

Press release

SMART MOBILITY? HYPOTHESES ON TRULY INTELLIGENT MOBILITY

Zurich, 13 July 2016 – The Swiss think tank W.I.R.E. goes in search of truly intelligent mobility in "TRANSFORMING TRANSPORT", the new issue of its ABSTRAKT book series. In addition to contributions from thought leaders and different thinkers such as Virgin founder Richard Branson, science fiction author Kim Stanley Robinson and Bjarke Ingels, architect of the new Google Campus, W.I.R.E. presents its own hypotheses and ideas about the future of transport.

We're being promised a great deal: mobility as we know it today will give way to a new, smart form of transport, characterised by clean drive technologies and self-driving cars that promise more efficiency, safety and time. Time, then, to make a close examination of the proclaimed revolution. Will mobility, from private vehicles to the global transport system, be redefined? Will the majority of drivers on our roads be robots in a few short years, as prophesied by Elon Musk? And if so: what will be the consequences of even more efficiency?

With "TRANSFORMING TRANSPORT", W.I.R.E. identifies the relevant developments in mobility and presents analyses and inspiration for the design of truly intelligent mobility:

1. Autonomous vehicles will redefine travel – but implementing them needs more than powerful software. It will take time for them to be accepted in society and for control to be relinquished. For these things to happen, innovation has to focus more strongly on the benefit to the individual and society as a whole. Ethical questions also have to be resolved before such cars are launched on the market.

2. Mobility will become an ecosystem – a complex infrastructure is required. A sustainable transport system will not depend on individual means of transport such as electric vehicles, but on the networking of different forms of mobility. The focus of mobility will shift from the product to the service. This will open up opportunities to play a pioneering role internationally, alongside Silicon Valley, for countries like Germany or Switzerland which have a strong infrastructure.

3. Public transport will go beyond its function as mass transit – and become the glue that holds society together. Self-driving cars will compete with public transport. Although passengers will travel in more comfort, there will be a massive drop-off in communication with strangers. As a response to social fragmentation, bringing people together will once more become a central role – and a differentiating feature – of public transport.

4. Vehicles' value added will lie in their individuality – status will still feature in the future of mobility. As mobility has become more democratic, means of transport – particularly cars – have converged to the point where one is indistinguishable from another. However, the need for status, as reflected in the choice of brand, will continue to feature in the mobility market of the future. Because cars' internal workings have become largely indistinguishable thanks to algorithms and electric motors, a distinctive appearance will become important again. With the possibilities of 3D printing, new levels of individualisation will open up in design or even driving style.

5. Immobility will become the real luxury – traffic planning will have to be networked with urban and rural development. The popular visions of smart mobility will not see us departing from the 20th century culture that opened up our world through more and more mobility. As a counter-trend to this added mobility, the longing for a slow-down is already evident today. And in future, immobility will become the real luxury. Virtual communication will take the place of some of our physical travel. Nevertheless, there is no way around linking up urban and rural development planning with traffic planning, using flexible work models and reinforcing the new values.

W.I.R.E. think tank

W.I.R.E. is a leading European interdisciplinary think tank that has engaged with global developments in business, science and society for around ten years now. The focus of the Swiss think tank is to recognise new trends early and translate them into strategies and fields of action for companies and public institutions.

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