

Mobile by bike - in the age of digital transformation

By Michel Wildt, 22/06/11

Michel receives an email with a prompt reply: Its brother-in-law Paul is not averse to paying him a visit. *From time to time Michel does this when he has some work to do in the German capital and when there is a free slot between its appointments. "Far too rarely," Michel ponders after having been seated on Paul's sunny balcony. "I can recommend visiting for him. It was a lovely conversation - thank you, dear Paul!"*

The diverse Michel reflects itself. However, there is a risk in meeting Paul. All too soon, you're stuck with a job to do or get done. At least this happens to Michel again and again. This may be due to the fact that Michel, now retired, is still the youngest child in a large family and one little of an almost unmanageable number of children. And Paul is the husband of his eldest sister, who sadly passed away a long time ago. As a professional in systemic organizational development, Michel knows only too well what happens when the youngest child behaves disrespectfully towards the eldest. That's a no-no - and that also applies to Paul, even if, strictly speaking, acting as the deceased sister's placeholder in the family system.

However, Michel, the youngest, also knows how to relieve himself of obligations. Otherwise it would sink miserably, right at the end of the series of directives. It simply subcontracts many jobs to others. Michel's frog calls this 'subcontracting'. Michel itself describes the strategy rather as 'showing virtual mindfulness'.

Paul gives Michel an unavoidable assignment: "Write something for the family magazine that comes out once a year. About cycling!" Well, Michel does indeed have a lot to say about "Mit dem Fahrrad mobil". But it thinks it's the wrong person for 'writing'. Its German teacher confirmed to him back in secondary school: "But you can't write." This feedback did not only refer to the typeface of his texts and was less an expression of the black pedagogy of the 1970s. Rather, as Michel interpreted it at the time, it was actually a - clumsily expressed - compliment: "Wrapping us up with your stories - you're excellent at that. Orally. But unfortunately not in writing."

To stick to the truth, Michel is now writing this article itself. Although it always tries to pass such assignments along. To others. The texting for the Michel-Wildt-Winkel of the argentine, for example, is managed by a frog called Sigfried Schmidt, together with his dear colleague Mr. von Förster (the two of them adorn the genre picture of the "Michel-Wildt-Winkel"). Paul's writing assignment would like to give the Michel to Lovis Ryan (see menu item in "Lovis-Ryan-Edition"). Yes, to the poly-gender journalist from Frankfurt am Main, the retired member of the journalists' guild. Lovis, the fictional writing character of Kim Dorno, active together with Michel in the senior start-up "Agentur für vielfältige Wirklichkeitskonstruktion". But Paul waves it off. No subcontracting, please! Family members write in the family magazine themselves. So you, Michel, determines Paul.

Michel owns a 'Bernds' folding bike with electric drive. Despite the 20-inch tires, it rides like a well-developed touring bike - the Mercedes among bikes of this type. Folding bikes have the invaluable advantage that you can always take them with you on the train. When sustainability criteria are applied, the combination of Bahncard 100 and an e-folding bike is vastly superior to owning and operating a mid-range car. Michel will probably never understand why more people who travel a lot for work and have to work in different locations don't do this.

But unfortunately - and now we come to the story that Paul has asked me, Michel, to tell - Deutsche Bahn is experiencing a variety of disruptions to its regular operations. For political reasons, I must - as educators like me usually believe - repeatedly denounce this undesirable development. Even the best

folding e-bike can only partially remedy the situation. But I believe in the pedagogical trend in storytelling: constructive reporting. A good idea! You can read about it in the German newspaper project 'Perspektive Daily', for example. The credo is: always combine criticism of grievances with a vision of success!

Michel is traveling by train and folding bike to moderate two workshops at a conference for school didactic leaders in June 2022. The conference will take place - corona-adapted and weather-optimistic - in the garden of Xanten Youth Hostel. In the open air! In fact, the weather is excellent that day.

Unfortunately, the train from Moers to Xanten does not run. Rail replacement service due to construction work - not an attractive alternative! So the next station is Wesel. The folding bike is to be used for the last mile anyway. So why not cycle straight from Wesel, after a train journey from Münster, with a change in Oberhausen? The ADFC cycle map 1:75000 'Niederrhein I' offers two routes: Along the B 58 over the Rhine bridge in Wesel. Or a section of the famous Rhine cycle path, on the dyke, with a view over the river, and crossing to the other side with the passenger ferry at Xanten. Who wouldn't choose the prettier route in the glorious sunshine?

Nowadays, cyclists who keep up with the times no longer use a map to navigate. No, they are guided by a digital device! That used to be different. With the thousands of kilometers that Michel has cycled together with his partner in the decades since the German reunification, he is the 'master of the route' - as far as a diverse person can be "master" at all. Thanks to its map-reading skills, acquired in its Catholic Youth Organisation, Michel not only determines the route, but also leads the way. This is because it has mastered the technique of reading the map and scouting the route while driving. As an advocate of participative communication, it naturally involves its fellow passengers in finding the way, as it should. However, due to its structure, it does have a certain dominance. Malicious tongues have sometimes spoken of 'paternalistic' or 'male-dominant' behavior in this context. Sounds unpleasant - is that what he wants?

In its relationship with Michel's wife, however, the creeping digitalization of route finding when cycling is leading to a change in the balance of influence. She is an early adopter of cycling apps and plays them on the now ubiquitous digital devices. Such apps not only promise wonderful routes, but also support navigation in the field extremely efficiently. Anyone who has ever cycled with digital equipment knows that the fine art of navigation boils down to a simple skill: keeping an eye on whether a small blue point on a map section displayed digitally on the screen is following the route shown there as long as you keep pedaling. The cell phone, the goblin of the digital age, takes the lead.

Clever cyclists put their cell phone in a case and click it onto a holder on the bicycle handlebars. This allows you to operate the touchscreen with the hand that rest normally on the handlebar. At the latest when the blue point on the map section disappears, you push the map further so that it remains in view. Sounds like child's play. So Michel's sweetheart, who rides the same folding bike as Michel, attaches a holder to Michel's handlebars on the day she attaches the holder to her own. Long live equality! There is already a second cell phone case - in the expectation that both partners will switch to 'digital' at the same time.

However, the actual practice of the cycling couple turns out quite differently than expected. As long as the blue point on the display in the phone case actually moves as desired, everything is easy. But the real trick is to configure the device so that the map actually appears, the desired route is actually displayed and the blue nipple actually appears. Cell phones are small, difficult to read for people who wear glasses and practically blind in the wrong position when the sun is shining. They do what they want if you tap on them awkwardly. According to Michel's experience with these little digital monsters, anyone who wants to navigate digitally on a bike needs specific device skills that are at least as difficult to acquire as the ability to read a map.

That's why Michel is increasingly leaving the navigation to his partner. After all, there are enormous advantages to pedaling through a wonderfully sunlit Lower Rhine landscape, for example, and letting your gaze wander over the vastness of the river with its busy shipping traffic, sheep on the Rhine dyke and untidy farms in the fields, if you leave the responsibility for finding the way to someone else - a great temptation for the youngest member of the family, Michel. However, you don't learn to navigate digitally this way. As a result, the role of determinant shifts imperceptibly from the male to the female. Women's power is creeping in. A real man may try to prevent such a development. But any real diverse who takes such a positive view of the dissolution of age-old relationship patterns, not only in the constant debates of feminism, but also - obviously - in practical life, must be happy.

Today, however, Michel is traveling alone on his way from Wesel to Xanten. Google Maps offers low-threshold access to digital navigation. The program operates in the Android environment. Un-elitist, not an Apple program! If you want to be taken seriously today, you can hardly avoid it. Maps is extremely powerful and now even shows train connections. That's remarkable! That's why Michel is planning to premiere the use of digital navigation with a case on the bike today, in true professional style! Not just pulling its cell phone out of the pocket and checking whether it's still on track. Instead, it's going to enjoy riding along the Rhine to the workshop like a king in the sunshine, guided digitally by the blue nipple!

The start of the tour is not under a good star. Due to a detour of the IC and a delay of the regional express train, Michel and its folding bike arrive at the starting point in Wesel 30 minutes late. It is 8.15 am. The workshop, 20 km away, is due to start at 9.30 am. That should still be manageable with an e-bike if you have digital guidance and everything goes smoothly! Arrived at the station of Wesel, Michel clicks the cell phones cover onto the handlebar and activates Maps. Sure enough, this clever program shows exactly the two route alternatives that the map promised. However, the digital device still has to be put into the case: unfold the case, carefully grab the phone with two fingers and slide it in. Don't tap the display - otherwise another window could pop up. Michel has not practiced this. As Michel, a trained computer scientist, swears, the device reacts in a 'non-deterministic' way, i.e. it shows what it wants to, but not what it should to show. It takes 5 minutes for the map, routes and nipples behind the foil to light up as they should.

To make matters worse, the way Maps is currently configured the map doesn't automatically orient itself in direction of north. Michel doesn't know how to change this in a hurry. However, an experienced human map reader does this automatically when the sun is shining. In Michel's mind, there is a cognitive dissonance between the map in his head and the one on the small screen. The latter is barely recognizable due to the inclined position of the cell phone on the holder. The sun is glistening so beautifully! The same applies to the blue nipple with additional navigation aid, which is supposed to show the user in which direction he is currently looking.

This makes it really difficult for Michel to find its way around. Because it reverses the logic of the map: Here, the person navigating does not think its way into the topography of the field shown by the map. Instead, the map rotates so that the path you are supposed to take is always in front of you - on the logical assumption that the cyclist's eyes are directed in the direction in which the handlebars are pointing. Google's logic may make sense, but it is not compatible with the habits of Michel, the person using it. The classic problem of digital transformation!

Fortunately, there are cycle route signs at Wesel station. NRW is currently switching to the 'junction system' at great expense. It has been working perfectly in Holland for years. You don't need a map or sat nav. Each junction is given a number. A map showing the numbers is displayed at the junctions. If you want to cycle, memorize the sequence of numbers. Michel, interested in transport policy and - admittedly - slightly disoriented in this unfamiliar city at an unfamiliar train station with increasing time

pressure, reads off: the route over the Rhine bridge is 30 - 29 - 31 - 65 - 59 - 37 - 26 - 39 and the route along the river and with the ferry is 30 - 29 - 31 - 65 - 59 - 37 - 26 - 39. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to write it down," he thinks, but doesn't because of the lack of time and first cycles via 29 and 31 to 65. A glance at the nipple on his cell phone display shows him that he's on the right track so far! This is where the Rhine bridge path and the riverside path branch off.

The bridge can be seen in the distance, swinging proudly over the river. Will Michel now spontaneously take the 59 or, as planned, the 37 as his next stopover? Which way is which? The signposts indicate the location and distance. Unfortunately, all the destinations are outside the map section on the display. There are signs with the numbers below the signposts. There is a gaping hole at the signpost where, as Michel assumes, the 37 should be visible - signpost gone! A decision has to be made here - immediately! The uncertainty factor, as Michel only now realizes, is that it has not checked whether the ferry across the Rhine is in operation. Corona has thrown everything out of sync. Passenger ferry - what does the term say about the standard of service? On the other hand, car traffic roars over the bridge along the main road next to the black band of the cycle path - who wants to cycle along there?

If Michel had still been a civil servant and in the service, it would certainly have opted for the bridge. But now it's a pensioner! That means freedom! So it takes the risk of the ferry and treats itself to the beautiful route. He steers the bike along the signpost where the 37 is missing and pedals. The blue nipple on the display gives good feedback. The route is correct. But the map scale to which the display is set is too large. Because the route zigzags through the Rhine harbor of the city of Wesel, orientation is not yet optimal. It is annoying that the official cycle route of the state of NRW and the route from Google Maps sometimes give different suggestions for the optimal way.

So Michel has to decide whether to trust Google or the NRW State Surveying Office - and make sure that there are no pranksters on the road who have twisted or stolen signs. So Michel stops again and, as its wife has done so often, uses its thumb and index finger to push the map apart until every junction is clearly visible. It works perfectly, despite the cover, which pleases the user! Michel switches the e-bike to the highest setting, as it's already getting a bit late, and whizzes along the crown of the Rhine dyke, which has been given a perfect asphalt surface by the Directorate of Waterways and Shipping, in wonderful sunshine, with a tailwind, the beguiling scent of the Rhine meadows and the magic of the river. The blue nipple spurs faithfully along the track on the display, everything in the „green zone“. A wonderful business trip on a wonderful day! This is how life should be. Workshop participants, your moderator is rushing over and will be on the mat on time!

In this wonderful landscape, the pedal rider starts to daydream. He is also distracted by the activity on the river. It's impressive how many ships there are on the Lower Rhine! His attention to the nipple on the display wanes. Every now and then there is a cycle path arrow at the side of the road. That's enough information for the route.

But suddenly the blue point is off the line of the display. Something is wrong. The varifocals make it difficult to study the display accurately. So Michel reaches for the brakes and tries to tilt his glasses, forgetting that the bike helmet had to be taken from the skull. A targeted look reveals you've missed the turn to the ferry. You can't blame digital technology for that! Missing the turn-off - this also happens with classic map navigation. Digital technology has a clear advantage here. Because you can immediately see where you are, you can recognize what is going wrong and making a turn necessary.

A turnaround leads Michel a short distance to the river. The tarred path turns into cobblestones and the slope leads directly into the water. The picture is the same on the opposite side of the river. Obviously the passenger ferry runs here. Now it's only 10 minutes to our destination, plus the ferry ride. But there is no ferry in sight for miles around. Where is the boat? Does it run at all? Has the ferry service been discontinued without Google's knowing?

Ifos are displayed in an inconspicuous showcase next to the landing stage: Ferry times in the summer months from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesdays, Fridays and at weekends. Also on Thursdays during the vacations. A photo of the ferry, an e-mail address and a landline number. Lucky Michel: Today is Wednesday! But no ferry in sight! Michel is unsettled, pulls his cell phone out of its case and calls the number. An answering machine voice explains: "Corona is over. The ferry is back on schedule," and repeats the timetable on the notice board. Unfortunately, it's not until 10 a.m., so it'll be 45 minutes late at his destination - if the ferry shows up at all.

All that remains is to wait. Michel settles down on the only bench on the spot, with an intoxicating view downstream, pulsating shipping traffic in the sunlit Lower Rhine meadows. The poplars rustle, in a line that seems to lead all the way to the Netherlands. You could spend the day here if it weren't for the call of duty and the food and drink on your bike. But there is no time for the idyll. The colleague, a teacher at a comprehensive school in Oberhausen and organizer of the training course, needs to be informed. Unfortunately, Michel has neglected to write down his cell phone number. The landline number stored in its cell phone and the email address are not helpful here, shortly before the destination.

Michel searches the school's website, finds the school's telephone number and the secretary gets in touch. She listens to the story in a friendly manner, refuses to give out the colleague's cell phone number - which is correct - but promises to call him and inform him so that he can inform the workshop participants about the lateness of their moderator. Hopefully she does this and is successful? She has also sent Michel's cell phone number, but there is no feedback from her colleague.

Instead, more cyclists appear at the jetty and, like Michel earlier, they check out the situation. No ferry to be seen, that doesn't look good. Everyone wants to get across to Xanten. What if the ferry doesn't run today? Expert discussions from cyclist to cyclist. How likely is it that traffic will simply be stopped here without informing people about it on social media? Experiences and opinions differ. The next crossing options, the experts discuss, are the Rhine bridge in Wesel in the south, which Michel rejected earlier, or the next river bridge downstream - detours of between 30 and 40 km. A cyclist, so impatient that he doesn't even take off his helmet, discovers a cell phone number on the side of the notice board. Michel, active as ever, dials the number.

At the other end, a male voice, obviously the skipper, announces: "Of course we're going. It would be even nicer if we weren't going!" When asked, he explains that the ferry is within calling distance, right next to the jetty, hidden behind an old section of dyke that has long since fallen into disuse. "They're eagerly awaiting you here," Michel replies and, prompted by the captain's words, immediately falls into his native Rhenish singsong. A pure sense of home - the Lower Rhine is his home, despite having lived in Münster for many years.

The conversation breaks off, still 30 minutes until the scheduled start of the ferry service. But, oh wonder, a diesel engine starts to chug, the ferry appears, rounds the dyke remnant, docks, the skipper throws the rope around the polder. The cyclists push onto the ferry, the skipper collects the money and, as is customary in the Rhineland, everyone talks to everyone else, or rather everyone talks to each other: "How unfortunate," states the boatman, while the skipper lets the diesel roar and the ferry picks up speed towards the western bank and a gap miraculously opens up in the shipping traffic, "you should have called immediately. We would have come straight away. We don't keep anyone waiting here!"

The ferry sways in the wake of the freighters. It docks on the Xanten side, the entrance leads right through the beer garden at the ferry house - a beer here on the way back, Michel thinks to itself. Helmet on, and thanks to speed level 6 on the e-bike, the Xanten Youth Hostel appears 10 minutes later. In the garden, under thick trees in the shade, the workshop participants sit in several circles. The colleague from Oberhausen is standing at a bar table at the beginning: "Hi Michel, that went faster than I thought.

Great. Your people are already sitting back there. Indeed, a circle of seats, 20 people in conversation, nobody seems like a moderator. This must be the group. Michel goes over, welcomes the group, moderates a round of introductions related to the work issue. Goals are agreed and the lively conversation starts again. The scent of summer, rustling leaves, visions of a good school in a beautiful setting. A beautiful destination for a beautiful business trip by bike!