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Politicisation of Travelling. Interrail and Freedom

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Abstract

Travelling is today an important aspect of the European political agenda-setting of both individual actors and institutions. The paradigms of car and air travel are contested in terms of climate change; I continue the contestation from the perspective of political liberty. Three paradigms of personal travel – by car, by flight and by train – are confronted with two concepts of liberty: the freedom from interference versus the freedom from dependence.

Three ideal types of travel – travelling to, travelling away and travelling around – are judged from the perspective of the two freedoms. Train travel by Interrail is a political innovation that links the freedom of movement to the freedom from dependence on the national states. The EU could offer, with systematic and coherent pro-railway support, travellers' freedom from dependence, and I suggest some simple pro-railway measures and steps towards parliamentarisation of travel politics. The conceptual point of the article is that freedom of movement can also be regarded as a part of freedom from dependence. In the Postscript I dispute the closing of borders under the corona lockdown and speculate how to retain the freedom of train travel under the condition of keeping the necessary distance from others.

Keywords

Politicisation, travel politics, freedom from dependence, freedom from interference, freedom of movement, Interrail, Quentin Skinner, Max Weber, European Union

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1. Introduction

Travel is today an important aspect of living, and the modes and conditions of travelling play an increasing role on the agenda of European politics. Even established bourgeois politicians pay lip-service to reducing flights, restricting car-driving, and supporting railways. In transport policy the shift from the roads to rails is widely accepted in the EU, although the results are still very modest. The declarations of change have so far not been followed by major concrete political moves against cars and flights. Nonetheless, compared with the post-WWII period, we can speak of a rhetoric of revaluation¹ in the ways of transport, of a politicisation of the very act of travelling.

The climate change argument provides remarkable rhetorical resources for this politicisation by contesting the car and flight paradigms for travelling. However, the climate change argument frequently has a Hegelian tone of ‘recognising the necessity’, which easily lends support to authoritarian politics and could also require a drastic reduction of travels.

In this thought experiment I offer rhetorical tools for analysing the politics of travelling. I discuss the politics of travelling by contrasting two concepts of (negative) freedom, namely freedom from interference vs. freedom from dependence, the latter referring to Quentin Skinner’s ‘neo-Roman’ concept.² These two conceptions of liberty offer me here a perspective on judging traveller’s choices and practices, as well as the controversies around them.

I consider politics as a contingent human activity that can always be otherwise, that acting in a certain way rather than another makes a politically relevant difference. John Pocock used, in *The Machiavellian Moment*, the formula of politics as ‘dealing with the contingent event’.³ Pocock equates, however, contingency with the classical figure of *fortuna*, and understands contingent merely as the hazardous or the accidental. An alternative figure of contingency is the *Chance*, a key concept for Max Weber in his methodological and political writings.⁴ Weber’s *Chance* includes related aspects, such as possibility, opportunity, occasion, realisability or option for future action,⁵ all referring to nuances in something that the actors can play with both time and space.

Once I emphasised how ‘the everyday decisions concerning food, clothes, habitation, sexuality, travel and so on are all experienced as contingent, as politicized’.⁶ In a book review

1 As discussed by Quentin Skinner with the scheme of paradiastole, see, in particular, Skinner 1996, chapter 4.

2 See esp. Skinner 1998 and 2002.

3 Pocock 1975, 156.

4 Max Weber esp. 1904, 149–150; 1918, 222–223 and 1922, Ch. 1.

5 See Keith Tribe’s comments in the Translator’s Appendix, Tribe 2019, 460, 464–465. When I use the German spelling *Chance*, this marks the use of the concept in the distinct Weberian sense.

6 Palonen 2008, 157.

my Oxford colleague Michael Freeden disputed this: ‘Do political actors really necessarily experience everyday decisions... as contingent, rather than as pursuing certain ends or just getting on with it’.⁷ Now I want to continue the debate with the case of travelling, focusing on the political alternatives that are available for individual travellers.

Travelling itself has grown politically more important than ever. Although travellers ‘pursue certain ends’, as Freeden writes, and frequently consider their choices as practical arrangements, such choices can be linked with conceptions of liberty. There are always alternative ways and aims of travelling, as is today famously illustrated by Greta Thunberg. Politicisation concerns both the travel polity – the ways of regulating what is allowed, legitimated, tolerated, excluded, or ignored in matters of travelling – and the travel policy, the official lines of travel organisation within the polities as well as the chances of individual actors for politicking in the ways of travelling.⁸ In this sense ‘travel’ is a policy concept, ‘travelling’ refers to the actors’ perspective on politicking.

In this essay I shall first compare the paradigms of travelling by car, by flight and by train with the conceptions of the traveller’s freedom and three ideal-typical aims: travel to, travel away, and travel around. I illustrate the *Chancen*, conditions and practices of independent train travelling with comments on the history and the present state of railway politics in Europe, including the contribution of the EU to the politicisation of train travelling. As a third analytical tool I distinguish between two types of contingency, between *fortuna* and *Chance*, between the Machiavellian and the Weberian moment as I called them.⁹ Towards the end I speculate shortly on train travel’s parallels to two other distinctly European ways of acting politically, football and parliamentarism. My discussion makes use of my own experiences as a regular Interrail traveller since the opening of the system for adults in 1989, and contains a *Wertbeziehung*¹⁰ in favour of train travelling.

2. The freedom of the traveller

The paradigmatic alternatives of travelling that have been available from the early twentieth century onwards are, namely, by car, by flying and by train. Other means, such as ferries, buses, horses, trams and bicycles, are combinable with any of them.

Car-drivers frequently argue for their greater freedom of travel: they can drive where, when and how they want, free of schedules. *Freie Fahrt für freie Bürger* is an old slogan of the German car lobby that has successfully opposed speed restrictions on the *Autobahn*. Although there are not roads everywhere, a license to drive is required, speed restrictions

7 Freeden 2016, 130.

8 For the four aspects of politics, inspired by Max Weber, see Palonen 2003, 2019.

9 In Palonen 1998.

10 In the sense of Weber 1917.

exist, and traffic rules can be strict, car driving seems to offer a large degree of freedom. Freedom here refers to the absence of interference, of which the freedom of movement is seen as a major dimension. This freedom is, as Quentin Skinner insists, a Hobbesian view that all kinds of physical or other obstacles that interfere with action similarly restrict freedom.¹¹

Let me return to the liberty of car-drivers. In the Hobbesian sense, besides politicians and officials regulating the traffic rules and conditions, all other travellers, including all other car-drivers, appear as obstacles to their freedom. The ideal liberty of a car-driver is that of *bellum omnium contra omnes* and, correspondingly, the lives of the drivers are frequently 'nasty, brutish and short', to quote Hobbes.¹² The car-drivers' free movement is an illusion: they are entirely dependent on others.

When we understand liberty in the neo-Roman sense of absence from the arbitrary powers,¹³ car-drivers' lack of liberty becomes even more obvious. They depend on the car manufacturers and car sellers, as well as on the availability and quality of a lot of services, such as petrol stations, repair businesses, parking and sheltering spaces, insurance companies, and whatever else there might be. Those engaged in these services are 'living off cars' in the same sense as politicians are living off politics, as James Bryce and Max Weber famously put it.¹⁴ They are perhaps not free to treat the car-drivers so arbitrarily as if they were external obstacles to their freedom, but one cannot own or rent a car without being aware of being dependent on such external powers.

Dependence, as counter-concept to liberty, does not lie in the actual fact but forms the way of thinking, an adaptation to the status of dependence with a slavish mentality even before being faced with specific demands, as the ancient Roman thinkers already understood.¹⁵ In a similar sense we can speak of a prevailing car discourse based on dependence. We outsiders can easily identify such a discourse when, for example, hearing radio stations after the news announce the *Staus* and road blockages. It is a major mark of absence of dependence to remain largely ignorant of this entire car discourse.

Moving to travelling by air, my thesis is that from passengers' points of view flying is characterised by the absence of both freedom of movement and freedom from dependence. The seating in the planes is intolerably close to others, in a way that I have encountered in trains merely in the eight-person compartments of the former East German Reichsbahn. It is well known that intercontinental flights have provoked deaths or severe health breakdowns of passengers. The low-cost airlines' price policy consciously operates at the

11 On the radicalisation of Hobbes's view to the freedom from inference, see Skinner 2008.

12 Hobbes 1651, 89.

13 See Skinner 1998, 70–77.

14 Bryce 1888/1914, 731–732; Weber 1919, 42–44.

15 See Skinner 2002.

cost of the welfare and health of passengers. I have been wondering why the World Health Organization does not require the flight companies to maintain at least similar standards for air passengers as those that are required in trains.

The complete dependence on the flight company and its personnel is, or at least used to be, compensated with food, drinks, films etc. – *panem et circences* as the old Romans said – in order to keep passengers quiet and not to quarrel. An extreme case of this dependence was manifested a couple of years ago, when a co-pilot committed suicide by crashing the plane to the Alps and killing passengers, mostly German school children, and the crew.

In the trains one can walk around, go to the restaurant car, or to talk with colleagues and friends in other wagons, but in flights you are bound to a seat. An air travel type method of controlling the entrance has been introduced, very understandably, to the Eurostar trains crossing the Channel tunnel. However, as a general norm entrance and identity control, as well as passenger registration, in trains would be intolerable.¹⁶

Despite all this unfreedom and its fatal effects on climate change, flying is still considered as the norm for travels lasting more than a couple of hours. State and university administrations still tend to require their staff to use the cheapest and fastest connections, which in travels abroad usually are flights, due to the subventions and lack of taxation as well as the competition produced by the cheap flight companies. Among the 30 most frequent flight routes in Europe,¹⁷ I noticed that I had travelled almost all of them by train. The Madrid-Barcelona flight was on the top despite the fact that there are hourly trains from city centre to city centre lasting only some 2,5 hours.

I can somehow understand those who want to visit nice countryside villages or mountains by car and enjoy the freedom of movement and the possibility to go places that are impossible or difficult to reach by train or bus. But I do not understand why people willingly relinquish their elementary freedom for flying, as if the time ‘lost to travel’ would be compensated by its shortness. ‘Price, convenience and time’ serve as the main justifications for Finnish air travellers, according to my colleague from the University of Jyväskylä, the sociologist Terhi-Anna Wilska.¹⁸ In order to obtain these benefits the travellers seem to be willing to accept a short-term prison sentence, or in neo-Roman terms, a temporary status of slavery. Neither the individual freedom of the passenger nor enjoyment of the travelling as such plays any role.

Flying is frequently justified by the slowness of train travels. By checking actual timetables, it is easy to see that this is another myth. In travelling from Stockholm to

16 For a critique of such proposals see the column by Heribert Prantl, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/prantl-kolumne-datenschutz-1.4550085>.

17 In Finnish <https://www.vihrealanka.fi/juttu/kymmenettuhannet-eurooppalaiset-voisivat-matkustaa-paivittain-junalla-lentokoneen-sijaan->. This link from summer 2019 is no longer working.

18 Quoted in Helsingin Sanomat, 1 August 2019.

Málaga, if you want to minimise the time, you can leave Stockholm around 8 o'clock in the morning, use the night train from Hamburg to Offenburg, and you could reach Málaga before midnight the next day.¹⁹ This journey requires a degree of railway literacy and experience in using timetables, changes of trains, and seat reservations.

It might be rather difficult for people with their 'bourgeois' work and family life to raise the question of travellers' freedom. Politicians should, however, know better. In particular, they could use EU meetings as occasions for train travelling. Is it really necessary for the ministers to fly to EU council meetings from Helsinki to Brussels in the morning and come back the same evening? With such a schedule travelling appears as a burden, no break with the routine. However, when Internet connections are now available in trains, ferries, buses and hotels, why not give ministers and their staff more time for travelling, still taking care of the politically urgent tasks on the way?

For freedom from dependence and enjoying the travel, trains are definitely also the best way of travelling for long trips in Europe. When reaching the destination at a definite time is not the main objective, changing travel plans *ad hoc* might be a refreshing experience. The shift between trains is part of the enjoyment, and the delays and breaking down of the connections challenge your travel literacy and ability to improvise with alternative routes and schedules. If you look for convenience, for Interrail travellers first class travel is only approximately 25% more expensive than second class travel.²⁰ There you rarely need seat reservations, at least when avoiding the peak holiday or festive seasons.

It is, furthermore, still common to identify the Interrail with its oldest version, a ticket for a month, which still exists. Since 1989, when the adult Interrail was introduced, the variety of tickets has multiplied. First there was a 15-days Interrail, which was practicable for academic conference trips. A senior version for those 60 years and older, and the first-class option, have been present for at least a decade. At present there are youth, adult and senior tickets for 5, 7, 10, 15 and 22 days within a month, as well as all-day tickets for 15 and 22 days, and for 1, 2 or 3 months.²¹ The ticket for 3 months is relatively cheaper than for shorter periods. The wide spectrum of Interrail versions does justice to the multiple purposes and different rhythms of train travels, and as such increases both freedom of movement and freedom from dependence.

Of course, train travels also have their inconveniences, partly due to such things as the length of the journey, the growth of passenger numbers, as well as the number of change connections. Many of the inconveniences are due to the political neglect or administrative mismanagement of the conditions and practices of railway travelling. Better railway literacy

19 This holds for the pre-corona period. Currently there seems to be no connection from Barcelona to Málaga after 17 h. See <https://reiseauskunft.bahn.de>.

20 See <https://www.vr.fi/cs/vr/en/interrail-english>.

21 See <https://www.vr.fi/cs/vr/en/interrail-english>.

of the passengers can facilitate dealing with them. Below I shall discuss the European railway politics and speculate on the chances of improving it, but first some comments on ideal types of travelling.

3. Ideal types of travelling

Should we travel or not? Is it better to travel than not to travel? In contrast to many of those emphasising climate change, I claim that travelling is better than not travelling. It allows us to get rid of what Quentin Skinner once called the ‘mythology of parochialism’.²² I commit myself to a pro-travelling lifestyle, in favour of a nomadic rather than a rooted way of living.

For constructing ideal types of travelling, I suggest a division between three pure alternatives: travelling to a destination; travelling away from the domicile; and travelling around. The Interrailer operates within the last type, and its differences to the others deserve comment.

In travelling the person moves from one place – home, domicile – to another, to a destination, say from Helsinki to Paris. Out of this statement it is possible to read out tacit common assumptions, which are by no means necessary for all travellers.

First, travelling is commonly assumed to be an exceptional act, whereas staying at home is the norm. A stable domicile has been regarded as a civilising achievement, while the nomadic styles of living appear as suspicious, which can be seen for example in binding voting rights to the domicile. The second assumption is that the traveller comes back to home, ends the exceptional situation, and returns to normalcy. A third assumption is that only the destination counts, whereas the journey is only a transition from A to B and does not have a value of its own. A second normalcy lies in the assumption that the transition is expected to be as simple and fast as possible: the ‘rational’ traveller chooses to minimise the burdens of the voyage.

For a number of journeys and travellers none of these assumptions holds. The obvious cases include homeless people, those having a flat in several places, or those living in hotels – as the young philosophy teachers Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre did in Paris in the 1930s – to nomads, such as the Roma were until a few decades ago. It is, however, easy to add more mundane cases to this list. In my research periods abroad, I used the Interrail ticket to catch the train and travel to cities close by my place of residence, without any special interest in the destination, the main criterion being that the train connections allowed me to return the same day. Sitting in the train reading a book, or commenting on

22 Skinner 1969, 25.

or revising a manuscript, were part of the trip, but so too was the simple idea of travelling around, not being fixed to one place. I visited, for example, Coventry, Caen, Örebro and Wismar, places which I probably would never have gone otherwise.

The second assumption is contrary to the everyday experience of us luggage professors, those who have two flats between which to travel during the academic term from week to week. Travelling is not an exception but a regular part of living, and none of the trips between the flats is a return. Trains are not sites of transition, but like the university desk and the two flats, are sites of academic life, of preparing lectures, reading students' papers, writing letters of recommendation, doing proof reading, or working on manuscripts. The addition of Internet access in the trains has further improved the quality of train travels.

For a remarkable number of persons, the time spent in travelling is not a waste of time that should be minimised and realised with the least possible effort. Travelling is not only getting from one place to another, but also a way of living. From this perspective it is the freedom of the traveller that matters.

The second ideal type is travelling away from the domicile. Again, we do not need to think of dramatic stories of refugees fleeing from their home country, or emigrants choosing to leave. Everyday phenomena, such as young people moving away from home or adults changing flats, equally correspond to travelling away. In all of these cases the point of travelling is to leave something behind, including a moment of freedom from dependency, a 'break with the custom',²³ a liberation from prevailing traditions and conventions.

An irrevocable and irreversible break with the old domicile opens up new *Chancen* for thinking and action. Moving from one country to another used to require a lot of formalities at the border, which used to be a real experience not only in the trains between the Western and Eastern European countries, but also between Western European countries themselves. The abolishment of border formalities marks a major gain of denationalising travelling within the Schengen area as well as the freedom from dependence on 'national identity'.

Travelling around is an old European tradition, especially the 'grand tour' of young gentlemen. The First World War saw the introduction of restrictions to freedom of travel in the form of passports, visas and stricter border controls, but international trains still circulated widely. The number of trains declined when Eastern Europe fell under Soviet rule after the Second World War. The absence of freedom of travel was a distinctive experience in the countries of the Soviet bloc. The long periods spent waiting on the Soviet or East German borders for passport and customs control, including the search for hidden passengers, gave trains crossing the border between east and west a distinct status. The existence of such trains already contained an element of free movement, which, however,

23 In the sense of Walter Bagehot (1872).

was met with a huge apparatus of control and repression, and the experience was disturbing also for us Westerners.

The trains in Eastern Europe tend still to be few, slow, and rather uncomfortable, the tracks are old, and an investment in train travel has not been a priority for these countries. To travel from Berlin to Tallinn by train takes twice as long as it did in the 1930s, and requires a Russian visa. The Deutsche Bahn website shows that the fastest way would be by taking a ferry from Stockholm to Tallinn.²⁴

The Interrail was from the beginning understood as an entirely new way of travelling around Europe, one which increased the freedom of the travellers from the dependence of state borders. Guidebooks for young Interrail travellers were written, the first in Finnish in the mid-seventies by Pekka Haavisto, today the Green foreign minister in the Sanna Marin government. Haavisto revised his Interrail experiences in 2018 with another book in which he even insists on the contribution of the Interrail, in which several Eastern European countries were included, to the breakdown of Communism, as young people could have personal exchange with colleagues from the west.²⁵

The radical idea of Interrail is the absence of a single or privileged destination, an idea that revaluates the act travelling itself. An Interrail trip consists of different phases, which must not be planned in advance. The ticket enables us both to learn to know some places which one happens to visit and, perhaps more importantly, to travel 'to the trains', as I use to say when someone would ask where I was going. With the Interrail, sitting or eventually sleeping in the trains forms the recurrent element, whereas the stops in cities and accommodation outside trains remain the exception.

4. Railway politics in the European Union

How is the train traveller's freedom in Europe today? The state railways once rescued the European railway network from the fate suffered in the United States and southern America. The privatisations, such as in Thatcher's Britain, have also been experienced as a failure. The state railways, with different rules, conventions and practices in each country, contain, however, a bureaucratic apparatus with vested interests of its staff, as we recently saw from the SNCF staff who went on strike to retain their extremely low pension age. Replacement of the administrative model by the business model has improved the quality of services but has also led to closure of less used lines. Border crossings in passenger services were for long time difficult even in Western Europe.

24 Again, this was the case for the pre-corona era.

25 Haavisto 2019, 24

The high-speed trains initiated a new era in train travelling in the 1980s: the TGV (*Train à grand vitesse*) was the first, allowing travel from Paris to Lyon (ca. 540 kilometers) in 2 hours. It was followed by the ICE (*Intercity Express*) in Germany, the Thalys (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany), the Eurostar under the English Channel, the Pendolino in Italy, as well as AVE in Spain. Every West European country today has some kind of high-speed trains. In France and Spain new tracks were built for them, whilst other countries mainly use old tracks with new trains. Part of the improvement in speed and quality was enabled by preventing railway lines from crossing the roads at the same level. The landscape looks different from window of the high-speed trains as compared with the slower regional lines, which still exist and have partly even been improved. *Thomas Cook's European Timetable*, the 'bible' of Interrail travellers before the Internet age, regularly used to contain a list of scenic railways, routes that were recommended for their landscape.

The European Union, the Schengen area and the Eurozone have provoked major changes in railway and travel politics, although vested interests of national railway services still persist. So far changes have been largely unintended by-products of the common market and the freedom of movement. Nonetheless, travellers experience them also to enlarge their freedom from dependence from nation-states. A consistent and large-scale pro-railway policy, based on systematic lowering of the dependence on the member states, could be a major politicising project for EU citizens

Of the EU member countries with railways, Estonia and Latvia have only in 2020 been included into the Interrail system. In France some trains have been excluded for Interrail users. Finnish and Swedish railways have ceased to sell seat tickets to other European countries at their stations. The return of border controls in Denmark, Sweden and Bavaria are part of the current rhetoric of reaction.

The high-speed lines have finally made the railway companies cooperate, although obligatory seat tickets for border crossings for Interrail travellers are more expensive than those within a country. For the trains from Brussels to Cologne seat tickets are obligatory for the Thalys, but not for the ICE trains. The EU support for new rail tracks also gives hope to neglected areas: the completion of Rail Baltica – promised to allow travel by train from Tallinn in the morning to Berlin the same evening – is now planned to open in 2026. Not-in-my-backyard 'environmentalists' have acted on behalf of the car and flight lobbies by delaying the completion of new lines, such as the Fehmarn Belt bridge between Denmark and Germany and the Alps crossing line from Lyon to Turin.

In 2018 the EU Commission allocated by lot a number of complimentary Interrail tickets to 18 year olds. This is a modest attempt to illustrate how travelling by train across Europe is possible and practicable. The next step could consist of arranging a similar lottery for persons turning 60 years of age, the age for the senior Interrail ticket. Especially for persons

who have never travelled abroad in trains, this move might be an encouraging step of de-provincialisation in their experiences.

There is an old tradition – practised already in the German Empire under Bismarck²⁶ – that Members of Parliament receive for the period of their membership a free first-class ticket for travels within the national rail network. In the EU an obvious possibility would be extending this practice to the MEPs, giving them first-class Interrail tickets as compensation for their travels. For the Greek and Finnish members ferries could be added to the compensation. The Interrail ticket would not exclusively concern the travel between Brussels/Strasbourg and the home country, but the MEPs could also travel across Europe by train. With this move it might perhaps be easier to legitimate the change from the member-state-based electoral districts in the election of the European Parliament.

A major EU measure could be including the railway politics and policy within the range of items dealt with by the ‘ordinary legislature procedure’, that is, by the regular political struggles between the Commission, the Council, and the Parliament, complemented by the EU committees of member state parliaments. Railway politics and policy would then become an issue of the debates concerning the EU’s general interest. Understanding railway travel as a European topic would facilitate cross-border connections as the strategic key to deepening European integration and securing the priority of travelling by train. The railway politics could then gain prominence on the agendas of the European Parliament’s elections campaign and the debates of the Parliament.

5. The contingency of travelling

To travel is to be exposed to contingency. To travel to a destination and back by the shortest and fastest means attempts to minimise contingency through planning the journey as exactly as possible in advance. The Soviet regime was committed to maximal planning, and therefore regarded individual travel with suspicion. Inland passports already existed in Czarist Russia, and the Soviets continued with this system with closed cities and so on. Even the British border officials, in 1989, still asked upon entry where I was going, and did not really understand when I said that I travel by Interrail without knowing in advance my exact destinations in the country.

Travellers using Interrail willingly expose themselves to contingency, to both *fortuna* and *Chance*. The *fortuna* is manifested for example in the fragility of train connections: there is a limited number of rails, and still fewer stations or other places where trains can pass each other, different trains have different speeds, the signals guiding trains may be

26 See Butscher 1998.

temporarily out of order, the weather conditions may disturb the traffic, and so on. All this may be liable to provoke delays, which frequently leads to broken connections between trains.

Of course, the train timetable presupposes that not everything is left to the *fortuna* and avoiding 'accidents' is a minimal requirement of all travelling. Some planning is required even for Interrail trips, including the reading of timetables, making seat reservations and, for us senior travellers, reserving hotels in advance. However, each train change can be understood as facing the *fortuna*. Professional train travellers have learnt to accept this contingency, and nonetheless it is still frequently the case that everything goes according to plan.

The very idea of travelling around contains its profile of *Chancen*, which the traveller has to judge and consider with each other. The political imagination of the Interrail traveller consists of attempting to turn accidents of the *fortuna* to a *Chance* to invent something new. This can consist of visiting places one never intended to visit or detecting local trains with slower connections which would enable enjoying the trip, for example due to being quieter or allowing a better view of the landscape.

Which cities and stations one happens to visit during an Interrail tour remain partly accidental choices which depend on the train connections, timetables, how crowded the trains might be, and so on. No specific reasons are needed to step down at a particular station, just a couple of hours walking around with lunch or coffee, say in Donaueschingen, as another step of freedom from dependence.

The contrast between *fortuna* and *Chance* is also otherwise relevant for the freedom vs. dependence debates. The nationality and citizenship of a person is still largely a result of *fortuna*. A propaganda slogan from the 1980s claimed that to be born in Finland is like winning the lottery. From the perspective of freedom from dependence, any nationality is a matter of dependence, a creation of a 'we' that I have not chosen myself. This 'fact' must not be denied, but it can be relativized, and the European Union is a major project in reducing the dependence on both nationality and citizenship. The Europeanisation of the railway politics would for the individual EU citizen mark another step for the freedom from dependence, and the specific *Chance* included in travelling by Interrail already provides the model for using this type of chance for politicking with one's own life.

The Interrail also did away with the practice of counting kilometres of railway travel and replaced this with counting instead the total days of travelling, regardless of state borders. The next analytic step to increase the freedom of dependence of the train traveller would consist of changing the relationship between the exception and the rule. Instead of paying for single trips or periodic travel cards for the same interval, the annual train travel profile of each individual could serve as the ticket paradigm.

We could imagine that train travel up to a certain sum would be free for all persons, after which the Interrail or maybe regional travel-around tickets would provide the basis for travelling. This ticket reform could illustrate how the freedom of movement serves as an inherent part of the freedom from dependence of railway travellers by emphasising that train travel is not an exception, but a regular practice available for everyone in the EU. Whether the freedom criterion would then gain priority over the voluntary dependence of car and air travel would of course require other measures, including improvement of the rail connections and trains.

6. Travelling by train – a European way of life

It is time to raise travelling to the agendas of political science debates. Travelling has, indeed, been a classical method of studying politics. Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique*, James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* and Moisei Ostrogorski's *La démocratie et l'organisation des partis politiques* are examples of classical comparative studies on politics using travelling as a tool for knowledge and judgment.²⁷ Max Weber's letters have also made clear how important his travels were for the formation of his work.²⁸

Reinhart Koselleck saw a *Verfremdungseffekt* as a necessary condition for historical studies of concepts, and the concept also provides a further justification of travelling as tool of analysis.²⁹ My own scholarly practices have brought me close to the sources abroad, with experiences and observations of both the contexts and of the practices of travelling by train as by-products.

In his *Ach Europa!* from 1987 Hans-Magnus Enzensberger presents six reports from the mainly peripheral European countries, an imagined epilogue by Timothy Taylor in *The New Yorker* on 21 February 2006.³⁰ Taylor visits a number of European countries, notices a nuclear accident close to Bordeaux, reports how biologists and art historians dispute what to do to with the Berlin Wall after its fall, and visits the former president of the European Commission, Erkki Rintala, in the Finnish village of Rääkkylänmäki. Importantly, Taylor notices on several occasions that 'free movement', that is, car-driving, has become impossible in Europe, and he was obliged to take a train to Kaiserslautern. For Taylor travelling by train and reading books in trains are another 'europäische Marotte'.³¹ With his political imagination Enzensberger could foresee something important was coming, including the renaissance of train travelling.

27 See Tocqueville 1835, 1840, Bryce 1888/1914, Ostrogorski 1903/1912.

28 For a new selection of the letters see Weber 2019.

29 Koselleck 1972, xix.

30 Enzensberger 1987.

31 Ibid 456.

In his anecdote Enzensberger refers to train travelling as a distinctive part of the European political lifestyle. Football and parliamentarism could similarly be viewed as two other aspects of distinctly European political phenomena.³² Politicisation consists in all three cases of converting time into a medium of politics. This is done in a manner that disputes the unconditional priority of speed and the hurry that characterises flights and car-driving. The journey – train travel, football match and parliamentary debate – is more important than the result, the fair play more important than victory.

7. Postscript: the corona virus – a death blow to travelling by train?

A few weeks after the completion of this essay a malign *fortuna* called the corona virus struck like lightning. The strike provoked the frightened governments to close the state borders within the Schengen area as well as all ‘non-necessary’ intra-state travel. The restrictions to protect freedom from dependence – from other people – were understandable. However, closing the borders was a *non sequitur*: the virus does not follow the borders.

‘L’enfer, c’est les autres,’ was a famous line of Garcin in Jean-Paul Sartre’s play *Huis clos*, written during the Second World War after Sartre’s return from a prisoner of war camp.³³ Max Weber’s principle of keeping ‘Distanz zu den Dingen und Menschen’³⁴ is only a more polite and academic formula for Sartre’s thesis. Both ideas refer to keeping distance as a mark of freedom from dependence.

The virologists and epidemiologists – the disputes among them are equally militant as among us in the humanities – claim that the danger lies in the proximity and keeping 1.5 metres distance between persons was offered as a new norm. The gatherings of people at railway stations might be dangerous. Contrary to rumours, trains themselves have been no danger. Bertold Huber from the Deutsche Bahn claimed that no train traveller in Germany would have been infected.³⁵

Thanks to the Internet and other forms of digitalisation, as well as the continuation of regular radio programmes, the non-travelling situation was not as bad as it would have been in the 1980s. Nor can we compare the *Ausnahmezustand* with living behind the ‘iron curtain’, as numerous debates on both what is going on and what should be done have been on the agenda. The unfreedom of car and air travels has not diminished at all, but here I shall only discuss the *Chancen* for removing the restrictions for Interrail travel within the Schengen area.

32 For football see Cohn-Bendit 2019; for a parliamentary interpretation of Europe’s borders see Palonen 2014.

33 Sartre 1944, 128.

34 Weber 1919, 74.

35 ‘[E]s sei bislang kein einziger Fall bekannt, bei dem sich ein Reisender im Zug mit Corona infiziert habe,’ taz, 25 Mai 2020.

For train travels the ‘hell’ mediated by the virus offers a real challenge. A minimum requirement, besides efficient cleaning operations, for reactivating train travels would make single seats the norm, which would of course reduce the number of seats available to passengers. This also was the praxis of railway companies when the strict lockdown ended. The limited number of seats can be expected to make travel planning in trains more difficult, and perhaps tickets more expensive, but these steps are worth taking to regain the freedom of movement.

Keeping distance in the queues at the stations and in the trains, frequent handwashing, and wearing a mask have been recommended for the upcoming months. Such restrictions on the freedom of movement would hardly be more severe than entry requirements for football matches in major stadiums before the corona virus struck. The time required for controlling the passengers should not affect the timetables or transfer to connecting trains, but travellers should reserve more time for entering the stations.

The nationalists and populists of all countries welcomed the closure of borders in Europe, a *de facto* suspension of the Schengen area. Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat*³⁶ suddenly turned into a tacit model for the ultra-protectionist border regime. For the Interrail travellers the closure appears as being due to the lacking competencies of the EU concerning the health and railway policies, which has been judged as an authorisation to governments to close state borders without even waiting for an EU level debate on the wisdom of these emergency measures.³⁷

I have insisted on the value of travelling as a regular part of the European lifestyle in favour of freedom from dependence. This freedom should not be given up due to the corona virus. On the contrary, measures are needed to support enabling train travelling in the Interrail style in a manner that does not place the health of the travellers and the personnel in trains and stations at high risk. Equally important is to understand that staying at home for several weeks involves risks to health, as well as risks for the mentality of dependence – something which can often best be gotten rid of by travelling around.

36 Fichte 1800.

37 See also Klaus Hillenbrand, taz 7 May 2020, <https://taz.de/Ueberfluessige-Grenzkontrollen/!5681222/>.

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