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Press release

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Revolution in Urban Airspace?

Joint press release of TU Berlin and Wissenschaft im Dialog TU Berlin and Wissenschaft im Dialog (WiD) publish 12 recommendations regarding the integration of delivery drones and air taxis into traffic in German cities

Over the past two years, the Sky Limits joint research project run by Technische Universität Berlin and Wissenschaft im Dialog addressed the opportunities, challenges and risks associated with the possible use of delivery drones and air taxis in cities. As a conclusion to the project, TU Berlin and WiD are publishing 12 recommendations concerning the possible use of urban airspace as a "third traffic level." Findings based on literature reviews, extensive public surveys and participatory initiatives form the scientific basis for the recommendations.

The Sky Limits recommendations are intended to spark a public debate regarding the use of lower airspace as a new traffic level, and cover a wide range of areas including developing an air traffic management system prior to the introduction of drones on the basis of proactive policies, raising awareness among municipalities for the possible introduction of delivery drones and air taxis and strengthening their capacities to organize such developments, as well as the need to recognize current public opposition to deliveries of consumer goods using drones. The recommendations are aimed at politicians, business, and urban and transport planners.

"At the moment, the debate concerning the possible use of drones is primarily driven by the commercial sector. At the same time, there is a lack of scientific confirmation of the added values that manufacturers promise the population as a result of using this technology. Consequently, different perspectives and competing views need to be included in the debate," says Dr. Robin Kellermann, project coordinator of Sky Limits at TU Berlin's Chair of Work, Technology and Participation. In their recommendations, the team calls for the public to be more closely involved in future discussions as it is ultimately they who will be directly affected by the introduction of delivery drones and air taxis.
"This is primarily the responsibility of political decision-makers. They now need to involve the public and local communities in discussions about the use of delivery drones and air taxis. One option for this would be citizen councils," says Nico Dannenberger, project leader of Sky Limits at Wissenschaft im Dialog. According to another recommendation, social, economic and ecological consequences should be monitored on an ongoing basis. There also need to be clear and binding decisions regarding which rules and regulations would apply for the use of urban airspace as a new traffic level.

Sky Limits also examined the level of public support for the introduction of transport drones. One representative public survey conducted in 2020 reveals that the majority of people living in Germany fundamentally reject the use of delivery drones (55 percent) and air taxis (62 percent). The majority can only imagine their use in emergencies, such as to deliver medicine (63 percent) and to transport the sick (65 percent). As a result, the Sky Limits team recommends that future developments take account of the wishes expressed by society and restrict the use of transport drones to medical emergencies.

Sky Limits is a two-year joint project of WiD and TU Berlin funded as part of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research's Innovation and Technology Analysis (ITA). Throughout 2019 and 2020, the project systematically identified

and examined the opportunities and challenges presented by transport drones at the interface between technology assessment, futurology and social-scientific mobility research.

Download the recommendations: https://skylimits.info/delivery-drones-and-air-taxis-in-cities-twelve-research-based-recommendations-for-handling-future-traffic-in-lower-airspace/

Further information about the Sky Limits project available at www.skylimits.info

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