

## Press Release

Dübendorf, St. Gallen, Thun, 30 October 2013

### **Empa's Successful Business Incubator**

## **Happy Birthday: Five years of glaTec**

**The glaTec development association has been successfully running a 'Business Incubator' at Empa in Dübendorf for five years. At present there are twelve young companies that have taken up tenancies at glaTec, tackling the most varied of challenges. The five-year anniversary at the end of October offered customers, investors and guests the opportunity to get to know both the Business Incubator and the fledgling companies a little better.**

Even in the early phase of the business development of a young company, markers are laid down that massively impact the company's chances of future success. In so doing, every young company must face its own unique challenges: while one company may be focussing on premises and establishing contact with other researchers, other young companies require help with market surveys or require coaching regarding discussions with potential investors.

Mario Jenni, who has been Managing Director of glaTec since its foundation in 2009, is convinced that getting support at the right time is hugely important for company founders. "Our focus is directed clearly towards early-phase projects in the fields of material sciences, environmental sciences and technology," says Jenni. "We accompany the young entrepreneurs until they are 'mature', and can take the step into independence." This is generally after around three years.

### **Strict selection procedure**

However, not just anyone can take up residence in the glaTec Empa Technology Centre: the selection procedure involves a strict project evaluation by the glaTec advisory committee. A dozen entrepreneurs, CTI start-up experts, marketing, economic, legal and financial experts put the applicants through their paces, sounding out their applications with regard to their innovation potential, market relevance and the proposed business model. Consideration is given as to whether the young entrepreneurs have the potential to implement their business plans. Only then does Empa decide whether the company is to be accepted into its "incubator". Gian-Luca Bona, Managing Director of Empa, commented on the occasion of the celebrations: "I am delighted at the large number of companies that we have been able to help with glaTec, a number that is

“sensibly” large, taking our own circumstances into account. For one thing is quite clear: quality precedes quantity; we would rather have fewer young companies, but with greater potential and greater chances of implementation. Incubation within glaTec and the Empa spin-off label should be a sign to potential customers and investors: something exceptional can be expected here.”

One entrepreneur, who has not only shown great potential but has already taken the step into independence, is Marcel Aschwanden. His company, Optotune, develops and produces flexible, continuously focusable optical lenses based on electro-active polymers, better known as “artificial muscles”. Optotune was one of the first companies to be able to call glaTec “home”, but to have also gone on to leave that home. Aschwanden is thankful for the support received, but also emphasised that it can be advantageous to drop the start-up “image” after a certain period of time. This is because many industrial partners associate the term “start-up” not only with “innovation”, but also with “risk”.

### **glaTec tenants with the most varied of focuses**

The current glaTec tenants are spin-offs from Empa, Eawag and ETH, external start-ups and research and development units that have been outsourced by companies. They deal with the most varied of subject matter: dedicating themselves to the development of optical instruments for aerospace travel, marketing measuring systems for the wireless monitoring of buildings, developing intelligent hospital bed add-on systems, producing a self-heating bivouac tent, researching ceramic foams for heat insulation or getting a procedure that biochemically analyses and sorts grain by the tonne up and running. Yet they all have one thing in common: they can count on professional help and support from glaTec. And they have gathered experts into their team - for instance experts in financial matters - or draw on the support of experienced business people to help with negotiations.

With this strategy, success is often not far around the corner for glaTec companies and this has not escaped the notice of the business sector: just recently, 100 experts again placed the fledgling glaTec company “QalySense” in 10<sup>th</sup> position in the list of the 100 best start-ups in Switzerland. Another glaTec company, “compliant concept” came in in 34<sup>th</sup> place. And Monolitix, a spin-off that has specialised in flexible components for mechanical engineering has been nominated for the renowned “De Vigier Prize 2013”. (A detailed bio can be found here: <http://www.empa.ch/plugin/template/empa/3/141468/---/l=1>

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### **Who is behind the glaTec association?**

The glaTec association members and executive board are made up of representatives from: Empa and Eawag, the City of Dübendorf and glow.das Glattal, the City of Zurich and the Location Development Association of the Canton of Zurich.

### Further Information

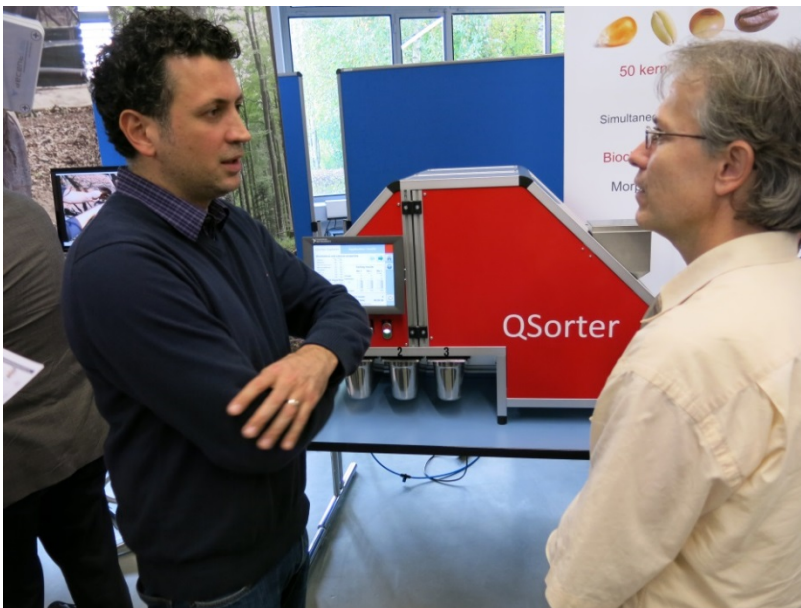
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The Empa spin-off, "Decentlab" offers a wireless measuring system for the monitoring of buildings and construction sites. However, it can also be used for the eco-physiological monitoring of trees.



QualySense AG has developed a procedure for sorting grain deliveries, by the tonne, according to biochemical and other quality features, with a high level of precision.



In the "marketplace", customers, investors and other guests at the anniversary celebrations have the chance to hear the young entrepreneurs explain their ideas in person.



Marcel Aschwanden, Co-founder of "Optotune", one of the first glaTec start-up companies, pictured in discussion with Empa Director Gian-Luca Bona and Mario Jenni, glaTec Managing Director (f.l.t.r.)



"Mister Empa" Gian-Luca Bona, "Mister glaTec" Mario Jenni and "Mister tebo" Peter Frischknecht of the Empa Business Incubator in St. Gallen.

The images can be downloaded at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjLygMCo>