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Factors that influence how people appropriate travel time

A systematic analysis of the available literature on all issues affecting how people make use of their travel time reveals three key factors:

1. Material conditions

The first of them, material conditions, covers the actual means of transport used, including the comfort and ergonomics of the chosen form of transport, as well as available facilities, passenger information and cost.

2. Personal conditions

There is a wide range of miscellaneous personal conditions. Examples include passengers' knowledge of the network on which they are travelling or whether or not they suffer from travel sickness: All of these factors can influence the way in which people use transportation time.

3. Situational conditions

Finally, situational conditions refer to the situation in which the journey takes place: whether a passenger is travelling at rush hour, whether travel conditions are good or bad, etc. Appropriating different means of transport will vary according to the people and objects involved in the journey. It is also true that we still know relatively little from a systematic standpoint about the different factors influencing the way in which

people appropriate their travel time. A brief study of available information on the subject reveals that the majority of studies focus on specific types of transport or specific situations, particularly in terms of modes of transport. We still have much to learn about how time is appropriated when travelling by car, for instance. Most studies cover time spent travelling by train, which gives a very limited view of how people appropriate their travel time.

Using public transport to allow more free time

According to my recent research into alternative mobility solutions and the habits of long-distance commuters, it is clear that the potential to allow more free time is a crucial factor in choosing the means of transport and, in particular, in choosing a form of transport other than the car. It is obvious in qualitative studies, which observe people and ask them about their habits. However, it can also be shown from a quantitative standpoint and that is worth noting. People in this category will tend to choose public transport, particularly because it gives them time to engage in other activities. They will choose travel times that are objectively longer but are subjectively more rewarding, allowing them to make much better use of their everyday schedules.

The search for quality time: a source of satisfaction

In conclusion, the main element is that travel time clearly has an inherent value. This underscores the importance of seeking a better understanding of the factors that affect the appropriation of this time, not only in public transport — and in particular on the train — but from a more general standpoint, with respect to all available means of transport. Furthermore, time spent travelling should not automatically be considered useful in the sense that it provides an opportunity to engage in other activities. It should also be approached in the way it is perceived and how these activities contribute to making use of travel time, i.e. if they are used simply to kill a time seen as pointless and wasted or if they are seen as adding value to the travel time. Travel time must not be seen as time well spent solely because it provides a means to develop other activities; it is also important to take into account people's perceptions in developing these activities: That is: will they engage in activities simply to make time go by faster because they feel time travelling is time wasted or that the journey is "too long", or will they really make the most out of this time, if they perceive it as a source of satisfaction and pleasure? This naturally opens up a whole range of opportunities for transport operators, to find out how they can attract

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and secure passengers' loyalty so that they fully enjoy their travel time.

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People approach their travel time in various ways as time budgets for transportation increase. When it comes to choosing a means of transport, travel time in itself takes a back seat to the way in which people perceive time spent commuting and the type of activity in which they engage during the journey, explains Stéphanie Vincent-Geslin.

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