

Promoting Sustainable Bicycle-Train Tourism: Dream versus Reality

Professor Marcos Bosquetti, Ph.D. | Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil

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Introduction

Every year, cyclists take to the roads to discover new places, some of them opting for the bicycle-train combination, which is considered an example of a sustainable tourism attitude.^[1] However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of bicycle tourists has never been so high while rail transport is making great efforts to win back its passengers. A recent example is the German 9-Euro-Ticket scheme, through which passengers could travel for 9 euros per month on local and regional transport across Germany. The tickets were valid for June, July, and August 2022. The German government subsidized the public rail operators with 2.5 billion euros to compensate for the lost ticket revenue.^[2] German citizens benefited, but so did summer tourists from Europe and all over the world.^[3]

Method

This study investigated the German 9-Euro-Ticket scheme from the perspective of bicycle tourists who opted for bicycle-train intermodal travel in Germany using this promotional scheme. It discusses the impact of this scheme on their decision to travel and their train travel experience. Primary data was collected through a focus group with 6 cycle tourists, 214 face-to-face interviews with cycle tourists on trains and at train stations, and field notes by the participant observer cycling across Germany from July 15 to August 2, 2022.

Findings

For 52,8% of the respondents, the 9-Euro-Ticket was the main factor influencing their decision to travel to distant bicycle touring destinations this summer.

The 9-Euro-Ticket influence on long distance bicycle touring (n=214)



- Would not travel long distance (52,8%)
- Would travel anyway (41,6%)
- Not sure (5,6%)

Of those who would travel long distance anyway (n=89), 57,9% would do the train-bicycle combination, 22,9% would put their bicycles in cars and drive to the cycling destination, and 19,2% would cycle to their long-distance destinations.

Those who would travel anyway (n=89) would reach their cycling destination



- By train & bicycle combination (57,9%)
- By car & bicycle combination (22,9%)
- By riding their bicycles (19,2%)

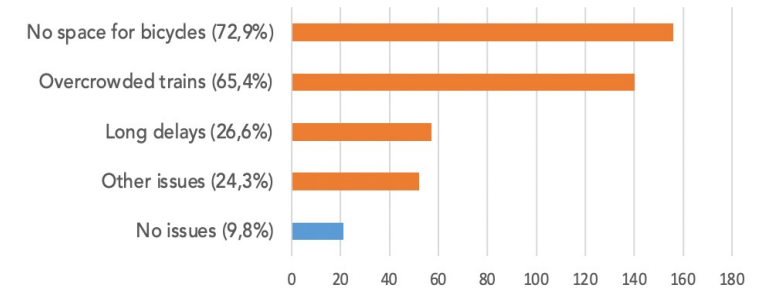
For 24,3% of all respondents, this is their first long-distance bicycle touring trip. Of those who had already done this kind of trip, only 11,2% had not experienced the train & bicycle combination. These figures show that a third of the sample first experienced the train & bicycle combination for long-distance bicycle touring trips, mainly attracted by the German 9-Euro-Ticket campaign. More than half of all respondents are Germans (53,3%) and, together with French (14,5%) and Dutch (7,5%), they sum up three-quarters of the sample. In the other quarter, 16,4% come from other European countries and 7,0% come from other continents. Male bicycle tourists make up 62,1% of the sample.

About doing the train & bicycle combination for next summer cycle touring (n=214)



- Only if trains meet demand efficiently (49,5%)
- Yes! Would do it anyway (38,8%)
- Not sure (11,7%)
- No (11,2%)

Travel issues experienced by cycle tourists with the train & bicycle combination (n=214 multiple-choice)



Other issues include stifling and dirty trains and the lack of elevators in some train stations. Apart from the issues related to bicycles, all the other issues pointed out by bicycle tourists may also apply to other passengers.

Conclusions

The relationship between public transportation, tourism mobility, and climate change has been a subject of discussion in the literature.^[4] The German 9-Euro-Ticket initiative sounds very positive, but findings show that investments may need to go beyond a transportation subsidy to first build the necessary infrastructure if the intention is to make public transportation more attractive for tourists, and not the other way around.

References

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