



WORDS — DR. PHILIPP SCHARFENBERGER

MOBILITY THE
DESIRE
TO
ARRIVE

With THE DESIRE TO ARRIVE, we take a look into the mobility needs and the mobility behaviour of consumers of today. Why do we sacrifice our scarce and valuable time to be on the move and to get from A to B? Have the past two years not demonstrated that we can also survive with a lot less mobility? Our guest author Dr. Philipp Scharfenberger provides an insight.

ARTWORK — MATHIAS LEIDGSCHWENDNER

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→ “To what extent is mobility a human need, a part of being human?”

The future of mobility is currently the subject of much discussion: How will we travel in 30 years from now? Are we still going to drive automobiles? Or asked differently: At which point will they finally live up to their name and drive us autonomously? And what is going to power these future vehicles: batteries, hydrogen, something else? Will the entities we will be traveling in still be our own — or will we soon be sharing everything? In 30 years time, will we still consider an “automobile” to be a vehicle with four wheels or extend our definition to drones — given they are also “auto” and “mobile”? Which role

will other traditional mobility modes such as trains and planes play in all these scenarios? And how will more sustainable and efficient movement affect our economy? How will sales figures for cars and other modes of transport develop? Which business models for mobility providers will break through on the mass market? What effects is this going to have on suppliers and employment? And how will infrastructure change? How will it alter inner cities and architecture if we potentially need fewer roads and parking spaces?

In the barrage of all these questions, one very important question — maybe even the most crucial of them all — may be overlooked: Why do we even want to be mobile? Why do we sacrifice our scarce and valuable time to be on the move and to get from A to B? Have the past two years not demonstrated that we can also survive with a lot less mobility? Virtual trips and meetings on Zoom or Teams: From home office into the world with one click. Or, on the contrary, have the past two years not shown how important mobility is for a healthy, happy life? Have we not all experienced so-called “cabin fever” at different stages of lockdown, felt “trapped” and not being “able to get ahead”? The underlying question is quite fundamental: How significant is mobility in our life and what function does it fulfill? To what extent is mobility a human need, a part of being human?

This question is not only extraordinarily interesting to better understand the creature human. It should also be an essential reference point for our notion of future mobility solutions. That is, future mobility solutions should build upon — or at least substantially consider — our nature as human beings and our need to move.

WHY WE ARE MOBILE

Mobility is defined as the ability to move. Etymologically, the word originates from the Latin term “mobilitas”,

which is also translated as mobility, but can also stand for speed, agility, variability, volatility and fickleness. If you ask consumers¹ how they would currently define mobility, many will state “movement” as a synonym. They primarily think of means of transport such as cars, aircrafts, public transport or bicycles, as well as increasingly electric bikes and electric-powered scooters. Some people also consider running, going for walks, hiking or jogging as a part of their mobility. Depending on individual backgrounds and leisure-time activities, motorcycles, motor scooters, surfboards, skis and snowboards, inline and roller skates, boats, paragliders, etc. are also considered as means of mobility in conjunction with the associated forms of movement.

When people are asked why they are mobile, the most common (and, at the same time, most trivial) response will be because they want to get from one place (A) to another (B): For instance, from their homes to their workplaces, to visit family and friends, to go shopping, or on vacation. Business trips also primarily serve to reach a destination. In this context, mobility is frequently described as annoying and time-consuming, as a means to an end. Pragmatism plays a key part here — it must be practical, convenient, safe, fast, reliable and, if possible, also deliver a good cost-benefit ratio. And although this utilitarian form of mobility is considered by many to be an annoying yet necessary exercise, it frequently occupies large parts of the time they spend being mobile. It is not greatly valued — if they could, they would avoid it.

However, this does not apply entirely: For some people and in some situations, the simple need to get from A to B already involves a different sense of mobility. Some people appreciate these trips because they experience them as a so-called flow. Commuting by car gives us the chance to switch off, enjoy the peace and quiet, get lost in our thoughts, be →

¹ This article is based on a research project by the Institute for Mobility at the University of St. Gallen in cooperation with Porsche AG. As part of the project, consumers from Europe, the USA and China were interviewed about their mobility habits and needs. This article sums up the key results.

