homeless people in public transports asking for donations and missing connections. Members of parliament belong to the occupational groups that can work from home and can better protect their health in times of pandemics (such as we as researchers also do I have to add), whilst [day-care workers, supermarket salespersons and pharmacists have to drive to work and thus expose themselves to more risks](#). And last but not least, there is the fear of rising food prices, a demand which [is not elastic](#) for people as it is essential for life. People with higher incomes will remain unencumbered by this as well. But if these groups are not affected by so many current developments around pandemics, cost-of-living increases, job losses, and the climate crisis, how can they adequately decide in a way that is representative of the majority of people?

My answer is: They partly can't. And yet, being politician does not lead to make alienated decisions. It is surely also due to their conscious decisions for a non-alienated life including resonances with other humans, nature, and one self – no matter to which party they belong. Continuing to cycle to work, as [Cem Özdemir](#) used to do in Berlin, is certainly just one example to still experience the town you live in, to resonate with different segments of it, and to witness others' realities.

So eventually to conclude my plea, if for example holidays as a more elastic demand product are no longer possible or more difficult for many families, then the 9-Euro-Ticket is a wonderful offer. And if the daily commute to work, as already mentioned, is not always socially just and has to be done by public transport, then why put hurdles in the way here? And finally, if people develop new habits away from the car towards public transport, then that represents a successful and urgent transformation towards greater sustainability.

Tram stop in Karlsruhe: Perspective on a pausing man (Photo: S. Müller)



So please, dear Minister of Finance, try it out for a day and boldly experience something new, resonate with what you encounter - be it a river, other people on the platform or even history. Cheers to experiential policies that are also based on diverse senses and empathy! Or leave it and listen to the people and stories of those who are on the way with it and perhaps let yourself be touched at eye level.

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If you have any comments or question on the essay, feel warmly invited to contact the author (s.mueller@ioer.de)

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