

"The last driver license holder ..."

*Statement from DI. Dr. Mario Herger
on the basis of the given, concrete questions for the event
"In Focus: The Ethical Challenges of Automated Driving"*

Every year between 300 and 400 people die in traffic accidents in Austria, 40,000 are injured. The Austrians own more than four million vehicles, an average of just 38 minutes a day, the rest of the time they just stand around occupying valuable space in cities.

At the same time, the number of young people who obtain a driving licence is declining and, in view of traffic congestion, the joy of driving is a myth that can no longer be sustained.

In Silicon Valley - the Californian region between San Francisco and San Jose with 3.5 million people 80 kilometers away - today more than 60 companies have permission to operate autonomous cars on all public roads in California. And these companies are very industrious. More than one thousand such vehicles are already in operation today, and as robotic taxis they even take passengers with them.

At the end of 2018, Google's sister company Waymo launched the world's first commercial robotic taxi service with several hundred vehicles in Phoenix, Arizona. The area covered covers 259 square kilometres, an area twice the size of Graz. Waymo's robotic taxi service will also start in San Francisco and Mountain View later this year. Today, Waymo cars drive 40,000 kilometers a day in autonomous mode, in the densest city traffic and in the rain. In the coming years Waymo plans to send 82,000 more robotic taxis onto the streets in the USA. For comparison: today, for example, New York has about 13,000 taxis, the entire USA about 240,000.

In other words: autonomous cars are already there, but they are not yet evenly distributed. The question is no longer whether, but how quickly they will be there. And so we are already challenged to understand what autonomous cars mean for cities, traffic, urban and rural planning and many other professions and economic sectors.

We have to consider how we in Austria and Germany, where the automotive industry is one of the most important economic sectors, have on the one hand suffered such a backlog and whether we will still be relevant in the future. This is indicated by the different approaches of the regulators. While the USA sees autonomous cars as an opportunity to drastically reduce the number of road deaths, we are first setting up an ethics committee and are pleased to discuss irrelevant ethical problems.

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Biographical data:



Mario Herger has lived in Silicon Valley since 2001 and was a software developer, development manager and innovation strategist at SAP for 15 years. Since 2013, he has been self-employed researching technology trends, writing books and advising companies on technology trends, innovation, Silicon Valley Mindset and Foresight Mindset.