

# collective incubator report

Second Half of 2025  
July – December



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Dear Community,

The past year has once again shown the incredible energy, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit that students, researchers, founders, and partners bring to Aachen. Ideas have taken shape, projects have flourished, and our vibrant ecosystem has reached new heights. With this report, we want to highlight these developments and show what can be achieved in Aachen's innovation scene.

As the board of Collective Incubator e.V., our mission is to provide a space where ideas can take root and evolve into tangible ventures. Our focus is not just on individual programmes or KPIs, but on the everyday encounters, sparks of inspiration, and development – from the initial spark to sustainable impact.

This past year has also proven how resilient and adaptable our ecosystem is. Even the major relocation of the Collective Incubator to its new home couldn't slow us down. Instead, new spaces and networks have unlocked fresh opportunities and set new milestones. Together, these form the foundation for progress and impact in Aachen.

Our goal remains clear: to continue shaping Aachen as a flagship region for innovation and entrepreneurship. For us, growth is primarily qualitative – measured by networking, visibility, and a lasting impact that goes far beyond individual projects.

This report is for everyone who is active in Aachen's start-up ecosystem or looking to get involved. At the same time, we want to thank the entire Collective Incubator team, who shape this space every day with passion and drive, as well as our colleagues at RWTH Innovation GmbH for their ongoing support.

We invite you to explore this report as an insight into a growing ecosystem and to continue this journey with us.

Best regards,  
Tarick and Felix

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tarick Al-Masri', written over a horizontal line.

Tarick Al-Masri, Chairman Collective Incubator e.V.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Felix Mertens', written over a horizontal line.

Felix Mertens, Chairman Collective Incubator e.V.

# Overview of the Collective Incubator

## Facts and Figures on the Development of the Collective Incubator Community

Between July and December 2025, the Collective Incubator was used by...

673

new community members

34

new start-ups

15

new student initiatives

During this period, the Collective Incubator premises, spanning over 4,000 m<sup>2</sup>, hosted...

63

public events

6285

hours of room bookings across its 8 meeting rooms and event rooms

Since data collection began, the Collective Incubator has been used by...

6200+

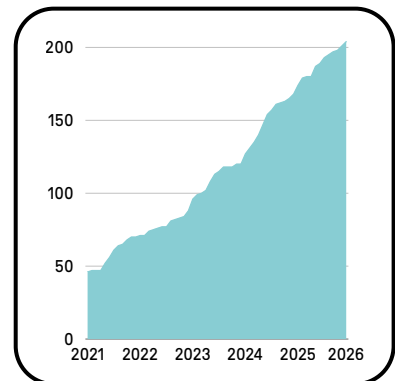
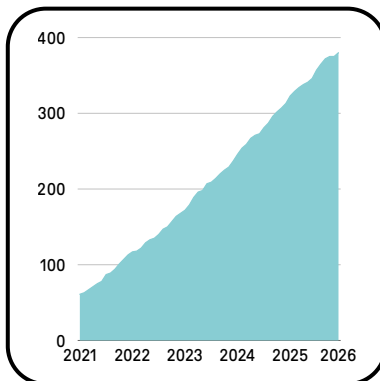
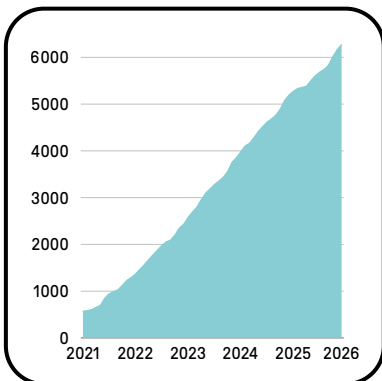
community members

380

start-ups

204

student initiatives



**“Many students come to the Collective Incubator wanting to contribute to a better world. That impresses me the most.”**

Interview with Prof. Dr. Malte Brettel  
Patron of the Collective Incubator e.V.



Photo credit: Benjamin Motyka

Dear Malte, thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. Please introduce yourself to readers who may not know you.

With pleasure. My name is Malte Brettel, and I am currently a professor at RWTH Aachen University. I head the chair “Wirtschaftswissenschaften für Ingenieure und Naturwissenschaftler”, where I teach business administration to engineers and natural scientists, with a clear focus on entrepreneurship. I have also been an entrepreneur myself and am active in the start-up scene, for example as an investor.

When did your passion for entrepreneurship and start-up culture develop? How did you get to where you are today?

I studied industrial engineering and have always had a strong affinity for the technical side. At the same time, I never wanted to lose touch with the business side of things. While studying at WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management, I co-founded a company. Our product was a digital platform for buying and selling used books called “JustBooks”, which we built in Europe and later sold to Amazon. Being a founder made me realise how fulfilling it is to create something yourself, to have the freedom to be your own boss and, at the same time, to take responsibility for its success. This combination has shaped me profoundly.

Later, the chair of “Wirtschaftswissenschaften für Ingenieure und Naturwissenschaftler” was advertised – essentially an industrial engineering professorship with an associated start-up centre. Even back then, this role suited my motivations perfectly.

You were there when students at RWTH Aachen University founded the Collective Incubator in 2017. What made this project so special back then?

The Collective Incubator was special because it was student-driven from the very beginning. I thought that was fantastic. The idea came particularly from the student union (AStA), as the university environment brings together people from many different backgrounds with their own experiences, passions, and visions. However, there was no space to bring all of that together.

The students therefore had the idea of bringing this “collective intelligence” together in a space where people could meet and put ideas into practice, and of channeling it in specific directions, for example towards personal initiative or an entrepreneurial spirit.

Together, we tried to develop something physical and tangible from this idea.

How did you contribute to the project back then, and how did the Collective Incubator project develop further?

At the time, I was Vice-Rector at RWTH Aachen University and worked closely with the student union (AStA). That's how I learned about the students' idea. Initially, we discussed the idea extensively and allowed it to develop. Then we worked on institutionalising the project, for example by searching for funding opportunities. A key part of this process was RWTH Aachen's application for funding from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia's “Exzellenz Start-up Center. NRW” programme. This programme supports

universities with a strong entrepreneurial spirit in expanding their start-up and technology transfer structures. We seized the opportunity to combine the students' idea with the topic of start-up incubation.

This proposal included a high-quality Maker Space for developing prototypes and co-working spaces for collaborative creative work. These spaces would be embedded within the Collective Incubator, which would serve as a hub for start-ups, exchange, and collaboration. The most important milestone was undoubtedly the state of North Rhine-Westphalia's approval of this proposal in 2019. This secured RWTH Aachen University five years of funding until 2024, with a significant portion allocated for the building and equipment of the Collective Incubator. I am pleased that the university continues to fund the Collective Incubator.

Photo credit: Benjamin Motyka



What is the Collective Incubator's vision today? Has it changed over time?

Since its founding, the Collective Incubator's vision has essentially remained the same. We aim to harness collective intelligence, facilitate incubation, and foster the emergence of more start-ups from the RWTH Aachen environment. However, I initially didn't consider another important impact of the Collective Incubator to be so central: the contribution to the personal development of students that the Collective Incubator and its ecosystem make. I only came to appreciate this over time, and it fascinates me the most today. I get to know many teams as they take their first steps. Often, after a few months, I realise how much the people have

grown personally. I believe we need to integrate this dimension more strongly into the university because it can be an important part of students' education – especially during times of dramatic change in the world of work, such as the increasing use of artificial intelligence. In the future, people will continue to distinguish themselves through their personalities.

What is so extraordinary about the Collective Incubator e.V. being student-run and housing both start-ups and student initiatives?

I think that's precisely what makes a true ecosystem. We don't want to restrict students by opening the Collective Incubator only to start-ups, for example. The Collective Incubator is intentionally open: students are welcome to come, get involved, and pursue different paths. This dynamic attracts many people.

The fact that the Collective Incubator e.V. is student-run is unique and distinguishes it from other institutions in Germany. The Collective Incubator remains innovative because students implement projects for students, developing themselves personally in the process. This gives the place a special appeal and ensures that the student atmosphere and low-barrier entry point are maintained.

Which teams that are currently developing their projects in the Collective Incubator – or which have developed their projects there in the past – particularly impress you?

There are many teams that are economically strong, and I see great future potential in them. I don't want to single out any specific start-ups or student initiatives. However: Many students come to the Collective Incubator wanting to contribute to a better world. That impresses me the most. The desire to make a difference is often more present than economic goals. As coaches and start-up supporters, our task is to translate this aspiration into viable business models. It's not always easy, but I find this combination particularly fascinating. If we can achieve this together, we might make a significant contribution to a better world.

What characterises the start-up culture in the Aachen city region for you? What do you hope for in the future development of Aachen as a start-up location, so that it becomes a central European hub for start-up creation?

In my view, the start-up infrastructure in Aachen works seamlessly. RWTH Aachen University mobilises students passionate about entrepreneurship and talented individuals. When they join the Collective Incubator, they can develop and grow – either personally, through student initiatives, or by launching start-ups. This low-barrier approach is the Collective Incubator's core. RWTH Innovation GmbH offers exciting programmes to help young start-ups grow. The Gateway Factory, a newly founded inter-university start-up accelerator, provides support for start-ups looking to scale, including production capacity and a strong network. DigitalHUB Aachen e.V. assists with digital business models. These institutions form a solid foundation because the stakeholders maintain open communication and the components mesh effectively.

Building on the strong foundation we've established in Aachen, I hope that we can now significantly accelerate our efforts together. In my view, it's possible to generate considerably more start-ups each year. Of course, one could lament that large surrounding cities like Cologne and Düsseldorf are particularly attractive to start-ups – but there's also a lot we can do to make Aachen more attractive as well. Above all, it's crucial that all stakeholders in the ecosystem understand and appreciate each other's work instead of operating in silos or competing. If we collaborate in this way, we can accomplish significantly more.



Photo credit: Benjamin Motyka

Furthermore, raising awareness and visibility about entrepreneurship is extremely important. The best ambassadors are often those who have started their own businesses. The more success stories we showcase, the more people will be inspired to become entrepreneurs. Even if not everyone ends up founding a company, we have already achieved a tremendous amount if students develop personally within the Collective Incubator.

Thank you, Malte!



Photo credit: Benjamin Motyka



Dr.-Ing. Julian Hofmann  
CEO & Co-Founder



Adrian Holt  
CTO & Co-Founder



Dr. Sascha Welten  
COO

### FloodWaive Predictive Intelligence GmbH

Founded  
2023

Industry  
ClimateTech,  
WaterTech

Funding Stage  
Early Stage  
(bootstrapped)

Team Size  
20 team members

FloodWaive develops AI-powered flood and heavy rainfall forecasts that provide high-resolution predictions and risk analysis within seconds. These forecasts allow municipalities, infrastructure operators, and companies to identify risks early and coordinate emergency response and protective measures quickly. FloodWaive's vision is to provide intelligent, data-driven flood protection that safeguards lives, property, and critical infrastructure worldwide. At the core of FloodWaive's offerings is the DeepWaive software platform, which translates weather and environmental data into precise risk and impact analyses.

FloodWaive was founded in November 2023 in the research environment at RWTH Aachen University. Since then, the young company has developed its prototype into a robust platform and successfully implemented its first pilot and funding contexts. FloodWaive uses personal office space at the Collective Incubator and regularly participates in networking events to exchange ideas with other teams.

In the second half of 2025, FloodWaive focused on operationalisation. The start-up improved the quality, stability, and runtime of its models, integrated new visualisations (including 3D views), and expanded functions for demo and mission-critical workflows. In terms of organisation, FloodWaive significantly expanded and strengthened its team and deepened its collaboration with partners for pilot projects.





Lukas Oster  
CEO & Co-Founder



Jens Lotte  
CFO & Co-Founder

### Plasma Additive GmbH

Founded  
2023

Industry  
Mechanical  
engineering

Funding Stage  
Early Stage  
(seed-strapping)

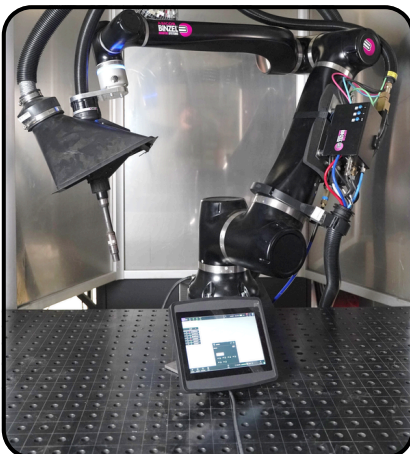
Team Size  
7 team members

Plasma Additive is a technology-driven company that specialises in Wire Arc Additive Manufacturing (WAAM). As a spin-off from RWTH Aachen University, Plasma Additive develops highly automated manufacturing solutions that replace traditional, material-intensive processes and allow for greater design flexibility. The start-up's vision is to make industrial additive processing of metals more flexible, efficient, and sustainable. Through these efforts, Plasma Additive aims to contribute to securing Germany as a manufacturing location in the long term.

The company's most important milestones include successfully transferring technology from research, establishing an interdisciplinary core team, and implementing the first demonstrators for industrial applications. At the same time, the start-up has continuously developed its technology towards market readiness.

Plasma Additive made significant progress in the second half of 2025. Of particular note is the further development of its control system, which, for the first time, enables stable, real-time communication of all process components under industrial conditions. Plasma Additive also expanded its team by hiring additional specialists and student employees. Strategically, the start-up gained new industrial partners for pilot projects and laid the groundwork for the first commercial use of its technologies.

Plasma Additive plans to launch its first market-oriented applications in 2026 and expand ongoing pilot projects with industry partners. Additionally, the start-up intends to expand its product portfolio in a targeted manner. The goal is to establish Plasma Additive as a reliable innovation partner for sustainable, forward-looking manufacturing solutions in the metal industry.





Dr.-Ing. Jannik Bühring  
CEO & Co-Founder



Dr. Jana Maria Weinand  
CFO & Co-Founder



Maximilian Schirp-Schoenen  
CTO & Co-Founder

### leitspalt GmbH

Founded  
2024

Industry  
Battery technology,  
Mobility

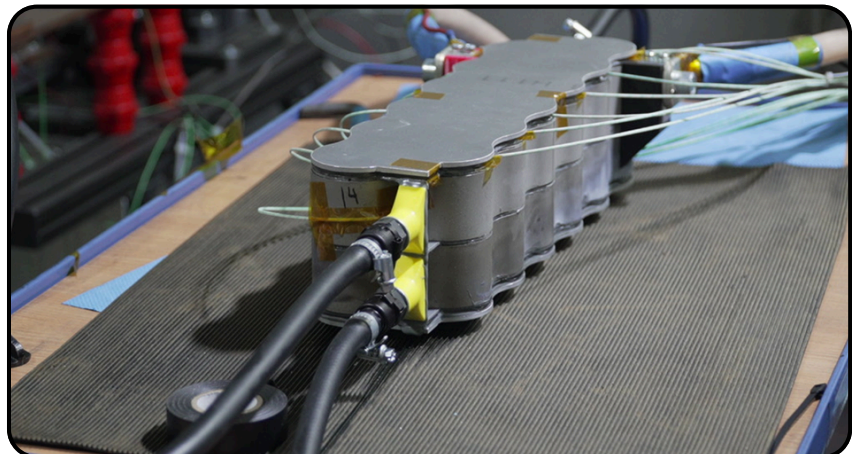
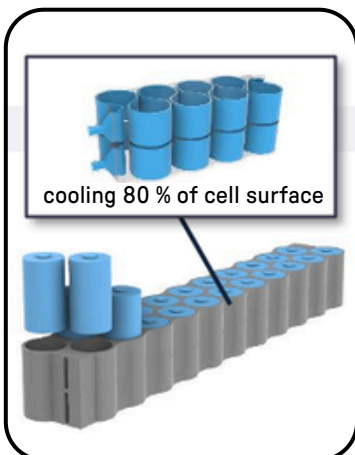
Funding Stage  
Pre-Seed  
(CLA Round 2024)

Team Size  
9 team members

leitspalt develops structurally integrated battery systems for various mobility applications, ranging from electric vehicles to UAVs. At the heart of the start-up's technology is a patented, multifunctional cooling structure that replaces several conventional components in the battery pack and enables ultra-fast charging in under ten minutes, longer ranges, and significant cost reductions. leitspalt's mission is to make battery systems more efficient, affordable, and sustainable by simplifying their design.

Since its founding in March 2024, leitspalt has validated the performance of its technology in several fully functional prototypes and launched an extensive testing programme to mitigate technological risks. At the same time, the young company has achieved important commercial milestones. Initial projects with leading German original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), a sports car manufacturer, and a drone manufacturer demonstrate the flexible and versatile applications of the technology. Additionally, Leitspalt secured €500,000 in financing and strengthened its engineering team. leitspalt makes intensive use of the Collective Incubator's infrastructure for office space, hardware setup, and community engagement. The company recently impressed in various competitions, including INNOspace Masters 2025, Ignition+, Startupland, EPIC, and the HERHOOD Award.

For 2026, leitspalt plans to scale its technology to Technology Readiness Level 7, further expand its engineering and sales teams, and complete its pre-seed financing round. At the same time, leitspalt is working with its partners on pilot projects that will form the basis for future series production.



“Aachen is an excellent location for technology companies. Many successful spin-offs remain here and establish large companies in Aachen.”

Interview with Dr.-Ing. Jannik Bühring  
Co-Founder & CEO of leitspalt



Photo credit: Moritz Gebler

Dear Jannik, thank you so much for joining us today. Please introduce yourself to our readers.

I'm Jannik Bühring, a co-founder and CEO of leitspalt. We develop battery packs with a novel cooling system that significantly reduces costs and improves performance. This technology creates value across various mobility sectors. We are currently focusing on the automotive industry.

I earned my Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering and my Master of Science in Aerospace Engineering at RWTH Aachen University. I then earned my Ph.D. at the Institute of Structural Mechanics and Lightweight Design at RWTH Aachen and worked at the institute for about six and a half years, spending the last year as a group leader in the field of modelling. Instead of staying there, I decided to pursue a different path in 2024. Since March 2024, my team and I have been working full-time on the development of leitspalt's technology, which we had already started at the institute.

What is your vision for leitspalt?

Our vision is to become the world's leading supplier of high-performance battery systems for the mass market. We're starting with the automotive industry, but eventually, we want to expand to other mobility markets, such as commercial vehicles, boats, and perhaps agricultural machinery. Basically, anything that moves.

You have a degree in mechanical engineering and a doctorate in a traditional mechanical engineering discipline. When did you start working with battery systems? How did that come about?

Initially, my research had nothing directly to do with battery systems. However, I was involved in automotive projects from the beginning at the institute, which was my main point of contact with the field in which we now work with leitspalt.

My colleagues at the institute have conducted extensive research on multifunctional spacecraft structures. "Multifunctional" means combining several functions into a single component. This offers significant advantages, particularly in spaceflight, as it reduces component weight and consequently saves costs. Specifically, their work has included multifunctional heat shields for re-entry vehicles, which is a field that overlaps with what leitspalt is currently doing.

These colleagues and I were friends. One evening, we saw a particular structure and thought, "Wait a minute – couldn't we integrate batteries into this and use it as a cooling system for the automotive industry?" That's how the idea began as a spontaneous "over-a-beer" discussion. We further developed the concept, created an early prototype, and iterated technically. With the second iteration, we took the step of founding the company.

What motivated you to start your own business? What did you hope to gain by founding a company, as opposed to working as a researcher?

I would rather frame it the other way around. The working methods I enjoyed as a researcher translate well to starting a business. At our institute, we had a relatively high degree of freedom. Of course, there were projects and responsibilities, but most importantly, I could pursue what I believed in within my area of work. As a founder, it's similar. I truly stand behind what motivates me and pursue it with all my might. However, I didn't want the typical path to a large company with rigid hierarchies and little room for initiative. The freedom I have as a founder and the passion it gives me for my work ensure that I come to work every morning highly motivated.



Photo credit: Moritz Gebler

When did you and your founding team start leitspalt? What happened next?

After developing the technology and manufacturing prototypes at the Institute of Structural Mechanics and Lightweight Design at RWTH Aachen University, we launched a minimum viable product. The overwhelmingly positive market feedback enabled us to further develop our product. This paved the way for my colleague Max [Editor's note: Maximilian Schirp-Schoenen] and me to found our company in the fall of 2023. Max is now the CTO of leitspalt. In preparation for starting our company, we

participated in the RWTH Innovation GmbH Incubation Program, where we met our co-founder Jana [Editor's note: Dr. Jana Maria Weinand]. With her business background, she was the missing piece for us engineers. Today, she is our CFO.

All we needed now was seed capital. Through the Incubation Program, we met Daniel Schellong, a business angel and former Boston Consulting Group partner in the automotive sector. He was convinced by our idea and offered to become a founding investor. He also brought Andreas Kupke, the founder of FINANZCHECK.de, on board as a second investor. With our mature technology and investors with experience in the industry and in start-ups, we were well prepared. The five of us founded the company. Together, we built it into what leitspalt is today.

How did you develop leitspalt's business model? Has it changed since the company was founded?

Our core technology has remained the same since our founding. However, our business model has changed somewhat. Like many mechanical engineers, I used to dream of building our own large production facilities, but we abandoned that idea. After discussing the matter with experts from the automotive industry and customers, we realised that this wouldn't make sense for this sector. We would need a lot of capital to establish an "automotive-ready" production line for a battery system. At the same time, it would be difficult for us, as a new supplier, to successfully establish ourselves in the market so that original equipment manufacturers would purchase complete battery systems from us. Furthermore, Germany and Europe have large production capacities with established suppliers who are currently under considerable pressure because they are not utilising their capacity fully. Many classic combustion engine components are unnecessary for electric cars, and there is high competitive pressure from Asia. The supplier industry is searching for new products. Our conclusion: We work hand in hand. We provide the technology, engineering

expertise, and prototypes, while the supplier takes over production.

What have been the biggest challenges so far? Were they primarily technical, bureaucratic, or psychological?

As a hardware company, we face technical challenges every day. Therefore, we work hard to improve our technology every day.

Bureaucracy also presents a major challenge. I find it almost unbelievable how difficult things are for founders in Germany. The tax office, accounting, legal issues, professional associations – these aspects are all justified, but no one provides founders with the relevant information in a consolidated way or guides them through the process. Instead, different agencies constantly request new things and offer no support with implementation. Despite this, we strive to handle these matters thoroughly.

Being a founder isn't always easy, even in your personal life. It's not a job where you start work in the morning and finish in the afternoon. Evenings, weekends, and vacations are filled with calls and other tasks. You have to be prepared for that.

Given all these challenges, was there a time when you felt close to giving up?

No, not really. I look forward to coming to work every day. I really enjoy it, even when it gets extremely stressful. The great thing is that, despite having many responsibilities, I also have a lot of flexibility.

Our founding team is very good, and we can speak openly. If one of us feels overwhelmed, it's okay to address it. It's invaluable that we can support and help each other through such situations as a team. This helps us get through stressful periods.

How would you describe the team culture at leitspalt? What values are most important to you, especially with regard to the precision and reliability required for successfully developing technological solutions?

We are a harmonious team, and things are

changing rapidly. Besides the three founders, who all work full-time, we have hired several working students, not only in engineering but also in sales.

The team is highly motivated. That's not something to take for granted. Many of our working students were previously involved in student initiatives. They are particularly enthusiastic about their work and dedicate themselves to their projects until they're finished. This is very impressive and not something I can generally expect from employees.

I think our team functions so well primarily because we collaborate closely and communicate frequently, both digitally and in person. Personal interaction is important to my co-founder and me. We ensure that all employees spend most of their working time with us at the Collective Incubator, rather than working primarily from home.



Photo credit: Moritz Gebler

In retrospect, were there specific environmental factors, such as mentors, role models, or other start-ups, that played an important role in leitspalt's success?

I didn't have any direct role models. However, I recommend that everyone look to those who are more experienced for advice, because they've already made similar mistakes and know how to deal with them. At the same time, the team's instincts have often proven their worth. Over the past few years, many mentors and coaches have offered different perspectives, but

ultimately, we've found ourselves back at square one with what we instinctively knew from the beginning. Therefore, I don't put too much weight on outside opinions anymore, though I'm not saying you shouldn't seek help from experienced people on critical issues. That's precisely why our founding investors are important. We brought them onto the team deliberately because they are very experienced in certain areas.

One example is our business model. As previously mentioned, we handle the engineering and prototyping in-house, license our technology, and suppliers manufacture it industrially. Many people around us tried to dissuade us from this business model, believing that we would be better manufacturing the product in-house. We listened to them, tried it out, and found that it didn't work for us. Afterward, we returned to our original plan.

Photo credit: Moritz Gebler



#### What advice would you give to students and researchers with an idea for a business?

If students have a good idea, they should definitely pursue it. If the idea proves to be marketable, it will likely be very worthwhile. Even if it isn't, they will have learned a lot. In my opinion, that's worth the year they might "lose" in the process because they will probably work for a very long time in their lives.

For researchers, it's important not to be too "in love with technology." Many aspiring entrepre-

neurs fall into a common trap: They develop something that works and are passionate about it, but they lose sight of whether the market needs their product. Then, there's a high risk that the business plan will fail. Rather than developing technology first and then considering its purpose, aspiring entrepreneurs should identify a market need and find a solution to address it.

We also had our problems at the beginning. Initially, our battery solution didn't meet the automotive industry's primary needs of cost reduction and energy density. Our product had other technical benefits, but not those. Therefore, we studied the market intensively, sought out experienced contacts, held discussions with industry professionals, and assessed whether there was a product-market fit. I recommend that everyone do this early on because many research spin-offs fail precisely because they don't.

#### What would you like to see in the future to better promote start-ups in Aachen?

I've only started a company in Aachen, so I can't make perfect comparisons. However, for a medium-sized city, Aachen has a lot to offer. Thanks to its strong technical university, start-ups in Aachen can recruit highly qualified engineers. Because of the many successful student initiatives, graduates bring valuable experience and skills right from the start. This is extremely valuable for start-ups in Aachen. In this context, we would be delighted if more women found their way into our company. For example, we recently advertised a position for which we received seventy applications, only two of which were from women. We want to build a diverse team, so we would like to see this changed.

The ecosystem surrounding RWTH Aachen University and the Collective Incubator is strong as well. We've visited other cities and seen similar things, but the Collective Incubator is unique, especially because of its professional Maker Space.

Regarding our situation specifically: We've found that the city of Aachen actively supports

start-ups in their search for office space or technical facilities. The city is responsive to companies' needs and helps them find good solutions.

Overall, I have absolutely nothing to complain about. Aachen is an excellent location for technology companies. Many successful spin-offs remain here and establish large companies in Aachen.

How are you planning for the near future of leitspalt? What important developments or projects would you like to implement with your team in 2026?

One very concrete next step is moving, as our team is slowly outgrowing our office at the Collective Incubator. We are currently looking for a new location and have probably already found

a suitable space with office and workshop areas.

We are also in the midst of a larger funding round. We completed a round at the end of last year to enable further growth.

Technically, we want to set up a pilot line not for our own series production, but to be able to plan processes and conduct prototyping for customers. To do so, we need to equip our new hall with the necessary equipment. We are currently preparing for this.

A major milestone for 2026 is developing a full-scale battery system for a customer and implementing it in a test vehicle, as we are now involved in initial automotive projects. Our goal is to successfully complete these projects.

Thank you so much for your time, Jannik!



Photo credit: Moritz Gebler



Dipl.-Ing. Philipp Ketteniß  
CEO & Co-Founder



Dr. Carolin Krieweth  
CFO & Co-Founder



Dr. Agastya Peela  
CTO & Co-Founder

### regascold GmbH

Founded  
2020

Industry  
Energy,  
Special-purpose  
Machinery

Funding Stage  
Seed

Team Size  
5 team members

regascold is a greentech start-up that develops hardware for sustainable industrial cooling processes through cold recovery from liquefied gas.

Almost all manufacturing companies in the metal, chemical, electrical, food, and pharmaceutical industries require cooling for processes, machines, warehouses, and buildings, and they must produce this cooling mechanically. This results in high costs and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Around 20 percent of these companies could avoid much of this cooling production by using cold recovery. These cold sources are cryogenically liquefied gases that companies need to manufacture their products. In order to use them, the liquefied gases must be converted back into gas, or regasified. Until now, this valuable cold has escaped into the environment unused — but regascold makes it usable with the freecooler, a patented heat exchanger. The Collective Incubator supports regascold with a personal office, access to the Maker Space, workshops, and access to the ecosystem network.

Since its founding, regascold has achieved numerous successes. These include steadily expanding the team, winning awards, attracting investors and funding, and raising awareness in business and politics about sustainable cooling through cold recovery. In addition to establishing numerous contacts with customers in various industries, regascold is currently in the bidding phase with three large companies from the electrical, metal, and automotive industries. The company has test benches for trials and signed a strategic partnership with Nippon Gases in December 2025. This partnership aims to enable customers to recover cold from liquefied gas and to provide access to the market.



# AUXSYS



Enno Dülberg  
CEO & Founder

## Auxsys GmbH

Founded  
2022

Industry  
Robotics,  
Defense

Funding Stage  
Pre-Seed  
(bootstrapped)

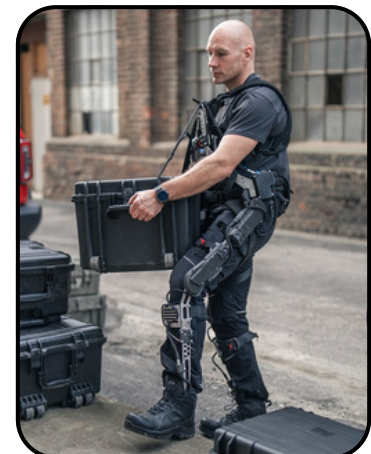
Team Size  
17 team members

Auxsys develops active exoskeletons and robotic systems that make physically demanding work in unpredictable environments easier for humans. The start-up's core technology consists of active full-body exoskeletons that transfer the weight of external loads (e.g. heavy backpacks) directly to the ground via a supporting structure. In addition, electric motors actively support the wearer's movements. This holistic approach distinguishes Auxsys from existing solutions, which are mostly passive and often only relieve pressure on individual areas of the body.

Auxsys's development began in 2020 at the FH Aachen - University of Applied Sciences and culminated in the company's founding in 2022. The team uses an iterative development process in various research and development projects. These advanced systems bring the start-up closer to its goal of achieving widespread adoption of robotic technology to relieve the strain of heavy physical work.

In the second half of 2025, Auxsys completed the sixth generation of its exoskeleton prototypes and successfully tested them in studies with users, including military personnel. These tests provided valuable insights for developing a scalable series product. Auxsys uses the Collective Incubator's Maker Space for prototype production.

In the coming months, the start-up will prepare for extensive trials for use in the defence sector. Other areas of focus include developing fully robotic systems and exoskeletons to support the elderly.



“The Collective Incubator plays a central role in bringing visions to life in Aachen.”

Interview with Brenda Ritter  
Founders Associate at the alumni start-up IonKraft



Photo credit : Alexander Kirch

## IONKRAFT

IonKraft is an Aachen-based start-up that develops and manufactures an innovative, recyclable barrier coating system for mono-material plastics. Founded in 2021 by Benedikt Heuer and Dr. Montgomery Jaritz, the young company operated from an office in the Collective Incubator from 2023 to 2024. In October 2024, IonKraft, by then a pre-seed start-up with 22 employees, moved into its own premises. Since then, the team has grown to over 30 employees, and the company has closed its first equity financing round.

Thank you, Brenda, for sharing insights into your time at the Collective Incubator and your work at IonKraft. Please briefly introduce yourself to our readers.

My name is Brenda, and I studied Business Administration with a focus on Corporate Development and Strategy at RWTH Aachen University. From 2022 to 2024, I was part of the Collective Incubator team. Initially, I worked in Partnership Management, then on the board, and finally as the Head of Collective Incubator. Since June 2024, I have been working as a Founders Associate at IonKraft, supporting operational and strategic initiatives – primarily at the intersection of communications, HR, corporate development, and organisational strategy.

How did you come across the Collective Incubator in 2022, and why did you start getting involved?

David Beumers, one of the founders of the Collective Incubator, first brought the initiative to my attention. I liked the atmosphere from the start: open, supportive, and characterised by

genuine team spirit. The active support for start-ups and other student initiatives convinced me to get involved with the team as a volunteer.

You were part of the Collective Incubator board from October 2022 until October 2023. What was that time like for you?

It was intense, incredibly educational, and personally very enriching. I was given a lot of responsibility, and together with the team, I contributed to shaping the Aachen start-up ecosystem. We leveraged the trust placed in us to expand the Collective Incubator's offerings to the community, such as regular after-work events and new funding opportunities for student initiatives.

At the same time, it was important to us to further strengthen enthusiasm for innovation and entrepreneurship in Aachen. Our goal was to support the community in the long term, not by organising as many events as possible, but through greater commitment and genuine cooperation.

We wanted to foster an ownership mindset, so students and volunteers could take on responsibility and see the impact of their efforts. To this end, we structured the formats and roles within our team to enable active participation. Team members led their own projects, took ownership, and implemented their ideas.

This strengthened the team's identification with the Collective Incubator and improved team cohesion and work quality.

You have been working at lonKraft since June 2024. What exactly does lonKraft do, and what is your vision?

lonKraft is a spin-off start-up from the Institute for Plastics Processing (IKV) at RWTH Aachen University. Our coating technology makes millions of plastic containers recyclable every year. Many products have demanding packaging requirements. Currently, the industry combines packaging plastics with barrier plastics in multilayer packaging, which is difficult to recycle.

We have developed a plasma-based coating technology that offers comparable performance to conventional multilayer structures while ensuring complete recyclability. Our goal is to enable a circular economy for plastic packaging.

lonKraft was founded in 2021 as a small start-up. How did you come into contact with lonKraft and what was your experience with the company during its initial phase?

I first met the lonKraft team at the Collective Incubator's co-working space and had since encountered them at numerous events.

At the time, lonKraft had its own office at the Collective Incubator and produced prototype components in the Maker Space. To me, lonKraft is a prime example of how research can lead to an industrially viable product. I'm fascinated by the combination of technology, industrial relevance, and its clear contribution to the circular economy.

The company demonstrated its capabilities early on in programmes like the RWTH Innovation Sprint in 2020, and it reached a significant

milestone in 2023 when it received over €2.5 million in funding from the EIC Accelerator. In its early stages, the start-up consisted of a small, close-knit team characterised by mutual support, a high degree of personal responsibility, and a shared vision. They addressed challenges openly and celebrated successes together. This blend of professionalism and team spirit, in my view, was a key factor in their success.

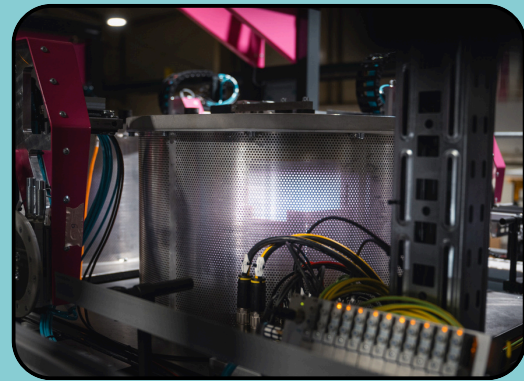


Photo credit: Jonas Mohr

Close-up of the coating chamber of an lonKraft production plant, where plastic packaging is coated with a thin barrier layer.

How has lonKraft developed since leaving the Collective Incubator, and what is your role in the start-up?

Since October 2024, our offices and technical centre have been located in the TRIWO Technology Park in Aachen-Rothe-Erde. Thanks to €3.5 million in venture capital funding and larger premises, we have expanded our team and commissioned our first two industrial coating lines. The first plastic packaging products coated with our technology are now available on the market.

As a Founders Associate, I work closely with our two founders. I oversee marketing and human resources, support strategic projects, and play a key role in organisational development. My goal is to create structures that support our growth without sacrificing our start-up-like speed. This means clear responsibilities, transparent decision-making processes, and simple, reliable systems.

You know both sides: IonKraft as a Founders Associate and the Collective Incubator as a former board member. How does this dual perspective influence your work today?

At the Collective Incubator, I learned the value of sharing responsibility early on and placing trust in others.

At the same time, I also saw that having clear structures without unnecessary bureaucracy is essential. Maintaining this balance is very important to me at IonKraft. We consciously avoid a silo mentality, work together as a team, and support each other. Regardless of role or title, the work is strongly hands-on. This ensures that problems are solved quickly and that successes are truly a team effort.

How would you describe the culture of the start-up community in Aachen, and what role does the Collective Incubator play in it?

The Aachen start-up scene is tech-driven, down-to-earth, and collaborative. The Collective Incubator plays a central role in bringing visions to life in Aachen. It brings people together, creates space for experimentation, and lowers the barriers to getting started. I had the

opportunity to build a network that I still benefit from today.

I hope that the Collective Incubator continues to provide space for experimentation while strengthening its connections with industry and investors. Aachen has enormous technological potential. To foster more successful start-ups, it needs bold funding, close industrial partnerships, and greater visibility beyond the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

What does the near future hold for IonKraft? What projects or developments are planned for the coming years?

We are continuing to scale our company, in terms of both personnel and technology. This means ramping up production, constructing additional industrial machines, and further developing long-term partnerships with packaging manufacturers. Our goal is clear: we want to replace fluorinated and multilayer plastic packaging with our recyclable, mono-material solutions to make the industry more sustainable.

Thank you so much for your insights, Brenda!

Photo credit: Alexander Kirch



The IonKraft team



# Robotics Collective

**Robotics Collective**  
(open robotic metaverse e.V.)

Founded  
2023

Area of Activity  
Robotics

Active Members  
10



Amine Kharrat  
Chairman



Karim Siala  
Treasurer

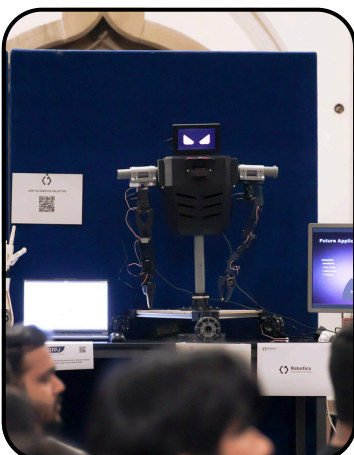


Jan Strehl  
Secretary

Robotics Collective builds bridges between science and industry. In an open ecosystem, the initiative connects students, researchers and companies with the aim of facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience in robotics and of making the subject more accessible to interested parties. Its work is based on three pillars: “Learn”, “Connect” and “Innovate”. One of its flagship projects is the Aachen Open Source Humanoid (AOSH), which brings together hardware and software experts and researchers to develop a humanoid robot.

Autumn 2025 was all about connections: in October, the biannual Robotics Meetup brought together over 150 participants, 14 institutions and numerous robots in a relaxed setting. Guests from all over Europe used the event to network. In November, this was followed by the AI+Robotics Hackathon, organised in collaboration with the WZL at RWTH Aachen University. Over 50 participants worked in interdisciplinary teams to develop solutions at the intersection of AI and robotics.

Robotics Collective has set itself ambitious goals for 2026: the association aims to establish its flagship event as one of the leading German robotics conferences and welcome over 500 guests. To meet growing international interest, the initiative is continuously working to expand its partner network.




**Cinesis e.V.**

Founded  
2024

Area of Activity  
Photo and Video  
Production

Active Members  
14



Benjamin Motyka  
Chairman



Alp Ergin Kunac  
Vice Chairman



Jacob Maxton  
Treasurer

Cinesis is a student initiative based at RWTH Aachen University. Its mission is to make campus life more visible through professional video and photography. Furthermore, the initiative supports student councils and other student initiatives by providing them with high-quality recordings. Cinesis supports projects from initial idea to finished product, from event documentation to image films.

During the second half of 2025, the initiative expanded its work significantly, taking responsibility for photo and video recordings at Aachen events such as the Baustrom Party, Studiball, Floodlight Musicals and Bonding Automotive Day. During this period, the association further streamlined its production workflow and expanded its network of student partners. In May 2025, the initiative hosted the official celebration to mark its foundation, bringing together partners from various student councils and initiatives to celebrate this occasion. At the same time, the team trained new members and set up internal training courses on camera work, lighting and video editing.

In 2026, Cinesis plans to strengthen its presence on campus as a creative service provider by providing photographic and video coverage of further major events and offering workshops to interested students. To achieve this, the initiative plans to continue making intensive use of the Collective Incubator's infrastructure and services. In particular, the association makes regular use of the media studio and meeting rooms. Cinesis looks forward to receiving many content requests in the future and bringing new projects to life.





**Sonnenwagen Aachen  
e.V.**

Founded  
2015

Area of Activity  
Solar Racing

Active Members  
45



Leonie Brandt  
Chairwoman



Christian Sonnenschein  
Vice Chairman



Velten Skorwider  
Treasurer



Christian Behrends  
Technical Lead

Team Sonnenwagen Aachen is a student initiative from RWTH Aachen University and FH Aachen University of Applied Sciences. Every two years, the team develops and manufactures a solar-powered racing car to compete in the Bridgestone World Solar Challenge, which covers over 3,000 kilometres across Australia. The race rules require participants to push the boundaries of efficient, sustainable mobility by combining lightweight construction, electronics and energy management.

The 2025 Bridgestone World Solar Challenge took place at the end of August. The previous months were marked by intensive testing and preparation. During this time, the Sonnenwagen Aachen team's solar car model, the Covestro Æthon, which was developed and manufactured specifically for this competition, clocked up around 3,000 test kilometres on Australia's Stuart Highway to test the reliability of each system. In Darwin, the Covestro Æthon passed scrutineering, with the team achieving pole position in qualifying. At the start of the race, the Covestro Æthon stopped briefly due to an electrical issue and initially fell behind; however, the students managed to work their way back up to fourth place by the end of the first day. Despite cool temperatures, wind and changeable cloud cover, the team maintained this position until the finish in Adelaide. This is the Sonnenwagen Aachen team's best result to date in the World Solar Challenge.

Team Sonnenwagen Aachen will begin developing a new solar racing car in 2026, aiming to compete for victory in 2027 and participate in the "iLumen European Solar Challenge" in September 2026.



“Our goal is to push the boundaries of what is technically possible and make a statement about efficiency.”

Interview with Olivia Wahle  
Sponsorship Manager at Team Sonnenwagen Aachen



Photo credit: Team Sonnenwagen

Hello Olivia, thank you for allowing us to conduct this interview with you. To start, please briefly introduce yourself: Who are you and what is your position within the Sonnenwagen Aachen team?

My name is Olivia and I am a business administration student at RWTH Aachen University. I am also involved in the student initiative “Team Sonnenwagen Aachen”. Last season, I worked in the sponsorship department, specifically in sponsorship logistics. My role involved finding sponsors to enable us to travel to the Bridgestone World Solar Challenge in Australia in 2025. After the season ended, I decided to stay on and I am now in charge of sponsorship. I have also taken on the role of marketing manager on an interim basis, until these positions are filled in the new team.

What does the Sonnenwagen Aachen team do?

In short, we build solar-powered racing cars and compete in international races. Each cycle takes two years: one year for the concept and development phase, followed by just over six months to build the car. Our ultimate goal is to participate in the next Bridgestone World Solar Challenge in 2027.

You've been with the team since summer 2024. What personally motivated you to become part of the Sonnenwagen Aachen team?

It was important to me to do something practical alongside my business studies and strike a balance. Through my work with the Sonnenwagen Aachen team, I have also had the opportunity to develop important soft skills through volunteering. However, it was ultimately the adventure in Australia that convinced me to join the Sonnenwagen team.

What exactly is the “Sonnenwagen” and what makes it technologically special?

Our goal is to push the boundaries of what is technically possible and make a statement about efficiency. What makes the car special is that it runs entirely on solar power and is extremely efficient. For instance, we can drive from Darwin to Adelaide – a journey of over 3,000 kilometres – with the battery being charged exclusively by solar power. It's also impressive that this project has been realised entirely through student self-organisation.



Photo credit: Benjamin Motyka

What disciplines and fields of expertise come together in your team, and what opportunities arise from an interdisciplinary team?

Our student body is very diverse. As well as students of mechanical and electrical engineering, we also have students of computer science, materials science, sustainable energy, raw materials technology, physics and business administration. Programmes such as aerospace engineering and business law at the University of Applied Sciences are also represented. This interdisciplinary mix fosters diverse perspectives on problems and decisions. Furthermore, our international student population fosters cultural exchange and brings new perspectives.

The journey from the initial idea to the racetrack is long and intensive. How much work goes into the preparation behind the scenes, and how do you, as Head of Sponsorship, ensure that the team is financially secure and set on resources from the first concept phase to the finish line?

The amount of work varies greatly depending on the current phase and department. At the beginning of the development phase, for instance, the aerodynamics department carries out a lot of work. Things get really intense during the production phase, particularly when building the structure, when the entire team provides support, working three six-hour shifts per week – often with additional time commitments. In terms of resources, we are fortunate to be able to draw on ten years of experience and a large network of partners, which provides us with some basic resources. Nevertheless, we constantly need to acquire new partners and find sponsorships for specific materials in order to keep the project going.

What were some of the key milestones for Team Sonnenwagen in 2025? Which competitions or other events did you participate in?

One of the highlights was the unveiling of our fifth solar car model, the Covestro Æthon, in May. In August, we took part in the Bridgestone World Solar Challenge, achieving fourth place — the best result in our club's history. At the end of

the year, the main focus was on assembling the new team for the upcoming season.

A project like the development of your solar car thrives on experience. How is your team structured? Do you rely on a complete generational change after each racing cycle, or how do you ensure that valuable knowledge remains within the team for years?

In fact, we experience a near-complete generational change every two years. Our organisational structure comprises a board of directors, a technical management team and



Photo credit: Team Sonnenwagen

The Covestro Æthon

various departments, including aerodynamics, structures, chassis, driving strategy, marketing and sponsorship. To retain knowledge, we rely heavily on our alumni network. Our alumni provide intensive training to their successors. We also use an internal wiki system for knowledge transfer. This year, the challenge is particularly significant as fewer people from last season are continuing than in previous years.

What did you take away from your time with Team Sonnenwagen Aachen that you wouldn't have learned on your own during your studies?

Above all, I learnt to solve problems independently, without relying on others. If I don't take charge of my tasks, no one else will. Unlike what is often the case in typical student jobs, I was given real responsibility very quickly in the Sonnenwagen team. I also learned how

essential coordination and communication are in a large team, particularly when it comes to resolving conflicts professionally.

What role does the infrastructure of the Collective Incubator play in your work and in achieving your technical goals?

The Collective Incubator is perfect for us. We use it for meetings and workshops because our office becomes too cramped when we have 50 people in it. Recently, we have also been able to carry out part of the production process in the Collective Incubator's facilities. This has been a huge help, as we had 24/7 access, which we didn't have at RWTH Aachen University. Exchanging ideas with other student initiatives on site has also been very helpful.

What projects are you planning for 2026? Are there any competitions or other events already scheduled?

Our main goal for 2026 is to participate in the iLumen European Solar Challenge in September. We plan to enter two cars again, including our current Covestro Athon model. Until then, our focus will be on preparing the cars and completing the testing phases. The next Bridgestone World Solar Challenge is scheduled for mid-2027, and our aim is to take first place.

Thank you for the interesting conversation, Olivia!



**Tunisian Relations' Window e.V.**

Founded  
2014

Area of Activity  
Social  
Engagement

Active Members  
33



Mohamed Bayrem Tounsi  
President



Maram Athimni  
Vice President



Mayssen Ben Amor  
Treasurer

Tunisian Relations' Window e.V. (TunRW) is a non-profit student association at RWTH Aachen University dedicated to promoting intercultural exchange between Tunisia and Germany. The association's mission is to support Tunisian students as they settle into life in Germany, building lasting cultural bridges in the process.

TunRW combines counselling, educational work, and social engagement, providing assistance to new arrivals and organising workshops and collaborations. TunRW promotes development cooperation by providing ongoing support to Tunisian academics, with a view to their long-term employability.

Highlights of the second half of 2025 include participation in the Global Village event in the main building of RWTH Aachen University, as well as various other events designed to foster a sense of community among participating students. The Nawarni team, which provides structured guidance for first-semester students, was particularly active. TunRW recorded its first podcasts for the association's social media channels in the Collective Incubator's media studio. Meanwhile, the Event Committee organised workshops and the HR team focused on member recruitment and team support.

In 2026, TunRW plans to expand its network in Germany and Tunisia, as well as to deepen its cooperation with institutions and companies. Thematic podcast series on degree programmes and personal development workshops are planned. The goal remains to support students in the long term and strengthen intercultural dialogue sustainably.



# aix solution

aixsolution e.V.

Founded  
2000

Area of Activity  
Consulting

Active Members  
70+



Paul Zitzke  
Chairman



Anthony Fokam  
Chairman



Emily Meyer  
Chairwoman



Nils Gros  
Chairman

aixsolution e.V. is a student consultancy based in Aachen. Working in interdisciplinary teams, the association supports small and medium-sized enterprises and corporations in optimising processes, sharpening marketing and driving digitalisation forward. The initiative combines the latest university knowledge with practical project work and creates added value for its customers. For 25 years, aixsolution has stood for professional consulting at student rates.

In the second half of 2025, the association implemented several highlights: At the aixperienceDays 2025 and the Women's Brunch with VW Consulting, students were able to exchange ideas with top consultants in workshops and networking events. The initiative also celebrated its 25th anniversary, relaunched the annual Founders Report together with Gateway Factory as the Gateway Factory Ecosystem Report, and was named the second-best initiative in the audit conducted by the German Association of Student Consultancies. For projects, event planning and training, aixsolution regularly uses the rooms and facilities of the Collective Incubator as a flexible campus offering consulting services, start-ups and networking opportunities.

In 2026, the association plans to further expand its project work in the field of AI-supported digitalisation and support even more companies in data-driven decision-making. In addition, aixsolution e.V. plans to visit various career fairs throughout Germany to attract new partners and make it easier for students to get started in consulting.



# The Team Behind Collective Incubator e.V.

Collective Incubator e.V. is a student-led initiative founded in 2017 by students at RWTH Aachen University. From the beginning, the goal has been to provide student projects, start-ups, and initiatives with an open space where they can receive support, exchange ideas, build networks, and grow sustainably. This mission remains unchanged to this day and is guided by a clear vision: The Collective Incubator aims to become one of the largest tech incubators in Europe. Thanks to several years of funding from the North Rhine-Westphalian Ministry of Economic Affairs, Industry, Climate Action and Energy's state programme "Exzellenz Start-up Center.NRW", it has been possible to establish the Collective Incubator as a dedicated physical hub, secure staff support, and develop a broad portfolio of services for aspiring founders.

The driving force behind the Collective Incubator is its team. In the second half of 2025, nearly 40 enthusiastic students from RWTH Aachen University and FH Aachen – University of Applied Sciences contributed across seven internal departments. With support from experts from RWTH Innovation GmbH, the team ensures that the Collective Incubator runs smoothly. The students shape a coherent and compelling external image, provide start-ups and student initiatives with tailored support, and organise regular training, consulting, and networking events. They also maintain the organisation's reliable IT systems and work with strong partners to support and amplify the Collective Incubator's impact. Within the team, they foster a culture of trust and positive energy that enables strong results.

Between July and December 2025, the Collective Incubator team reached several key milestones. Highlights included the opening ceremony of Werkhalle Nord, the Collective Incubator's new location, participation in nationwide start-up conferences, the Talent Festival 2025, and the Community Christmas Party 2025. Read more about these events on the following pages.



# Werkhalle Nord Opening Ceremony

## Festive Inauguration of Werkhalle Nord as the New Home for the Collective Incubator – A Place for Innovation, Exchange, and Growth

After months of relocating, intensive planning, and growing anticipation, the long-awaited day finally arrived on July 4, 2025. The Collective Incubator officially inaugurated its new home in Werkhalle Nord at Aachen Campus Jahrhunderthalle. The event marked a significant milestone for the team, the Collective Incubator community, and the start-up and innovation ecosystem in Aachen. It also reflected what the Collective Incubator stands for – before and after the move: a place where motivated students, dedicated researchers, and inspiring companies come together to enable growth, progress, and innovation.



Karolina Braun, then a board member of Collective Incubator e.V., and Wibke Mattay, Head of Collective Incubator, opened the ceremony. In their opening remarks, they reflected on the Collective Incubator's remarkable development and shared an outlook on what lies ahead. They emphasised the opportunities created by the Collective Incubator's new location, future collaborations with new partners, and the expansion of Aachen's vibrant start-up scene.

Then, invited guests from politics and academia welcomed the participants. Dr. Johannes Velling (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Industry, Climate Action and Energy of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia), Prof. Dr.-Ing. Matthias Wessling (Vice-Rector for Translation and Transfer at RWTH Aachen University), and then Aachen Mayor Sibylle Keupen highlighted the importance of the Collective Incubator for knowledge and technology transfer, as well as for Aachen's long-term development as a centre of innovation.

A panel discussion on the opportunities and challenges of entrepreneurial transfer at RWTH Aachen University followed, moderated by Yasemin Cilt. The panellists – Prof. Dr. Malte Brettel (Professor of Entrepreneurship at RWTH Aachen University), Dr. Jannik Bühring (co-founder of the start-up leitspalt), David Lebus (former board member of Collective Incubator e.V.), and Dr. Johannes Velling – discussed enabling conditions, the role of universities and support programmes, and the unique contributions of student initiatives in the early stages of start-ups. The discussion underscored how crucial strong, interconnected ecosystems are for turning ideas into viable ventures.



Guided tours of the new building and the Maker Space showcased how the Collective Incubator is much more than just a place to work. It creates opportunities for encounters, creative development, and collaborative progress. With its extensive equipment and associated infrastructure, the Collective Incubator supports and accompanies the entire innovation process of start-ups and student initiatives – from the first concept to a functioning prototype.



Photo credit: Christian van't Hoen

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to the community. Start-ups, students, alumni, and partners came together in an informal setting. Several community members took the stage to share personal insights and anecdotes. They talked about their experiences at the Collective Incubator's former location, recalling the highs and lows of their own projects, long nights in the Maker Space, and the special sense of community that defines this place.



Photo credit: Christian van't Hoen

The day concluded with music, drinks, and relaxed networking. Once again, it became clear that the Collective Incubator offers more than infrastructure: it connects diverse and committed people, builds momentum, and opens up new pathways. The Werkhalle Nord opening ceremony marked a new beginning – not only in terms of space, but also as a key step toward developing a strong, open, and future-oriented innovation ecosystem for the Aachen urban region.



Photo credit: Christian van't Hoen

# On the Road at (Inter)national Conferences

## Exchange, Networking, Friendships – The Collective Incubator Team at Start-up Events and Deep Tech Conferences throughout Germany

From July to December 2025, the Collective Incubator team participated in several events focussing on entrepreneurship, start-up culture, and deep tech innovation. In early July, the team co-organised the interdisciplinary Aachen innovation congress chiotec. In September, the team took part in the IdeaLab! start-up conference at the Otto Beisheim School of Management in Vallendar near Koblenz. In October, some team members travelled to Berlin to attend Stage Two, one of the largest pitch competitions for start-ups and spin-offs from leading European universities. At all of these events, the Collective Incubator team met dedicated students and inspiring people from industry and science, while also strengthening existing relationships with partners who shared the same drive: enthusiasm and commitment to a strong German and European start-up landscape.



The chiotec, which took place on July 2, 2025, was a very special event for Aachen as a start-up hub. It brought together important business leaders, primarily from the sports industry, founders of innovative start-ups, and partners from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. chiotec was held alongside the international equestrian tournament CHIO Aachen. The congress featured exciting presentations and panel discussions on the topics of venture creation, management, and scaling. The Collective Incubator played a key role in the

chiotec event. Team members took on tasks such as moderation, on-site coordination, partner accreditation, and support for the start-ups in attendance. The team also took time to listen to the varied presentations and exchange ideas with the start-ups on site. A highlight was the start-up pitch battle, in which investment prizes of up to €500,000 were awarded. The day concluded with the show jumping competition at the CHIO in Aachen, which the congress attendees enjoyed in the evening.

The IdeaLab! start-up conference took place on September 25 and 26, 2025, at the WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management in Vallendar, near Koblenz. The event was organised by WHU students. Together with the start-ups leitspalt and Auxsys, which have offices at the Collective Incubator, and the student initiative Space Team Aachen, the Collective Incubator showcased its ecosystem and the teams' technical products. The Collective Incubator team presented its highly professional Maker Space and its range of hands-on consulting,



training, workshops, and co-working spaces. The team members also took the opportunity to exchange ideas with interested WHU students, professors and partners, as well as to establish long-term connections.

Several members of the Collective Incubator team also attended Stage Two in Berlin from October 28 to 30, 2025. Stage Two is one of Europe's largest annual pitch competitions. In 2025, more than 45 promising start-ups from leading European universities, including RWTH Aachen University, competed against each other, presenting their innovative products. Investment prizes with a total value of over €5 million were awarded to the most convincing start-ups. Many of the founders presented products aimed at solving specific social challenges, such as an AI tool for speech therapy for children and a solution for reusing construction waste, which accounts for a significant share of man-made waste.



The Collective Incubator team uses events like these each year to make new contacts, inspire people to start their own businesses, and connect founders, start-ups, and partners. The team is planning exciting new events for 2026, and anticipation is already building.



# Talent Festival 2025

## An Exclusive Collective Incubator Recruiting Event with a Personal Atmosphere and Six Strong Partner Organisations

McKinsey, Dürr Group, Würth Elektronik, INFORM, and the innovative start-ups IonKraft and FloodWaive: With these partner organisations, the Talent Festival in November 2025 brought together a strong cross-section of industries and career paths. The Collective Incubator's Talent Festival is an exclusive recruiting event that annually connects selected students and partner organisations in an intimate setting. Participants took part in one-on-one interviews with HR representatives, attended informative keynotes, and concluded the day with a networking dinner.

The Collective Incubator is home to a vibrant community of over 250 start-ups, more than 100 student initiatives, and numerous other student projects. Additionally, the team maintains successful collaborations with corporate partners from a wide range of industries. Bringing talented and committed students together with these leading companies creates significant value for everyone involved.

The Talent Festival 2025 took place on November 20. Hand-picked top applicants from the Collective Incubator community and six partner organisations attended. Out of the 396 applications, 32 particularly promising students were selected for personal interviews for internships, working student positions, or permanent roles. While the interviews were taking place, recruiting experts from the partner organisations shared valuable application advice in keynote speeches on the event stage. They also offered insights into their industries, hiring practices, and current entry-level opportunities.



Christian Böttge and Sebastian Nippes of Würth Elektronik explained how the company's identity as a family business influences its partnerships and long-term sales strategies, as well as what sets Würth Elektronik apart in a competitive market. Then, IonKraft co-founder Benedikt Heuer spoke about the start-up's ambitious scaling journey, which included a stop at the Collective Incubator. Brenda Ritter, also from IonKraft, highlighted the unique energy of daily life at a start-up and the advantages of founding a company early in

one's career. Nina Jelic presented the application process at INFORM, and Kevin Kiesling complemented her talk with insights into his personal career path at the company and the diverse development opportunities available. They also provided perspectives on the role of artificial intelligence at INFORM and explained how AI is currently changing the software market. Tamara Klie, human resources manager at the Dürr Group, shared practical tips on presenting personal strengths in a CV and writing a compelling cover letter. Timon Rochholz, from the start-up FloodWaive, combined insights from his work in finance and people management with lessons learnt from working alongside the FloodWaive founders, encouraging participants to boldly embrace new opportunities. Finally, Annika Arbitter and David Niwar presented McKinsey's values and expectations of its employees, emphasising three essential pillars for successful consulting projects: reliability, teamwork, and versatile problem-solving.



After an inspiring day, HR professionals and applicants enjoyed an exclusive networking dinner at the Collective Incubator's Maker Space – an ideal setting for meaningful conversations and lasting connections. The Collective Incubator thanks the participating partners for their excellent cooperation and the students for their commitment and enthusiasm.



# Community Christmas Party 2025

## A Joint End-of-Year Celebration by Gateway Factory and Collective Incubator as a Driver of Sustainable Growth

Enriching dialogue, exciting ideas, and professional input: The joint Community Christmas Party, hosted by Gateway Factory and Collective Incubator on December 11, 2025, offered much more than just a festive end to the year. Founders and partners came together to celebrate a year full of innovation, exchange, and collaboration. Two inspiring keynote speeches, an exciting pitch battle, and casual networking over good food and mulled wine made for a lively gathering of the local start-up scene. The strong cohesion within the community was particularly noticeable – an important building block for future development.



The Community Christmas Party was organised by the Collective Incubator together with the Gateway Factory, a cross-university deep tech accelerator of RWTH Aachen University, the University of Cologne, and HHU Düsseldorf. The Gateway Factory bridges the gap between prototyping and industrial market adoption. It provides access to modern production infrastructure, strategic investors, and an excellent network of mentors, enabling a seamless start-up journey. Start-ups that have validated their ideas and developed prototypes

at the Collective Incubator find specialised support for scaling and market access at the Gateway Factory. Organising the Christmas party together underscores the synergy between the two institutions and serves as a growth engine for the region.

The core of the evening was the varied programme, which included two exciting keynotes and a pitch battle. Richard Haas, COO of FibreCoat GmbH, started things off. He described how the materials technology company developed its initial ideas in a laboratory at RWTH Aachen University, refined them at the Collective Incubator, and now serves international customers. Richard Haas used personal insights and humorous anecdotes to illustrate that the path to entrepreneurial success is rarely straight.

Rather, he said, perseverance, adaptability, and clear values are crucial. Next, Alexander Stoffers, co-founder of Modell Aachen and the sole founder of nextAudit, provided further insights. He discussed key lessons learnt from his own start-up experiences, emphasising the importance of reliable



numbers, robust financial structures, and emotional resilience in the face of uncertainty and pressure. His motivation to continue investing in the regional start-up ecosystem after a successful exit was inspiring as well.

The subsequent pitch battle, moderated by Lukas Wrede of Gateway Factory, marked the highlight of the evening. Five start-ups – aixOpt, UNHEAT, Cynrise, Plasma Additive, and bettermind – presented their innovative business models and successes to date in three-minute pitches. They competed in a friendly contest for €1,000 in prize money. A jury of representatives from Gateway Factory, RWTH Innovation, TechVision Fonds, and Osborne Clarke evaluated the pitches. The winner was aixOpt, presented by Dr. Tim Reuscher. The start-up impressed with its innovative approach to optimising machines and industrial processes.

Photo credit: Christian van't Hoen



The evening concluded with relaxed networking in a festive setting. During these conversations, guests made new contacts, shared perspectives, and strengthened existing partnerships. Special thanks go to the sponsors of the evening: Osborne Clarke, TechVision Fonds, Zoho, and the Economic Development Agency of the City of Aachen. The Collective Incubator would also like to thank Gateway Factory for its close and trusting cooperation. The 2025 Community Christmas Party demonstrated the impressive energy that is created when committed people, close partnerships, and efficient structures come together.



Urheber: Christian van't Hoen

## Closing Remarks

The first edition of the Collective Incubator Report offers an overview of the Collective Incubator's diverse ecosystem. It features innovative start-ups, impactful student initiatives, and insights into past events, as well as interviews with exciting interviewees. This report is both a review and an invitation to find inspiration for your next steps. In 2026, the Collective Incubator team aims to make it easier for talented individuals to start their own businesses, provide targeted support to more start-ups and student initiatives, and help more teams grow sustainably.

Through the Collective Incubator Report, the team reaches out to students, founders, professors, entrepreneurs, and supporters who are passionate about shaping Aachen as a start-up hub and who want to embrace start-up culture, entrepreneurial spirit, and innovation. The Collective Incubator's doors are always open.

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