

Press release

Student Project House opens

The future of learning

Zurich, 25 October 2021

Following the pilot project at the Hönggerberg campus, ETH Zurich is opening a Student Project House on its Zentrum campus. Students can now make their ideas a reality, in the heart of Zurich, and away from the pressure of grades. At their disposal are 1,200 square metres of renovated space, distributed across five floors.

A smart white cane, replacing an instruction booklet with augmented reality (AR) glasses and a self-sustaining house run via blockchain: this and many other ideas have already been realised by students in the recently opened Student Project House next to the ETH main building. “We want to encourage students to try new things, to initiate and engage in projects that explicitly don’t form part of their studies, and, if they fail, to learn from their experiences” explains ETH Rector and patron of the initiative Professor Sarah Springman. Over 2500 students have been supported and challenged since the launch of the pilot project at the Hönggerberg campus in 2016.

Skills beyond a degree

Students and doctoral candidates at ETH Zurich can turn their ideas into reality at a five-storey building on the Zentrum campus, without the pressure of having to obtain credits. “We are convinced that the knowledge gained as part of academic studies, combined with the freedom to experiment, can lead to great innovations,” says Sarah Springman. The aim of the Student Project House is to give students the opportunity to extend their skills’ base beyond their specific degree programme. For instance, they can learn how to develop unconventional ideas, critique concepts and collaborate in interdisciplinary teams.

To this end, several workshop areas are available, which, thanks to their modular structure, can be adapted to individual requirements. Various lounges, a communal kitchen and a roof terrace encourage creative exchange and networking between the students. In addition to numerous co-working spaces, they can also use the workshop on the ground floor to implement their ideas. “With its 24 3D printers, four laser cutters and many other tools, the Student Project House provides the perfect infrastructure for building prototypes. We are also motivating students to step outside their comfort zone

and speak to potential users. This is the only way to adapt the idea to the user's needs and is the key to success," says Dr Lucie Rejman, Director of the Student Project House.

The student space, which extends over 1,200 square metres, has been created in the former district heating power plant on Clausiusstrasse. The building dates from the 1930s and is a nationally significant listed building, which ETH Zurich is responsible for preserving and maintaining. The renovation of the building complex, which includes the neighbouring machinery laboratory, will cost around CHF 120 million and is expected to be completed in 2025. "The opening of the Student Project House is an important initial step in the renovation. By dismantling the power plant, we have been able to create extra space for our students on the Zentrum campus," says Ulrich Weidmann, Vice President for Infrastructure at ETH Zurich. The building combines traditional ETH pioneering spirit with the creative atmosphere of a start-up.

When ideas become enterprise

However, the Student Project House is much more than just a building: ETH Zurich is supporting its students in a variety of ways, including benefitting from a range of coaching opportunities and workshops. H el ene Iven and Sonia Meller regularly take advantage of these. The pair met during an "Un-box your idea" programme two years ago in the pilot project space for the Student Project House on the H onggerberg campus. Sonia Meller, who was a doctoral student at the time, presented her idea for a device that could analyse soil health automatically. Master's student H el ene Iven was so enthused by the idea that the two have been working together on it ever since. Their project, "DigitSoil", has already received [Pioneer Fellowship funding](#) of CHF 150,000, and they are hoping to found a spin off in January 2022.

"Our goal is to educate and stimulate skilled, internationally sought-after, independent thinkers and makers, by offering a study environment that goes beyond traditional learning," says ETH Rector Sarah Springman. "I am convinced that the new Student Project House is the future of learning."

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Further information

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