

Life

The most academic barracks in Switzerland

We visit an ETH institution that is devoted to the military but has no room for clichés.

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What it feels like to view the world through countless microscopes – but without a lens for the inner world.

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Do we need binding rules for meetings?

ETH employees appear to be unified on the matter. What do you think?

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ETH zürich



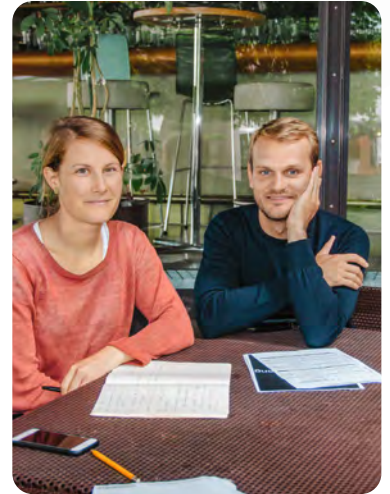
Which ETH experience will stay with you forever?

POINTS OF VIEW

“Last Autumn Semester, we gave our professor, Ueli Maurer, a personalised glass cleaner as a leaving present because the partition between him and the students that was installed as a COVID safety measure was always dirty. However, it was mainly intended as a sign of appreciation because his lectures were so good. He was delighted and told us that appreciation was the best gift anyone could give him.”



Felix Quernheim (21)
Bachelor's degree student at D-INFK



“We used to hold a drinks reception for our students after they had finished their Master's degree. I have a vivid memory of once having to pick up more beer at three in the morning – though I must admit that I was part of the reason why we needed more in the first place...”



“I will always remember my first triathlon competition, which I had the chance to do a few years ago thanks to the training programme offered by the Academic Sports Association of Zurich (ASVZ).”



María Cristina Guzmán Solís (26)
Student assistant at the CSS



Rudi Krieg (57)
Head of Study Administration at D-ARCH

Recorded by
Anna Maltsev

Photos
Josef Kuster

Cosimo Caccia (33)
Scientific assistant at D-ARCH

"I have fond memories of a study trip to Los Angeles in the second year of my Bachelor's degree. We spent ten days looking at impressive buildings, and I truly realised what I was actually studying for and what you can do with all the theory."

Tessa Vollmeier (30)
Scientific assistant at D-ARCH

"I won't forget last week's spaghetti carbonara in a hurry. The food in the Chemistry cafeteria is never a culinary highlight. I think it really was the worst thing I have ever eaten."



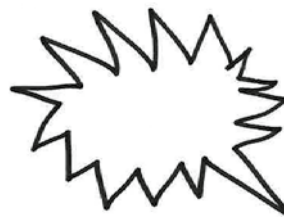
Ramona Wolf (29)
Postdoctoral student at D-PHYS

"My favourite experience was having the chance to organise my first multi-day scientific conference last autumn. Being able to make all the decisions on my own and turn them into reality with the incredible support of the assistants was amazing. The fact that it was the first real conference after the coronavirus pandemic made it that extra bit special."

"The opening party for the Student Project House on the Zentrum campus will stay with me for a long time. The atmosphere was open and creative, and I found it very inspiring to see lots of different projects from a huge array of disciplines. I would love to do a project there myself one day."



Yufei Duan (24)
Master's degree student at D-MTEC



Abdellah Aragonese (26)
Barista on the Höggerberg campus

"I have been here every Wednesday and Thursday for the past year. Alongside lots of wonderful encounters with ETH staff, I always have a special one with a pigeon. It comes to our truck every morning and keeps us company for a while – perhaps because it has realised that it will get some breakfast from us."

"I will never forget my first day at ETH Zurich. First, the fantastic bus trip up to the Höggerberg and then to suddenly see cows standing in front of huge high-tech buildings. This was when I realised that I was going to have a great time doing my doctorate!"



Damla Göre (31)
Doctoral student at the gta

The most academic barracks in Switzerland



Militär
an der ETH

BACKGROUND



Ever since Russia invaded Ukraine, the Military Academy's expertise has been more in demand than ever. We visit an ETH institution that is devoted to the military but has no room for clichés.



Beatrice Thomann strides determinedly across the parade ground at Reppischtal Barracks. In the background, the building that houses the Military Academy (also known as MILAC) is big and imposing. Against this backdrop, the orange of her summer dress is particularly vibrant and in stark contrast to the green-grey combat uniform worn by the guards.

Ms Thomann is the personal assistant to Hugo Roux, the Commander of MILAC. It is a hot summer's day in the middle of August and she has been tasked with giving us a tour of the building before we interview her boss. When Ms Thomann speaks about MILAC, there is no hiding her enthusiasm: "The level of respect that I have been shown here these past four years is incredible." Born in the Swiss canton of Glarus, Beatrice Thomann was 58 when she was forced to find a new job after the company she had previously worked for was sold.

Nowadays, she knows MILAC and its history like the back of her hand. It was founded in 1877 as ETH Zurich's military department to allow the army to utilise the university's technical knowledge; in 2002 it was renamed the "Military Academy at ETH Zurich". In organisational terms, it reports to the army, but remains part of ETH Zurich when it comes to its scientific work.

Beatrice Thomann

MILAC's administrative backbone

Age: 63

Role: Assistant to the Commander

Hobbies: Her two cats Fridolin and Candy, hiking, reading

The building in Birmensdorf blends modern exposed concrete with quintessential 1970s architecture. We walk past countless Swiss flags, military insignia and portraits of past commanders on the way to Brigadier General Roux's office. The father-of-three is not your typical old-school soldier: there's no trace of briskness or that commanding military tone. He comes across as open and friendly, speaking softly with great consideration. At first glance, it is difficult to imagine that this man – who is involved in his local village church and football club and enjoys playing the piano in his free time – could ever raise his voice.

Roux is from a farming family and grew up bilingual in the canton of Fribourg. It was only after completing his law degree that he decided to join the army. "I wanted to work with people, not paper and paragraphs," he reminisces. Speaking to Roux, it doesn't take long to see that he believes strongly in the purpose of his chosen profession: "Societies that are unable to defend themselves in an emergency run the risk of being overrun." For Roux, values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law cannot be taken for granted. "We could lose them if we are not able to defend them." In the most extreme circumstances, he would even be willing to give his life or take someone else's for the cause.

A training ground for career officers

Hugo Roux is just one of ten professional soldiers who work at MILAC. The remaining 60 employees are either civilian

researchers who study topics like leadership, military psychology, defence economics and strategy, or staff in administrative roles, like Beatrice Thomann.

In conjunction with ETH Zurich, MILAC is responsible for providing education, training and development for career officers in the Swiss army. If anyone becomes a general in Switzerland, it is highly likely that they studied here and were therefore once an ETH student. Over the course of six semesters, students attend courses in political and military sciences at the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, which are taught either by ETH researchers or lecturers from MILAC. At the end of their studies, they are awarded a Bachelor's degree.

A total of 66 future career officers are currently studying at MILAC, five of whom are women. While at ETH Zurich, they only wear uniform in exceptional circumstances. However, as militia reserve officers they still have to complete their refresher courses in the army while they study.

Diversity in unity

So, what type of people become professional soldiers, the backbone of the Swiss army? Hugo Roux points to the large Swiss flag on his office wall. It is made from small squares of fabric that have been sewn together. For the 53-year-old, these squares embody the motto of the Armed Forces College: diversity in unity.

MILAC is open to people from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and religions. However, the unifying principle of this diversity is clear: officers must stand up unconditionally for the democratic values of Switzerland and defend them if the worst comes to the worst. "Rambo wannabes or people with extreme political views are not welcome here," explains Roux. However, he goes on to explain that this in no way means that you have to agree with everything that happens in the armed forces: "We are looking for critical thinkers who enjoy leading and training other people."



Hugo Roux

A law graduate in uniform

Age: 53

Role: Commander of MILAC, Brigadier General

Hobbies: Playing the piano, football



Tamara Cubito

A passionate military historian

Age: 35

Role: Assistant lecturer in military history

Hobbies: Reading, yoga

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, MILAC researchers have been very present in the Swiss media. That's because expert military knowledge is essential to contextualise everything that is happening in Kyiv or the Donbas region. One such researcher is military historian Tamara Cubito, who we meet in her office at the other end of the parade ground. There are stacks of thick books wherever you look. If you didn't know you were in a military facility, titles like "A History of the Royal Navy" or "The German Armed Forces during the Second World War" may give the game away.

Cubito comes from a rather left-leaning household, and her interest in the history of war began at a very early age. Her father, a former co-president of the local Social Democratic Party, was never able to fully understand his daughter's fascination with the military. What is it that Cubito finds so enthralling about war?

War is a reflection of society

"War is part of human life, as tragic as that may be," says the 35-year-old, who has been working at MILAC for almost ten years now. War has always had a major impact on the worlds of politics, business and society. This is what makes it particularly interesting for historians, she explains. In her courses, she tries to show future career officers in the Swiss army how warfare has evolved over the last two hundred years and why it is always a reflection of the societies involved in it.

She doesn't really notice that she works in a world that is still very male-dominated. "I get the feeling that my students – most of whom are male – don't care whether I am a man or a woman. It is my historical expertise that really matters."

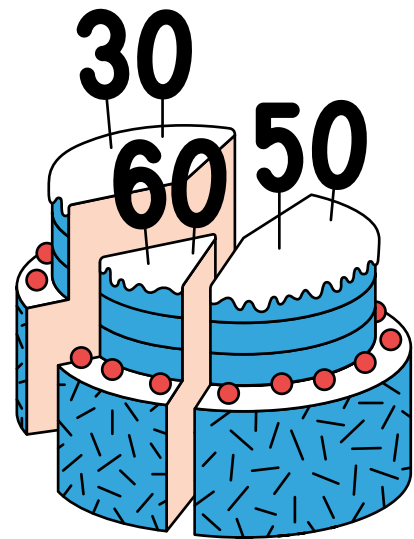
Visitors to MILAC will quickly notice that there is no room for military clichés and prejudices at the academy, which is located in the middle of a forest. If you didn't have to go back past the guards in camouflage when leaving the site, you could even mistake Switzerland's most academic barracks for a normal university.

Author
Christoph Elhardt

Photos
Marco Rosasco

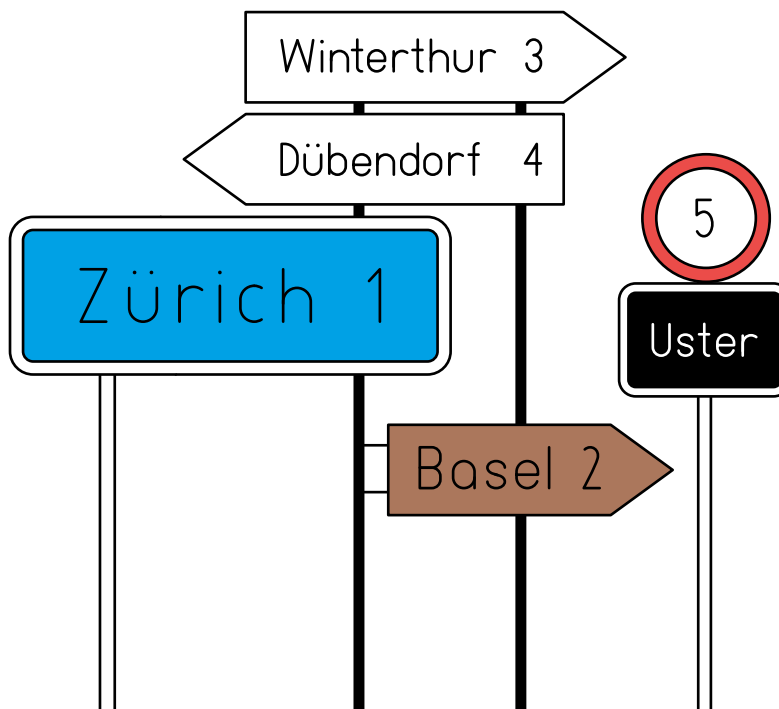
Things you've always wanted to know about the ETH community ...

Anna Müller is between 30 and 50 years old, lives in Zurich and works full-time: this is how you could describe your typical ETH employee. Find out more facts and figures about the roughly 13,500 ETH Zurich employees here.



How old we are

Most ETH staff are between 30 and 50 years old (45%). They are closely followed by the under-30s (40%). 14% of all ETH staff are aged over 50.



Where we live

Most ETH staff live in Zurich – followed by Basel, Winterthur, Dübendorf and Uster.

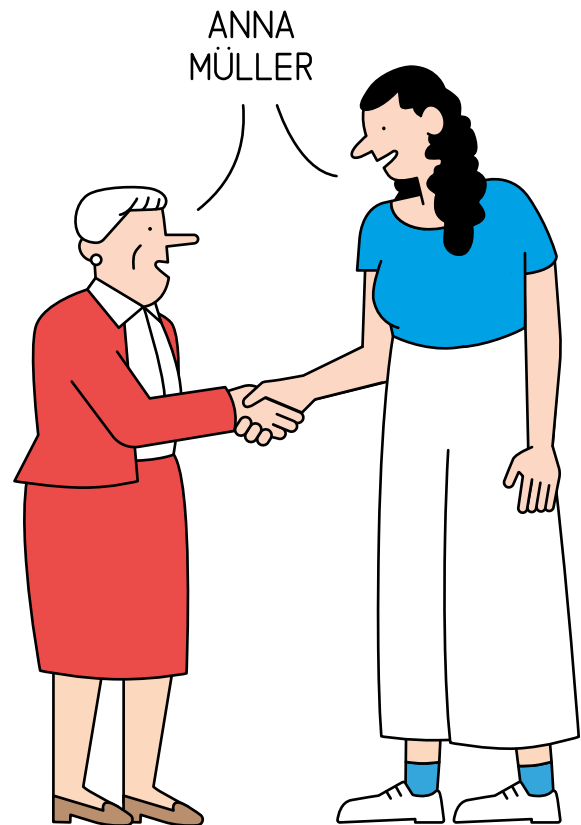
How much we work

62% of all ETH staff work full-time. Around a fifth (22%) work less than 50%. Just under 9% work between 80 and 99%, and around 8% work between 50 and 79%.



Where we are from

People from 116 countries work at ETH Zurich. The majority of them come from Switzerland, Germany and Italy.



What we are called

The most common female names among ETH staff are Anna, Claudia and Maria. Thomas, Daniel and Andreas are the most popular men's names. Müller, Wang and Zhang take the top three spots when it comes to surnames.

PORTRAIT



At ETH Zurich, Franziska Menti combines data from telescopes all over the world. And yet, she herself sees the world as though through countless microscopes – without filters and with no lens for the inner world.

When Franziska Menti goes for a walk in the forest, she sees dewdrops in every colour of the rainbow sparkling on the oak leaves. She sees the tiny little white mushroom shimmering amongst the foliage on the ground and, at the same time, she spots the round, almost invisible deer tracks in the dark brown earth. What she doesn't really see is the forest as a whole. "I have a kind of tunnel vision, so I see every detail with an equal level of intensity. I find it incredibly difficult to see the bigger picture," says Franziska.

Franziska – who is originally from Lucerne – had always known that she was somehow different. But it wasn't until the second year of her Bachelor's degree course in physics, when she was 21 and suffering from depression, that her doctor referred her to a psychiatrist and she got a diagnosis: Franziska is on the autism spectrum.

Diagnosed at 21

"The news was a tremendous relief," she remembers. "Suddenly everything made sense, and I no longer felt like I was doing everything wrong. I simply have a way of thinking and of seeing the world that is fundamentally different to that of neurotypical people." Since her diagnosis, she has been receiving support in her private and professional life from the Workaut advice centre.

"Like many other people with autism, Franziska lacks a system for filtering her sensations. That means she senses things in much greater quantity and intensity, which makes all contact with the outside world really tiring," her advisor Mona Hepp explains.

Franziska has her own way to describe it: "After a walk in the city centre, I'm exhausted; it feels like I've run a marathon. I can hardly bear all the adverts, clothes and voices. And every bus ride is like torture, having to sit so close to other people. For me, physical contact is so unpleasant that it almost hurts."

Emotions remain hidden

In contrast, the 29-year-old finds it very difficult to identify her own emotions: "When I smile, I'm not sure whether it's because that is what the social context calls for or because I am truly happy." She has trouble reading other people's emotions too. That is why interactions with other people sap so much of Franziska's energy. "I have to translate the entire time: What is the person I'm talking to thinking right now? What are they feeling? And I'm always having to make sure I don't say anything that could offend others."

In contrast, the physicist really enjoys spending time with animals: "Their style of communication is much more logical to me, and contact with them is more stress-free," she says. This is why she spends her free time volunteering in an animal shelter or teaching her cat new tricks.

Physics and animals

"People with autism often have special interests. Mine are animals and astrophysics. When I am focusing on either of these things, I feel huge amounts of joy and really get into a state of flow. All other subjects are just means to an end," Franziska explains.

She knew that she wanted a job related to physics all the way back in primary school. And she has known that astrophysics was her thing since secondary school. During her studies, she attended lectures on exoplanets,

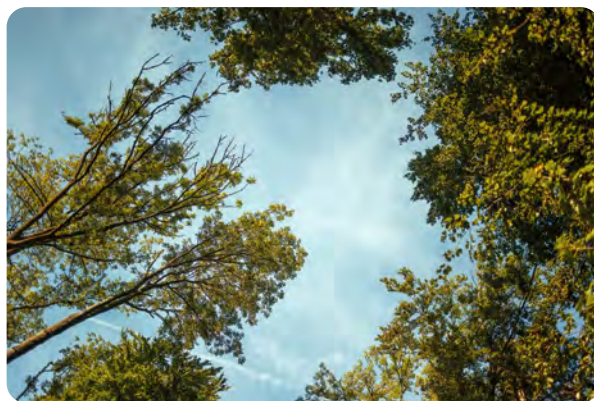
which is how she got to know ETH professor Sascha Quanz, who ended up supervising her Master's thesis.

At her advisor's recommendation, she told him about her diagnosis and offered to work in his research group after completing her degree – in the context of a supervised role. This involves regular feedback meetings between the three of them.

On the hunt for Earth-like planets

Franziska joined Sascha Quanz's group in June 2019, where she works part-time and is responsible for creating a database. Using data from telescopes all over the world, she is creating an overview of the star and planetary systems that are suitable as targets for the LIFE mission, which will be looking for signs of extra-terrestrial life in 25 years' time.

"Franziska is incredibly structured, reliable and organised – and also refreshingly direct. The project she is in charge of runs extremely well," says Sascha Quanz. "I have never encountered autism before and I find that working with Franziska is an incredibly fascinating experience because she is able to provide a completely different perspective, leading us to reflect on our own behaviour and learn a lot in the process. This is benefiting the entire group."





“ETH feels like home,” says Franziska. “This is the first place where I have felt understood in my differentness.” Despite the sensory overload, she often goes for lunch with her colleagues and organises a games night for her research group once a month.

More awareness of autism

Nevertheless: “I wish there was more awareness of autism and I would like the working environment to be more autism friendly. Then ETH, too, could benefit more from our special interests and the strong analytical skills that many people with autism have,” says Franziska, looking towards the forest on the Höggerberg.

Every day, she goes for an hour-long stroll in the forest to recover from the overwhelming sensory experience – her favourite trails are here or in Schlieren, where she has lived for the past year. The forest is one of the few places where Franziska finds that

“After the diagnosis, suddenly everything made sense.”

Franziska Menti

being different offers an advantage: “When I’m alone in the forest, I experience all the beautiful details in nature. For most people, they will probably remain hidden forever.”

Author
Anna Maltsev

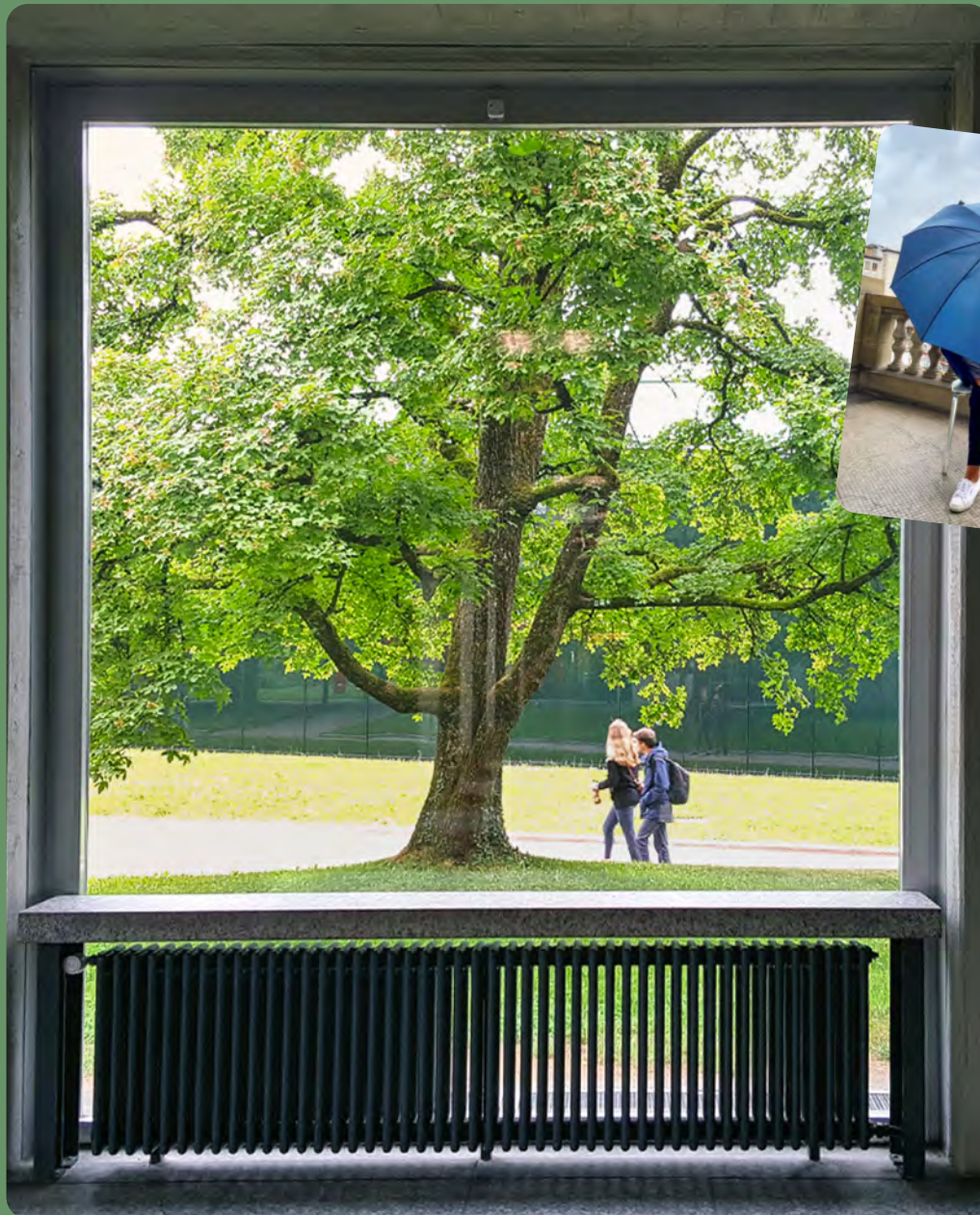
Photos
Yves Bachmann

Where did Regina Moser, employee at D-PHYS, take this photo?

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Take part now!
Send us your snapshot
for the next issue:
life@hk.ethz.ch

Take a guess and email your answers to life@hk.ethz.ch by 30 November.
With a bit of luck, you might win one of three ETH umbrellas!



Prize



SNAPSHOT

ANSWER

July 2022 edition: Axel Schild's picture shows the pond between the first and second arm of the HCI building on ETH's Hönggerberg campus.
Congratulations to our winners (see page 18)!



Should ETH introduce rules for meetings?

We have only heard from advocates of this topic, which is why – unusually – you can read two For articles here. Do you think differently? Have your say on our online platforms!



For

Ursula Suter
Employee in Study Administration at the Department of Architecture

In my many years of working at ETH, I have regularly experienced invitations and meeting agendas that initially seem innocuous but eventually end up running out of control – in terms of both time and content. In these cases, I often ask myself what the costs are and whether these financial resources could be put to better use elsewhere. But how can we avoid these costs in the first place?

Drawing up a carefully prepared list of invitees is an important first step towards ensuring a productive meeting. Lots of people go to great efforts to invite whole groups of people to meetings, regardless of their individual expertise, roles or areas of responsibility. Moreover, I often notice that the latter in par-

ticular are not defined properly or are not communicated clearly enough.

With fewer participants – but the “right” ones – we can not only reach the meeting’s objectives more quickly but also increase the satisfaction of those who have invested time and prepared for the meeting.

To identify the right participants, I recommend structuring meetings and putting together clearly defined packages of topics and agenda items. In the run-up to your meeting, it can often make sense to conduct a preliminary survey of participants and analyse the results so that you can build on the findings.

Meetings should be strictly managed, with personal comments only permitted right at the end under the agenda item “Miscellaneous”. If you notice that more in-depth discussion is required for certain topics, these must be added to the agenda for the next meeting and the invitation list should be revised accordingly.

To make sure all participants are on the same page and to increase their level of commitment, I believe it is essential for any (partial) outcomes from a meeting to be recorded in brief minutes and the final outcome to be documented in a list of resolutions.

Speakers should generally keep things brief without having to resort

“Drawing up a carefully prepared list of invitees is an important first step towards ensuring a productive meeting.”

to time limits, though the chair of the meeting should be responsible for this. Another way to keep meetings short is not to offer seats or drinks.

If we apply even just a few of these rules as best as we can, we as employees and ETH as our employer will all benefit.

Having first studied the topic in a university course and experienced it for over a decade during the course of my professional experience, I can testify as a user and organiser that rules are crucial for successful meetings.

I believe rules are not set to be followed blindly, but to either improve an outcome or curb potential damage. I don't stop my car at the red light just because there's a traffic rule telling me to do so; I hit the brake because I know it helps me avoid a collision, even when none seems imminent.

When meetings turn out to be repeatedly unproductive, they incur losses in terms of time and energy, and they have financial implications. It is easy to spot when people are drained of energy from attending too many meetings. It is also easy to see how a meeting with a dozen participants that goes on for hours can quickly drive up operational and opportunity costs,

especially when senior staff are involved. Ultimately, we are responsible for what we spend on meetings. But unlike money, we can't get time back. Here are two principles that may prevent us from losing time and energy with meetings.

The first rule could be to determine whether a meeting is really necessary. Does it have to be synchronous, or could it be asynchronous? The all too familiar phrase "an email would have been enough" hits the nail on the head here. Clarifying the topic, the goals, the people who need to attend and why before the meeting would already go a long way.

The second rule could be to determine what type of meeting we want to have and to ensure that everyone taking part makes all the necessary preparations. Some meetings are about cre-

ative brainstorming, whereas others are about making a major decision. For the former, we want to ensure that everyone is ready and able to openly share their ideas. For the latter, we want to ensure that all the required information is documented and that action items are clearly defined.

The challenge is to find a minimum set of rules that help participants

"Rules should be set to either improve an outcome or curb potential damage."

achieve the goals of a specific type of meeting while making the most efficient use of resources. Even if we never manage (or need) to do so at the ETH level, bringing about a small improvement is already a reason to celebrate.



For

Tomas Aliaga
Software engineer at the CSCS Swiss
National Supercomputing Centre

What do you think?
Join the discussion now at:
www.ethz.ch/meetingrules

IT Services Head of Communications interviews Head of Carpentry

DOMINOES



•••
In the next issue of *life*, Martin Dosch will interview an ETH member of his choice.

Sabine Hoffmann
Feels like 25
Head of Communications for IT Services
Has been at ETH for 20 years

Martin Dosch
53
Head of the ETH Carpentry department
Has been at ETH for 16 years

In an interview with Sabine Hoffmann, the Head of Communications for IT Services, Martin Dosch discusses unusual carpentry orders, his favourite places at ETH and why a community centre played a decisive role in his choice of career.

Sabine Hoffmann: Martin, what are the three things you cannot live without?

Martin Dosch: The three Fs: family, friends and free time.

Sabine: What's your ideal breakfast?

Martin: In a relaxing atmosphere in a peaceful spot with beautiful views – in the mountains or by a body of water. The food itself doesn't need to be anything special.

Sabine: What are your duties at ETH?

Martin: For the past five and a half years, I have been in charge of two carpentry and joinery workshops at ETH – one on the Zentrum campus and one on the Hönggerberg – and I manage a team of four employees. At Zentrum, I am responsible for the organisational side of things, which includes planning, ordering materials, preparing quotes and budgeting. I also support my team with operations where needed. On the Hönggerberg, my deputy Oliver Zraggen is responsible for these jobs. Our team helps to maintain over 160 ETH properties. This means that we repair things like windows, doors and furniture, help with furnishing offices and build a number of custom items.

Sabine: Have you ever had any crazy carpentry orders at ETH?

Martin: We regularly receive interesting orders, such as bespoke products for research projects. Recently, we were asked to build a tripod that doesn't conduct electricity – so we made it completely out of wood. It will be used for electromagnetic measurements.

We have also built cabinets for *focus-Terra* to display their projects in. For Cybathlon, we often build wooden elements for the obstacle course. And a few years ago, we built the large wooden frame for your own team's photo shoots.

Sabine: How important is your team to you?

Martin: Very important! My goal is to always create good working conditions for my employees and to make sure they are OK. We also enjoy doing things together, such as visiting the trade fair for the construction and timber industry or going on our annual team trip. These occasions give us a chance to talk and get to know different sides of each other. Unfortunately, digitalisation has led to the social side of things becoming somewhat neglected. That is why face-to-face conversations and interpersonal relationships – what I call team life – are all the more important to me.

Sabine: You must know nearly every corner of ETH. What are your favourite spots?

Martin: I don't actually have a favourite building. However, I do really like Villa Hatt, for example, and the new Octavo building with its terrace and courtyard, and of course the Dozent foyer and Polyterrasse.

Sabine: Who would you like to spend an evening with?

Martin: Roger Federer – despite his success, he has always managed to stay down to earth. I think he would have lots of interesting tales to tell.

I also think that his strong commitment to social causes is very commendable. However, since I am a former footballer and football coach, a conversation with Jürgen Klopp, the head coach at Liverpool FC, would also be very interesting.

Sabine: As you know, I am an advocate for apprentices. What would you say to make a carpentry apprenticeship sound appealing to girls?

Martin: It is a creative and varied job. Wood is a beautiful material that can be used in a variety of ways. You also get to work with lots of other interesting materials too. And at the end of the day, you get to see the results of your work – that's incredibly motivating!

Sabine: How did you end up doing a carpentry apprenticeship?

Martin: I spent a lot of time in Zurich's Heuried community centre as a child. There, I learned to build huts and boats; I carved, nailed and glued things... That's how, at an early age, I became familiar with wood as a material and many of the tools that I now use in my job as a carpenter. A carpentry apprenticeship was the logical next step.

Sabine: What would you have done if you hadn't become a carpenter?

Martin: A career in physiotherapy would have been interesting. It's fascinating how the human body is made up. I also would have liked psychology or coaching – something to do with people. That's what stimulated me as a football coach too: working with lots of different people to achieve something together.



Reducing the room temperature is one of the measures that ETH Zurich will be using in its efforts to counteract the potential energy shortage this coming winter. Lowering the room temperature by 1°C can cut heat consumption by around 6%. So, heating your office to 20°C instead of 21°C will help to save a significant amount of energy.

→ www.ethz.ch/energysavings



And the winners are ...

In the first issue of *life* magazine in a brand new look, ETH employees had the chance to win a very special prize: a *life*-branded towel. A huge number of employees entered the contest by guessing what was in the snapshot (the answer is revealed on page 13). The winners are Coralie Busse-Grawitz, a doctoral student at D-ITET, Joana Catarina Moreira de Matos, an employee at D-CHAB, and Fabio Masero, a doctoral student at D-CHAB. Congratulations!

Colleague-to-colleague coaching

How can I help my colleagues to solve day-to-day problems? How do I have more effective conversations? In the online course “Introduction to collegial coaching”, you will learn techniques for solution-focused coaching and a range of coaching tools. The course is geared towards all ETH staff and does not require any previous knowledge.

→ www.ethz.ch/coaching-course



New online course

As part of the “Stand up for respect” initiative, the Executive Board will soon be launching an online course on Moodle. The prevention course module will train ETH members to recognise and prevent sexual harassment and respond to it appropriately as upstanders. Further information and login details will be published on www.ethz.ch/respekt from the end of October.



UNI or POLY?

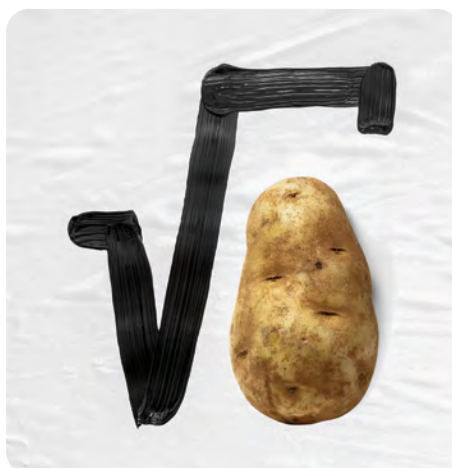
The 70th UNI-POLY rowing regatta will take place on Saturday, 5 November 2022. From 3 p.m. onwards, the eights will go head-to-head over 600 metres through Zurich's old town, racing from the lower part of Lake Zurich up to the Town Hall. Follow the action live!

→ www.asvz.ch/unipoly

The roots of agricultural

science: The third edition of the ETH Zurich Tours app is dedicated to the 150-year history of agricultural science and reveals how research is helping to feed the world. Over the 60-minute tour of the ETH Zurich campus, you can uncover lots of interesting facts from the past and present. And there are plenty of prizes to win along the way.

→ www.ethz.ch/tours-en



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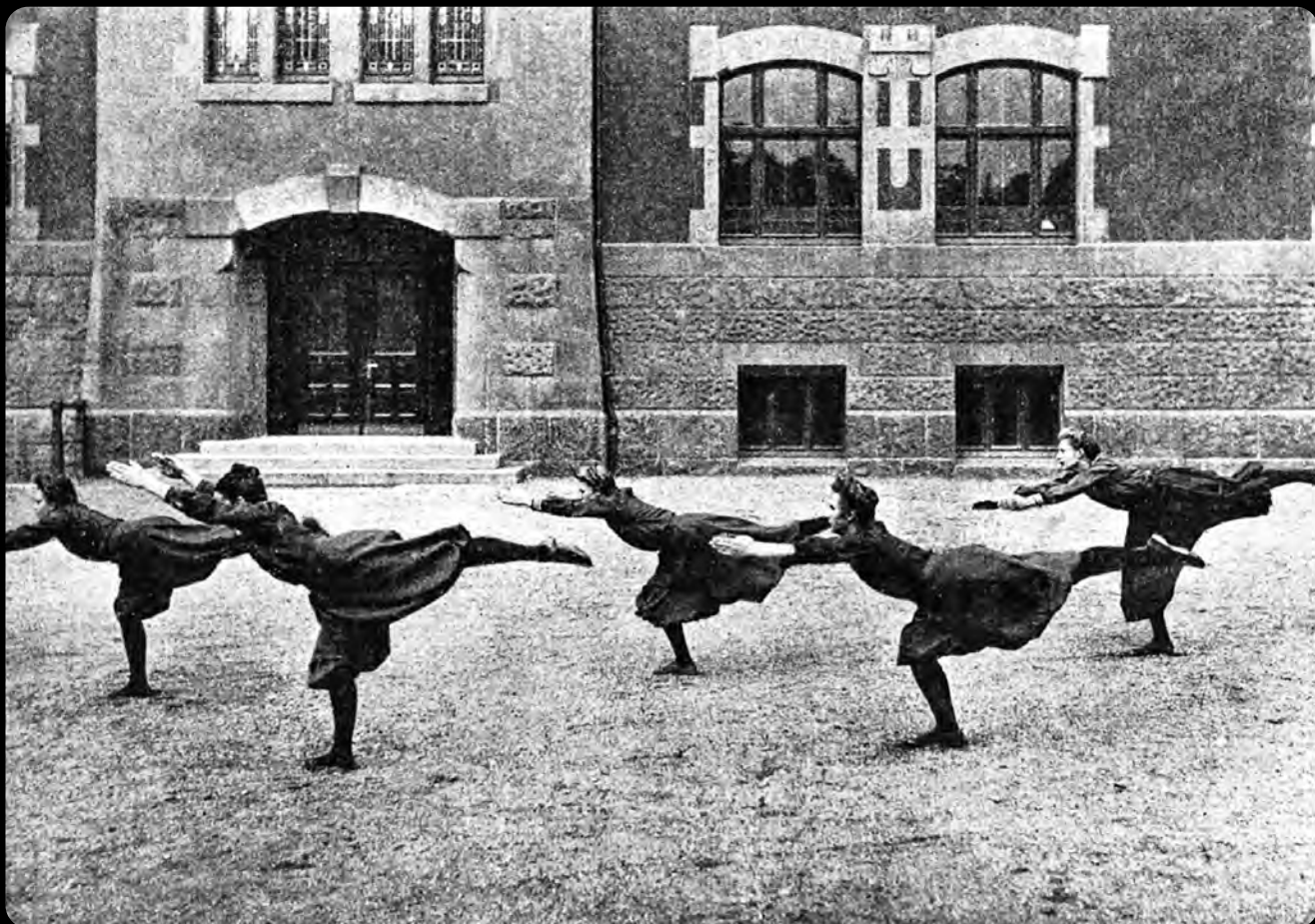
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Further information and subscriptions:





Zurich's universities were already sporty back in 1900.

In those days, students – most of whom were male – could sign up for a variety of physical exercise programmes. So it is all the more unusual that this photo from the turn of the century shows a group of women.

Since the Academic Sports Association of Zurich (ASVZ) was founded in 1939, women have been involved in the action, including as instructors. Today, the ASVZ offers more than 120 different sports. The standing scale, the type of exercise captured in the photo, is still used for improving coordination and strength. It builds muscle, improves balance and enhances motor skills.

www.asvz.ch/en