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INTERVIEW

"To be unique in the automotive industry, it's no longer about horsepower and so on. You have to find something else."

***Automotive IQ* interviewed Dr. Irene Kamp, researcher at TU Delft about her experiences involving end users in automotive interior design.**

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What is your background and how did you get interested in automotive seating?

Irene Kamp: I studied industrial design at the Technical University of Delft. I've always been interested in human side of product design, also human factors, and ergonomics. After graduating I started as a freelancer and I designed my own research. Then I had the opportunity to do a PhD study in automotive interiors so I went to BMW in Munich and there I completed my PhD and that's how I got into seat innovations.

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You're doing post-doctoral research?

I.K.: Yes, now I'm doing post-doctoral studies.

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What do you foresee as the car or user experience of the future?

I.K.: It depends on several different trends. I think one of the things is of course autonomous driving and whether that will be fully autonomous or partly, or first partly and then fully, I'm not sure yet. But, of course, with autonomous vehicles, the driver himself or herself will not have to do any dedicated tasks so they can do what passengers do now. Maybe it will be more like a working environment or leisure environment or for relaxation purposes. There are a lot of possibilities when you don't have to drive yourself.

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The driver becoming a passenger. What challenges would hinder the realization of that future?

I.K.: Of course, the acceptance of the user. When I worked at BMW, 'the joy of driving' was their slogan, but with autonomous driving this slogan probably needs to be redefined. It changes a lot. To be unique in the automotive industry, it's no longer about horsepower and so on. You have to find something else. I think the acceptance by the passengers and the driver himself but also for the care manufacturers and, of course, regulations. That's also important and infrastructure, you have to accommodate traffic lights for autonomous driving and so on. There are a lot of challenges.

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And vehicle to vehicle as well?

I.K.: Yes, exactly. There are still many developments that look at the people, but if drivers do not accept them then it's difficult to sell them.

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In your view how can end users effectively participate in co-creation activities to design the seat or any other product of the future?

I.K.: I think you have several options for that and there are many possibilities. I don't think you can really ask the users what they want because then they just say a faster car or more luggage space or if you ask them, "do you want to have a massage in your car," they say, "yes, why not?" So that's not the way to go. I think that you can involve them in the very early stages of the process and really look at the needs and maybe also dreams of the user and you can do that by observations or creative sessions together with the user. There are lots of techniques for that and then, of course, in the end, it's interesting to see how they look at your innovations once you've translated their issues and their dreams into a real product. Then you should check with them if you did a good job or not.

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Some sort of constant feedback loop?

I.K.: Yes, I think that's the most efficient and, I think, best way to involve users in your process.

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Thank you very much for the interview.

I.K.: My pleasure, thank you.