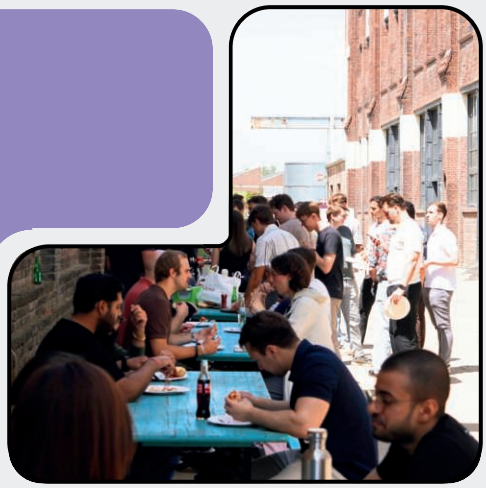




collective incubator report



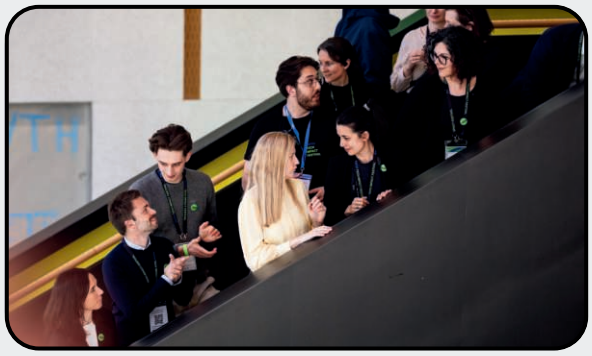
First Half of 2026
January – June

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Michael Riesener
about Aachen as deep tech hotspot “Made in Europe”
→ page 8

Dr.-Ing. Tim Reuscher
about artificial intelligence for more productive machines
→ page 16

Fabian Binz
about the mission to take urban logistics into the air
→ page 26

Anh Vu
about hydrogen racing and student team spirit
→ page 34





Photos on the cover by:
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Christian van’t Hoen
Heike Lachmann
Collective Incubator e.V.

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Dear community,

The first half of 2026 was characterised by new beginnings and exchange. In Aachen, students, researchers, founders and partners have forged ahead with curiosity and courage, turning initial ideas into concrete plans and gaining momentum with existing projects.

As the leadership team of the Collective Incubator, we are committed to creating a space where ideas can flourish. The following pages illustrate what this looks like: the reopened Maker Space, for example, turns concepts into tangible prototypes. Formats such as “Startups in Slices” and “Ideas & BBQ” help students to take their first steps towards founding a startup. The first RWTH Tech Impact Festival brought academia, industry and the startup scene into conversation with each other. It is not just individual key figures or programs that matter to us, but the encounters and inspiration that arise in everyday life.

Our goal is to continue strengthening Aachen as a region for innovation and entrepreneurship. We measure success by the quality of our collaboration – strong networks, visibility and an impact that extends beyond individual projects.

We would like to express our special thanks to the entire team for their dedication and drive in shaping the Collective Incubator, as well as to all our partners for their support. With this edition of the Collective Incubator Report, we aim to reach anyone passionate about entrepreneurship and forward-looking topics who wishes to learn more about the Collective Incubator’s work. We invite you to find inspiration in the following pages and continue to follow developments in Aachen.

With best regards,

Tarick Al-Masri, Yasmin Cilt, Wibke Mattay and Felix Mertins
Leadership Team of the Collective Incubator

Facts & Figures about the Collective Incubator

Between January and June 2026, the Collective Incubator was used by ...

761 new community members

69 new startups

24 new student initiatives

16 startups supported under the Ideation Program

11 startups supported under the Incubation Program

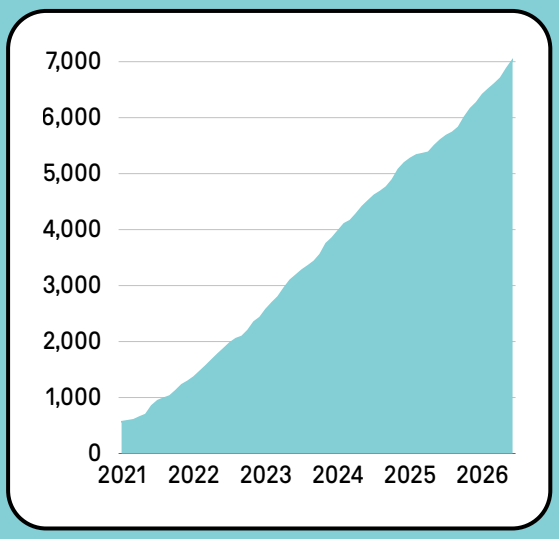
During this period, the Collective Incubator premises, spanning over 4,000 m², hosted ...

15 public events

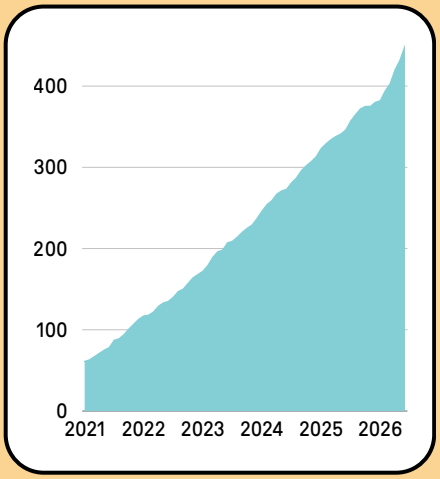
5,726 hours of room bookings in the 8 event and meeting rooms

Since records began, the Collective Incubator has been used by ...

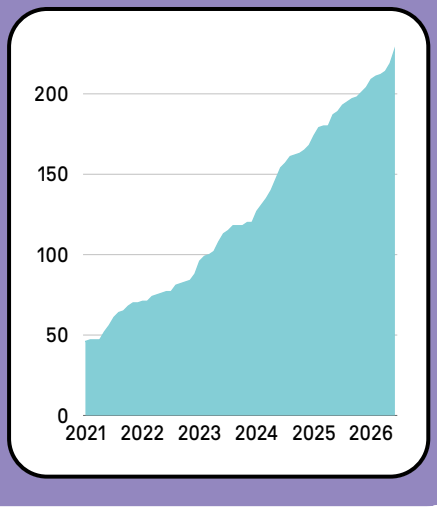
7,031
community members



449
startups



228
student initiatives



The Maker Space of the Collective Incubator

From idea to functional prototype – more than 1,000 m² for manufacturing, support and exchange

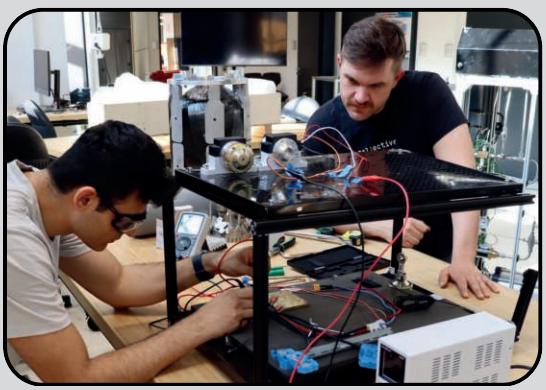
The Maker Space is a central facility of the Collective Incubator and offers students, researchers and entrepreneurs direct access to advanced manufacturing technologies. Following the Collective Incubator's move in 2025 to the new Werkhalle Nord on Aachen's Campus Jahrhunderthalle, the Maker Space reopened in 2026. It now spans more than 1,000 m² and brings together state-of-the-art equipment under one roof. Whether working with metal, wood, plastics, textiles, electronics or additive manufacturing – here, users can develop and create functional prototypes.



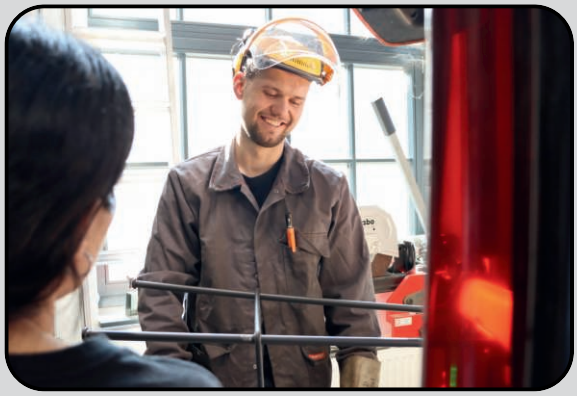
One particular strength of the Maker Space is the support it provides throughout the entire prototyping process. Qualified workshop staff help with selecting the appropriate manufacturing method and with the safe and efficient operation of the machines. This enables both experienced makers and first-time users to turn their ideas into tangible products. In addition, the workshop team offers a series of hands-on training sessions that empower participants to use the infrastructure independently and safely.

Additionally, six project garages of various sizes are available for startups, student initiatives and project teams. Together with the open workshop area, these create ideal conditions for prototyping, hardware assembly and technical development. Access is granted on a rotational basis for a limited period, so that as many teams as possible can benefit. Teams can reapply at any time for future projects.

The Maker Space is divided into several specialised areas, each equipped with state-of-the-art machinery for various manufacturing processes. In the field of 3D printing, the Collective Incubator offers solutions ranging from entry-level to professional applications. These include machines for producing detailed models made from plastics and high-performance materials such as carbon-fibre-reinforced composites, equipment for large-format printing and continuous printing, as well as a system for precise additive manufacturing using sintering



processes. The production workflow is complemented by post-processing solutions for recycling plastic waste, as well as for precision cutting and model preparation.



The metalworking and welding division offers comprehensive capabilities for machining, cutting, forming and joining metal components. A wide selection of machining centres, both conventional and CNC-controlled, enables a wide variety of milling and turning operations. Modern drilling and thread-cutting machines ensure precise machining, while automatic horizontal band saws guarantee accurate cuts across a wide range of material sizes. A press brake with manual bending machines as well as waterjet cutting systems for 2D and 3D applications round out the equipment. Various welding technologies also make it possible to efficiently manufacture complex metal components.



Photo by Auxsys

The signage division is equipped with a modern UV flatbed printer as well as a combined printing and cutting system. This optimises the production process by enabling the seamless printing and cutting of sticker films in a single workflow. For precise cutting and shaping, a cutting plotter is also available, which is ideal for creating intricate designs and patterns on vinyl, paper, cardboard and other materials.

For textile-based projects, the textile division offers a wide selection of professional sewing machines, an embroidery machine for flat embroidery and another for embroidering caps. In addition, two heat transfer presses are available, one for flat designs and one for caps. These are particularly well-suited for the efficient transfer of graphics and lettering onto textiles, even in larger quantities. This allows users to produce custom-made garments, promotional materials and textile prototypes with high-quality printed or embroidered designs.

The woodworking and model-making workshop offers an extensive selection of equipment for precise material processing. A laser cutter enables exact and clean cuts for models and functional components, while professional sanding and polishing machines ensure a high-quality finish. A vertical panel saw and a sliding table saw allow for the precise cutting of sheet materials. In addition, hand-guided CNC routers can be used to create complex contours in wood for both prototypes and final products.

The Maker Space combines advanced manufacturing technologies with technical support, accelerating the journey from concept to prototype. It provides entrepreneurs and innovators with the infrastructure they need to test, refine and validate ideas. This makes the Maker Space an essential part of the Collective Incubator's innovation ecosystem.

“The Collective Incubator raises students’ awareness of entrepreneurship and creates an incredibly low barrier to entry.”

Interview with Prof. Dr.-Ing. Michael Riesener
Driver of Aachen’s innovation ecosystem



Dear Michael, thank you for taking the time to talk to us. For the benefit of our readers who might not know you yet, could you briefly introduce yourself?
With pleasure. I’m originally from Aachen, studied industrial engineering at RWTH, and I spent many years working at the WZL research institute. Today, I see myself also as an enthusiastic driver of Aachen’s innovation ecosystem, operating in many different roles.



How did your passion for innovation develop?
Right after school, I founded my first company together with two friends. After my studies, my role as project lead at e.GO, the Aachen-based electric car startup built around Günther Schuh, had a significant impact on me.
I was fascinated by innovation because I was able to see it from completely different angles: the perspective of startups, industry and university research.

That sounds exciting! What did these perspectives actually look like?
On the one hand, I was sitting at the notary’s office founding my own company, and on the other, I was sitting in major investor meetings with e.GO. I also set up several centres on the RWTH campus that bring industry and academia together. There, as managing director, I learned what running a business operationally really means.

Even today, you fulfil several roles at RWTH: you are a chair holder at WZL, the managing director of RWTH Innovation and the Rector’s Delegate for Translation. What does a typical day look like for you?
This interview is already my seventh appointment today. My days are usually completely packed. The exciting thing is that I shift perspective almost every 30 minutes, moving between lectures, industry meetings and committee sessions. This creates a huge number of synergies.

You also lead the Deep Tech Innovation research area at RWTH Aachen. What does ‘deep tech’ mean to you, and why is this field so important for Aachen?
In my opinion, deep tech is what makes Aachen stand out as a startup hub. I understand deep tech as exceptional technologies that require lengthy development times, entail significant risks and span multiple disciplines.

Aachen is home to over 260 institutes and tens of thousands of students with in-depth technological expertise. It would be impossible to replicate that kind of infrastructure quickly. Aachen is destined to become the "Made in Europe" deep tech hotspot.

What role does the Collective Incubator play for Aachen as a startup hub?
It plays an absolutely essential role. The Collective Incubator features in almost all of my business presentations on the Aachen ecosystem, and people are usually astonished when they hear about it. This is because the Collective Incubator raises students' awareness of entrepreneurship and creates an incredibly low barrier to entry. It brings together people who might never have met in a lecture hall. It is this community that makes the Collective Incubator the central hub for startups in Aachen, a place where they can grow together.

The Collective Incubator's Maker Space is especially popular among startups. It offers countless machines for prototyping. Why is it so important?
Access to machines like these is normally incredibly expensive and extremely difficult to obtain. Not only does the Maker Space provide this hardware, but it also offers professional support in using it. For deep tech startups in particular, the Maker Space is a huge competitive advantage. It enables extremely fast iteration loops in product development.

Infrastructure is one thing, but the right framework conditions are another matter entirely. What steps should political decision-makers take to strengthen research transfer?
One important factor, of course, is money. For example, as in other countries, we could create a funded pension scheme in Germany and invest a small proportion of the long-term capital set aside for retirement provision in the companies of the future. Early-stage teams need more support, and to achieve this, we require bold political initiatives.

What about universities and industry?
Universities should measure research success more by its transfer outcomes, such as intellectual property, spin-off startups and industry collaborations. From industry, I would like to see investment in exciting projects at an earlier stage, as well as closer collaboration with universities and research institutes on development issues.



That would certainly be a powerful lever. What else is needed to further strengthen Aachen's position as a startup hub in the future?
Aachen and its ecosystem need to embrace a more European approach. The region also needs a significant increase in the number of venture capital investors based locally. A strong local industry matters too. Together, an international network, capital for investment and industry as a customer base create the ideal conditions for the "Made in Europe" deep tech hotspot.

Thank you, Michael!

All photos in this interview by Beniamin Motyka, Cinesis e.V.

Startups

Senlytics

På Vei

Cynrise

inframind

aiXopt + Interview with
Dr.-Ing. Tim Reuscher, Co-Founder & CEO

Ideation Program

Incubation Program

Interview with
Fabian Binz, Co-Founder of
the alumni startup Urban Ray

SENLYTICS

Kofinanziert von der Europäischen Union

Ministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Verkehr des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen



Florian Wirsing
Co-Founder & CEO



Prof. Dr.-Ing. Florian König
Scientific Co-Founder

Senlytics GmbH

Founded
2025

Field of Activity
Wind industry, Predictive Maintenance, Condition Monitoring

Funding Phase
Pre-Seed (grant-funded)

Team
3 members

September 2025
Founding of Senlytics GmbH

November 2025
Technology demonstration

December 2025
2nd place at KUER business plan contest

February 2026
Start of NeuroAE, GrüneGründungen.NRW

May 2026
Receipt of the RWTH Spin-off Award 2026

Senlytics is developing a condition monitoring system for wind turbine drive trains. Using acoustic emission sensors, edge computing, and AI-based condition assessment, critical conditions are detected early, enabling proactive prevention of damage. Operators and service organisations can also plan maintenance measures in advance and reduce unplanned downtime and production losses.

In the first half of 2026, the Senlytics team further developed its product both technologically and in terms of market fit. The focus was on validating user needs, pain points, and economic benefits, as well as on further developing signal-processing and machine-learning models. Senlytics makes targeted use of the Collective Incubator network for brainstorming and visibility.

In the coming months, the team will concentrate on further validating the value proposition and on product development towards an MVP. To this end, Senlytics plans to flesh out pilot applications and explore initial approaches to a scalable business model with recurring software revenue.



Sensor prototype



The Senlytics founding team

på | vei

På Vei

Founded
2026

Field of Activity
Consumer goods

Funding Phase
Pre-Seed
(grant-funded)

Team
3 members



Sarah Nahrstedt
Co-Founder, CEO & CPO



Till Kleinau
Co-Founder, COO & CMO

January 2026
Completion of the functional prototype

August 2026
Finalisation of the design prototype

September 2026 (upcoming)
Securing of funding

January 2027 (upcoming)
Realisation of the production prototype

February 2027 (upcoming)
Attainment of certification

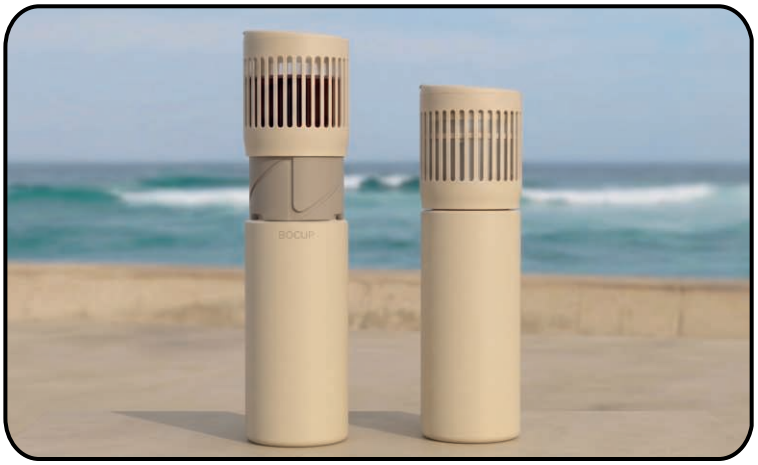
På Vei is developing the innovative thermal bottle “BoCup” – for anyone who wants to enjoy a hot drink on the go without having to wait, risking spillage or burning themselves. The BoCup features an innovative, sealed filling mechanism: using negative pressure, a measured amount of the drink is drawn spill-free from the bottle into a cup. There, the liquid cools down safely while the rest stays hot in the bottle for hours.

In the first half of 2026, På Vei built a working prototype, which the team is now iteratively refining at the Collective Incubator. The startup also established valuable connections with German injection moulding manufacturers and international industry partners. At the same time, the team revised the business model and submitted applications for follow-up funding to enable full-time work on the project.

In collaboration with industry partners, På Vei plans to launch its first production series as well as a crowdfunding campaign by the middle of next year. In doing so, På Vei will actively seek contact with investors to find partners who will support its vision in the long term.



Design sketch of the BoCup



Design rendering of the BoCup

CYNRISE

Cynrise UG

Founded
2026

Field of Activity
PropTech

Funding Phase
Pre-Seed
(grant-funded)

Team
4 members



Ian Neuling
Co-Founder & CTO



Francis Lang
Co-Founder, CEO & CMO



Konrad Beukenberg
Co-Founder & COO

June 2025
Receipt of the EXIST grant

December 2025
Completion of Gateway Accelerator #5

February 2026
Participation in Web Summit Qatar

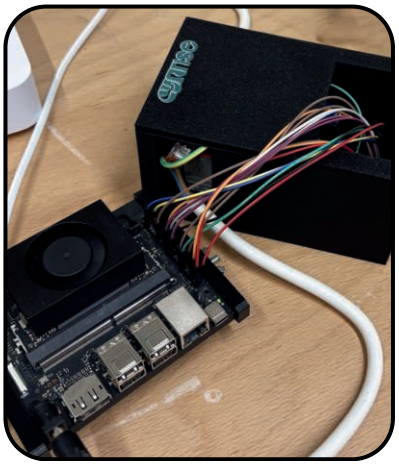
March 2026
Audience Award at Innovators Night

April 2026
Achievement of TRL 6

Cynrise develops innovative solutions for the property sector to make living spaces intelligent through smart control and deep data insights. Its hardware and software bundle the entire energy management and smart home control into a single app. The “Cube” replaces the traditional electrical panel and uses AI and non-intrusive load monitoring (NILM) to analyse the power flow of each individual device in real time, without additional smart plugs. This enables self-optimisation and active participation in the energy market.

A lot happened in the first half of 2026: the team successfully completed its EXIST funding, validated its technology in a real-world environment (TRL 6) and officially founded Cynrise UG. On an international level, the team represented the German delegation at Web Summit Qatar as a flagship example of innovative startups from North Rhine-Westphalia. To strengthen its regional presence, Cynrise also took part in events such as Startupland. For over a year now, the team has had its office at the Collective Incubator and regularly engages in community events.

In the coming weeks, the focus will be on further technical development and building the pilot program to refine the product and prepare for market entry.



A component of the “Cube” at Technology Readiness Level 6



The Cynrise team at Web Summit Qatar



Dr.-Ing. Philipp Lutat
Co-Founder & CEO



Luis Böttcher
Co-Founder & CTO

inframind GmbH

Founded
2025

Field of Activity
Energy

Funding Phase
Seed
(CLA-Round 2026)

Team
9 members

June 2025
Founding of inframind GmbH

August 2025
Acquisition of the first paying customer

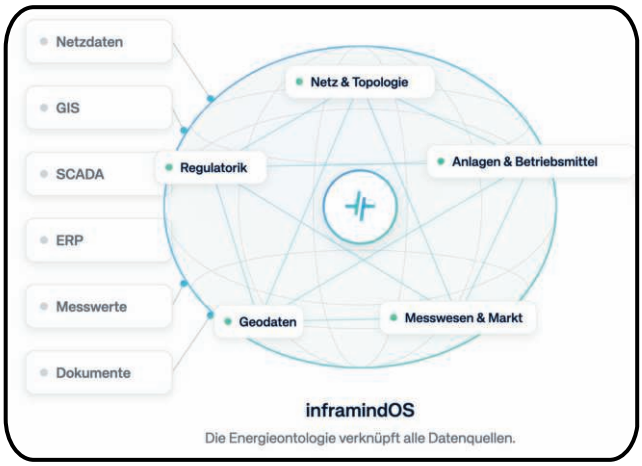
November 2025
Receipt of the RWTH Spin-off Award 2025

May 2026
Top 10 in the "Out of the Box.NRW Award"

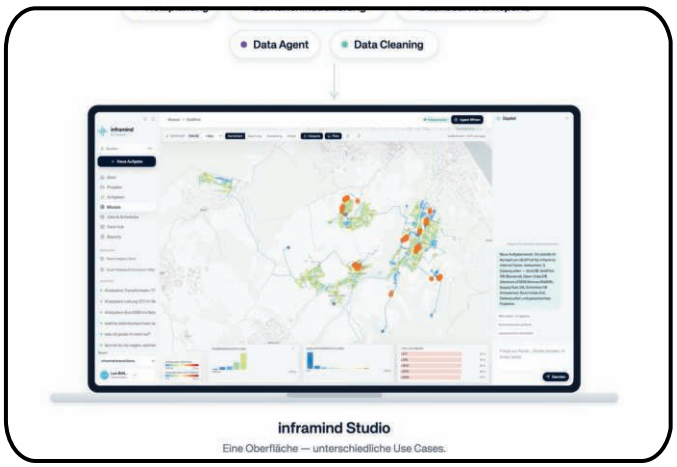
inframind is a spin-off from RWTH Aachen University that is developing an AI-native data platform for grid operators and municipal utilities. The software rapidly integrates fragmented data from systems for geodata, resource planning, network control and other legacy systems into a unified data foundation. This enables smart applications for grid analysis, planning, automation and AI-driven decision-making. The team's vision is to build a leading data platform that powers Europe's energy infrastructure and enables the use of AI in critical networks.

In the first half of 2026, inframind significantly expanded its customer base and now supports grid operators with a total of 1.38 million connected end customers. At the same time, the startup extended its platform, established new partnerships within the energy sector and strategically strengthened its team. By moving into the Collective Incubator's premises, inframind aims to accelerate its product development and continue to grow.

In the coming months, the startup will focus on scaling the platform technologically and rolling it out to further grid operators. In doing so, inframind is laying the foundations for broader market penetration within the European energy sector.



inframindOS –
The energy ontology connects all data sources



inframind Studio – One interface for every use case

aiXopt GmbH

Founded
2025

Field of Activity
Automation technology

Funding Phase
Pre-Seed (grant-funded)

Team
5 members



Dr.-Ing. Tim Reuscher
Co-Founder & CEO



Dr.-Ing. David Stenger
Co-Founder & CTO

September 2025
Receipt of the EXIST grant

November 2025
Founding of aiXopt GmbH

February 2026
Completion of the first pilot project

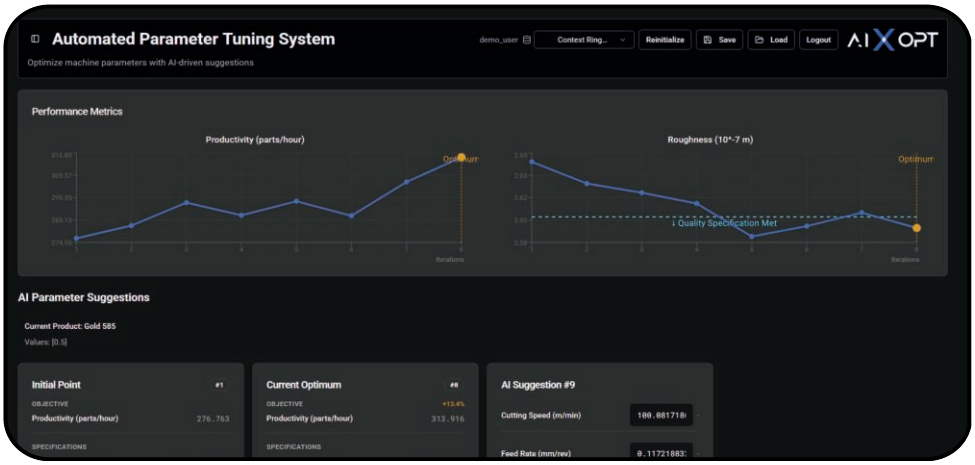
March/April 2026
RWTH Spin-off & ICT Tech Transfer Award

May 2026
Start of customer contract negotiations

aiXopt develops AI software that automatically optimises machine parameters, making equipment faster, more stable and more efficient. The startup addresses a core problem facing European industry: machines often operate suboptimally, resulting in higher energy and resource costs. Finding ideal settings requires time, testing and experience – resources that are not available in day-to-day production. The vision is an AI operator that continuously improves processes, scales up expertise and enables highly profitable manufacturing. The solution integrates seamlessly into existing production facilities.

In the first half of 2026, aiXopt made significant progress in bringing the product to maturity. The software is now ready for pilot customers, and the team is continuously optimising its scalability, explainability and usability. At the same time, the founders continued to develop the commercial pipeline: they successfully completed a pilot, and concrete negotiations are underway for further high-impact industrial applications. In addition, the team expanded to include motivated student talent.

Next, aiXopt will convert ongoing proof-of-value projects into recurring revenue. In the medium term, the goal is to scale the business concept to become an integral part of the European industrial AI landscape.



The aiXopt dashboard for parameter optimisation



Tim pitching

> “To me, making an impact means a machine running 20 percent more productively or a customer saving 30 percent in material costs – it’s measurable in money and resources.”
>
> Interview with Dr.-Ing. Tim Reuscher
> Co-Founder & CEO of aiXopt



Dear Tim, we’re looking forward to this conversation. Tell our readers a bit about yourself.
Sure. I’m Tim Reuscher, co-founder of aiXopt. I originally come from a small village in the Eifel region. I studied mechanical engineering at RWTH Aachen University, specialising in automation technology for my master’s degree. It was through my master’s thesis that I ended up at the Institute of Automatic Control, where I was a group and department leader. I eventually co-founded a startup based on a technology from that time.

What problem are you trying to solve with this technology?
In the manufacturing industry, many machines run automatically, but at the last level, experts still have to set the decisive machine parameters. This creates two problems: first, the machines are often too complex for manual adjustment to be optimal. Secondly, these experts are retiring in large numbers right now. With aiXopt, we solve these problems by using AI-based optimisation to set parameters faster and more efficiently.

How can this be applied to such different kinds of machines?
I think that’s exactly the ‘magic’ of machine learning. Mathematically, it’s one optimisation problem: parameters go in, and KPIs such as productivity or costs come out. This applies to every machine.

The process in between doesn’t matter to our algorithm – it simply selects the machine parameters as quickly as possible to improve the outcome. And this structure can be generalised across a broad range of applications.



How did you transition from research to founding a company?
For a long time, I considered a career in academia versus one in industry, asking myself if I could really have an impact either way. In research, we developed strong algorithms, but we rarely made the leap into application. Working in a corporation would have meant being part of an existing system. Then my co-founder David asked me if I wanted to start a company and I was quickly convinced.

What does having an impact mean to you?
It’s an uncomfortable realisation, but only a small fraction of researchers truly generate progress.

If nobody reads your publications, you haven't created real impact in the medium term. To me, making an impact means a machine running 20 percent more productively or a customer saving 30 percent in material costs – it's measurable in money and resources.

How did you manage to turn your research into a market-ready product?
We talked to people in the industry early on and in great detail. That was the only way we could understand what the industry actually needed. Our product used to have countless features, but we discarded many of them and focused on the core elements that actually work for the industry. Our approach is problem-driven, not solution-driven.



What were the most important milestones during this turbulent phase?
The EXIST grant was essential for us to get started. After that, the RWTH Innovation Incubation Program helped us to make further progress. Then came the official founding and our first paying customers – the first real confirmation that people are willing to pay for our product.

How do you use the Collective Incubator?
We use it very intensively – we're practically here every day. For us, it's about more than just office space, it's the community that makes it special. For example, I recently happened to meet someone at the coffee machine right before an important investor meeting. They were involved with that exact investor and gave us some great tips.

What unexpected challenges have you faced?
There are a lot of bureaucratic things that I didn't know about beforehand. For instance, when I wanted to take out insurance, I was immediately asked to submit a fully formulated business plan, which I obviously didn't have to hand at that moment. Then there are NDAs from customers with one-sided clauses that you have to negotiate without spending thousands of euros on lawyers.

That sounds complex. Is there any specific advice you wish you'd had before your founding journey?
The most important thing is to find out what the industry actually needs. The easiest way to do that is simply to pick up the phone and call people. Otherwise, you might end up spending months developing a product that nobody wants.

Finally, let's look ahead: what are your plans for the future?
Right now, we're taking on our first customer projects and want to validate our growth hypothesis. Our next big milestone is to secure pre-seed funding of between one and four million euros early next year and then put that scaling into practice.

Thank you for your time, Tim!

All photos in this interview by Alp Kunac, Cinesis e.V.

Ideation Program

From invention to a viable business idea – the teams from the March Batch 2026 and the June Batch 2026

RWTH Innovation's three-month Ideation Program supports early-stage deep-tech teams in transforming initial ideas into startups ready for pre-seed funding. To this end, the program offers ongoing one-to-one coaching and targeted support with applications for the EXIST startup grant, one of Germany's best-known funding programs for spin-offs from academia. In this way, the teams develop a clear business model, a solid business plan and an investor-ready pitch deck. The program also helps the teams to refine their technological feasibility and competitiveness and to grow together as a founding team. In doing so, it lays the foundation for successful pre-seed funding and subsequent acceleration.



The March Batch 2026 comprised eight promising young teams. The brief profiles below provide an insight into their business ideas and progress to date.

Behrens & Behrens

Behrens & Behrens is developing an AI-based grant manager. The software proactively identifies suitable EU programs for SMEs and drafts grant applications, thereby significantly simplifying access to capital through a largely automated funding pipeline.

RawTimber

RawTimber combines computer-aided design and analysis processes with material-driven construction. Based on this approach, RawTimber creates structural systems made from naturally grown and reclaimed wood, with a particular focus on non-standard resources such as tree crowns.

Bonaro

Bonaro is a highly automated solution for testing, flushing and maintaining H_2 systems in industry and trade. It consists of service equipment for commissioning and refuelling such facilities.

Chatpoints

Chatpoints offers an easily integrable AI infrastructure that connects locations, events or organisations to a smart chatbot via QR codes. Users receive immediate information, guidance and answers – without having to install an app.

PrognoseWerk (formerly Thermal Predict)

PrognoseWerk helps companies with significant fluctuations in resource usage achieve greater planning certainty. Using Thermal Predict, it makes data-driven predictions of these fluctuations based on external factors. New features include, in particular, a tailored solution for smaller businesses and the integration of workforce planning.

REHOS Building Controls

REHOS Building Controls develops modular, agent-based control software for complex building energy systems and sector coupling. The solution replaces time-consuming custom programming with preconfigured, adaptive modules and enables optimal operational management.

GAIDA

GAIDA is an embedded AI platform that translates tire acoustics into friction potential in real time. This enables exceptionally safe automated driving – universally compatible with any tire or wheel, regardless of manufacturer or road surface.

NeoCircuit

NeoCircuit is developing a novel hybrid process that combines biotechnology and traditional hydrometallurgy in electronic scrap recycling. This enables sustainable, selective recycling and the production of high-quality, biogenic gold, platinum and palladium nanoparticles.

With the June Batch 2026, a further eight deep-tech teams completed the Ideation Program. The following brief profiles outline what they are working on and how far they have progressed so far.



NoPaper

NoPaper is developing a waterless paper production approach using a newly developed, energy-efficient nonwoven process. This reduces energy and resource consumption in production.

ECCS

ECCS (Extruded Carbon Concrete Systems) is working on an innovative extrusion process for the automated production of lightweight carbon-reinforced concrete components. This significantly reduces material consumption, CO_2 emissions and production costs in the construction industry.

Sonicspace

Sonicspace offers software for physics-based spatial sound simulation in video games. Using advanced acoustics modelling, its tools calculate complex sound propagation patterns and enable automatic, immersive 3D audio rendering in real time.

duckout (formerly beyond)

duckout builds a data-driven entertainment ecosystem that combines ticketing, social interaction and modern technologies. Users can discover exclusive events, invite friends and give tickets as gifts, while the integration of NFT infrastructure and data-driven partner insights creates an innovative and forward-looking event experience.

FaloHire

FaloHire is creating an efficient, transparent hiring platform that replaces the traditional résumé with structured skill profiles. The company uses AI not to screen people out in a “black box”, but to translate experience into measurable, weighted data.

Nügear

Nügear develops electric drive systems that handle traction, electric gear shift, charging and pre-heating without the need for separate hardware. Its proprietary software and switching solution reconfigure components to deliver multiple functions from the same hardware.

QDSense

QDSense is building a quantum sensing platform that detects the magnetic signatures of nanoparticle-labelled biomarkers with extraordinary sensitivity using a compact optical setup. Multiple diagnostic targets have been demonstrated in proof-of-concept studies.

Suman

Suman is developing an AI-based simulation analyser that evaluates real-world simulation logs, uncovers the causes of errors and recommends necessary changes.

Incubation Program

Ready for market entry and funding – the teams from Spring Batch 2026

RWTH Innovation's three-month Incubation Program builds on the Ideation Program and is aimed at early-stage deep-tech startups with a clear business plan. It supports founders across Europe in developing prototypes, bringing their products to market readiness and securing early-stage funding. The program combines bespoke services, coaching and mentoring with weekly workshops and specialist talks on topics such as fundraising, pitching, sales, legal frameworks, scaling and internationalisation. Participants gain access to a broad network of investors and partners – including venture capitalists, business angels, legal experts and experienced founders. The highlight is Demo Day, when the teams pitch to investors and corporate partners.

As part of the Spring Batch 2026, eleven startup teams took part in the Incubation Program. The following pages feature brief profiles of these startups, offering insights into their products, development milestones and future plans.

Aetheria

Aetheria develops a mobile on-site technology that prevents the release of highly climate-damaging F-gases from insulation foams. At the same time, it enables circular material recovery and regulatory compliance for waste operators.

Industry: Waste Management

Customer problem & solution: Insulation foams contain F-gases with high global warming potential, which are often released uncontrollably at the end of their life cycle despite EU regulations. Waste management companies lack a practical on-site solution. Aetheria's MonoFoam captures these gases and recovers reusable materials.

Unique selling proposition: MonoFoam is the first fully mobile system for on-site extraction of F-gases from insulation materials in the construction and demolition sectors. It enables compliant recycling and destroys the gases in a controlled manner in Aetheria's MonoHub. Additionally, MonoFoam reduces logistics costs and generates additional revenue through metal recovery.

C.I. Joe

C.I. Joe develops an adaptive hearing training app for cochlear implant users, delivering personalised rehabilitation beyond standard therapy.

C.I. Joe

Industry: eHealth

Customer problem & solution: More than 60,000 cochlear implant users and about 4,000 new patients each year receive only brief, poorly structured hearing rehabilitation and practice on their own – experiencing frustration and making little progress. C.I. Joe enables cochlear implant users to follow structured, long-term programs at home and get more out of their cochlear implants.

Unique selling proposition: C.I. Joe combines adaptive algorithms, audio output optimised for cochlear implants, personalisation and gamification into a digital hearing therapy program. In collaboration with the Department of Otolaryngology at Aachen University Hospital, a clinically validated, DiGA-compliant and reimbursable app for CI users is being developed.

CORTEXIO

CORTEXIO replaces fragmented shopfloor documentation with configurable, audit-ready data apps. These capture operational events as structured records, cutting repeat failures, downtime and costs of poor quality.

Industry: Manufacturing

Customer problem & solution: Production teams document events in a scattered and unstructured manner; audits and root cause analyses are slow and prone to errors, and quality costs are rising. CORTEXIO solves this with configurable, audit-ready data apps that feature structured data collection, quick access to evidence and significantly faster reporting.

Unique selling proposition: CORTEXIO combines audit-ready records, similarity searches, workflows such as 8D, voice and photo capture and a flexibly configurable platform – including on-premises deployment with local AI services to meet stringent data residency and security requirements.

Determion

Determion develops an open-source, safety-certifiable software stack and AI-enabled engineering tools for safety-critical cyber-physical systems (CPS). The goal is to make safety engineering faster, more transparent and more scalable.

Industry: Software & Safety-Critical CPS

Customer problem & solution: Safety-critical CPS, such as modern vehicles, use complex, distributed software that currently runs on proprietary middleware (manufacturer-specific control software) that is difficult to test and slow to certify. With Determi.FLOW, Determi.CORE and Determi.AIDE, Determion offers an open, certifiable stack for the transition to safe series production.

Unique selling proposition: Determion provides a security-focused open-source stack with deterministic, ISO 26262-compliant layers and full code transparency, validated in German research projects (e.g., UNICARagil, AUTOtech.agil), supplemented by AI-powered support from Determi.AIDE.

EdgeFlow

EdgeFlow develops a route optimisation system for waste management. Using machine learning and real-time data, it continuously generates optimal routes and dynamically adapts them to current conditions.

Industry: Waste Management

Customer problem & solution: In waste management, routes are typically driven according to fixed patterns. When road closures or traffic jams occur, drivers have to improvise – making routes inefficient and driving up costs and fuel consumption. The solution automatically calculates optimal routes for all roads in an area and dynamically adjusts them in seconds using machine learning and real-time data.

Unique selling proposition: The company addresses a previously unsolved optimisation problem and offers a technological edge in real-time route planning for waste management, backed by the founders' complementary expertise (Henry Fischer in technology, Stefano Cascio in strategy).

HubIQ

HubIQ automates the engineering and financial planning of electric truck charging hubs. This reduces investment decision times while also cutting grid connection costs.

Industry: E-Mobility, Energy Infrastructure

Customer problem & solution: The expansion of electric truck fleets is stalling due to complex, manual charging infrastructure planning. Fragmented tools increase the workload and the risk of planning errors. HubIQ acts as a "Planning OS" and, using machine learning and techno-economic optimisation, generates construction-ready layouts and bankable business cases in minutes.

Unique selling proposition: The "Triple-Engine" architecture combines probabilistic AI with engineering-grade optimisation: "Predictive Demand" generates load profiles, the "Techno-Economic Core" optimises hardware (BESS, PV), and "AI Engineering" provides precise sizing and bill of materials via an agent-based LangGraph workflow.

ILIAS

ILIAS develops robots that enable inspection and maintenance of space assets to reduce and remove space debris.

Industry: New Space

Customer problem & solution: Satellites often develop defects, and the cost of damage can quickly run into the millions; small satellites are written off, while larger ones are rarely inspected or repaired, and space debris increases the risk of collisions. ILIAS offers robust, cost-effective space robots for inspecting, repairing and removing defective systems – serving as "physical insurance" against failures.

Unique selling proposition: ILIAS is developing the smallest modular space robot in its class: compact, quick to manufacture and – thanks to its redundancy – capable of operating even in the event of partial malfunctions. Standard components, a patent-pending high-force technology and universal tools and cameras enable a wide range of inspection and repair missions.

Photom

Photom develops a versatile spectrometric analyser that identifies and quantifies complex chemical and biological samples on site. This circumvents common sample limitations and enables real-time, cost-efficient analytics.

Industry: Environmental Analytics, Biopharma, Chemical and Food Producers

Customer problem & solution: The biopharma industry requires precise in-line monitoring, and environmental monitoring must detect unknown substances in complex samples. Many spectrometric methods are too large, complex or limited in scope. Photom offers a compact, versatile analyser with networked real-time analysis software.

Unique selling proposition: Photom combines universal spectrometric measurement in a compact device with customised analysis software for the biopharmaceutical and environmental monitoring industries, thereby bridging the gap between laboratory technology and industrial or field-ready applications.

RumenAI

RumenAI measures fermentation at its source and turns real-time rumen data into smarter feeding, healthier animals, higher productivity and lower CH_4 emissions.

Industry: Agriculture

Customer problem & solution: Feed accounts for up to 70% of production costs, while farmers have little control over productivity losses, methane emissions and periparturient diseases. RumenAI uses a patented rumen bolus (a swallowable sensor capsule) that continuously measures anaerobic conditions and provides real-time recommendations for feeding and animal health via an AI platform.

Unique selling proposition: Dissolved CO_2, a key parameter in rumen fermentation, has not yet been measurable continuously in situ. RumenAI's patented ATR-IR bolus continuously monitors dCO_2 and, through international patents, proprietary analytics and rumen expertise, provides a clear, globally scalable competitive advantage.

SnEW

SnEW recovers tin, enabling the recycling of critical raw materials currently lost in the recycling process chain for printed circuit boards.

Industry: Recycling of Raw Materials, Metallurgy

Customer problem & solution: The metal sector in Germany lacks the ability to recover critical metals (CRM) such as gallium, tantalum, niobium and neodymium with current technology. With its process, SnEW enables CRM recovery and optimises the downstream processing of strategic metals such as copper and tin.

Unique selling proposition: The team has the necessary expertise, gained while pursuing PhDs in metal recycling of complex waste streams, and also uses proprietary process technology while aiming for an environmentally friendlier recovery of metals.

Zendia

Zendia provides a highly sensitive diagnostic technology based on the enrichment and direct detection of single parasites. The goal is to help eliminate malaria and save millions of lives.

Industry: Malaria Diagnostics

Customer problem & solution: Hundreds of millions of malaria infections with low parasite density (including 600 million asymptomatic carriers and 35 million pregnant women) are often missed by standard tests. Zendia closes this gap with the first highly sensitive point-of-care malaria diagnostic that enriches and directly detects individual parasites.

Unique selling proposition: The technology achieves 100 times greater sensitivity than standard diagnostic tests at a comparable price and is the only available method that safely detects asymptomatic carriers and pregnant women. The test is fast, automated, easy to perform and provides a Level 1 diagnosis at the point of care.

“Our mission is to add a new layer to urban logistics: we transport medical goods by air.”

Interview with Fabian Binz
Co-Founder and COO of Urban Ray, an alumni startup



URBAN RAY

Urban Ray is a logistics startup that transports medical goods by air. The young company was founded in Aachen in 2022 by Cem Uyanik, Henry Schmidt and Fabian Binz. Until February 2023, the team worked from an office at the Collective Incubator. Urban Ray then moved into its own premises as a pre-seed startup with 10 employees. The team has since grown to 15 members of staff and is now in the seed phase.

Dear Fabian, thank you for your time. Could you briefly tell us who you are and what you do?
With pleasure! I’m Fabian, 31 years old and one of the co-founders of Urban Ray. My fascination with flying began in childhood, which is why I studied mechanical engineering with a focus on aerospace technology in Aachen. As COO at Urban Ray, I am now responsible for all operational matters: from customer implementation to flight permits and compliance.

Wow, that sounds like a lot of responsibility! What vision are you and your team pursuing with Urban Ray?
Our mission is to add a new layer to urban logistics: we transport medical goods by air. To achieve this, we have developed a “hub”, which you could picture as a fully automated package locker, as well as a drone that shuttles autonomously between two hubs and the accompanying software that controls everything. We combine these three components and operate them as a logistics service provider for laboratories, hospitals, pharmacies or blood banks.

Let’s take a step back. You co-founded Urban Ray while you were still a student. I find that really impressive. How did that come about?
We were inspired to develop our idea by the NASA/DLR Design Challenge 2020, a student competition focusing on air-based autonomous logistics, which we won. During the competition, we already had in mind to turn it into a real product. We officially established the company in 2022, while I was studying for my master’s degree. Finishing my studies at the same time was no fun. I worked through the nights and Sundays, and I wouldn’t recommend it, but it worked!

It’s remarkable that you pulled that off. What role did the Collective Incubator play during Urban Ray’s early days?
It played a hugely important role. Exchanging ideas with other founders made us feel that we weren’t alone in facing certain challenges. The office space provided was also extremely valuable. We’ve even hired people from the Collective Incubator. The ecosystem is simply great.

What have been the most important milestones since founding the company?
One major regulatory success was achieving flight permit level SAIL 3 in February 2025. Only around 15 companies across Europe have achieved this. In terms of technology, we developed the hub, the drone and the software ourselves, and we now hold a patent on the hub. In terms of commercial operations, we have signed up paying customers and are already operating pilot routes. For instance, we transport real samples from emergency rooms to laboratories in Essen and Hanover.

Was your focus on medical logistics clear from the start, or did your business model evolve in that direction?
It was clear from the outset. We conducted practical trials with hospitals, pharmacies and laboratories early on, and then developed our systems for these customers. The need is obvious: logistics are becoming an increasingly significant problem in healthcare. Furthermore, the market is still very fragmented and shaped by long-term contracts rather than project-based work, which gives us a competitive advantage.

Others have recognised this too: in 2023, you secured a six-figure pre-seed round. What mattered most to you at that time?
We wanted to find someone we could trust from the outset, someone who could open doors for us. Our first business angel was Andreas Kupke, the co-founder of FINANZCHECK.de and one of Germany's most active aerospace investors. Thanks to him and our other investors, we gained not just capital, but also knowledge – something I'd recommend to every startup.

Do you have any other advice for young people who are thinking of starting their own startup?
Ultimately, the answer is the clichéd one: just do it! When it comes to anything new, there will always be an element of uncertainty. The only way to overcome this is to get started and learn how to handle setbacks and pivot. You develop resilience through failure. Rather than trying to raise as much money as possible, the goal in the first few years should be to build that thick skin.


The "Jelly" drone outside a hospital in Essen

That's exactly the kind of courage that we at the Collective Incubator want to pass on to many students.
Finally, what are your plans for the coming months and years?
Our objective is to maximise our revenue potential now. We want to bring as many routes as possible into regular operation and establish air-based logistics in Europe. We are currently transforming from a development company into a service company and will expand, particularly in the Rhineland and Ruhr regions.

Thank you for the conversation, Fabian!


Urban Ray Team

All photos in this interview by Urban Ray

Student Initiatives

Triton

Studiwerkstatt Aachen

TEDxRWTHAachen

iGEM Aachen – Team Adesonica

Ecogenium + Interview with
Anh Vu, Mechanical Lead

TRITON

Triton e.V.

Founded
2023

Field of Activity
Engineering sciences

Team
20 active members



Laurenz Rathmann
1st Chairperson



Peter Oettinger
2nd Chairperson



Bastian Hagenah
Treasurer

December 2023
Foundation of Triton e.V.

September 2024
Completion of the prototype

December 2024
First test at Lake Blausteinsee

May 2026
Completion of the boat

June 2026
Successful on-land system tests

The student initiative Triton e.V. is developing a 2.4-metre-long autonomous, unmanned and solar-powered boat for the Microtransat Challenge. The aim of this international competition is to cross the Atlantic Ocean autonomously, which takes approximately two to three months depending on weather and sea conditions. Having successfully completed the construction phase, the team is now in the testing and trial phase.

Between January and June 2026, the Triton team achieved numerous milestones: the students fine-tuned the final components and completed the construction of the boat. A particular success was the development of the propulsion system in-house, including a custom-designed magnetic coupling. The association also carried out onshore system tests to verify the functionality of its core systems. In parallel, long-term tests of individual components, such as the propulsion system, were conducted on a purpose-built test rig to assess system reliability under realistic conditions.

Over the next few months, the Triton team will conduct extensive testing at Lake Blausteinsee. Initial trials on the open sea are set to follow in autumn. Further ocean tests, including a possible English Channel crossing, will prepare the initiative for the Microtransat Challenge 2027.



Triton's autonomous boat



The Triton Team



Studiwerkstatt Aachen e.V.

Founded
2013

Field of Activity
Open workshop

Team
104 club members, incl. 14 supervisors



Lennart Wilde
1st Chairperson



Daniel Schmitz
2nd Chairperson



Christian Toenneßen
Treasurer



Christian Sambol
Workshop Manager

July 2013
Founding of the association

October 2015
Workshop opening at Adalbertsteinweg 109

February 2019
Acquisition of lathes and milling machines

March 2023
Acquisition of Traub woodturning lathe

May 2026
Installation of solar power system

Studiwerkstatt Aachen is a workshop founded by students and open to everyone, offering those interested access to machinery and tools. Members work here on their own projects and collaborate to further develop the workshop. The facilities range from woodworking and laser cutting to metalworking via turning, milling and welding.

In the first half of 2026, the Studiwerkstatt team implemented several technical improvements. The association completed the compressed air installation, meaning that every workstation now has a compressed air connection.
In addition, a new extraction system was installed in the welding area. To counter rising energy costs and meet the growing demand for self-consumption, a balcony-mounted solar power system was commissioned, which covers part of the electricity requirements.

Several projects relating to the association are being planned and carried out for the future. The most advanced of these are the construction of a new hardening furnace and the completion of the association's own CNC machine for metalworking. Furthermore, discussions are underway regarding a move to larger premises.



Plasma cutting



Titanium turned parts

TEDx RWTH Aachen



Mirah Arab
President



Jad El Ghazzawi
Vice President



Adham Eid
Treasurer

TEDxRWTHAachen
AiX Talks e.V.

Founded
2013

Field of Activity
Interdisciplinary exchange

Team
40 active members

April 2014
First TEDxRWTHAachen conference

May 2024
10th anniversary: “eXponential”

January 2025
TEDx Salon: Sustainability

March 2026
Welcome Week booth at RWTH

May 2026
TEDx event “Beyond the Obvious”

TEDxRWTHAachen brings the TED philosophy “Ideas Worth Spreading” to RWTH Aachen and into the Aachen innovation ecosystem. Since 2013, an interdisciplinary team of around 40 volunteers has independently organised TEDx conferences, salons and community formats. This creates a platform for ideas from science, technology, business, culture and society that reach a broad audience.

In the first half of 2026, the initiative welcomed new students during RWTH’s Welcome Week and hosted its flagship event “Beyond the Obvious” in May. Six speakers from various fields spoke there in front of more than 300 guests. All talks were recorded for publication on the official TED platform. For its weekly meetings, the team uses the infrastructure of the Collective Incubator.

Together with the team, TEDxRWTHAachen’s new board has planned numerous projects for the future. These include, for example, a TEDx Salon (a smaller, discussion-focused format), as well as further partnerships across Aachen’s academic, startup and innovation landscape. In this way, the initiative continues to showcase forward-looking ideas and give inspiring individuals a stage.



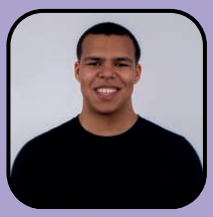
TEDx booth at the RWTH Welcome Week



The TEDx team



Kathrina Scheiermann
Teamlead



Samuel Pytlik
Teamlead



Lisa Prinz
Teamlead

iGEM Aachen e.V.
Team Adesonica

Founded
2025

Field of Activity
Synthetic biology, Research

Team
17 active members

December 2025
Start of team and project formation

April 2026
Team-weekend in Bremen

May 2026
Best Pitch Award at the "BFH Meet-up"

June 2026
Start of the laboratory work

November 2026
Grand Jamboree (World Final in Paris)

iGEM is the largest international competition in the field of synthetic biology. Every year, student teams from all over the world develop a new biotechnology project and present it at the Grand Jamboree, the global final. This year's team from iGEM Aachen e.V., Adesonica, is developing a novel mechanism of action for antibiotics against gram-negative bacteria. As more and more bacteria become resistant to existing antibiotics, treatments are becoming increasingly difficult.

Adesonica's approach targets the genetic information (DNA) of the bacteria. This is normally kept stable by tiny chemical markers known as methyl groups. The team specifically intervenes in this process, throwing the DNA out of balance. This slows down the growth of the bacteria or triggers their death.

At the same time, the Dry Lab project group is developing software that brings together resistance and patient data. This is intended to help doctors select suitable antibiotics more quickly in future. In this way, the iGEM team Adesonica is making an important contribution to the fight against resistant infections.



At the "BFH Meet-up" networking and exchange event



This year's iGEM Aachen team, "Adesonica"

ECOGENIUM
The H_2 Team



Nils Hupfer
Team Lead



Chedi Amor
Team Lead



Björn Christ
Treasurer

Ecogenium e.V.

Founded
2020

Field of Activity
Hydrogen motor racing

Team
30 active members

December 2020
Association founded

June 2022
First vehicle "Charlemagne" ready

May 2024
Successor "Hydraix II" ready

June 2025
Record: 238 km per m³ hydrogen

June 2026
Participation in Shell Eco-marathon

Ecogenium e.V. develops hydrogen-powered vehicles with the goal of covering maximum distances with minimal fuel consumption. The team brings together students who are passionate about sustainable mobility and alternative fuels.

In June 2026, the association participated in the Shell Eco-marathon – an efficiency competition for self-developed vehicles – just as in previous years. However, complications with the electrical system and the supply chain had already arisen in the preceding months. Combined with the extreme heat on the race weekend, these issues prevented a trouble-free official run. Nevertheless, the team successfully identified the root causes and resolved the problems.
At the same time, the students finalised the plans for the next-generation vehicle: it is designed to weigh under 100 kilograms and will be equipped with a new water-cooled fuel cell system. With the development of the chassis and wheel suspension nearly complete, the team is now seeking manufacturing partners.

The newly elected Executive Board will be responsible for the new vehicle. The association would like to thank the previous board for their dedication and wishes the new management team every success for the upcoming season!



Passed the technical inspection!



Ecogenium's in-house fuel cell

> "Our aim is to develop dedicated technologies for our hydrogen-powered vehicle, always keeping people at the heart of everything we do."
>
> Interview with Anh Vu
> Mechanical Lead at Ecogenium



Hello Anh, thank you for joining us. Could you please introduce yourself briefly?
Hello, thank you for the invitation. I am a mechanical engineering student at RWTH Aachen University and have been a member of Ecogenium since 2024. I've been part of the Mechanical Team right from the start, and we are responsible for the mechanical construction of our hydrogen vehicle. Since last year, I have been co-leading this team with my colleague Vallabh Pataneni.

What exactly does Ecogenium do, and what are your hopes for the future?
We are building a racing car powered by a hydrogen fuel cell. Firstly, we want to raise awareness of the potential of hydrogen technology, because we believe in it, despite it being under-researched so far. Secondly, we want to experience real racing on a circuit as a team, which is why we compete in the Shell Eco-marathon every year.

It's hard for an outsider to imagine students building a racing car with a hydrogen fuel cell.
It looks highly complex from a technical perspective, but when you're part of Ecogenium, you have a completely different view of the technology. Most members quickly grasp the individual components.

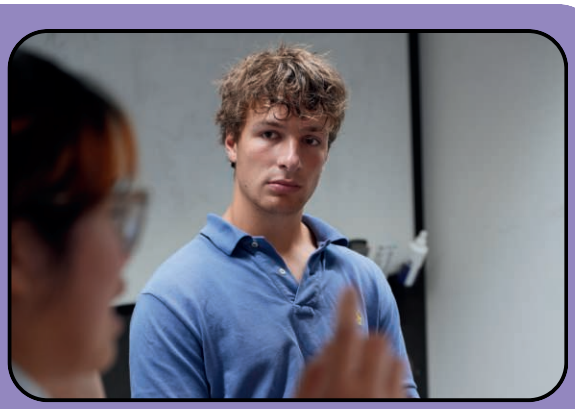
Could you explain the basics of this technology to us? How does a hydrogen-powered vehicle work?
Many young people learn about the electrolyser at school. This technical device uses electricity to split water into hydrogen and oxygen. A fuel cell works in the opposite way, generating electricity by causing a reaction between the hydrogen and the oxygen in the air. Some of this electricity is temporarily stored in a supercapacitor, which then powers the electric motor. The aim is always to find the most efficient operating point with the lowest hydrogen consumption.



This sounds exciting, but so far, hydrogen technology has hardly caught on. Even ten or fifteen years ago, it was seen as the future of vehicle technology, yet I still hardly ever see such cars on the roads today. So, what are the pros and cons of hydrogen-powered vehicles?
Well, a few hydrogen vehicles are on the road, such as the hydrogen buses in Wuppertal. First, let's look at the advantages. Unlike fossil fuels, a fuel cell produces no CO_2.

Hydrogen is also an exceptionally light element with a very high energy density per unit of mass.

And weight is a crucial factor, especially when it comes to cars, isn't it?
Yes, absolutely. In motor racing, every kilogram counts, so this low mass combined with high energy density is helpful. Hydrogen also has many advantages for long-range travel. Aside from its use in vehicles, it is suitable for long-term energy storage and can be produced in many countries, reducing dependence on fossil fuel imports.
As for the disadvantages: the biggest hurdles are the lack of widespread infrastructure and the complex transport process, which requires hydrogen to be compressed or liquefied.



Such complex technology requires a large team to work successfully. What disciplines are represented in your team?
At Ecogenium, we bring together people from various disciplines, including mechanical and electrical engineering, computer science and industrial engineering. We also have materials scientists, business economists and sociologists. Everyone shares a common vision. Each person brings their own knowledge to the team, whether from their studies, industry experience or personal life. This makes our team very dynamic, and working together is great fun.

But are you still facing challenges?
Of course. As an independent student initiative, we have to manage all our finances ourselves, whereas some of our competitors receive direct funding from their universities. Recruiting new members is also not always easy as we're not yet as well known at RWTH Aachen University and FH Aachen – University of Applied Sciences as other teams are. That's exactly what we're working on: raising our profile, networking more effectively and strengthening our links with other student initiatives because it benefits everyone.

Where are you actually building your vehicle?
We're currently building it at the C-Werk industrial estate in Aachen. We also spend a lot of time at the Collective Incubator, mainly using it for computer work and team meetings. This support means a great deal to us.

We're delighted to hear that. Finally, let's look to the future: what are your goals for Ecogenium?
Quite simply, we want to work on more projects with more team members and have more fun. Our aim is to develop dedicated technologies for our hydrogen-powered vehicle, always keeping people at the heart of everything we do.
Over the next one to three years, we would like to grow as a student initiative, complete our next prototype and bring new ideas to life. These include our own sidepod with a cooling system and, in the long term, perhaps our own fuel cell stacks.

Those are great goals. Thank you very much for the fascinating insights, Anh.

All photos in this interview by Beniamin Motyka, Cinesis e.V.

Events

Tech Impact Festival

Startups in Slices

Visible in Aachen’s Innovation Ecosystem

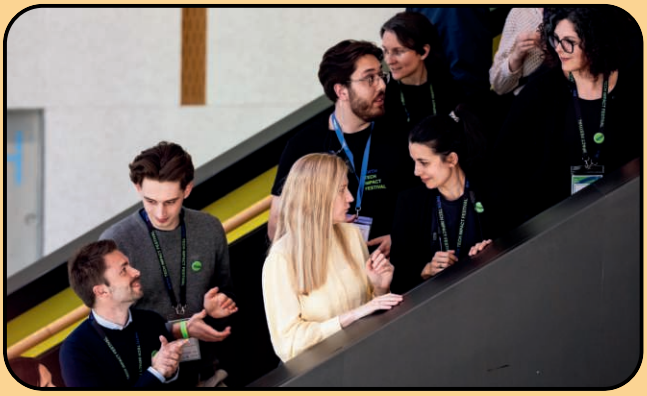
Ideas & BBQ

Tech Impact Festival

Impact happens through dialogue: The RWTH Tech Impact Festival connected science, industry and entrepreneurship to accelerate innovation.

With the inaugural RWTH Tech Impact Festival in March 2026, RWTH Aachen University, RWTH Innovation and RWTH Aachen Campus GmbH jointly launched a new event format. With the overarching theme “Bridging the Innovation Gap”, this two-day event brought together researchers, industry leaders, startups and policymakers to explore ways of translating scientific discoveries into real-world applications more quickly. The festival was designed to combine technological excellence and a mindset driven by impact, as well as the dynamic atmosphere of a festival.





With around 1,500 registrations and more than 300 speakers, the event sent a strong signal for exchange between academia and industry. Across ten thematic tracks, experts discussed emerging technologies and explored new ways to strengthen collaboration between research and industry.
During the opening remarks, Prof. Dr.-Ing. Matthias Wessling and Prof. Dr.-Ing. Michael Riesener emphasised the importance of close collaboration between academia and industry. Thomas Jarzombek, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Digital Affairs and State Modernization, and Ina Brandes, Minister for Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, highlighted the critical role of strong innovation ecosystems in ensuring Germany’s future competitiveness.

Rather than focusing solely on presenting the latest research findings, the festival prioritised dialogue and collaboration. Keynote speeches, panel discussions, workshops and innovative networking formats created opportunities for new partnerships, while guided tours of RWTH institutes and partner organisations provided participants with first-hand insights into cutting-edge research.



Startups, university spin-offs and innovation initiatives showcased their work in a dedicated exhibition area, engaging directly with companies and researchers. In their role as speakers across the thematic tracks, founders demonstrated how scientific discoveries can be transformed into innovations ready for the market, thus making entrepreneurship a tangible driver of technology transfer.



As a festival partner, the Collective Incubator supported this focus through the voluntary commitment of numerous associated students. They contributed to setting up, organising and dismantling the event, playing an important role in creating the festival's open and collaborative atmosphere.





The RWTH Tech Impact Festival was designed to be more than just a traditional academic conference. Networking was not just an additional element of the agenda, but an integral part of the event's overall concept. The exhibition area at C.A.R.L., RWTH Aachen University's largest lecture theatre building, and the moderated networking sessions provided countless opportunities to forge new connections, develop ideas further and initiate future collaborations.

This inaugural RWTH Tech Impact Festival demonstrated the potential that emerges when science, industry and entrepreneurship come together at an early stage. The relationships and project ideas developed during the two-day event provide a strong foundation for long-term collaboration, showing how science, industry and entrepreneurship can work together to bring innovation into practice.

All photos of this event by Christian van't Hoen

Startups in Slices

Introducing students to entrepreneurship: An afternoon full of new perspectives, an innovative spirit and delicious pizza.

On 21 April 2026, the Collective Incubator team brought students and experienced founders together for “Startups in Slices” to make entrepreneurship a tangible and exciting career path. At SuperC, which is centrally located on RWTH Aachen University’s Mitte campus, two passionate founders first shared their experiences in personal keynote speeches. The afternoon then transitioned into an open Q&A session with representatives from five other startups, which quickly evolved into a lively exchange with relaxed networking. Over pizza and drinks, students explored the topic of starting a business and made new connections in a casual atmosphere. The event showed how curiosity can develop into genuine entrepreneurial ambition when the right environment is created.





For many students, the idea of starting their own business seems abstract and far off in the future. Instead, most waver between supposedly safer career paths, such as working for a large corporation or pursuing an academic career. This is precisely the gap that “Startups in Slices” aimed to fill. This event built a bridge between students and the startup scene, making entrepreneurship accessible by providing real-world insights rather than dry theory. Many participants came into direct contact with Aachen’s startup ecosystem for the first time that afternoon.

At the heart of the program were two keynote speeches offering different perspectives on starting a business. Dr.-Ing. Kira Frings, co-founder of the startup requAIre, dispelled common myths about entrepreneurship in an approachable and genuine way. Drawing on her own experiences, she encouraged the audience to start small, embrace imperfection and take the first step. She emphasised that no one faces this challenge alone and that a strong support network is always within reach. Kira’s central message was: There’s never a “right time” to start a business – you just have to get started.

Konrad Beukenberg, co-founder of the startup Cynrise, then provided a practical roadmap. He explained that the foundation of every successful company is a diverse team with complementary skills. He also emphasised that setbacks do not necessarily spell the end, but are a necessary and instructive chapter in every startup’s story. The idea that perseverance beats perfection ran like a common thread through Konrad’s entire presentation.

The keynote speeches had a tangible impact. The students learned that setting up a startup does not have to be a leap into the unknown, but can be a step-by-step process supported by the wide range of resources offered by Aachen's startup ecosystem. The speakers made it clear that you don't need perfect timing or the perfect idea to get started; what matters most is courage, curiosity and the willingness to learn from setbacks. The speakers also emphasised to the participants that they are not alone with their questions and uncertainties; they can draw on a robust network of mentors, founders and like-minded individuals for support.
Direct contact with people who have already embarked on the entrepreneurial journey – or are currently doing so – helped to alleviate the concerns of the interested audience. This highlights the importance of events such as "Startups in Slices" for the university, its industry partners and the city of Aachen as a hub for startups.

The easiest way to bridge the gap is through direct dialogue, so the keynote speeches were followed by an open discussion and informal networking. Representatives from five other startups – flyXdrive, PlasmaAdditive, regascold, FloodWaive and UncovrIQ – were available to answer students' questions openly and honestly. Over pizza and drinks, the conference room at SuperC was transformed into a welcoming setting for conversation where students and founders interacted as equals, students exchanged ideas and participants made new connections with one another.
"Startups in Slices" demonstrated that the path from university to founding a startup is more prevalent than many young people realise before entering the workforce, and that taking that first bold step is often all it takes to gain personal experience in starting a business.





Visible in Aachen's Innovation Ecosystem

Aula, campus, festival grounds – the Collective Incubator team in conversation with academia, students and the public

During the first half of 2026, members of the Collective Incubator team participated in various events across Aachen's higher education and innovation landscape. In January, Tarick Al-Masri and Felix Mertins from the Collective Incubator board spoke at RWTHtransparent, the annual university-wide review. In May, the team introduced the association to curious students at the Day of Student Initiatives. In June, they brought entrepreneurship closer to interested festival visitors at CCT.square during the Kimiko Festival in Aachen.

RWTHtransparent is RWTH Aachen University's festive annual review: at the end of January, the rectorate reflects on the previous academic year in the main building's Aula, presents awards and provides a platform for individuals who are shaping the university's development through short conversation rounds. In addition to university members, guests from business, politics and civil society are also invited.



On 30 January 2026, the Collective Incubator formed a thematic focus of the event: Chancellor Thomas Tränapp introduced it as a fixed component of Aachen's startup ecosystem, inviting Tarick Al-Masri and Felix Mertins from the board to join him on stage. During a discussion with the Chancellor and Prof. Dr.-Ing. Matthias Wessling, Vice-Rector for Translation and Transfer, the significance of the Collective Incubator's premises on Jülicher Straße for its daily operations was covered, as well as the range of services offered and how institutes, students and researchers can get involved. The appearance was an opportunity for the Collective Incubator to introduce itself to an audience that rarely comes together in this composition, and to showcase what has developed on Jülicher Straße in recent months and years.

To make Aachen's startup ecosystem more accessible to students, the Collective Incubator took part in the Day of Student Initiatives on 12 May 2026. As its premises are not located on RWTH Aachen's central Mitte campus, the event was an important opportunity for the Collective Incubator to raise its profile among students. The team set themselves the goal of making entrepreneurship an attractive and tangible career path and lowering the barrier to entry into Aachen's startup scene. With a running 3D printer, printed goodies, a prize wheel and numerous small prizes, the stand attracted a great deal of attention. During conversations, the team shared personal insights into the diverse community based at the Collective Incubator. This open exchange showed students how initial ideas can develop into technological innovations and, subsequently, successful startups.

By participating in events such as the Day of Student Initiatives, the Collective Incubator establishes itself as a key point of contact for entrepreneurship and innovation. This strengthens its reputation as a key link within Aachen's innovation network. The large number of people who visited the Collective Incubator's stand confirmed both students' keen interest in startups and entrepreneurship, and the significant role that the Collective Incubator plays in driving the ecosystem forward.

Every year, the Kimiko Festival on RWTH Aachen's Melaten campus brings together music, culture and science. The "CCT.square" (Celebrating the Culture of Tomorrow) on the festival grounds serves as a platform for forward-thinking topics, made more accessible to festival visitors by initiatives, associations and engaged students.

The Kimiko Festival took place from 12 to 14 June 2026. During the three-day festival, the Collective Incubator was also present at the CCT.square, alongside a diverse network from Aachen's ecosystem, including the FH Aachen Startup Center, AC.E Aachen, Space Team Aachen, iGEM Aachen and the City of Aachen's Department of Culture. This was an important opportunity for the Collective Incubator to engage with students in a relaxed, low-threshold festival setting. At the stand, the team playfully raised visitors' awareness of entrepreneurship. An interactive pitch game sparked spontaneous conversations about business ideas, innovations and available support.

By participating in events such as these, the Collective Incubator team continuously inspires students to consider entrepreneurship and starting a business, and introduces them to the support opportunities available in Aachen. The team is also planning events focused on community building, networking and exchange for the second half of 2026, and looks forward to welcoming many new and familiar faces.



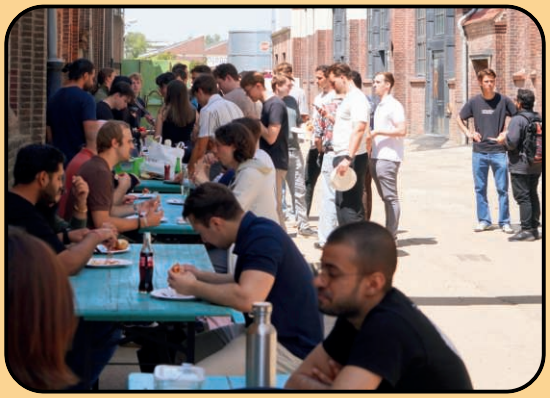
All photos of the RWTHtransparent event by Heike Lachmann

Ideas & BBQ: Meet Founders. Get Inspired.

How ideas turn into real entrepreneurial momentum: Ideas & BBQ brought together students, founders and startup expertise.

On 16 June 2026, the Collective Incubator invited students interested in entrepreneurship to Ideas & BBQ. At the heart of the event was a key question: How does an initial idea evolve into an actual step towards founding a company? Four speakers shared personal insights into their journeys, the challenges they faced and the lessons they learned. Afterwards, a shared barbecue provided an opportunity for relaxed networking and concrete conversations about ideas and available support.

The event was based on the premise that many students have exciting ideas, are generally interested in entrepreneurship and bring subject-matter expertise from their studies, research or projects – what is often missing is not the potential, but the initial spark, the right network and the courage to actually get started. Ideas & BBQ aimed to make the topic of setting up a startup more tangible, inspire students and show that founding a company rarely begins with a perfect business plan, but rather with a willingness to take the first step and experiment.



Rather than talking about entrepreneurship in the abstract, the speakers shared their real-life entrepreneurial experiences. The event opened with Dr.-Ing. Tim Reuscher, co-founder of the startup aiXopt. His talk demonstrated how years of research and technical expertise can evolve into an entrepreneurial approach. The participants could see how scientific work, technological competence and market demand could come together. At the same time, his story made it clear that founding a company doesn't necessarily start with a sudden idea, but can also emerge from years of engagement with a problem area and a strong team.

Anton Spitkovsky of RWTH Innovation offered a different point of view. As a startup coach and lead of the Incubation Program, which prepares participating startups for market entry and funding, he discussed the realities of the founding process. He explained that entrepreneurial paths are rarely linear. Startups experience ups and downs, phases of progress, setbacks, changes in direction and moments when founders must develop new skills. His central message: nobody needs to have all the necessary skills from day one.





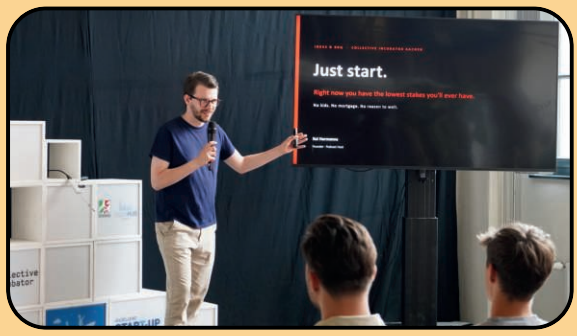
What matters far more, he said, is the willingness to learn, take on responsibility, stay curious and keep going even when the path isn't immediately clear. This perspective alleviated many students' concerns that they needed to be "finished" or perfectly prepared before founding a company.

Participants gained another insight into a concrete startup journey with Florian Wirsing, CEO and co-founder of the startup Senlytics. Again, the focus was not on the business idea itself, but on the path leading to it. How does a team come together? Which assumptions need to be tested? How do ideas evolve when they encounter customers, markets and real-world problems? The keynote demonstrated that establishing a startup is an ongoing learning process that relies on in-depth feedback, adaptability and consistent execution.

Kai Hermanns, founder and CEO of Qontra and board member of AC.E, delivered the final input of the day. His message was deliberately direct: just start. Don't wait for the perfect moment, don't overthink every idea, but take the first steps, have conversations, test hypotheses and trust yourself to become an entrepreneur. Kai made it clear that founding a company is not reserved just for people with years of professional experience or an extensive network. In fact, entrepreneurial development often begins when people have the courage to start with an incomplete idea and develop it further with others.

Another highlight of the afternoon was the networking session that followed the keynotes. After touring the Collective Incubator, including the 1,000-square-metre Maker Space, participants continued their conversations over barbecue food in a relaxed atmosphere. This enabled open discussions that are often not possible in a traditional talk format. Participants shared their own ideas, asked follow-up questions, exchanged contacts and received an accessible introduction to the support offered by the Aachen startup ecosystem.

Ideas & BBQ showed how raising awareness for entrepreneurship can be achieved in practice: in an approachable, hands-on, open and free way, rather than in a preachy, theoretical or exclusive manner.



The event made clear that the Collective Incubator not only supports existing startups, but also actively works to stimulate new startup activity at RWTH Aachen University and in the region. It is precisely this early stage that matters most for a thriving startup ecosystem: only when students find the courage to voice their ideas, pursue them further and take the first steps can new teams, projects and companies emerge in the long run.

Closing Remarks

The Collective Incubator is growing, as are the stories to be told. Courageous individuals have launched new startups, existing teams have reached important milestones, and student initiatives have demonstrated just how much energy and ingenuity are already being generated in Aachen even before a startup is founded. This edition of the Collective Incubator Report showcases the progress of five startups, provides a platform for several student initiatives to present their projects and features personal interviews with founders, dedicated students and key figures within the ecosystem.

This would not have been possible without the openness of the startups, student initiatives and partners, or the dedication of the editorial team. A heartfelt thank you to all of them.

The Collective Incubator is constantly evolving, with new connections, innovative ideas and many more exciting stories. Anyone who wants to become part of it is very welcome.

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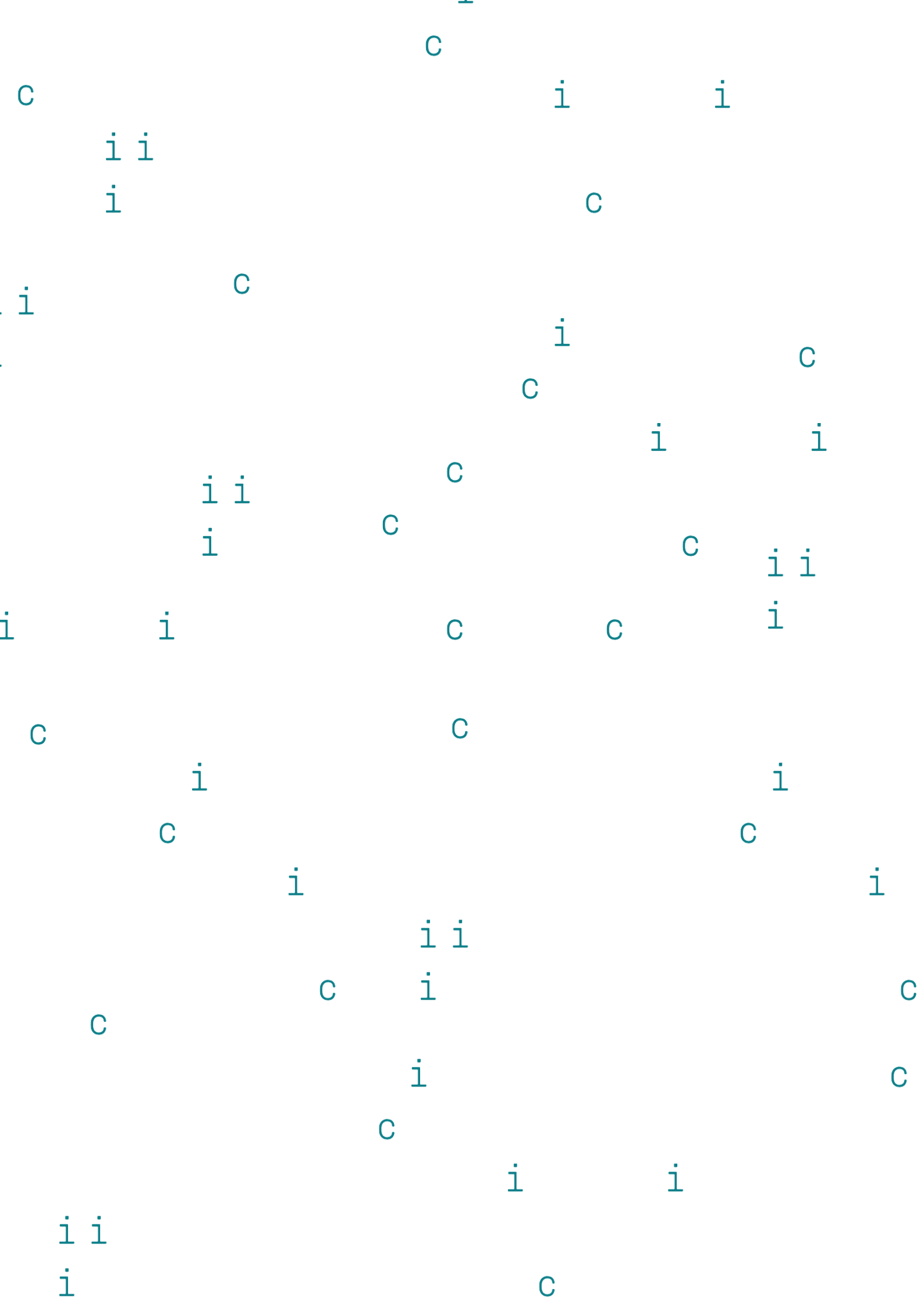
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Every big idea starts small. The Collective Incubator Academies guide you on your way to your own startup: over seven evenings, renowned professors, entrepreneurs, investors and experts teach you everything you need to know about founding, from your first MVP to law and funding. Free, hands-on and taking place in Aachen. We kick off in style with Startups in Slices – your entry point into Aachen's startup scene.

Startups in Slices – Entrepreneurship & Aachen Ecosystem
28.10.26 · RWTH Couvensporthalle

Lecture 1 – Think Like a Founder
04.11.26 · Collective Incubator

Lecture 2 – Solution, MVP & Validation
18.11.26 · Collective Incubator

Lecture 3 – Business Model & Go-to-Market
02.12.26 · Collective Incubator

Lecture 4 – Building Great Founder Teams
16.12.26 · Collective Incubator

Lecture 5 – Startup Law & Practical Founding
06.01.27 · Collective Incubator

Lecture 6 – Startup Finance, Funding & Scaling
20.01.27 · Collective Incubator

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