

Annual report 2023





hTri C215
Startup Lounge



**USI
Startup
Centre**



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Foreword

Supporting dynamic and fast-growing early-stage startup ventures is a fine balance between a structured approach and flexibility. In 2023, we consolidated our incubation programme offering to enhance the support we provide to science-driven projects originating from the local academic environment while also developing targeted support in the Life Science vertical following an increase in the number of projects in the Biotech and Medtech sectors. Tiziana Rosa joined our team in January 2024 as a Life Sciences Coach and Project Manager to provide tailored support to startups in this vertical. We are also witnessing a

growing number of projects involving artificial intelligence and solutions with strong environmental and sustainability components. In this context, close collaboration with faculties and research institutes is essential to foster the transition from labs and classrooms to the market and will remain key in our activities. Outside academia, we actively cultivate relationships within the broader ecosystem. Through dedicated investor events and collaborations, such as our recent framework partnership agreement with the Ticino Chamber of Commerce, we aim to expand our network and forge alliances that are instrumental in fueling innovation and propelling startup ventures towards success. This report summarises our activities and introduces the 15 incubated startup projects we supported in 2023.

From left to right:

Francesco Meli
Centre Management and
Coach

Anastasia Bedova
Community and
Communication Manager
and Coach

Francesco Lurati
Director of USI Startup
Centre

Samuele Morales
Incubator Coordinator

Umberto Bondi
Senior Coach

Tiziana Rosa
Life Sciences Coach
and Project Manager



In brief

2023 was an eventful year for us at the USI Startup Centre, we focused on strengthening our incubation programme offering, enhancing partnerships and expanding the community. All of this while supporting some incredibly talented and inspiring early-stage startup founders building promising solutions and leveraging pioneering technologies.

**Point of contact
for innovative ideas**

Universities are one of the main drivers of innovation. New entrepreneurial ideas are born in research labs, during courses or through informal exchanges in front of a coffee machine, and then shaped into potential business ventures through different phases of development. Our role as the USI Startup Centre is to equip founders with the necessary tools and knowledge at the beginning of their entrepreneurial journey to prepare them to deal with current and future challenges and increase their chances of success.

Students, researchers, professors and alumni from both USI and SUPSI can get in touch with us and receive specific support depending on the founders' profile, the sector and type of project, the stage of development and current needs. Whether it is only an idea, promising research findings or group work done in class that has some business potential, the USI Startup Centre team can assist members of the academic community with feedback, insights and recommendations through our "Desk" service, or with a full package of different support measures available through our incubation programme aimed at early-stage science-driven startup projects.

In 2023, we conducted 80 one-hour informal Desk meetings with 67 different users to help with a number of questions, from initial idea validation to navigating different support programmes available at regional, national and international levels or identifying relevant stakeholders to contact. The availability of such sessions that are easy to book and require no commitment from the participants provides an entry point for potential further interactions. Furthermore, it allows us to identify promising projects at a very early stage and provide better support to the founders.

**Desk
requests by**

origin

69% USI

- 9% SUPSI
- 3% Other Swiss Universities
- 4% Foreign Universities
- 15% Other

gender

25% Female

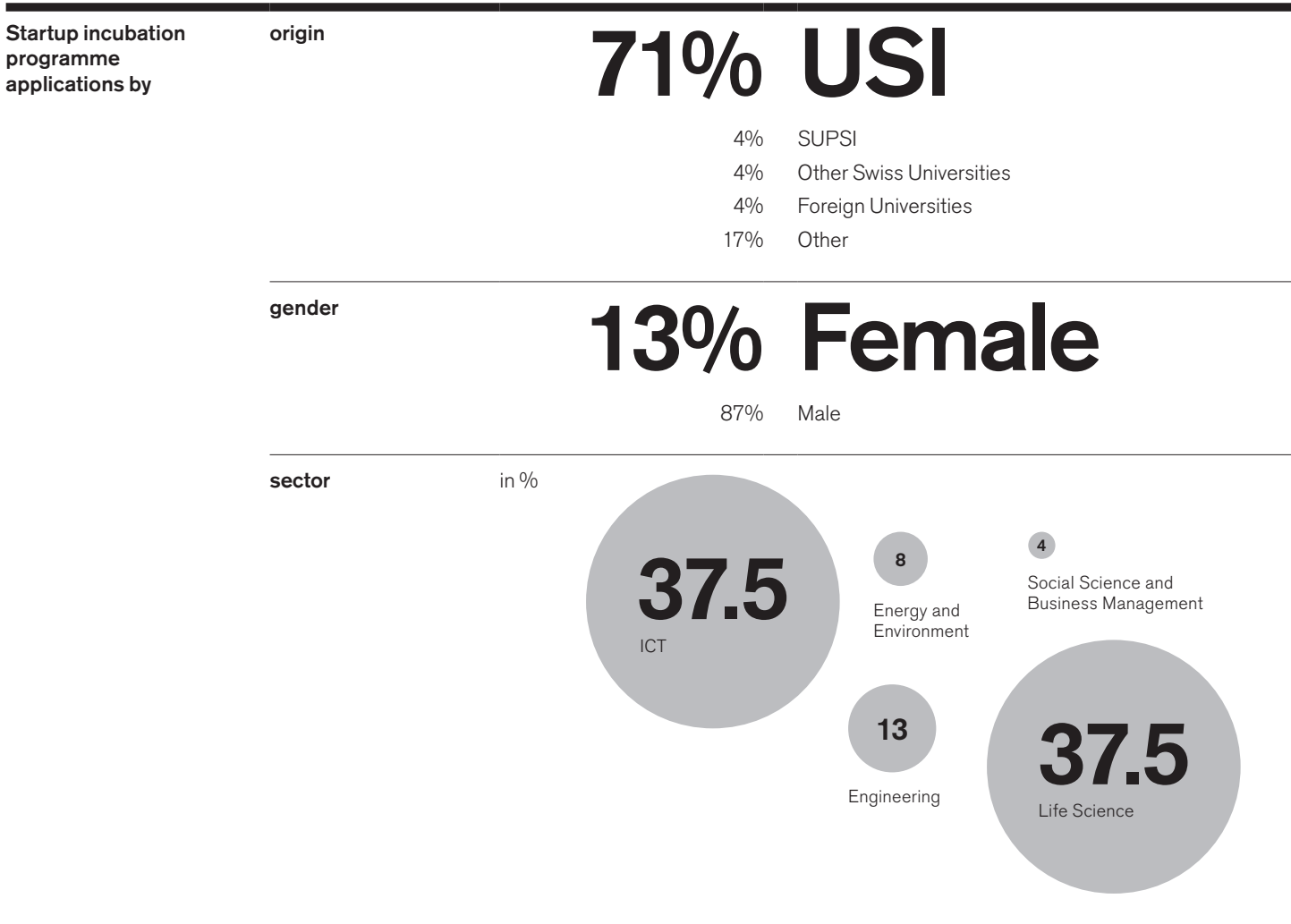
75% Male

Targeted support for startups at different development stages

While feedback provided as part of our “Desk” service is usually spot-on and covers the initial phases of idea development to help get an overview of different aspects to be taken into consideration, the incubation programme is designed for teams who have already created a Proof of Concept (PoC) and conducted initial market and competition analyses. It comprises a combination of different support measures to be provided over a period of time, where the appointed coaches follow the project’s development and tailor the programme based on the specific needs of the startup.

In 2023, 24 early-stage startups, mostly from the ICT and Life Science sectors, submitted their applications to the incubation programme, 13 of which were accepted following the initial assessment and the team interview. During pre-incubation the focus is on validating initial technical and business assumptions, identifying a viable business model and collecting customer insights, while in incubation the crucial aspects are market validation and fundraising.

All startup teams accepted into the incubation programme receive significant in-kind support to boost project development. To tackle different startup needs, we combine thematic training, strategic coaching delivered by the USI Startup Centre team, and targeted support from a network of expert external advisors. Furthermore, startup teams have access to our facilities at the East Campus in Lugano-Viganello, including offices, meeting rooms, coworking areas and event space. In addition, being part of a close innovation and startup community facilitates exchange with fellow founders and peer learning, crucial in this dynamic environment.



This recurring event is designed to introduce the innovative startup projects that enter into the incubation phase at the USI Startup Centre to the broader community on and off campus. Creating awareness about the products and services being developed by the incubated startups fosters fruitful exchanges and creates fertile ground for collaborations.

Participating startups pitch their project in front of the audience, sharing their current achievements and next objectives and answering questions from the audience in the room. This interactive format encourages discussion and provides an opportunity for presenting startups to gather valuable feedback and make connections that can lead to potential future joint activities, such as research collaborations, partnerships and Field Projects, that can be further explored during their time in incubation.

Members of the the USI Startup Centre Scientific Board representing different USI faculties as well as the Technology Transfer Manager also attend Incubation Kick-off Pitch events and may act as a bridge between the academic community and the startups providing input on potential synergies and collaborations.

Supported startup projects

Incubated startups are often juggling multiple priorities, pushing forward product development, talking to potential customers and investors, participating in competitions and applying for grants. In 2023 they achieved important results, carving their path through setbacks and challenges.

Overview of incubated startups' results

15¹ startup projects were incubated at the USI Startup Centre in 2023. Almost half of them (47%) represented the Life Science sector with projects in Medtech, Biotech and Digital Health, while 20% were from the ICT field. The rest of the projects were split between three different sectors: "Engineering" (13%), "Social Science and Business Management" (13%) and "Energy and Environment" (7%). Some of these projects are already heading towards the end of their incubation period while eight startup projects entered the programme in 2023 and are in their first year.

Based on the information reported by founders through our annual internal survey, eight incubated startups raised in total to CHF 1.3M in funding from third parties in both equity and debt, while an additional CHF 355K was committed through personal investments by founders. Most of the incubated projects are not yet generating any consistent revenues, which is common for early-stage startups. However, the startup teams actively participated in different competitions and support programmes gathering over CHF 400K in the form of cash prizes, grants or vouchers that can be used for coaching and/or professional services. This includes, for example, Innosuisse coaching and mentoring, Venture Kick, Boldbrain Startup Challenge, etc. Additionally, two

startups are involved in research projects with different universities and universities of applied sciences for a total amount of over CHF 1.3M.

Following a two-year incubation period, the startup projects become USI Startup Centre alumni and continue their path independently. However, they remain part of our wider community, participating in events and activities and sharing their knowledge with other founders. In 20 years of activity, we have supported over 100 different entrepreneurial projects. Their type, scope and profile evolved over time, together with the innovation ecosystem and the USI Startup Centre's focus transition from a generic to a science-driven perspective. 2023 marked the end of this transition, which was also reflected in the number of incubated startups compared to previous years. The updated selection and coaching processes were applied to all new projects admitted into incubation, while targeted community initiatives contributed to building a solid pipeline of potential candidates that might enter the programme in 2024. Startups are known for being high-risk ventures and not all of them will ultimately succeed. From 94 projects that ended their incubation journey prior to 2023, 5% reached an exit, while 34% are still active and the remaining 61% are either closed or are in stand-by mode.

¹ Not all the startups that enter incubation terminate the programme. Those that leave due to the discontinuation of the project or because of other reasons are not considered in the analysis.

² Information is self-reported.

³ FTEs refer to the number of team members, including founders, employees, interns, etc.

⁴ Of which 21% are women

⁵ Of which 7 filed and 16 granted

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Annual turnover | 0.3M |
| Number of FTEs³ (full-time-equivalents) | 40.9⁴ |
| % of FTEs that receive some kind of remuneration | 56% |
| Number of patents | 23⁵ |
| Funding raised (including CHF 355K invested by founders) | CHF 1.6M |
| Cash prizes, grants, crowdfunding and other support | CHF 407K |
| Research and applied research projects with partners | CHF 1.3M |

Startup profiles

Within our incubation programme we support talented founders coming from different backgrounds in growing their startup ventures into scalable businesses. These solutions have the potential to make an impact in various sectors, from hospitality to construction and new treatments.



Aility

ICT

aility.ch

This startup founded by Christian Altrichter, Ioannis Athansiadis and Anthony Gruppung enables hoteliers to make sophisticated data-driven decisions based on people flow analytics through artificial intelligence. Their in-house trained model, along with their proprietary sensor, provides highly accurate people detection and people counting data, simplifying back-of-house operations, removing redundant procedures, and enhancing guests' experience to bring improved business results.

After gathering initial feedback from industry experts and potential clients, the Aility team is currently testing their solution in an operational environment. With initial funding raised, they aim to accelerate its product development and implement first pilot projects to prepare for the pre-seed round.

Christian, one of the three co-founders, completed his bachelor's degree at EHL Hospitality Business School in Lausanne and is currently finishing his MSc in Artificial Intelligence at USI. He enrolled in this master's program with the intention of launching a startup, and USI proved to be the ideal environment for his science-driven entrepreneurial aspirations.



Christian Altrichter



Ioannis Athansiadis



Anthony Gruppung



Arcadia

Engineering

xegate.eu/ARCADIA

Arcadia is developing a process for recycling construction waste that currently stays in landfills by using non-pathogenic bacteria, harmless to humans and the environment. Waste is crushed and placed in moulds, where subsequently bacteria and nutrients are added, and after a few weeks, the new biomaterial block is ready. Arcadia bacteria produce a natural binder made of calcium carbonate (the same material as corals and seashells) that keeps crushed particles together.

After completing the initial feasibility studies and talking to potential customers and partners who showed interest in the product, the team identified some critical elements that led to a significant change in strategy. Concomitantly one of the co-founders had to leave the project due to personal circumstances. This led the CEO, Luca Colzani, to reshape the project and look for another co-founder.

At the moment, Arcadia is back in the lab, with R&D efforts focused on testing a different kind of binder. Furthermore, the startup is looking to bring on board an expert in the construction industry to complete the team.



Luca Colzani



Elysium Lab

ICT

www.elysiumlab.io

The founder and CEO of Elysium Lab Aron Clementi and the co-founder and CTO Gianmarco Guazzo have been active in the crypto and blockchain space for a long time and noticed that complex onboarding processes and keys management can be a barrier for adoption both in terms of security and user experience.

With their solution, the Elysium team of experts, joined by Ilaria Stirpe as CMO, wants to contribute to accelerating the adoption of digital assets. Its Digital Wallet technology redefines the concept of Self-Custody and increases security ownership while ensuring a user-friendly experience.

Elysium is part of the Lugano Plan B network. Furthermore, in 2023, the team was selected by Tenity, one of the Top 25 FinTech acceleration programmes, to participate in its 11th batch and received the first investment. The Elysium Wallet will be first launched for the B2C market, but the team is already thinking of additional products aimed at B2B clients.

Aron Clementi

Gianmarco Guazzo





Foldcast

Engineering

www.linkedin.com/company/foldcast

Concrete is by far the most widely-used building material and responsible for 8% of global CO₂ emissions. Combined with the constantly growing size of the global building floor area, it creates pressure for finding and adopting new approaches in construction. Foldcast's solution includes modular software and digital machines for the design and cutting of paper cut-outs that are then assembled into a mould allowing to optimise the use of concrete in structural elements while enabling unique architectural designs.

The concept of using paper as material for moulds that is behind Foldcast's patented solution stems from research conducted by Prof. Ena Lloret Fritschi and PhD candidate Fabio Amicarelli from Accademia di architettura at USI. Andrea Realini subsequently joined the team bringing on board real estate sector expertise.

After winning both the first prize and the audience award at the Boldbrain Startup Challenge in 2023, Foldcast continues to build momentum and is working on implementing its first pilot project.



Fabio Amicarelli



Ena Lloret Fritschi



Andrea Realini



Finar Module

Energy and Environment

www.finarmodule.com

Power Electronic devices commonly used in applications such as power conversion, train traction control, battery chargers and electric motor drives are made of layers of materials with significantly different thermal expansion coefficients that make them fragile and subject to deformations when subjected to high-intensity and time-varying currents.

Finar Module tackles this problem through its proprietary patented technology for developing metal interfaces that join layers in an extremely reliable way using common materials (e.g. copper or aluminium). These interfaces ensure excellent electrical mechanical contacts and thermal conduction between surfaces with very different thermal expansion and allow to reduce the cost of individual devices by 30%. This could pave the way for a new generation of more affordable and reliable devices, potentially disrupting the current market.

The startup was founded by Daniele Finarelli, who has a deep understanding of solid-state physics, and William Gould, who brings on board extensive managerial experience, who are now working on a long-term collaboration with the Department of Innovative Technologies at SUPSI to further strengthen their R&D efforts.



Daniele Finarelli



William Gould



Go Healthy & Co

Life Science

gohealthyandco.com

The story of Go Healthy started from the personal experience of one of the co-founders, Joy Bordini, who went through psychotherapy as a patient and realised that mental health professionals were heavily relying on paper-based processes and patients often dropped out due to high costs and long treatment times.

To tackle this problem, Joy and her team designed a digital toolbox for mental health professionals comprising a patient mobile app synced with a dashboard. The app collects patient behavioural data to facilitate faster and more precise diagnoses and identify the most effective therapy. Furthermore, the Go Healthy solution helps personalise treatment based on the patient response analyses.

To design their MVP, the team conducted extensive market research, interviewing therapists and gathering feedback from patients. Furthermore, they ran a randomised non-clinical study with over 500 participants to understand the impact of the Go Healthy solution on patient engagement and received an Innovation cheque from Innosuisse for a preliminary study on its content profiling and recommendation model with the Dalle Molle Institute for Artificial Intelligence USI-SUPSI (IDSIA).

Joy
Bordini

Gianluca
Esposito



Healiva

Life Science

www.healiva.com

There is a major gap in the current wound treatment paradigm and around 70% of chronic wounds remain unhealed. Healiva builds on the assumption that every wound is unique, and their goal is to deliver personalised and optimised therapy for different patient needs. To provide end-to-end treatment, the startup is currently developing four different products, including cell therapies and medical devices.

The initial idea came to the CEO Priyanka Dutta Passecker, a seasoned professional with 15+ years of experience in the biopharma industry, while working on an enzyme coming from fish waste that can clean dead tissues in the wound. After collecting feedback from key opinion leaders, patients and doctors, the team realised that there were several pain points on the wound patient journey requiring a complex approach and this opened the door to Healiva's founding in 2020.

Healiva targets B2B customers such as clinics and hospitals and aims for these therapies to be fully reimbursed by health insurance. In 2023 the company worked on advancing its first product, skin replacement therapy, through the last development stage and is expected to launch it in the Swiss market in 2024.



Priyanka
Dutta-Passecker



Valerio M.
Ferrari



Paolo
Magri



Heima

Social Science and Business Management

ourheima.com

Heima, founded by Marco Antonio Caporale and Mark Tosi, offers to landowners, companies and public institutions a comprehensive hospitality solution allowing them to offer travellers a unique outdoor living experience while preserving pristine locations. The startup focuses on developing eco-resorts, from concept design to property management.

The project stemmed from the hospitality industry background of the founders. They recognised a need for a different approach both in resort construction and guest experience that would allow experiential stays in nature. Through Heima they aim to enable travellers to access remote places in a sustainable way, combining conservation and development.

Currently the Heima team is working on the launch of the first pilot projects both locally and internationally, talking to potential clients in 6 different countries. In addition, they are finalising an R&D project on modular hotel cabins with a minimised ecological footprint with BFH Berner Fachhochschule Architektur, Holz und Bau that received funding through Innosuisse.



Marco Antonio
Caporale



Paolo
Danesi



Mark
Tosi



InCatalyst

ICT

www.in-catalyst.com

The InCatalyst team is building software that helps companies produce and manage their intellectual property (IP) in a simpler and more cost-efficient manner. The solution is targeted at small and medium enterprises with a portfolio of up to ten patents. The research conducted by the team shows that these companies lack time and resources when it comes to patenting their inventions. The startup vision is to provide a solution for companies to lower their IP costs and to completely outsource their IP management, from patent drafting to handling recurring fees.

With its privately hosted Large Language Model (LLM), InCatalyst's software iteratively asks users questions about their inventions to draft patents and ensure a high level of patent detail. At the same time, the system compares the user's draft to the existing patents through integrations with international databases counting over 100 million files, to check for any overlaps with any previous patent.

The project is developed by three co-founders with complementary backgrounds, Adam Novak, Konstantin Andreev and Yaroslav Petrov, who are supported by experienced patent lawyers as advisors. In 2023, they participated in the 11th batch of Tenity acceleration programmes receiving their first investment through it.



Konstantin
Andreev



Adam
Novak



Yaroslav
Petrov



InkVivo Technologies

Life Science

inkvivo.tech

InkVivo provides an advanced polymer platform for formulating drug delivery systems, which ensure temporal controlled and localised release of bioactive compounds. Moreover, it enables the combination of several active ingredients into a single solution. This technology has been used to design delivery systems for oral, injectable, and implantable administration. In vitro and in vivo results demonstrated safety and controlled pharmacokinetics compared to marketed products. InkVivo offers pharmaceutical and nutraceutical companies effective solutions to reformulate and extend the lifecycle of existing molecules.

InkVivo's go-to-market strategy starts with nutraceuticals for micronutrient deficiency, which allows to quickly validate the technology in humans. Pharmaceutical products focusing on cancer therapy and diabetes are in the pipeline.

The project started in mid-2021 and won the first prize at the Boldbrain Startup Challenge the same year. In 2023 the company was incorporated in Lugano and received the ETH spin-off label. The team led by Elia Guzzi also started conversations with several potential customers and expanded its Advisory Board with industry experts and experienced entrepreneurs in the Biotech sector.



Stefano
Cerutti



Elia
Guzzi



Jobelink

Social Science and Business Management

www.jobelink.com

Thousands of people are looking for specialised service providers every day while at the same time many professionals struggle to gain visibility and reach potential customers. Jobelink developed an online platform which is also available as an app that facilitates research, comparison and communication between clients and professionals.

Around 40% of small and medium-sized enterprises don't have an online presence, which makes it harder for them to find new clients. The Jobelink profile for service providers is not a simple listing; it functions as a dedicated business website at no additional cost. The registration process is very straightforward, and in a few minutes, any professional can join the platform and access a pool of potential customers for their businesses.

The CEO Brian Wullimann and his team focused on creating a customer-orientated solution that tackles major challenges that users experience with other platforms and on building strong connections with trade associations and other partners. They plan to officially launch the service in Switzerland in 2024 and then expand to other countries in Europe.



Franco
De Lucibidus



Daniele
Pierini



Brian
Wullimann



Lighthouse Tech

Life Science

www.lighthouse.tech

Lighthouse Tech has developed a smart eyewear frame designed to help blind and visually impaired individuals navigate safely and independently. While white canes are effective at detecting ground-level obstacles, they do not safeguard users from collisions above the waist. Existing alternatives are often bulky, heavy, and unsightly adding extra burden to the wearer.

Lighthouse Tech's solution provides upper-body protection without compromising comfort, style, or aesthetics. A miniaturised sensor that is constantly scanning the surrounding environment is embedded in stylish glasses, with a unique modular and patented click-in system that alerts the user of any hazards through a soft haptic vibration. Lighthouse helps avoid the social stigma often associated with medical devices.

The first version of this innovative product was tested and validated by over 100 end users and showcased at major international trade fairs, including CES in Las Vegas. Spearheaded by Franco Burlando, who brings decades of experience in the optical and eyewear industry, the startup has garnered significant interest from potential customers and received several awards and recognitions in anticipation of the market launch planned in late 2024.



Franco Burlando



Nathan Deutsch



Andrea Moroni Stampa



MicThera

Life Science

www.linkedin.com/company/micthera

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men and a major cause of cancer mortality worldwide. Although patients initially respond well to available therapy, resistance emerges in 10% of all diagnosed cases. Therefore, identifying novel therapeutic strategies that prevent resistance remains an urgent medical need.

MicThera is developing microbiome-derived therapeutics based on preliminary evidence suggesting that commensal bacteria from cancer patients produce anticancer molecules that could be used to treat the disease. The project is a spin-off of the USI-affiliated Institute of Oncology Research (IOR) and derives from research on the influence of microbiota on the effectiveness of androgen deprivation, one of the most widely used therapies to treat prostate cancer.

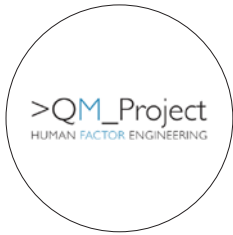
In 2022, the project won the first prize at the Boldbrain Startup Challenge, and the company was incorporated in 2023 in Bellinzona. Currently the team led by Nicolò Pernigoni focuses on proving compound efficacy in vivo and identifying the therapeutic lead to bring forward in the preclinical development process.



Andrea Alimonti



Nicolò Pernigoni



QM Project | Human Factor engineering

Life Science

www.qmproject.ch

QM Project uses artificial intelligence prediction models to analyse the correlation between environmental factors and human reactions in extreme situations in real-time and recommend appropriate actions. Their proprietary platform serves various purposes, including training, safety, and medical research, and integrates a wide range of different sensors and wearable devices.

Currently, the QM Project team is engaged in a 2-year research project with a partner in the Netherlands to further develop its platform. The main focus is on integrating real-time biosensor data with environmental monitoring to contextualize performance under pressure and psychophysical reaction in critical situations.

With the first version of the platform, this startup founded by Matteo Bigogno and Mario Arrigoni Neri is targeting defence, extreme sports and pharmaceutical sectors, as well as university research labs. Possible applications include monitoring the effectiveness of therapy for neuropsychiatric disorders or performance optimisation in critical training.



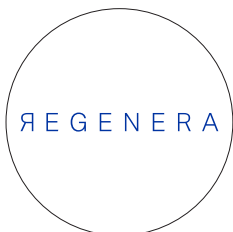
Matteo Bigogno



Andrea di Castri



Mario Arrigoni Neri



Regenera

Life Science

regenera.at

Spinal cord injuries, mostly of traumatic origin, currently impact around 250'000 new patients yearly worldwide, leaving them with permanent neurological impairments. The existing therapies only target single components of this multi-factorial complex pathology.

Regenera aims to tackle this unmet clinical need by developing a combined approach for acute spinal cord injury repair. The technology is based on a proprietary biomaterial, named SponoSave®, which hosts autologous stem cells from the patient and allows to counteract the cascade of events that follows the cord lesion. The European Medicines Agency's Committee for Advanced Therapies has classified SpinoSave® as an Advanced Therapy Medicinal Product under the subclassification of Tissue Engineered Product.

The startup, founded in 2022, stems from over a decade of academic research and is led by Prof. Giuseppe Perale who has previous entrepreneurial experience and is supported by a strong team. In the first two years, Regenera closed the seed investment round, won several research grants and received a "Seal of Excellence" from the European Commission presented as part of the European Innovation Council Accelerator Program.



Giuseppe Perale
Michael Raghunath
Heinz Redl
Filippo Rossi
Pietro Veglianesi



Community engagement

We focus on involving a wide range of stakeholders in our activities, including the academic community, experts, investors and industry partners, to enable fruitful exchanges and create a fertile ground for innovative ideas to transform into successful entrepreneurial ventures.

A gateway to the innovation community

The USI Startup Centre is not only a place where aspiring founders can receive support in developing their startup projects but also the centre of gravity for the innovation community on campus. It is where aspiring and established entrepreneurs meet, broaden their networks, enhance their entrepreneurial skills and get inspired. Having a startup idea is not required, innovation enthusiasts can join other teams and gain invaluable experience while contributing to their growth.

Every year over 500 people participate in our events, and 2023 was no exception. Thanks to our event partners and speakers we were able to cover a wide range of topics, from building blockchain businesses to funding instruments and scaling up their product. Through different activities, we aim to promote the startup culture and spread knowledge about the specific dynamics that characterise this sector, such as a focus on scalability, equity funding provided by business angels and VC funds and a fast-paced environment.

One of our focus areas is to inform the academic community on how innovative ideas or research findings can be transformed into startup projects and provide information about support measures available for early-stage science-based entrepreneurial ventures. Together with our colleagues from the Research and Transfer Service and partners from the

ecosystem we hosted events and information sessions to present a number of funding instruments: BRIDGE, Innosuisse innovation projects and Venture Kick. This contributes to building awareness about entrepreneurship as a career path.

Another important area where we invest our energy is the engagement with the student community through dedicated initiatives, such as "Startup Week", participating in the "Long Night of Careers", partnerships with student associations and supporting student-led events. Through informal meetups, founder testimonials and workshops, it is easy to meet like-minded individuals, share ideas and get feedback, broaden the knowledge on certain topics or come across internship and job opportunities in young ventures.

Besides our own initiatives, together with SUPSI, we coordinate the implementation of modules 1 and 2 of the 'Innosuisse start-up training'⁶ in Ticino, including "Business Ideas" and "Business Apéro" events, "My First Pitch" competition and "Business Concept" entrepreneurship course designed to provide both theoretical and practical expertise for setting up and running a startup. This course becomes the springboard for some startup projects that apply to the USI Startup Centre incubation programme and/or successfully participate in other competitions and awards after completing it.

⁶ www.entrepreneurship-training.ch/about-us



Promising startup projects are often born in the labs, so one of our focus areas is the transition from research to startup. To introduce researchers to entrepreneurship, we designed dedicated hands-on half-day sessions where experts, investors, and startup founders explain the key steps of launching a startup in the academic environment and share practical tips.

In 2023, in collaboration with the Research and Transfer Service, we held the first workshop focused on the Life Science sector at Bios+ in Bellinzona featuring a presentation of the BRIDGE programme and two roundtables with Venture Capital firms and startup founders. The “From research to startup” series will continue in other institutes and faculties with the objective of providing researchers with necessary background information, advice and actionable steps for launching a startup.

“The best entrepreneurs are the ones who can build a team with zero capital. If you are able to convince smart people that you have a great idea, it is a good sign that you will be able to convince investors as well. Convincing is a key element if you want to set up a company. It is one of the success predictors.”

Lorenzo Leoni
Managing partner at Ti-Ventures

2023

February

15



How to start a Blockchain Business

May

04



Business Ideas

22



Women in startups

30



From research to startup

June

12



Reverse Pitch

September

13



Venture Briefing Lugano

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Innosuisse - a funding instrument for research with companies

October

02–05



Startup week:

- Startup office visit
- Startups for Lunch
- Meet the USI Startup Centre community

04



Incubation Kick-Off Pitch #2

November

09



My First Pitch

28



Business Apéro: From MVP to full-scale product

December

14



USI Startup Centre Town Hall

Joining forces to enhance innovation and startup support

A strong ecosystem and active collaboration with a number of stakeholders and partners enhance our support to promising innovative ventures. In 2023, we worked to strengthen our existing relations as well as to build new ones, especially on the industry and investor fronts, for example, by signing a partnership agreement with the Ticino Chamber of Commerce (Cc-Ti)⁶ or through “Reverse Pitch”, a dedicated format to facilitate the engagement with investors for startups from our network. Furthermore, we actively participate in “USI Meets Industry” and innovation roundtables organised by the Pro-Rector for Innovation and Corporate Relations office.

We leverage our expertise and connection to academia to contribute to different initiatives implemented in the local innovation ecosystem, for example, during the Giornata cantonale delle startup, an annual gathering organised by the Department of Finance and Economics (DFE) in collaboration with the Agire Foundation.

We also collaborate in the organisation of Boldbrain Startup Challenge⁷, the Ticino-based accelerator program aimed at early-stage startups and innovative ideas. In the 2023 edition we registered a significant participation of projects originating from USI among

the 20 promising innovative ventures selected to participate in the three-month programme, with four out of five main prizes going to startups created by our students, researchers and professors. The winner and the audience award holder, Foldcast, is a spin-off of the Academy of Architecture of USI, that provides a solution that drastically reduces concrete usage in construction. Since late 2023, the startup has also been incubated at the USI Startup Centre.

The USI Startup Centre team regularly attends startup and innovation-related events in Switzerland to stay in touch with the wider ecosystem, build new connections and enhance existing ones as well as to exchange insights and expertise. In May 2023, Swissnex chose to come to Lugano for Swissnex Day, its annual event that gathers its global staff to engage with relevant Swiss stakeholders. This also presented an opportunity for the Università della Svizzera italiana to host a visit by the Swissnex delegation at the East Campus. This occasion provided a platform to introduce our activities and incubated startups to the key Swissnex leaders from numerous hubs around the world, spanning from Japan to the USA, thereby fostering opportunities for future exchanges.

⁶ www.cc-ti.ch

⁷ www.boldbrain.ch

From left to right:

Michele Merazzi
Deputy Director of Cc-Ti

Francesco Lurati
Director of USI Startup Centre

Luisa Lambertini
Rector of USI

Luca Albertoni
Director of Cc-Ti

Giovanni Zavaritt
Secretary General of USI

Luca Maria Gambardella
Pro-Rector for Innovation and Corporate Relations of USI



It is crucial for science-driven startups to establish connections with industry players to enhance their chances of success. Therefore, we are delighted that our longstanding collaborations with the Ticino Chamber of Commerce have evolved into a partnership that sets the stage for ongoing and future collaborative initiatives.

It opens a valuable opportunity for incubated startups to connect with local companies active in their sectors, gather insights or explore potential pilot projects to test their solutions prior to market entry. For companies, on the other hand, the connection with the startups present at the USI Startup Centre represents an opportunity to explore mutually beneficial collaborations that could be instrumental to their innovation processes.

“As the umbrella organisation of Ticino's economy, we believe that promoting entrepreneurial culture and fostering the creation of new businesses is crucial. We hope to see these startups grow and become established companies that contribute to the economic development of our region. This agreement represents an important milestone towards a cantonal innovation network”.

Luca Albertoni
Director of Cc-Ti

From classroom to startup

More and more students, especially at master's level, are selecting their study programmes with the explicit intention of developing their own startup ventures. Moreover, at USI, numerous courses encourage participants to generate and develop innovative entrepreneurial ideas. Through the USI Startup Centre, students can access additional support to advance their projects to the next stage of development.

Promoting entrepreneurial culture among students

There are a number of benefits that entrepreneurship-oriented students at USI can leverage during their studies, from access to a large talent pool with diverse backgrounds and skills to specific courses, for example, "Writing business plans", "Launching FinTech Ventures", "Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice", "Applied Social Entrepreneurship", "Social innovation" and "Entrepreneurial finance", and the possibility to apply what's learned directly on the startup and maybe even develop their master thesis around it. Moreover, other courses not directly focused on entrepreneurship often use existing or invented startup cases to address specific topics, which also creates an opportunity for students to get in touch with the concept of entrepreneurship.

Through collaboration and synergies with professors and faculties but also with student associations focused on entrepreneurship, USI Startup Centre aims to enhance these dynamics and support students

who would like to act on their ideas and create a positive impact on society. Regardless of whether the startup project is successful or not, students who work on their own venture acquire skills, knowledge and network that will be a valuable asset and experience for their future career, not only as entrepreneurs but also as employees.

Throughout 2023, members of the USI Startup Centre team were invited to several courses to introduce available programmes as well as other support initiatives to students and provided feedback on their entrepreneurial projects through dedicated sessions coordinated with the course directors. Some of the ideas developed in class are tackling pressing issues and have the potential to become viable businesses. Thus, if the teams behind them decide to take a leap and give a go ahead to the project, they can leverage the support from the USI Startup Centre to identify the next steps.

Prof. Laurent Frésard
Faculty of Economics,
Swiss Finance Institute
(SFI), Institute of Finance
(IFin) and member of the
USI Startup Centre
Scientific Board

“ I believe that it is very important to develop the entrepreneurial mindset of our students. Through various courses and activities, we empower students to take initiative, embrace change, think critically, and develop innovative solutions to real-world challenges. Developing these skills is essential not only to prepare students to start their own ventures but also to make them highly adaptable and resourceful employees, capable of driving growth and innovation in any organisation.”



USI
Startup
Centre

 A community
for innovation

- Foster an entrepreneurial culture
- Engage and serve the startup community
- Support early-stage startups

Exel Campus Lugano
www.startup.usi.ch

The banner is a vertical teal-colored sign with a large yellow arrow pointing to the right. It is positioned in a modern lounge area with wooden walls and large windows. The room contains several orange armchairs and small round tables. The floor is dark grey tile. The ceiling has white acoustic panels and recessed lighting. The windows offer a view of a cityscape with buildings and greenery.



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USI
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Annual
Report

2023

