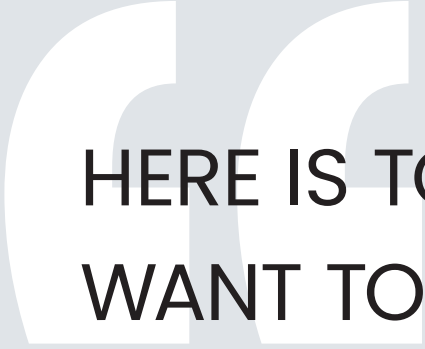




**WHERE
COURAGE
MEETS
COLLABORATION**



HERE IS TO THE PEOPLE WHO
WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, TO
THOSE WHO WORK FOR A BETTER
WORLD, TO THE ONES THAT HAVE
THE COURAGE TO DREAM, BELIEVE
AND ACT.

HERE IS TO YOU.

Welcome!

In the autumn of 2009, we took our first walk through the rooms that would later become Impact Hub. We had a clear vision of what we wanted: A place where people with an entrepreneurial mindset could take on the problems that matter. What we saw around us, though, was quite different—a massive construction site and a long list of unanswered questions.

A great deal has happened since then. Our original vision has grown into a dynamic space for innovation, collaboration and impact. Founders come here daily to refine their business ideas. Professionals from companies, foundations and public institutions sit down at the same table to work on questions that are too big for any one of them to take on alone. And this isn't just happening in Vienna. Over the last fifteen years, a network of more than a hundred Impact Hubs has taken shape around the world, we have supported over a thousand startups, helped create some ten thousand jobs, and set countless projects and partnerships in motion.

We have never stood still. We have taken on new topics, developed new formats and slowly sharpened our understanding of what an Impact Hub can be. After a long journey of strong growth, we wanted to take a moment to tell our own story. Where did we come from, how have we changed, which moments shaped us, and what challenges still need to be solved?

But where to begin? And harder still, where to stop?

Difficult questions. So we tried something new. Together with the team at KOMBÜSE, we came up with the idea for this magazine and opened our doors to their journalists, who visited us, traveled with us, and observed how we work. What they discovered are perspectives, insights and reflections that show our journey in a new light. And at the heart of it all, is the work that we've dedicated ourselves to over these first fifteen years: the stories, the people and the numbers that show what is possible when people come together and set their ideas into motion.

We hope you enjoy the journey!

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SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

What began in a courtyard in the heart of Vienna, with the energy of a handful of dedicated individuals and the support of many helping hands, is now a thriving mid-sized company with four locations. The “birth-place” of it all is the Impact Hub on Lindengasse. Here, social entrepreneurs work on their business models, companies from across Austria collaborate with partners in numerous programs to address the pressing issues of our time, and every year stakeholders and innovators come together at dozens of events. It is a vibrant space of collective action.

The same is true at the other locations in the Austrian capital. At Climate Lab, under the roof of Wien Energie, work is being done to find solutions to the challenges of climate change and a circular economy. Future Health Lab at CAPE 10 is the innovation center shaping the future of healthcare, while Education Lab, in collaboration with the City of Vienna, is dedicated to innovative educational practices. Everywhere, all at once, bridging sectors, collaborating, driving impact, addressing the challenges of our time, working together for the benefit of humanity.

And because this deserves to be celebrated, hundreds of stakeholders from the ecosystem of Impact Hub gather from all over the world once a year to network, exchange ideas and think boldly about the future. The two-day Impact Days conference is the apex of collaborative efforts to shape a future that will benefit the common good. They will meet in the heart of Vienna, in the magnificent ballroom of city hall (see photo). It is THE place to experience inspiration, collaboration and joyful optimism alongside the people who are making it happen.

We will continue to shape change with our energy. At Impact Hub. At Climate Lab. At Future Health Lab. At Education Lab. And in many other places across the country and the globe.







WE WANT TO CONNECT PEOPLE AND BRING THEIR IDEAS TO LIFE

They stand for social innovation and social entrepreneurship, for cross-sector collaboration and impact: Impact Hub Vienna and its three Labs have become renowned movers and shakers both in the city and across Austria. Now at the fifteen-year mark, what has made the group so successful? A conversation with Managing Directors Hinnerk Hansen, Alexis Eremia and Jakob Detering on how Impact Hub Vienna was founded, its growing pains and their vision for the future.

Hinnerk Hansen and Alexis Eremia, two of Impact Hub Vienna's founders, are here to welcome us in the Atelier, one of several event spaces at their location in Vienna's 7th district. Hanging on the wall is a richly illustrated poster, roughly three meters long, from a recent "Vienna Democracy Strategy" workshop. Jakob Detering, who has been managing director alongside Hinnerk for the last three years, is busy with appointments and will join us later. Thus it's a good chance to start our talk with how Impact Hub was founded.

Alexis and Hinnerk, what motivated you to found Impact Hub in 2010?

Hinnerk: Back then, we met many people who wanted to make a difference in society, but were having trouble getting started. There wasn't a place or a community to go to and barely any support was available for people who wanted to put their ideas into action. So that's what we set out to do: create spaces, invite people and build a network that can shape society in a positive way. A real home for social entrepreneurs.

How important is a good location for success?

Alexis: If I want to make a difference in society, I need a place I like coming to and where I feel at home. We drew inspiration from other Impact Hubs and were happy to find this space on Lindengasse. And because we were able to do a lot of the renovations ourselves, we could save a little on rent too.

It couldn't have been easy to create a good space with limited resources.

Hinnerk: We always told ourselves not to give potential members any reason not to come to us. And the conditions here were perfect: a central location in the 7th district, a quiet loft in an inner courtyard—just a good place with good energy. We then worked on it ourselves for nine months: Reinhard sanded down the community table, Roman sawed the boards, Alexis painted them, and I built them together. At least 50 people actively helped us during this phase, and we're still grateful to them to this day. Without them, it would have been nearly impossible to complete this renovation—and at the same time, this experience really brought together the initial community that would later become the heart of Impact Hub.

Sounds like a garage startup.

Hinnerk: More like a construction-site startup! But yes, lots of noise, lots of dust, lots of DIY—but that was a good thing. No one complained about sitting on simple folding chairs. Austrian President Alexander van

der Bellen, who was then still the federal spokesperson for the Greens (their party's leadership sometimes met at Impact Hub), didn't mind that the acoustics weren't perfect. The Caritas board paid us a visit, and Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate and social business icon, even showed up to officially open the space with us. Nobody was that interested in the furniture or a corner still waiting to be painted. It was simply a great location with an authentic atmosphere. And even though so many of our concepts were new and different, people somehow trusted us to be able to build this into a proper business. Many of them were probably thinking, 'These are interesting people. They have university degrees and good grades—it's not like they have to do this. But they are, and they're even taking on financial risk.' We had indeed taken out a bank loan of 150,000 euros and would be personally liable if anything went wrong.

Who gave you the loan?

Alexis: Erste Bank. How it happened was partly coincidence, partly good timing, and a real win-win for both of us. The bank was looking to make an initial investment to learn more about the social banking sector so that they could build it up. And we were looking for a bank that understood how social impact and financial returns can work together. It was a good fit and came at exactly the right time.

When you started, did you already have an idea of what this could become?

Hinnerk: No. In our planning, we worked off the assumption that we'd have one or two employees and 200 members in the community. How we thought we could live off of that, I really can't explain. But back then we thought: Our only resources are these 400 square meters, the opening hours and plenty of workspaces. What it meant to bring in the content, the community, the support and the expertise, and channel all of that into programs was completely unknown, completely unimaginable at the time.

Alexis: The most important thing for us at the beginning was that the basic idea worked. I remember visiting one of the larger Impact Hubs in San Francisco: It had two floors as well as offices for established social enterprises that could afford to pay for the space. That was the first time that I thought: This could be the goal, the vision, the next level for us. In San Francisco, we saw proof that the sector could grow. All the people working in the impact sector at the time—entrepreneurs, investors, companies—were our inspiration to say: I hope we can develop the sector just like how they've done it here. And we did.

2004 - The founders meet at AIESEC and WU Wien.

2010 - After nine months of renovation, Impact Hub officially opens on May 12 at Lindengasse 56 in Vienna's 7th district.

Jakob Detering enters the room and joins us.

Have there been any crises over the years?

Alexis: Of course! Finding the right location was difficult. Then everything was threatened when the global Impact Hub Network went into crisis due to overly rapid growth. That was when Hinnerk switched over to lead the global team. In 2013, we had cash flow issues and there were rumors amongst the staff about a coming apocalypse—that was a major challenge. Then there was a leadership change, and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Hinnerk: Corona was an external factor that we couldn't control. Those were difficult times: We could no longer use half of our space, and it was just as hard on our members who were also struggling and trying to save their own businesses. Fortunately, Austria came out with solid support programs. And in the end, COVID-19 brought everyone on the team much closer together, and we were actually able to scale up during that phase—counter to everything one might have expected. As a company, we're now about five times bigger than we were in 2020.

What phase are you in today?

Alexis: I'd describe it like this: Imagine you're a teenager and you're 1.50 meters tall, and suddenly you shoot up to 1.78 meters. Not everything is working perfectly. First, you have to mentally grow into your new body and deal with questions like, "Who am I now, and who do I want to be?"

That sounds like growing pains.

Jakob: Yes, the last few years have been ones of tremendous growth—new locations, new products, new brands. That creates an amazing amount of momentum and a lot of space for creativity. But of course, with growth comes a lot of new questions. Now we need to go deeper and focus. However, we're also dealing with all this in a macroeconomic environment that is very challenging: Austria is experiencing an economic slump that is longer than any we've seen in post-war history, and after last year's federal and local elections, we are seeing austerity policies coming out at both levels. Add to that the fact that Austria has a philanthropic sector that is very small by international standards. It's not a great market environment right now for anyone.

Hinnerk: We certainly have a great deal of pressure and tensions to deal with: external factors, our own high standards, the urgency in the face of societal challenges, bringing as many stakeholders on board as possible—and we must operate in a way that's economically viable.

You currently have 70 employees and an annual turnover in the millions. How would you describe Impact Hub's recipe for success?

Jakob: Despite the diversity of our locations, we are united by a set of well-established practices and approaches. We are anchored by our physical spaces and believe in the power that they hold. We are community-driven, aiming to bring people and organiza-

HOW A NETWORK FOUND ITS CENTER

It began as a mere idea in London in 2005, and grew into a global movement within just a few years. In more and more cities around the world, spaces started emerging for people who wanted to solve social problems through entrepreneurial efforts. But success also raises many questions: How do you organize a network in which every location is affiliated, but independent? How do you prevent a shared idea from fragmenting into countless individual interests?

The turning point came in 2011. After a phase filled with tension and challenges, the network decided it needed a fresh start. The founders of the then ca. 20 Impact Hubs entered into a new partnership and jointly assumed responsibility for global development—not centralized control, but local freedom with a shared brand and shared responsibility. The new mission statement: Locally rooted, globally connected.

Vienna had a central role to play. It was here that the new global structure was established, including an international association to serve as the umbrella organization and an operational company to lead the management, support and growth of the network. It was a logical choice, as the new leadership team—made up of Gabriela Gandel, Hinnerk Hansen and Simon Ulvund—also came from Vienna. Shortly after Impact Hub had opened in the Austrian capital, the city then became home to this new global experiment. The task: to lead a global network and build on the individual strengths of all its locations.

And the experiment was successful. After a year of consolidation came years of strong growth, and by 2017, the network consisted of more than a hundred locations worldwide. Although there were more challenges to come, the model proved its worth in the long term. The new structure allowed for a high degree of co-creation and the ability to integrate diverse perspectives. The network was resilient. The network was alive.

2011 - Vienna becomes the headquarters of the global Impact Hub Network.

2012 - Impact Hub launches its first startup program, "Investment Ready." Over 80 more programs will follow.



"All of this only works because of the people," says Alexis Eremia.

tions together. And through our programs, we provide guidance and support to individuals and their ideas so that they can develop and grow. The fourth pillar of our approach is the development of a wider ecosystem.

What makes it unique?

Jakob: We have a simple, clear logic that sets us apart and serves as the compass for everything we do. The Labs have their thematic priorities—specific, system-level challenges—and in Impact Hub, we focus on our stakeholders, namely, social entrepreneurs.

Alexis: Of course, all of this only works because of the people. You can have as many concepts as you want, but if the right mindset isn't there, it won't work. It's not just about building a business, but about committing to something that creates a real impact.

Hinnerk: Plus, we've managed to translate our intention into concrete strategy and actions, which I think has helped to build our credibility. Over the last 15 years, we've built a very solid foundation. I'm convinced that if we continue to be entrepreneurial, ambitious and intention-driven, it will work. If one of these three aspects is missing, then we have a problem.

Strong stakeholder relationships are at the core of your work. How did you achieve that?

Hinnerk: Our counterparts can sense that we genuinely care about them and the issue at hand. For example, I see Wien Energie, but above all, I see Fabian, who wants to create something. And even though Wien Energie is a thousand times bigger than us, Fabian also sees Hinnerk and may want us to work together. Alongside the strategic fit is the personal connection and trust. That's something we're always searching for and can build up as we create shared impact. This is deeply rooted in our DNA and all our initiatives.

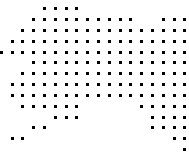
Alexis: We want to create a sense of belonging. This requires a strong core that can draw people in and then hold the community together. The question is always: What is at the center? What are we gathering around?

So a space alone isn't enough?

Alexis: We may all work in this space, but that doesn't turn people into a community. Not by a long shot. Our space is unique in that we pursue a clear, shared intention and create a structure of belonging: People come to the Impact Hub to make a difference in the world. They go to Climate Lab to work on reducing CO₂ emissions. Or to Future Health Lab to improve healthcare. Or now to Education Lab to transform the education system. That's what both connects us and



IMPACT DOESN'T HAPPEN IN ISOLATION



What started as an idea in London in 2005, has now grown into a global movement with over 120 locations in more than 60 countries.

Abidjan	Bern	Donostia	Kathmandu	Manaus	Porto Alegre	Tirol
Abuja	Bissau	Dresden	Khartoum	Medellin	Reggio Emilia	Tokyo
Accra	Boston	Duhok	Kigali	Mexico City	Rio de Janeiro	Trento
Agder	Brasilia	Florence	Kumasi	Milan	Riyadh	Turin
Amsterdam	Brno	Florianopolis	Kuala Lumpur	Minneapolis	Rome	Ubatuba
Ankara	Bucharest	Geneva	Kyoto	Monterrey	San Jose	Vienna
Antigua	Budapest	Goiânia	Lagos	Montevideo	San Salvador	Vitoria
Antwerp	Buenos Aires	Gyumri	Lausanne	Moscow	Sao Paulo	Waikato
Aruba	Bujumbura	Hamburg	Leipzig	Munich	Shanghai	Yangon
Athens	Cali	Harare	Liepaja	Nairobi	Shenzhen	Yaoundé
Baltimore	Caracas	Houston	Lisbon	New York	Stockholm	Yerevan
Bamako	Cape Winelands	Hyderabad	London	Odessa	Stuttgart	Yorkshire
Barcelona	Chongqing	Inverness	Ljubljana	Ostrava	Syracuse	Zagreb
Bari	Cotonou	Istanbul	Luanda	Ottawa	Syunik	Zaragoza
Belgrade	Curitiba	Istra	Lusaka	Panama City	Taipei	Zurich
Belo Horizonte	Dakar	Jakarta	Madrid	Phnom Penh	Tbilisi	
Berlin	Dar es Salaam	João Pessoa	Malaga	Port-au-Prince	Tegucigalpa	
Bogota	Dhaka	Karlsruhe	Managua	Prague	Ticino	

sets us apart from others. That, and the way we integrate these values into our programs and how we see our role as hosts.

How do you foster your unique corporate culture?

Jakob: First and foremost, the teams at Impact Hub and the Labs are deeply committed to their respective topics. That's the most important thing. The drive for social change is at the heart of our company's purpose, and our structure has embodied that since 2014 when we adopted the Holacracy organizational model. With this model, we don't have a traditional hierarchy. Instead, we work primarily in self-organized "circles" and roles. This distributes decision-making authority throughout the entire company, making things transparent and empowering everyone to take responsibility for their work. This unique culture is what drives us forward.

Alexis: Originally, we saw this model at Impact Hub

and went on to implement it here. Since then, the organization has become an organism whose structure continues to evolve, stays agile, and is very much in line with how we view organizations in general.

What role did Holacracy play in your success?

Jakob: It's an enabler of growth. When you no longer have to decide everything top-down, but instead work according to the principle of decentralized leadership, it creates momentum. The three of us often don't know everything that's going on in the organization at a given moment—and that's a good thing! We don't have to be involved in everything, but can trust the Circles—that is, that people are living their roles in line with our purpose.

Alexis: Without Holacracy, the extremely rapid growth we experienced over the past five years wouldn't have been possible. It's a system that can be continually adapted to challenges. It's fascinating.

2015 - Impact Hub expands its space to over 1000m² funded by a new community investment model.

2018 - The Social Impact Award (SIA) spins off. Today, SIA is active in more than 25 countries.



Alexis says her goodbyes and heads off to her next meeting.

Do you serve as a role model for other Impact Hubs?

Jakob: We're one of the five largest Impact Hubs in the network, so naturally people look up to us. I mean, at least at the annual network meetings, I feel like I'm always in high demand (laughs). Seriously though, Hinnerk's earlier role in building the global network does put us in the spotlight, which gives us a special kind of responsibility. Over the past three years, I've also consistently engaged with the global network and helped shape the standards that we aim to uphold across the soon-to-be 130 Impact Hubs.

Do other Impact Hubs look to you for inspiration, and do you look to others?

Jakob: Recently, a delegation of Impact Hub repre-

sentatives visited Climate Lab with the idea of possibly doing something similar in their own countries. And of course, we look to others too: Zurich, for example, just launched a community app that we've now adopted. We also learn a lot from how São Paulo organizes their annual conference, which we can then apply to our Impact Days. And Madrid has created great synergies between their multiple locations throughout the city.

Are all these initiatives part of a shared vision?

Hinnerk: Yes, and this is ultimately what unites us together across so many different contexts. We want everyone to have the opportunity to discover and realize ideas for a better world—and to find the space and support they need to do so with us. Whether it's here in Vienna, London or Kigali. Our task is to connect people, amplify ideas and work together to implement solutions to urgent societal challenges.



And how do we get there?

Jakob: Along two paths: the entrepreneurial path and the collaborative path. I believe that few Impact Hubs have broken this down at the local level as explicitly as we have. Impact Hub is primarily a place for entrepreneurs who want to create impact. The collaborative path is pursued by the Labs, where various stakeholders engage in cross-sector collaborations.

Does that also work when, as in the case of Climate Lab, you operate under a partner's roof?

Jakob: When choosing a location for Climate Lab, we made a conscious decision to go where the emissions are. Where better than right next to the iconic waste incinerator in Spittelau? We want to make a difference, don't we? It would be too easy to only work with actors who have already decarbonized and adopted circularity. A cozy nest doesn't exactly drive change. But of course, we only work with partners who are serious and truly want to make a difference. To them we offer various opportunities to collaborate, both with us and other partners, to create an impact.

So it requires close cooperation with the business community?

Jakob: To truly make a difference, we need business and industry on board. The trick is to link sustainable business practices with economic development. Then companies and industry associations will listen. We always look for common ground and what unites us in terms of impact, and then we work with and within the system, not against it.

Does it help that you're a small-to-medium-sized enterprise yourself?

Hinnerk: It definitely helped that we established the three Labs over the past three years, each with a thematic scope and founded together with partners. This has elevated us to a new level in politics, business and civil society. We've built a solid foundation despite all the entrepreneurial risks. Our partners can also sense that our team is thinking: We want this, we'll do this, we'll take this risk, we'll see it through—and we're most effective when we work together.

Jakob: That said, there's still a disconnect between our work and how it's perceived. We always try (keyword here is 'intentionality') to first do things well and then talk about them. There are others out there who are louder and thus more visible, even though they may just be spouting hot air.

Will there be more Labs in the future?

Jakob: The topics of the three Labs—climate, health and education—are essential to finding answers to the question of how we want to build a society fit for the future. I'm certain that we could find and develop more topics both within and between these pillars. At the same time, we're launching a strategic process this summer looking at the question: How can we best achieve our 2030 ambition? This year and next, we want to focus on deepening and strengthening our work. What's working today should be consolidated.

Hinnerk: I see it exactly the same way. We will open new labs when it feels right. At the moment, I find it exciting to be in an established position where we can offer partners the opportunity to think strategically together. This might mean being open to different kinds of structures. Labs are not the only solution for addressing challenges. But I definitely don't want to rule out the possibility that there may be topics in the future that we will decide to tackle as Labs and in full entrepreneurial spirit.

That sounds very next level.

Hinnerk: For me, it's a natural progression. Our goal is for the city, the federal government and all other partners to know that if they truly want to bring about solutions to problems—in the sense of creating positive change for society—then Impact Hub is the place to be.

Are you optimistic that we can pull off this transformation?

Jakob: Yes, I think we're all optimists here. But for me, 'What can you see in the crystal ball?' isn't a relevant question. You just end up getting lost in a very unproductive discourse. I find it more encouraging and joyful to think about what we can do to shape a path to transformation. And that's exactly the approach we take in our work. For example, even though there's currently a backlash regarding climate change, that shouldn't overshadow the fact that there are still many organizations and companies that have made the strategic decision to pursue this path. I find it much more exciting to focus on the question of how we can move forward rather than where exactly we'll end up. Because that's how we can make the transformation concrete, and how we can empower our society to take action.

ALEXIS EREMIA

is a co-founder and board member of Impact Hub Vienna. For over 15 years, she has played a pivotal role in shaping the strategic development and growth of the organization. She was involved in the founding of all of Impact Hub Vienna's labs as well as the annual Impact Days—Austria's leading conference on investing and social entrepreneurship. Alexis has served as a strategic advisor to WWF, UNIDO, Climate-KIC and REEEP, supporting these organizations to scale their impact and ecosystems. She also co-founded a consulting firm specializing in strategy, entrepreneurship and impact.



HINNERK HANSEN

is a co-founder and managing director of Impact Hub Vienna. He has led the development of Impact Hub in Vienna from the beginning, and as managing director of the global organization, Hinnerk was responsible for the Impact Hub Network's growth to more than 100 cities. Most recently, he shaped the expansion strategy in Vienna and initiated the establishment of Climate Lab, Future Health Lab and Education Lab through public-private partnerships. Hinnerk has advised numerous philanthropic and public institutions and has been actively involved in promoting social innovation and entrepreneurship with the World Economic Forum. In 2025, he was named EY Social Entrepreneur of the Year.




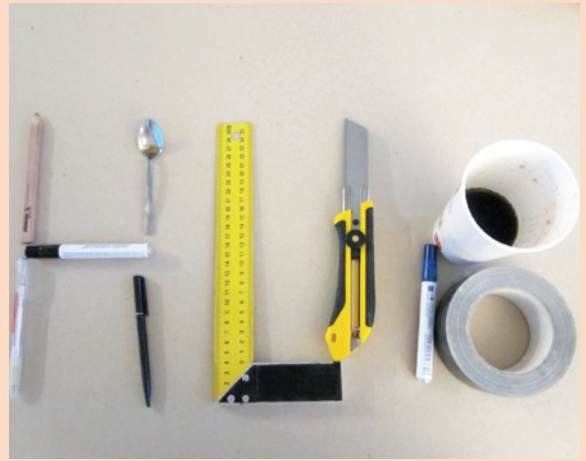
JAKOB DETERING

is a managing director of Impact Hub Vienna and leads the group's team of 70+ members. Before joining Impact Hub, he spent nearly a decade scaling the Social Impact Award from a local initiative into a global community of young social entrepreneurs that he continues to support to this day. He also worked in philanthropy and social business development in Austria and internationally, including building a social business in Romania focused on food waste and social inclusion. He speaks frequently at conferences and has been teaching social entrepreneurship at various universities for many years.



2025 - Education Lab is launched as a shared space where educators, practitioners and decision-makers can co-create innovations for schools and kindergartens.





THE MAKING OF IMPACT HUB VIENNA

A year filled with planning and renovation, hopes and doubts. Back when it started, it wasn't just about creating a place, but a community. Co-founder Matthias Reisinger looks back.

A large, bright room. A hundred students from all over the world are reflecting, discussing and working on their ideas for how to make the world a better place. Inspiring music plays in the background. There's something magical in the air, and I'm standing right in the middle of it, thinking: This is why we built this place.

It didn't always look like this. In recent months—or to be more precise, just a few hours ago—this was still a construction site. And for an even longer time, Impact Hub only existed as a business plan in a students' kitchen. Hinnerk, Alexis and I were just two students and a recent graduate with an idea: Vienna needs a place where people who want to make a difference can come together.

What followed was a lot of work. We toured a dozen spaces—too dark, too expensive, too small, too absurd. On the side, we studied, worked and spent a lot of time convincing others. Then we found the perfect place. We signed the lease. Three months of planning, nine months of construction. Weekends spent painting walls until our arms ached. Evenings spent alone on the construction site, wondering if it would ever be finished.

But then something magical happened. Even before the last brushstroke had dried, people started showing up. They wanted to help, to contribute, to become part of something that wasn't even finished yet. The community didn't form after the opening—it emerged on the construction site.

Fifteen years later, I know this wasn't a coincidence. In a world full of screens and algorithms, the things with the most impact remain surprisingly analog: people coming together in a physical space and making a difference together. That's exactly what happened in 2010. And it continues to this day at Impact Hub.



MATTHIAS REISINGER

is a co-founder of Impact Hub Vienna and is currently the Executive Director of the Foundation for Economic Education. He is committed to ensuring that young people have the tools to shape their own futures in school, business and society.



Community Table
Sit here to connect with other members during lunch time!





THE SEED

What began on a first floor tucked away in a Vienna courtyard is now one of Austria's most exciting centers for entrepreneurship. At its flagship location on Lindengasse, Impact Hub has firmly established its roots as a home for social enterprises and social innovation.

It could be that visionary figures see more than others. Why else would Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and the founder of social businesses, have come here? To the first floor of an unassuming building in a courtyard somewhere in Vienna, where a few young people were opening what they called “Impact Hub” on May 12, 2010? To this space created for tackling societal challenges with the power of entrepreneurship? Maybe Yunus had a premonition. Back then, it would have been hard to find someone who would wager a euro that this place would one day become a center for social entrepreneurship and social innovation in Austria. That over time, more than a thousand startups and nearly 10,000 new jobs would be born here. That it would host over 5,000 members to date. That three thematic labs with over 450 partnerships for the common good would emerge. No one except Yunus. Maybe.

“This is where it all began,” says Raphaëla Stock almost 16 years later. Her voice is subdued, because after all, this is a coworking space and there is a lot of work to be done. Light streams across the “Community Floor.” There’s a kitchen, a small café, chandeliers hung high on the ceilings, phone booths and special “leaf” tables. The tables were specifically designed by Impact Hub so that the leaf-shaped wooden panels can be easily reassembled into workstations of any size. Stock is responsible for events and the community at Lindengasse. “This is the origin of Impact Hub, the seed that started it all,” she explains.

A seed from which not only two additional floors here at the headquarters on Lindengasse have grown, but three more locations across the city with a total of 70 employees and €6.5 million in annual revenue. But it’s also a seed from which a large community, close collaborations and a dense network for social innovation and impact have emerged. A seed from which founders, companies, public institutions, foundations and civil society have come to collectively tackle social challenges. All in pursuit of one shared goal: “We stand for an economy in which all people can live well,” as it’s stated on the website and in brochures. A lofty aspiration, born of a deep conviction. “The economy must serve people,” says Alexis Eremia with a smile, as if it’s a law of nature.

Together with Hinnerk Hansen and Matthias Reisinger, Eremia launched Impact Hub in 2010. The early days of building the organization are long gone—the euphoric but difficult start, the slow growth, the occasional changes in leadership, the internal and external crises, the expansion to the ground floor in 2015 and then up to the third floor in 2018, and the accelerated growth driven by the three thematic locations—Climate Lab, Future Health Lab and Education Lab. “Today we are a



An unexpected honor: Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus at the opening of Impact Hub in 2010.

medium-sized company,” says the co-founder. “We’re a company that works.”

The business model is based on three pillars: First, there are the memberships and coworking, which served as Impact Hub’s foundation in the early days. “Today, we have 436 members,” says Raphaëla Stock. Their best-selling product is a Flex membership, which allows members to work for five days a month at one of the hundred desks in the coworking space for 75 euros. But of course, there are other options as well, ranging from single-day passes to one of the 15 offices that are home to companies like Dreamwaves, Vision Education or Ground Truth Solutions. A total of 189 companies are currently registered at Impact Hub, each with its own mailbox. So far, pretty normal for a coworking space.

Another benefit for the community—in addition to networking among members, which itself has led to joint startups—is that companies can participate in accelerator programs where they receive support from network

The collaboration between Impact Hub Vienna and Deloitte Austria began in 2016 with the joint acceleration program “Found,” which was designed to support social startups. It continued with “Grow,” a project focused on sustainability-oriented startups. Deloitte contributes technical expertise in strategy and consulting, while Impact Hub Vienna provides access to a strong network of startups. The goal is to promote innovative and sustainable solutions to societal challenges, particularly the creation of opportunities in the labor market and measures to combat climate change. The partnership has contributed to the successful support of innovative business models as well as to increased exchange between the business sector and social innovation.

Harald Breit - CEO, Deloitte Austria

partners and mentors at every stage of their journey: ideation, entering the market, and the various phases of growth and scaling. “It has always been a dream of mine to democratize entrepreneurs’ access to support,” says co-founder Eremia. “The more support there is for them, the better.”

There are also programs that target specific social issues and provide support for cohorts of up to 25 social enterprises across Austria. One example is a current program aimed at startups that are developing solutions related to the country’s changing demographics.

Or the “Grow” program, a joint venture of the Deloitte Future Fund and Impact Hub, which supports the growth of startups committed to tackling the climate crisis. Harald Breit, CEO of Deloitte Austria, is enthusiastic about the program. “The partnership has contributed to the successful support of innovative business models as well as to increased exchange between the business sector and social innovation.” (See his statement)

Impact Hub’s experts work together with partners to set the topics and design the programs. These may include both individual and group formats and are then implemented under the direction of the experts, many of whom have startup experience of their own as well as extensive know-how when it comes to developing and scaling ideas.

That leaves the events. Hardly a day goes by at Impact Hub without some kind of offering for members or interested guests—from private consultations with an impact investment manager from Erste Group, to trainings for startups, to the much beloved Friday “Bier um Vier” (Beer at Four). The spaces where the events



SOCIAL IMPACT AWARD

The Social Impact Award (SIA) is a global network empowering young people to turn ideas into ventures that address pressing social and environmental challenges. Through hands-on programs—from early ideation to incubation and awards—SIA equips participants with entrepreneurial skills, mentorship and a supportive international community that helps transform intention into action.

Founded in 2009 at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, SIA has grown into one of the world’s leading platforms for young social entrepreneurs. It was hosted at Impact Hub Vienna for many years before being established as an independent non-profit organization in 2018 under the leadership of Jakob Detering. The ERSTE Foundation supported this move with a continuation of its strategic partnership and long-term funding, which had been in place since 2010.

Today, SIA engages around 10,000 young people annually and has supported the creation of more than 1,000 impact-driven ventures across 25+ countries in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. Its approach goes beyond venture creation: SIA fosters empowerment, builds skills and connects a diverse, values-driven community committed to shaping a more just and sustainable future.



Impact Hub believes strongly in the power of physical spaces where people can meet and connect.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

"Social Entrepreneurship describes innovative entrepreneurial action which aims at solving social challenges. These actions could be initiated in the form of a new business (startup) or in the context of existing organizations (social intrapreneurship)."

— Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation, Vienna University of Economics and Business

In the early 2000s, the idea that a business model could focus on generating social value as well as revenue was practically unheard of. Now with rising social inequality and the urgency of the climate crisis, more and more companies are uniting purpose and profit as leaders recognize that a business can only thrive if its people and environment are thriving as well.

As of 2023, there were around 10 million social enterprises around the globe generating over \$2 trillion in annual revenue

and creating 200 million jobs across diverse sectors. In 2024, Austria counted ca. 2,500 social enterprises within its borders, with business models ranging from sustainable construction and inclusive education to impact investing. Social entrepreneurship has also gained formal recognition here with the introduction of the "Verified Social Enterprise" label and government funding directed at impact-oriented programs and early financing for social start-ups.

Social intrapreneurship has also taken off, with more and more companies and government agencies empowering individual employees to initiate and scale solutions for social or environmental challenges within their existing structures. This not only results in increased employee retention and productivity, but can also strengthen a brand's CSR reputation, drive a culture of innovation and open up new revenue streams.



Impact Hub plays a central role for the community of impact-oriented companies and social enterprises in Austria. As a dynamic network, it provides a space for exchange, visibility and mutual learning, thereby strengthening a community that combines social impact with entrepreneurial action. In our collaborations for the Verified Social Enterprise initiative and aws' impact-oriented tools, Impact Hub serves as a key gateway to this community. It provides orientation, networking and awareness-building around impact-related topics and helps ensure that social enterprises are recognized as independent and relevant players in Austria's innovation and startup ecosystem.

Ute Stadlbauer, Head of Entrepreneurship, aws-Austria Wirtschaftsservice GmbH

take place are certified as "Green Locations" and, naturally, are available for rent. The "Stage" can house large events with up to 150 people, while the "Atelier" and the "Library" can each accommodate around 30 guests. The Library in particular is a hit with visitors. Books from the flea market hang, fanned open on the walls, cleverly blending design, soundproofing and the DIY spirit of entrepreneurs.

As you get ready to leave, you can't shake the impression that here, entrepreneurship is not just reimaged, it's lived. Capital, talent, networks and resources are made available so that entrepreneurs have the best possible conditions to thrive and make a positive contribution to society. Companies like Vollpension (see p. 24-25) and aWATTar (see p. 30-31) and many others prove that it works. It is no exaggeration to say that this is a place where a bright future is being built. Surely, Yunus knew that too.

PROFILE: IMPACT HUB

Location: 1070 Vienna
 Opened: 2010
 Space: 1,610 m²
 Employees: 23
 5,011 members since opening
 364 events per year
 83 completed startup programs

SELECTED PARTNERS:

- Austrian Development Agency
- Austrian Economic Chambers
- Austrian Institute of Technology
- Austrian Red Cross
- Austria Wirtschaftsservice (aws)
- Blühendes Österreich - BILLA charitable foundation
- Climate and Energy Funds
- City of Vienna
- Deloitte
- EIT Urban Mobility
- Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs
- Erste Group
- Erste Social Finance
- ERSTE Foundation
- European Forum Alpbach
- European Investment Fund
- Federal Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry, (BMLUK)
- Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism (BMWET)
- FFG (Austrian Research Promotion Agency)
- Hil-Foundation
- IKEA Austria
- Interreg Central Europe
- Karin Granner
- Mercer
- OekoBusiness Vienna
- Social Entrepreneurship Network Austria
- Vienna Business Agency

STARTUPS FROM THE IMPACT HUB COMMUNITY

Since 2010, more than 1,000 startups and initiatives have been founded, supported and scaled at Impact Hub. Here are a few that have become leading examples of entrepreneurial solutions to societal challenges: aWATTar, Die Pflanzerei, Dreamwaves, erdbeerwoche, Fox Education, Hacker School, Hobby Lobby, inoq, Kern Tec, markta, Minimalist, myAbility, Revo Foods, sequestra, so.cool, soulbottles, Unverschwendet, VELLO Bike and Vollpension.



A café for the ages: Co-founder Moriz Piffl-Percevic with Grandma Marianne at one of the two Vollpension locations.

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

A visit to Vollpension is like a visit to grandma's house, only here you get a slice of inspiration with your coffee.

"Take a seat, then we're more," invites a sign hanging in a painted green display case next to the door. People have clearly heeded the call, because it's a Wednesday afternoon and it's packed inside. A waiter in a white shirt scours the room with a practiced eye, spotting a free chair at a large, shared table. At its head, a woman is reverently biting into a Buchteln with vanilla sauce; next to her, a teenager scribbles in a notebook while sipping from a large mug of coffee. Couples, groups of friends and people both young and old are lounging on small sofas and mismatched flea market chairs, while children dig their forks into slices of pie. Behind the counter, seniors in aprons and colorful headscarves whip their whisks in mixing bowls and ask customers about their favorite cakes. An underlying hum of conversation, laughter and clattering plates fills the room.

Welcome to Vollpension. The coffeehouse on Vienna's Schleifmühlgasse, just a few steps away from the Naschmarkt, is no ordinary café, but a social enterprise. Vollpension aims to solve a social problem: grandmas and grandpas bake and wait tables alongside young-

er people, allowing the seniors to earn a little extra money to supplement their notoriously low pensions. At the tables both inside and out, guests enjoy desserts that taste just like a visit to their grandparents' home. Vollpension's bottom line in a nutshell: Active participation instead of loneliness for the elderly. Self-empowerment through meaningful work instead of old-age poverty. Dialogue between generations instead of an empathy gap between youth and elders. A sense of cozy well-being in a public living room instead of the anonymity of big-city life.

Moriz Piffl-Percevic, his hair wind-touled from biking, plops down on a floral-patterned sofa surrounded by old, framed, family photos. He needs a large glass of water and an espresso. Piffl-Percevic is part of Vollpension's founding team. He and his co-found-

ers now run two cafés in Vienna that offer baking classes (the “OMasterclasses”), custom-made cakes, corporate catering and team events. The whole idea began, fittingly enough, in a community kitchen—the one at Impact Hub Vienna to be exact. There in 2012, Piffl-Percevic met Julia Krenmayr and David Haller, who soon became his partners and are now the managing director and shift manager, respectively, at the intergenerational cafés. “At Impact Hub, I first heard the term ‘social business’ from its co-founder, Alexis Eremia,” says Piffl-Percevic, sipping his espresso. “That was very important for us. Because this concept played a key role in the founding of Vollpension.”

Back then, he and Mike Lanner were making eco-fair jeans under the label “Gebrüder Stitch.” Sitting in a coffeehouse over a dry slice of cake, they came up with the idea for Vollpension. They tested it out during the Vienna Design Week in 2012, by converting their studio into a pop-up “Oma-Café.”

People were lined up down the sidewalk for a slice of Eierlikör cake. Clearly, Vollpension needed to become a permanent fixture. But how? Once again, Piffl-Percevic and Lanner found inspiration and support at Impact Hub—there they met Hannah Lux, an expert in “getting socially relevant projects off the ground” who’s today a partner at Vollpension. The rest is history: 12 years and two locations later, more than 100 seniors have baked their specialties at Vollpension and over a million guests have come to enjoy them.

Where does Vollpension stand today? “Socially, we’re very successful,” says Piffl-Percevic. “In terms of organization and business management, everything is not quite where it should be yet.” He finds that the term “social enterprise” often leads to misunderstanding: Vollpension is often mistaken for a social project that is funded by the government or through donations. “Some guests say: ‘That cake is pretty expensive for a social project!’ But the opposite is true: 100% of our financing comes from our own revenue. And there’s far more labor and complexity that go into our cakes compared with other restaurants—a slice should actually cost 15 or 20 euros.”

It all started in the community kitchen at Impact Hub. Their connections there are still strong, and many have turned into close, personal friendships. “The relationships we formed back then are still making it possible for us to do so much more today,” says Moriz Piffl-Percevic. Alexis Eremia, Impact Hub’s co-founder, still remembers her first encounter with the Vollpension team at Lindengasse. “I immediately thought: What a captivatingly beautiful idea!” she says. “Why hasn’t anyone thought of this before?”

Some things age well

2012

First contact with Impact Hub is made. Moriz and Mike meet the inspiring community as well as Julia Krenmayr and David Haller. It’s the first time they hear the term “social business.”

2014

Vollpension looks to become a permanent fixture. Moriz and Mike look for a partner—and find one in Impact Hub.

Hannah Lux joins Julia, Moriz and Mike to found a GmbH.

2015

The first permanent café is opened in the summer.

The team develops a functioning social business model for the intergenerational café.

2019

Over 350 seniors apply. The social need for Vollpension is clear.

2020

Corona: Both cafés are forced to close.
Problem: Securing income for the seniors.
Solution: Crowdfunding + live, online baking classes. So begins the online “Backademie,” a digital master class for baking.

2022

“We’re celebrating in style!” It’s Vollpension’s 10th anniversary.

2024

New partnerships are made, including a cooperation with SPAR supermarkets.

2025

Vollpension goes on tour across Austria with a public “living room.” The tour is backed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, as the team plans for expansion to other cities and looks for franchisees.

MOVING BEYOND TUNNEL VISION

To successfully address the climate and biodiversity crisis, we need to overcome our human-centred tunnel vision and adopt a broader, nature-based strategy. This is where Impact Hub can play a pivotal role. An essay by Thomas Vellacott.

We have become so used to stories of climate collapse and the loss of nature, that it's easy to forget what an existential threat they pose for nature and humans alike—with the most vulnerable being the most at risk.

The way we talk about it can make the climate and biodiversity crisis worse. Too often, we employ doomsday rhetoric that makes it sound like the situation is beyond hope, thereby increasing the likelihood that people will react with apathy. Or we insist that addressing the crisis requires a return to some golden age in the past—hardly an effective way to shape the future. And when arguing about system change, we focus almost exclusively on humans, treating the billions of other species on Earth as little more than resources at our disposal, devoid of any agency of their own.

We need to move beyond this narrow, human-centered tunnel vision. Anthropocentrism is a defining feature of the current crisis. Only by radically broadening our vision, can we overcome it. We need to move from 'I' to 'we,' but to a vastly broader 'we' than how we normally frame it. We need to focus on nature in all its forms, human and non-human.

Three measures can help us shift to a broader nature-based strategy. The first is to recognise the simple fact that we are part of nature. There is no 'environment.' There is no boundary separating us from the rest of nature. This isn't meant in an esoteric way, but it's simply a reminder that our bodies are, themselves, meta-organisms or ecosystems. More than half of the cells in and on my body are made up of microbes, without which I (and we) cannot live a healthy life. What is true at the microbial level also applies at the societal level. When cities like Paris or

London reduce air pollution and provide more space for nature to thrive, they enhance the health of both the city's human and non-human populations. Companies, meanwhile, depend on healthy ecosystems for supply chain security and long-term viability. The World Health Organization speaks of 'One Health': Humans cannot thrive while the rest of nature dies.

The second measure involves cooperating like never before. Ecosystems function through a dynamic interplay of competition, adaptation and cooperation, with symbiotic relationships playing a central role. Since we, as humans, are part of nature, cooperation is an essential tool at our disposal. Such cooperation is not about comfortably existing in a bubble with like-minded actors. It's about building coalitions that are broad enough to move markets and transform political systems. To do so, we need to reach out across sectors, countries and political divides. Such cooperation is the opposite of today's toxic culture wars: It is not about who is right and who is wrong, it is about coming together to develop and implement solutions at scale. The Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) is an example of such cooperation. SBTi helps companies—that, together account for more than 40 percent of global market capitalization—set credible climate targets. We should not stop at

human-to-human cooperation though. We can equally co-create solutions together with non-human actors: Cities seeking better protection against severe flooding often find that wetland restoration or the planting of mangroves prove more effective and cheaper than building ever-higher dams.

The third measure applies a broader nature-based vision to how we run organizations. Being part of nature has profound implications for how organizations define success, manage resources and make decisions. Nature has been evolving for the past four billion years. Instead of running organizations like machines, based on simplistic cause-and-effect models, we can turn to experimentation and prototyping instead. This is much better suited to the complex adaptive systems of which we are a part. We can look to the fringes of our organizations as hubs for innovation, in the same way that biodiversity tends to thrive in spaces like tidal zones, where different ecosystems overlap. Equally, we should stop projecting our own biases onto nature, creating pseudo-scientific concepts such as the 'alpha wolf,' which we then re-import into the design of social systems. Instead, we can learn from the processes that actually shape ecosystems, for example, when species like beavers act as ecosystem engineers, creating rich habitats where biodiversity thrives.

Impact Hub has been putting many of these principles into practice for years, curating vibrant communities that straddle sectors and countries, and collaborate across organizational boundaries in pursuit of impact. This remains an ongoing and demanding learning journey. By developing a broad nature-based strategy, Impact Hub can partner with others to move beyond human-centered tunnel vision and take impact to the next level.



THOMAS VELLACOTT

enjoyed exploring the natural world as a child, joining WWF as a member and volunteer. He spent his early career in banking and consulting before joining WWF professionally. Thomas currently serves as CEO of WWF Switzerland. He lives in Zürich and still enjoys exploring the natural world and helping it thrive. Thomas has led the advisory board of the global Impact Hub Network for many years.

THE FIRST PARTNER

Since the beginning of Impact Hub's journey the Erste Bank Group has been its constant companion, the two united by a shared purpose. It's a relationship that has already borne many fruits for both sides, and is now reaching a new milestone with their joint program "Marc."

The partnership between Erste Bank and Impact Hub began at a time when social entrepreneurship in Austria was truly groundbreaking. Since the launch of Impact Hub in 2010—supported by Erste Bank and the ERSTE Foundation—we have been united by a shared commitment to combining entrepreneurial thinking with social impact.

Peter Bosek, CEO of the Erste Group

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. In this case though, it's a number. Anyone who wants to understand the significance of the Erste Group's activities for social enterprises and organizations in Austria and Eastern and Southeastern Europe need only read the Social Banking section of the Group's Impact Report 2025. "800 million euros for financing and supporting those who are often overlooked," it states. It's a staggering figure from more than 15 years of financial activities starting in 2009/2010. "It all started with the financing for Impact Hub," says Florian Bauer, executive director of social finance and impact investment. "Since then, the sector has grown continuously."

The Erste Group's engagement, and that of the ERSTE Stiftung and Erste Bank Social Banking in particular, is no coincidence. With 23 million customers in eight countries, the bank is one of the largest publicly traded banking groups in Central and Eastern Europe. What may be less well-known is that its social roots go way back. The original "Erste oesterreichische Spar-Casse" was founded in 1819 with an explicitly social mission to enable people with little money—workers, servants, poor families—to save up, i.e., in case of illness, unemployment or emergencies. Remember, this was at a time when social insurance did not yet exist. The founding principle was, "No age, no gender, no social standing, no nation shall be excluded from the benefits that the Spar-Casse offers every depositor."

It was revolutionary for its time. "Which is why some even say that we, too, started out as a social enterprise," says Florian Bauer. "The foundation is, in a way, the successor to this original philosophy." This mindset is reflected throughout the entire group: entrepreneurs and micro-business owners, social orga-

nizations, and people facing financial difficulties are supported by both the Social Banking division of the group as well as Erste Social Finance. The latter is a separate organization that is neither a philanthropic entity like the foundation nor a bank, and thus not beholden to the Foundation Act or banking regulations. It is a unique construct in the European banking world. "It's the sweet spot," says Bauer.

With its first social banking loan given to fund the development of Impact Hub, the bank broke new ground in supporting social enterprises—a field it has continued to explore, expand and cultivate. "From the very beginning, this field has been driven and supported by the executive boards of the ERSTE Foundation and the bank," says Carmencita Nader, head of social banking at Erste Bank and Sparkasse. "Today, we are the market leader in social banking financing, a growing segment."

According to Nader, the bank is currently working with several hundred social organizations. The requirement: "The intended impact must be of equal or greater importance than the goal of generating profit. Our social enterprises are not profit maximizers." Nevertheless, they are subject to a rigorous review, though this can be streamlined. Organizations that—like Erste Social Finance—are

certified as a Verified Social Enterprise by the Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft, the development bank of the federal government, will already have key documentation available, “which significantly simplifies our review,” says Nader.

Erste—as everyone calls it—has become the central financial partner for Impact Hub Vienna, its Labs, the global Impact Hub Network and the entire sector. As part of its collaboration with Impact Hub, it supports social entrepreneurs with financing options, consulting and mentoring. It also acts as a partner at events such as “Impact Days,” funds publications and shares its expertise in Impact Hub programs.

Erste’s latest collaboration with Impact Hub is called the Marc Impact Program. Since 2024, it has been rolled out in the CCE region, with Impact Hub as the anchoring partner in Austria. “Over the course of eight months, the program aims to equip impact companies with essential tools—from business management to accessing financing,” explains Florian Bauer. On one side, it supports companies with successful business cases to improve their impact models. On the other, it supports companies with sound economic logic to optimize their business models.

It is an initiative based on experience. “Companies working on solutions to social problems or sustainability issues still often struggle to secure suitable financing. They also often lack the know-how and economic skills needed to convince investors of their plans. Marc is designed to close this gap,” says Bauer. Sixty social organizations have completed the first two rounds of the Marc program, and with great success: Participants have seen a total of 4.5 million euros in investments, with 2.1 million euros coming from the Erste Group alone.

The political significance should also not be underestimated. Many NGOs, for example, are dependent on fundraising and public grants. “Quite a few governments, especially autocratic ones in Eastern Europe, have been increasingly cutting their funding,” says Bauer. “Grants are a political steering instrument.” But it is precisely in these situations that organizations need support to become more entrepreneurial—and Marc is a valuable opportunity to do just that.

And who knows? Maybe in the future another idea will catch fire that will benefit these and other organizations. Together with the Impact Hubs in Tyrol and Vienna, Erste has launched an initiative that aims to bring philanthropists together with exactly these kinds of social organizations from across the entire Impact Hub network. A network that Bauer, incidentally, describes as the “core asset” of Impact Hub:

“They have an incredibly well-curated network of people and organizations with whom they effectively work,” says Florian Bauer. “That’s why they are an extremely important partner for us.”



CARMENCITA NADER

is the head of Social Banking Erste Bank and Sparkasse. She works at the intersection of strategy, sales and transformation, and has been with the Erste Group since 2010.



FLORIAN BAUER

is the executive director of social finance and impact investment at the ERSTE Stiftung and Erste Social Finance. His previous roles include positions at Siemens, REEEP and Impact Hub Vienna.

FINDING THE RIGHT ENERGY

Impact Hub serves as an ideal launchpad for companies looking to take root and grow. Take aWATTar: The green electricity provider took its first steps in the coworking space and is now a well-known brand throughout Austria.

Who says that those handwritten notes stuck on lamp-posts, café blackboards and company bulletin boards don't make a difference? The year was 2014 when Simon Schmitz pinned his note up at the Impact Hub: "Seeking electronics support for a new business idea." At the time, Peter Netbal was a traffic manager who was trying his hand at a startup in the field of traffic sensor technology, but "we had to wind that down fairly early on." It was for that reason that he was also taking on some IT work for Impact Hub. "Because, to be honest, nothing was really working back then."

In other words, he was open to new ideas—and reached out to Schmitz. It wasn't just the start of a fruitful collaboration, but the beginning of a company that remains a literal powerhouse in the renewable energy sector to this day: aWATTar.

"The idea behind aWATTar was very simple and hasn't really changed much since the company was founded," says Netbal, now the company's CTO. The short version: At the time, aWATTar was the first electricity provider in Austria to offer dynamic pricing for green electricity. When the sun shines and the wind blows, there is a corresponding abundance of electricity from solar and wind power, making electricity cheaper. aWATTar passes these lower prices on to its customers. The goal: "We want more renewable energy to be used and then, as a result of this demand, expanded," says Netbal. Thus, a catalyst for the energy transition.

And a successful one at that. aWATTar now generates annual revenue in the tens of millions, has a five-digit customer base, has been active in Germany since 2019, and in 2022 came under the complete ownership of Tado, a provider of smart heating and energy management based in Munich and active in 20 countries. A genuine success story. Or as Netbal humbly puts it: "aWATTar has become something of a brand in Austria."

Is it possible to say what role the Impact Hub played in their success? On the one hand, there was the "green-start" program, a startup accelerator run by the Climate and Energy Fund and Impact Hub, where aWATTar was able to raise 15,000 euros in 2015. But what was far more decisive: "Impact Hub creates an environment where everyone wants to push things forward. There's a drive there that ends up benefiting everyone." That's what brought the founders together, allowed them to exchange ideas with other members and find support during difficult phases. It's what gave them the space to explore their "shared capacity for perseverance."

Back then it was all still very informal. Mutual support took place over lunch or coffee—people felt understood, could talk about accelerator programs and financing, they exchanged contacts. And this shared mindset helped create a common ground: "We all wanted to make money while also making a difference for the good of society within our respective systems. But the key thing," recalls Netbal, "was that Impact Hub created the framework and environment for that to happen. And it still does to this day."

No wonder aWATTar stayed in the neighborhood when they outgrew the coworking space and their employees started to annoy the other members with their noise, "and weren't so popular anymore," as Netbal puts it. It was a

time when the Impact Hub was constantly packed to the brim and “you were a fool” if you showed up at eight o’clock only to find that all the desks were already taken.

So they moved one floor up, away from the coworking room, but still part of the space. To this day, aWATTar’s team are still Impact Hub members and the employees still use the shared kitchen and chat with coworkers over coffee. “And maybe they’ll sense that special atmosphere, that energy, too,” says Netbal. Which, after all, would be fitting for a company that found its success in supplying energy.

The successful founders of aWATTar: Simon Schmitz and Peter Netbal.



A powerful journey

2014

First contact is made with Impact Hub. Simon Schmitz finds a co-founder in Peter Netbal there.

2015

aWATTar wins the Climate and Energy Fund’s greenstart program and receives valuable start-up funding.

aWATTar is launched as a pioneer in dynamic green electricity pricing in Austria.

2019

The company successfully expands to Germany.

2022

aWATTar is fully acquired by Tado.

Today

aWATTar is an established brand with tens of thousands of customers.

A LEVER FOR GREATER IMPACT

The Vienna Business Agency has been a close partner of Impact Hub and its Labs for many years. But how does the future look in rapidly changing times? A conversation with Managing Director Dominic Weiss about the importance of partnerships, impact measurement and the consequences of tight budgets.

Dominic Weiss has led the Vienna Business Agency since January 2025. The agency has approximately 200 employees and supports founders and established companies in Vienna and the metropolitan region with consulting, funding and economic development. The goal: to strengthen the city's economic future.

Mr. Weiss, do you remember when Impact Hub first appeared on your radar?

I was not yet in the role that I am in now, but of course I'm familiar with the Vienna Business Agency's long-standing partnership with Impact Hub. We've worked together for 15 years and also partner in the Climate Lab and Future Health Lab in particular. From the very beginning, we were pleased not only to be financially involved, but to be enablers.

The commitment to Impact Hub is remarkable given the Vienna Business Agency's diverse range of activities.

The Vienna Business Agency works to drive business growth, and the Impact Hub has been an important partner in achieving these objectives when I look at the thousands of new companies, millions of euros in new investments, nearly ten thousand new jobs created – and all among social impact innovators that are also driving much-needed societal transformation.

Of course, our core business at the Vienna Business Agency lies in space and property for companies in Vienna and various funding programs. Among other things, we develop large-scale real estate projects and provide tailored offerings and funding mecha-

nisms to companies in Vienna. However, our mission must be understood in a broader sense, namely, to ensure Vienna's innovative strength, competitiveness and future viability. Many of today's key innovation fields – such as climate, health, social innovation and digitalization – emerge at this intersection. Our role is not to do everything ourselves, but rather to strengthen the right structures.

And does social entrepreneurship fall under that umbrella?

Vienna has a long tradition of social entrepreneurship, long before it was even called that. Social entrepreneurship today builds on this history and translates the city's social heritage into innovative, entrepreneurial solutions. That's why when it comes to social responsibility being paired with economic sustainability, Impact Hub has been a key partner from the start.

So you don't have to do everything yourself?

Of course not. That would be neither efficient nor in keeping with the times. The city sets the direction, goals and framework, and implementation is often achieved through collaborations with strong partners who can amplify the impact. To be innovative, especially in the field of social entrepreneurship, we need actors like Impact Hub that are close to businesses and communities. We have always been a steadfast partner of Impact Hub.

Because you see social entrepreneurship as a topic of the future?

Part of our mission is to take the lead where new topics

are emerging and the market has not yet fully matured. In these phases in particular, economic development also means trying things out, enabling pilot projects and actively shaping new fields. This is precisely why Vienna is well-positioned in many of its current areas of strength: because the Vienna Business Agency supported and helped shape the development early on. In this sense, we see ourselves not only as a funding body, but also as a player that shapes the pace and direction of business growth in the city.

Nevertheless, you are measured by growth, investment volume and jobs.

Of course! And that's not a contradiction, because growth, investment and employment are key metrics for us and for the city – as they are for the Impact Hub. What matters is in which sectors this growth occurs. When we focus on food innovation, we don't do so because we're foodies, but because we know, based on data and evidence, how the sector will develop. As an agency focused on economic development, we know very well where the journey is headed. We want to promote economic dynamism where it is sustainable in the long term: in sustainable technologies, life sciences, digitalization, the circular economy or urban production. Impact should not be an add-on, but a sign of quality growth.

We are currently living in difficult times. What does this mean for the Vienna Business Agency and its partners?

The conditions are undoubtedly challenging, both economically and geopolitically. It is precisely during such times that a strong public sector is important, offering stability and making targeted investments. For the Vienna Business Agency, this means sharpening our priorities and allocating resources effectively to support companies through this transformational phase. This is achieved through impact measurement, KPIs and target indicators. At the Vienna Business Agency, we are now refining our strategy to sharpen our focus, strengthen alignment and maximize impact.

So will Impact Hub also have to be measured more rigorously in the future?

The importance of sustainable business practices and social entrepreneurship becomes especially clear in economically difficult times, but this is a field that cannot be measured in the short-term using traditional metrics. Value creation, job generation and investment volume fall short here. Impact-oriented companies are essential "in the long run," even if the logic of returns is naturally different. It is our responsibility, and that of the City of Vienna, to think in terms of generations. But I have to be frank, defending this

long-term perspective against short-term expectations is not always easy.

Would you like to see more private capital in this sector?

I believe it's still important that the public sector continues to support the impact sector because we're in a position to make different decisions than venture capital. But we definitely also need private capital that thinks long-term and views social impact as part of its return on investment. Our job is to build bridges here and create attractive conditions.

Even so, will the tide turn?

Yes, times are getting tougher. The central question is: How can I use reduced resources differently so that we can improve across the board? That is my goal, and that is what drives us. And we will involve our cooperation partners in this process.

Will you scale back your activities in the public-private sector?

In principle, public-private partnerships are definitely part of our future. To succeed in such a fast-paced, complex era with shrinking budgets and a severely overstretched toolkit, we need close collaboration between the private and public sectors. The two are interdependent. And Impact Hub is the best example of this: Here, everyone brings the right assets to the table.



DOMINIC WEISS

has been managing director of the Vienna Business Agency since January 2025, having previously worked there from 2010 to 2012. Most recently, he was CEO of UIV Urban Innovation Vienna GmbH, a Wien Holding company.

IN SO MANY WORDS

What kind of collaboration do you have? What topics are you focusing on? How are you creating impact together? Impact Hub's partners speak up.

Sustainable impact is created where people can work in a healthy and motivated way over the long term! Through our **joint Wellbeing Initiative**, we have succeeded in shining a spotlight on an issue that has long been overlooked, but is central to the future of the social entrepreneurship sector. **Impact Hub Vienna impressively demonstrates how wellbeing can be approached systemically and implemented in concrete ways**—within the ecosystem, the community and within its own organization.

I was particularly impressed by the approach of not stopping at individual resilience, but also making the structural causes of mental strain visible and addressing them. Impact Hub Vienna credibly exemplifies this attitude in its own organizational culture, thereby sending a clear signal to and within the community.

By creating spaces for exchange, learning and reflection, important impulses are generated that have an impact far beyond individual initiatives. Mental resilience and well-being are fundamental aspects of achieving sustainable impact. I would therefore like to encourage others to join us here in viewing social entrepreneurship from a holistic, healthy perspective.

Dr. Susanne Hillebrand – Founder, Hil Foundation

Biodiversity and agriculture are the core ingredients of any sustainable society. Investing in these areas lays the basis for an ecologically-oriented economic system. Blühendes Österreich BILLA Non-profit Private Foundation, Impact Hub Vienna and BirdLife Austria have joined forces to launch the **Workshop for Innovation Nature #landwirtschaft**.

WIN #landwirtschaft is implemented with support from the federal government, the states and the European Union, under the Rural Development Program. The WIN team brings together the sectors of biodiversity, agriculture, impact investment and startups. We are bringing measurable biodiversity success to the field and empowering farmers. **The first Austria-wide innovation workshop and the resulting call for proposals—which received 70 submissions and applications for over €2.5 million in project volume—demonstrate that the demand and the spirit for this exist within Austria's agricultural sector.** The first 15 projects funded will begin their activities in 2026.

Ronald Würflinger – Secretary General, Blühendes Österreich BILLA Nonprofit Private Foundation

Eight years ago, our shared interest in sustainable transformation and innovative ideas brought us together, and we joined forces and pooled our ideas. **Today, Impact Days is much more than just an event. It is a space for exchange, inspiration and collaborative creation.** A place where diverse stakeholders come together and turn ideas into concrete catalysts for change.

Angelika Delen – Head of Impact Solutions, Mercer

REDpreneur is the global business development initiative of the Austrian Red Cross (AutRC), designed to strengthen the resilience of the Red Cross Red Crescent Network, local social enterprises, and marginalized communities. **Since 2021, it has been developed and delivered in close partnership with Impact Hub Vienna (IHV) and other partners, a collaboration that has become a cornerstone of the program.**

IHV has worked with the AutRC team in program and event delivery, including trainings, workshops and coaching, additionally supporting over 100+ graduates across 39 countries. Beyond the program itself, the partnership has fostered joint events and ongoing collaboration across initiatives, enhancing the connection between the humanitarian and impact entrepreneurship ecosystems.

By combining REDpreneur's humanitarian expertise with the entrepreneurial know-how and network of IHV, this partnership has played a key role in shaping, implementing and scaling REDpreneur across diverse contexts, contributing to its growing and long-term impact.

Elin Baranyai-Ulvestad – REDpreneur Team Leader, Austrian Red Cross

The collaboration between the Office for Public Participation and Impact Hub began as part of the European Capital of Democracy 2024/25 and is based on the shared conviction that participation must be accessible, open and diverse. **Working together, we implement our programs at various locations**—from Democracy Fitness Camps and networking events to regular participation meet-ups. This allows us to reach diverse target groups, highlight different perspectives and invite people to actively shape the future. **The impact is evident in growing networks and strengthened trust, and together we create spaces where democratic co-operation can be experienced firsthand.**

Wencke Hertzsch, Head of the Office for Public Participation, Energy Planning Department of the City of Vienna

I'm a philanthropist and have been working together with Impact Hub since 2018. **In 2020, we launched our joint program, FABB Social,** where I am the program director and a mentor. We focus on social issues that, we feel, need more attention. **We look for social ventures who want to have a positive impact on society, and work with them to develop and strengthen their business models.** The FABB Social program is customized to the needs of the participants: We design a workshop series and bring them together with the right mentors. We organize a pitch day at the end of the program, where we specially invite players who could be interested in the startups or serve as important contacts.

For the participating ventures this kind of program is incredibly valuable. They can network, learn with peers, get relevant expert input—and all of that can be directly applied to their businesses. I believe that entrepreneurial action creates a lot of value for the individual and society. With Impact Hub as my partner and FABB Social as my tool, I try to do my small part in making a difference.

Karin Granner – Philanthropist & Program Director, FABB.social

PROVING THEIR CASE

Hardly any researcher in Austria knows the field of social entrepreneurship and social innovation as well as Dr. Peter Vandor and Dr. Reinhard Millner from the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU). They have been observing and guiding the sector for ca. 20 years and are well-placed to analyze the role that Impact Hub has played—and continues to play—in the sector’s development. Their assessment: “Central.”

Researchers aren’t exactly known for making light-hearted statements. It takes data, facts and evidence-based proof. So when you ask Dr. Reinhard Millner for his assessment of Impact Hub’s significance in the field of social entrepreneurship and social innovation in Austria—how long it’s been the proverbial spider at the center of the sector’s web—he just smiles. Then he opens his laptop and pulls up the 2013 study, “Social Entrepreneurship in Austria.” The director of the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation at the WU points at the screen. “Here. Page 12, figure 1.”

At the time, 105 social entrepreneurs were surveyed about which supporting organizations they were connected to. In the center of the graph is Impact Hub, with dozens of lines radiating out like a halo toward various enterprises, far outnumbering all other organizations combined in the then-emerging sector. Two pages later, where the connections between these organizations are depicted graphically, Impact Hub is once again at the center. “Based on this, one can certainly say that Impact Hub played a major role in building both the network and the field,” says Dr. Peter Vandor, co-director and co-founder of the Center alongside Millner. “Its significance lies not only in its role as a supporter of the sector, but also in that it played a key role early on in shaping the discourse on the topic.”

The researchers, both of whom have been at the WU for around 20 years, have known the sector since before it could even be called one. Vandor attended the first major Vision Summit in 2008 with social business icon and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus (Grameen Bank) in Berlin. Later, he offered the very first social entrepreneurship course together with

Millner at an Austrian university and designed a seminar week at the Forum Alpbach in collaboration with the Impact Hub founders. He and Millner were also put to work on the original Impact Hub construction site polishing wood and tearing down walls. So they, too, were pioneers exploring uncharted territory.

It became clear early on that they were best-suited for the role of academic advisor. In the early 2010s, Vandor helped develop impact measurement tools based on the impact logic of the global Impact Hub Network (see also pages 12–13), because “they were closer to the field, while we were closer to the conceptual work and academic literature.” And of course, like Impact Hub, they were closely involved with the first multi-stakeholder dialogue that took place in 2012. At this forum, actors from the field developed ten demands for policymakers, the business sector, and foundations to promote social entrepreneurship—a process that ultimately gave rise to two critical outcomes. “One strand led to the founding of the advocacy group SENA, the Social Entrepreneurship Network Austria,” explains Millner. A second working group focused on developing a distinct legal form for social enterprises, which several years later ultimately resulted in the Verified So-

cial Enterprise (VSE) label, which is now issued by the Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft (aws), the promotional bank of the Austrian Federal Government.

“Academic milestones would certainly include the 2015 study on the potential of social businesses in Austria. This provided evidence-based support for the aws’ first ‘Social Business Call’ program,” says Millner. Since 2022, their institute has also published the Austrian Social Entrepreneurship Monitor (ASEM), a baseline study for the sector developed in their role as the Austrian partner for a larger European effort.

“Over the years, the field has continued to evolve and diversify,” Peter Vandor concludes. And in this context, the fact remains that Impact Hub played an important role early on that they’ve continued to develop to this day. As Millner puts it, “For the current sector and ecosystem, particularly in Vienna, it plays the most central role.”

This is all the more remarkable as Austria and Vienna, unlike other places in Europe, did not have any government-formulated strategies for the sector. There are also significant gaps in the philanthropic network here compared to other countries. “You have to give the Impact Hub credit for carving out its position in the free market,” says Vandor. “It took this kind of initiative here, because no one else—not even those with a stronger mandate—was working on this at a city or national level.”

According to the two researchers, another success factor is that the concept of “social entrepreneurship” has evolved over time, and people now increasingly speak of “impact business” and “social innovation.” With the establishment of the Labs, these concepts have become accessible to many different partners and created space for them to cooperate across sectors and on politically neutral ground. Reinhard Millner says, “In corporate Austria, at any rate, that was and remains a sensible approach.”

So what does this mean for the field as a whole? “The question remains as to whether the sector in Austria will succeed under the label of social entrepreneurship or some other term,” says Peter Vandor. “I don’t get the sense that the term is currently in vogue, whereas the practices and societal needs certainly are.” Perhaps it is time for a new narrative. The two researchers are keeping an eye on this.



DR. REINHARD MILLNER (left)

is co-director of the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. He also serves as a senior researcher at the Competence Center for Nonprofit Organizations and Social Entrepreneurship.

DR. PETER VANDOR

is a co-founder and co-director of the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. He is the founder of the Social Impact Award and currently serves on its board of directors.



A memory from the golden days: Theresa Imre in front of her store "markta."

WHEN THE STAMINA RUNS OUT

The economist Theresa Imre founded the social enterprise "markta" to bring products from small Austrian farms directly to consumers. But sometimes good ideas, no matter how popular, don't survive.

I grew up in the countryside in Styria with farms all around me. From an early age, I saw how hard the people there worked, and how little appreciation their products seemed to receive. I went on to study International Business and then spent four and a half years in management consulting, focusing on startups and business development.

In 2014, a friend and I started a food blog called "Eingebrockt und Ausgelöffelt" that told the stories behind our food. It clearly struck a nerve. Small-scale farmers began reaching out to us, and we visited them and wrote features about them. Out of these visits and stories, the idea for markta started to emerge—a direct-to-consumer platform for family-run farms. I was intrigued by the question: Why isn't there already a digital farmers' market out there, despite the obvious high demand?

There was already a lot of interest among our blog community, and producers had long been searching for revenue streams outside the conventional food

systems. It became clear to me that there was a structural need and that this could be drawn upon to develop a new model. During this period, Impact Hub Vienna played an important role for me: I participated in its "Innovate for Nature" incubator program, and we won the program's award with our markta concept.

On the producers' side, we were literally swamped. Within a very short time, 100 businesses wanted to work with us. markta got off to a very strong start in its first month, with free delivery during the launch period. In the second month, sales dropped. At first we thought, "Ah, it's the delivery costs ..." But it was something more fundamental than that. People liked the idea and wanted to support it, but simulta-

neously an asymmetry emerged that many social enterprises are familiar with: the difference between enthusiasm for a model and the actual willingness to fundamentally change one's own consumption habits. Our shopping habits are so deeply ingrained that it's incredibly difficult to break them.

We then ran a survey of 850 customers, basically asking: Why are you ordering less? It turned out that most people found it too inconvenient to order from individual farms—honey here, vegetables there. They're used to Amazon & Co., where you get everything in one package, with free shipping, and it's delivered the next day. So we adapted and set up a logistics center for small farmers at the end of 2019. Shortly after that, the COVID-19 pandemic began—a growth opportunity for us and revenue increased twentyfold. 2021 was also a good year. But people had a different set of habits during the lockdown: they cooked at home and wanted to support local businesses.

After the pandemic, online sales plummeted. Everyone went out again, met in cafés and restaurants, and returned to their old routines. From a human perspective, I could completely understand it. It was at that time that I met an investor from the brick-and-mortar retail sector. He found our mission to fairly pay farmers compelling, but in his experience, that kind of model could only have a future with physical stores along with the online platform. So in 2023, we opened our first store on Alser Straße, and the second one on Zoller-gasse followed soon after.

During this phase, I greatly appreciated the collaboration with Impact Hub. I had allies there—for example, to effectively communicate the concept of social businesses to traditional banks, funding entities, and the like. So often I heard: "It doesn't pay off quickly enough. Ms. Imre, after seven years, you're still not profitable with markta!" I tried time and again to explain that the logic of a social entrepreneurial business model is different. When I founded markta, the sentiment toward sustainable and socially-oriented business models was much more positive. COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, inflation and geopolitical disruptions shifted the thinking on that. markta had been working toward systemic change, and the social value of such models cannot be captured solely through a short-term, profit-driven lens.

When did I realize things were getting really critical? I now had 32 employees and was under constant pressure to secure funding. While markta received wide-

spread public attention and recognition, our real achievement was being able to generate revenue, income and visibility for hundreds of producers over the years. Unfortunately, the company's economic foundation remained fragile. The strain was enormous. During the week I tried to stabilize markta, and on the weekends I realized just how much I was reaching my physical and mental limits. At the same time, I didn't want to make any compromises, neither on the products nor on the farmers' pay—I know how tight their budgets are. Ultimately, the funds promised by investors didn't end up come through, and I had to file for bankruptcy on April 9, 2025.

It was a very painful situation. What weighed on me most was that it affected so many people and companies closely connected to markta. Nevertheless, I did my utmost to handle the bankruptcy properly. During those months, though, I realized how much Austria lacks a culture of failure. markta's bankruptcy has made me view the relationships between economics and politics much more critically. Today, I would advise young entrepreneurs to keep space open to maneuver for as long as possible—and to always keep in mind how quickly market conditions can change.

The social challenge that I set out to address with markta is still very much present. Small producers and related businesses are struggling to survive in the current market system, and far too many of them are forced to close their doors. I talk often with Alexis Eremia, Impact Hub's co-founder, about the need for stronger advocacy for small and medium-sized businesses with value-based operations. Perhaps that is exactly the big question we need to ask: Which issues do we want to champion collectively in the future—and which ones can no longer be dependent on the stamina of individuals?

DOUBLING DOWN ON CLIMATE

Climate Lab is growing. The innovation center for climate and circular economy is expanding to fill nearly six entire floors of the high-rise building located next to Wien Energie's iconic waste incinerator plant. The participating stakeholders come from diverse sectors, but they all share a common goal: climate neutrality, as quickly as possible.





**CLIMATE
LAB**

www.climatelab.at

Even from a distance, the shining golden sphere perched atop a glittering, blue-tiled tower beckons one to take a closer look. As you continue down the Danube Canal, brightly checkered and playfully crowned buildings emerge above the treetops. The waste incinerator plant on Spittelauer Lände in the ninth district was transformed into a work of art and prominent city landmark by the Viennese artist and ecologist Friedensreich Hundertwasser, who designed its colorful facade in the late 1980s. There are no straight lines, everything is in motion. Colors and tiled mosaics seem to dance joyfully across the walls.

Wien Energie GmbH, Austria's largest regional energy provider, incinerates 260,000 tons of household waste annually in its Spittelau plant. In a second step, the company uses the byproducts to produce district heating and electricity. It boasts one of the most advanced flue gas cleaning systems in the world. On the roof of the 'Power2Heat' facility, vegetables and herbs are cultivated in raised beds, and bees are buzzing around making their special Spittelau honey. There's more buzz, though, and it's coming from a gray, high-rise building next to the plant.

For the past three years, Climate Lab has occupied three entire floors in the towering office building. Soon it will occupy six. Climate Lab is an innovation center that initiates, facilitates and supports collaborations between companies, government, startups, NGOs and the scientific community. Its goal is to develop solutions to transform the economy into one that is resilient, carbon neutral and circular through new partnerships that bridge industries and sectors. Climate Lab was launched by the Austrian Climate and Energy Fund, the Ministry of Agriculture and Climate Protection, Wien Energie and Impact Hub Vienna. It is also supported by the Vienna Business Agency, Siemens Energy, Wiener Linien, REWE and other partners. The joint venture is working on a big goal: climate neutrality, as quickly as possible. No wonder they need more space.

The innovation center currently occupies floors seven through nine. The eighth floor houses the reception area and a large event space for 80 people, certified with the Austrian Ecolabel as a Green Location. This is where presentations, workshops and events on climate and circular economy take place. The other two floors house meeting rooms, offices, and spacious coworking and community areas. Everything is bright and open, decorated in earthy tones like ocean blue and sage green. Seating areas, an indoor terrace, open kitchenettes, ceiling elements covered in greenery, and plenty of plants are peppered around the space. All of the materials were chosen with care, with a focus on durability and recyclability.

The decision to add three more floors was made two years ago at a time when climate protection was much



Impact Hub Vienna and the Climate and Energy Fund have enjoyed a close and trusting partnership for several years now.

Over the past few years, 100 young companies, still in their development phase, have received targeted support from Impact Hub Vienna via our greenstart initiative. With regards to helping them to refine their business models, Impact Hub Vienna has proven to be a particularly strong partner, providing important guidance through workshops, coaching and a broad network of experts. This cooperation has significantly contributed to strengthening the quality, visibility and fundability of green business ideas in Austria. Our long-standing cooperation is a successful example of how strong partnerships and networks can generate concrete impact and foster sustainable entrepreneurship.

Bernd Vogl - Managing Director, Climate and Energy Fund

more the center of attention in politics and society at large. "Doubling our size now may seem countercyclical," says co-founder Hinnerk Hansen. "The federal government, the city and industry are cutting back, and philanthropy is almost completely absent in Austria. These aren't the best conditions." But he is certain that, looking back three years from now, he will be able to say that doubling down was exactly the right move. "In my view, it's becoming increasingly important to have such empowering spaces in order to achieve the necessary change."

Climate Lab operates on multiple levels. There is the coworking space, where more than 200 members find far more than just a desk—they also gain access to a network of climate innovators, professional development programs and curated community events. But Climate Lab's aspirations go far beyond Vienna, aiming to be a hub that connects stakeholders working on issues ranging from the circular economy and decarbonization, to sustainable packaging and the energy transition. Alongside cultivating the community, a major focus is put on shaping and facilitating stakeholder processes. Here's how it works:

CIRCULARITY IN CLIMATE LAB

In February 2023, representatives from government, the private sector and civil society gathered in Vienna Spittelau for the kick-off of “Circularity in Climate Lab.” Designated as the new center for circular economy by the Austrian government, Climate Lab would be playing an integral part in its national strategy for the “transformation of the Austrian economy and society into a climate-neutral, sustainable circular economy by 2050.” Since then, Climate Lab has brought together actors along entire value chains for innovative projects and events focused on topics ranging from circular building materials and digital product passes, to mattress and textile recycling.

In 2026, the government announced that it would once again be entrusting Climate Lab with the further development of Austria’s circular economy, building on the community and successes achieved in the previous three years. This time the scope is widening to include the bioeconomy, and Climate Lab has brought in BioBASE as a strategic partner to provide its expertise and network for this exciting new phase of innovation.

The Climate Lab team works with partners to identify critical challenges on the path to climate neutrality. They bring key stakeholders to the table and work with them to analyze the problem, search for solutions and prepare them for implementation.

Let’s make that more concrete with a real-world example: mattresses. Most worn-out mattresses can’t be recycled and end up in waste incineration plants—this is the fate of around one million mattresses in Austria every year. That is why Climate Lab, on behalf of the Ministry, launched a multi-stakeholder process to collaborate with companies along the entire value chain to develop ways to make mattresses recyclable. The project even inspired industry stakeholders to independently found the Austrian Mattress Alliance (OMÄ) in 2024, and two members of the alliance are founding a joint venture, namely, Austria’s first mattress recycling company.

It’s a fresh Monday morning in March. Barbara Inmann, managing director of Climate Lab, strides briskly into the “Leuven” meeting room on the ninth floor. The room was named after the Belgian city where local initiatives are stepping up to mitigate the effects of global warming in the region. Inmann, who holds a degree in business administration, has been part of the team since Climate Lab opened in 2022. Her ties to Impact Hub go back many years: She’s known the founders since university and was there for the opening of Impact Hub. After that, Inmann spent seven years working in the business world before returning to Impact Hub. “Companies are major and important drivers of transforma-

tion,” she says. “Through my experience, I’ve gained an understanding of what moves the business world, startups and NGOs, and can bridge the gap between these different perspectives.”

Her team consists of 12 full-time equivalents, but thanks to flexible part-time models, 21 people fill out the roles. Barbara Inmann’s colleagues come from diverse backgrounds, ranging from political science and geology to biochemistry, business administration, advocacy and journalism. “It’s the mix that makes us unique,” says Inmann. “We can speak the languages of business, government and NGOs.” This diversity has proven to be effective, as Climate Lab has just won its second major contract with the Ministry of Agriculture and Climate Protection to advance circular economy in Austria. The goal: to better connect and initiate collaborations between stakeholders in the circular economy and bioeconomy.

How has trust in Climate Lab grown? Impact Hub’s long-standing network and reputation certainly helped, but the founding process was also meticulously prepared. An entire year was spent “breaking down silos and bringing together all possible stakeholders



BARBARA INMANN

is the head of Climate Lab and has over 15 years of experience in the strategic development of partnerships, innovation programs and multi-stakeholder processes aimed at driving transformative change.



Everyone has a voice here: Building trust is key to developing system-level solutions.

in a wide variety of settings,” says Barbara Inmann. They wanted everyone’s input: What is needed now—for you, for the process, for achieving the goal? The answers were integrated into a model, which was further refined in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group after the first year of operations. “All of that helped us to build trust and legitimacy,” says Inmann in retrospect. “Everyone involved could see that something truly meaningful was taking shape here.”

Inmann’s colleague, Gregor Pflüger, leads innovation at Climate Lab. He studied business administration, founded a startup and later worked in innovation consulting with a focus on software automation and agile work processes. A high school friend told him about the Climate Lab job posting and two weeks and two interviews later, he had a new job. He’s now been with the team for three years. Pflüger says: “I was intrigued by the focus on sustainable solutions, on developing a real circular economy, and that we can work with really big players and companies. That, and we don’t operate like traditional consultants.”

What is the biggest difference for him? His magic word is ‘participation.’ At Climate Lab, strategies aren’t drafted behind closed doors only to disappear into a desk drawer after the big presentation. At the beginning of every endeavor, there are decision-makers who are committed to make things happen. “In a presentation,

everything always looks simple and polished,” says Gregor Pflüger, “but out in the real world, facilities, grids, charging stations all need to be re-designed or built from scratch. We have to be able to deal with the reality on the ground, with internal resistance inside companies, and the general reluctance for change in any social organization. We don’t want to build castles in the air.”

Many companies that Climate Lab invites for collaborations report that they have been trying for years to initiate dialogues and exchanges with other stakeholders. But getting cross-sector collaboration to work is difficult. “When we extend an invitation, it’s more neutral than when someone in the industry or politicians do,” says Inmann. In the workshops held on the eighth floor, all participants have equal speaking rights, regardless of their position in the hierarchy. Everyone is on a first-name basis, mutual respect is the guiding principle. Many find this approach refreshingly different from their usual work environment.

Anyone who partners with Climate Lab commits to the goal of achieving climate neutrality in Austria by 2040. “But we still hear time and time again: ‘That’s impossible. Who’s going to pay for it?’” says Pflüger. Personally, he finds it helpful to maintain a clear stance when he’s moderating. “We don’t even question the fact that change must happen.” His task, and that of his colleagues, is to make sure that the focus during a workshop stays on the topic at hand. “If someone wants to use a meeting to question fundamental principles or debate the existence of climate change, we politely but firmly steer the discussion back on track.”

“In the early years, Climate Lab spent a lot of time arguing about the need to achieve climate goals,” says Barbara Inmann. Three years later, experience shows that stakeholders are more receptive to a different angle, namely, that change is

“extremely important for the Austrian and European economies.” The topic of circular economy has become a priority at Climate Lab, in part because it promises greater national independence in light of today’s numerous global crises. “Keeping raw materials in the country and securing our economic standing—that resonates more right now than the climate issue even though it’s also a significant contributor to climate neutrality,” says Inmann. Currently, one of the projects she and her colleagues are working on with the Wiener Arbeitnehmer Förderungsfonds (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund) is to integrate the circular economy model into vocational training. “Innovation in education is a very lengthy process,” says Inmann. “But I find it incredibly exciting because it’s about scope. Every geriatric nurse, every plumber should understand why they need to recycle and how. This knowledge belongs in every training program.”

It can be hard to achieve broad impact or generate public attention with topics like a regulation for packaging or how to recycle construction waste. A more appealing example is the hydrogen-powered cell phone tower at the Donauinsel Festival 2024, a large, open-air music festival in Vienna. “After the mattresses, this is our second most frequently mentioned project,” says Gregor Pflüger with a broad smile. It all started with the question: How can you generate energy that is environmentally friendly and can be used in places where there are no power outlets? Or simply put, how can we replace the conventional diesel generator? “We really dug into that question with Wien Energie,” says Pflüger. “We conducted interviews, forged alliances, and in the end, five companies got involved.” And in the end, green hydrogen was cleanly powering one of the temporary cell phone towers as the first chords were struck on the festival stage.

In terms of emissions saved, it may be a drop in the bucket, but it is a prime example of how the innovation process can act as a catalyst. At first, no one believed the project could work without diesel. Then at the Climate Lab workshops, they brainstormed together, threw out ideas, reimaged and redesigned. And then, the transmission tower was up and running. “We proved that it works, and that we’re ready for the next step,” says Gregor Pflüger. “And that’s exactly what it’s all about.”

For him, Climate Lab is both an anchor and a source of motivation. “I know that when I go to the community kitchen for a coffee, I’ll meet people who are also interested in the same issues that I am,” he says. A few hours earlier in the Leuven conference room, Barbara Inmann described a similar feeling. “I love my job,” she said, “I’m inspired by what we’re doing here. For me, Climate Lab is a place of hope. A place that we can look to for the future. A place where people can—and want—to come together in an increasingly crazy, polarized world.”

PROFILE: CLIMATE LAB

Location: 1090 Vienna
 Opened: 2022
 Space: 920 m² (2027: 1,850 m²)
 Employees: 21
 48+ completed innovation projects
 60+ involved companies
 148 events per year

SELECTED PARTNERS:

- Austrian Institute of Technology
- BILLA
- BioBASE
- Caritas
- CEOs for Future
- Circular Economy Forum Austria
- City of Linz
- City of Vienna
- Climate and Energy Funds
- Climate Change Centre Austria
- Federal Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management (BMLUK)
- Green Tech Valley
- Holcim
- IKEA Austria
- Mondi
- nabe
- OekoBusiness Vienna
- ÖGUT
- respACT
- Scientists for Future
- Siemens Energy
- Umweltdachverband
- Vienna Business Agency
- waff
- Wien Energie
- Wiener Linien
- Willhaben
- Wohnfonds Wien
- WWF Climate Group

REDUCED EMISSIONS

Every year, Climate Lab supports around 30 companies in achieving their climate neutrality goals in the areas of energy, mobility, construction and the circular economy. For the innovation projects implemented in collaboration with corporate partners in its first three years, a CO₂ reduction potential of 250,000 to 500,000 tons per year starting in 2030 has been calculated. (Figures based on a BCG study for Climate Lab)

THE EXPANSION IS A CLEAR SIGNAL

Wien Energie is doubling the amount of space allocated to Climate Lab in its high-rise building in Spittelau. For Fabian Kesicki, head of corporate development at Wien Energie, the innovation center is a model for success for a participatory, sustainable transformation of the economy.

Mr. Kesicki, how did the idea come about to establish a Climate Lab together with Impact Hub?

We were ready to open up and collaborate with a variety of partners on the energy transition. That's why we came up with the idea of launching our own innovation center. Fortunately, we also had the right space for it: three floors in our high-rise building on Spittelauer Lände. We quickly got into constructive discussions with representatives from Impact Hub. I've always been impressed by how they manage—even on a global scale—to build communities that drive innovation. For years, Impact Hub has successfully facilitated collaboration between stakeholders from business, politics and government as well as representatives from startups, academia and NGOs. This ability is essential for the energy transition.

Climate Lab has now been collaborating with various stakeholders in the Wien Energie building for more than three years. Is this a model for success?

Climate Lab has gotten representatives from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Climate Protection, the Vienna Business Agency, the Climate and Energy Fund, and Wiener Linien involved. In addition to us at Wien Energie, companies such as Holcim, Mondi, Billa and Siemens Energy are also on board. As a neutral platform, Climate Lab makes this cross-sectoral work possible. Here's one practical example: As an energy company, we face major challenges in decarbonizing our waste incinerator plants. It's an issue we cannot tackle alone, as it requires collaboration with stakeholders from the public sector to build the infrastructure, secure funding and engage with neighboring countries. Climate Lab can help shape this process and translate findings into action.

Why is Climate Lab's multi-stakeholder approach successful?

Even for us, there are things that don't always work out—that's to be expected when you work in innovation. But Climate Lab went in-depth to address the question of how to refine its innovation methods early on, even bringing in the support of the Boston Consulting Group. Impact Hub also brings a wealth of experience to the table and knows what works in the real world and what doesn't. Over the past three years, we've learned a great deal together about what's needed, who has to be at the table, where scientific expertise is required, and what the end results should be.

How is Climate Lab's work received both internally and externally?

Not everyone views the topic of innovation favorably. But we've managed to establish a culture of innovation with successes that can even convince the skeptics. One example is a pilot project where we powered a mobile cell phone tower at the Donauinsel Festival using green hydrogen instead of diesel. The pilot came out of a multi-stakeholder project at Climate Lab. People are generally quite positive about the fact that we're driving initiatives forward and actively contributing to the energy transition. But it also has to be



A ray of hope for climate neutrality: Housed in the Wien Energie high-rise, Climate Lab uses cross-sectoral collaboration to shape a future-fit economy.

recognized that Austria has been in a recession in recent years, and unfortunately, this often means that innovation isn't always the top priority.

Is the expansion of Climate Lab to three additional floors a signal, both internally and externally, to push the issue even further?

Absolutely. We're being very deliberate about taking this step, because we're very satisfied with the work of Climate Lab. The expansion is scheduled to open at the end of 2026. We see this as a very clear commitment.

There's a special atmosphere in the Lab's space. What do you personally appreciate about the community working there?

I've spent 18 years of my professional life in the energy sector, and it's already given me gray hair. I don't expect my colleagues at Climate Lab to surpass me in energy expertise. But what I truly value is their motivation, their curiosity and their enthusiasm for driving things forward and trying new things. They have what I believe is crucial for the success of the energy transition—and that is courage. Even in important decision-making circles, that's something we sometimes lack.




FABIAN KESICKI

is an energy economist and for the past five years has led corporate development at Wien Energie GmbH, Austria's largest regional energy supplier. He is responsible for the areas of innovation and grants, strategy and sustainability. In the fall of 2020, shortly after he began working for Wien Energie, he was drawn into early discussions with Impact Hub about establishing a "Climate Lab."



Future Health

Lab We shape
Future Health.



THE SYSTEM ON THE OPERATING TABLE

Since 2023, Future Health Lab has been bringing together stakeholders from across the healthcare sector to develop and implement innovative ideas in a politically neutral, protected space with a focus on solutions. The priority: people's health and well-being.

Orange is good. Luca Frantzmann is beaming. The innovation manager stands in front of a whiteboard covered with colorful Post-its. On them, participants in the “Telemedicine in Primary Care” working group have noted how a surgical process unfolds—from diagnosis to follow-up care—using knee surgery as an example. The central question: Which steps in the process could be handled via telemedicine? Now, 11 of the 18 Post-its feature orange dots that answer precisely this question, ranging from steps like obtaining a second opinion and pre-operative counseling to wound management. “A good result,” Frantzmann confirms, glancing at the two boards from the other working groups. “Now we just need to turn these nice, colorful whiteboards into concrete measures.”

That’s what this is all about. Anyone keen on exploring innovation processes in the healthcare sector in Austria inevitably ends up here, on the second floor of the CAPE 10 building at Alfred-Adler-Strasse 1 in Vienna’s Favoriten district. Since 2023, this has been home to Future Health Lab (FHL). The team now comprises 14 employees, most of whom, like Frantzmann, are innovation managers. A team that is “intrinsically highly motivated,” says Olga Bratsun, communications and community manager, “as well as structured and disciplined.”

This is a sure advantage in a field that, in Austria more than in almost any other country in Europe, is extremely complex and difficult to navigate. When prompted to explain it, FHL Managing Director Romana Ruda—who knows the system inside out (see interview)—has to laugh. Then, she dives in: “We have too many different responsible parties in Austria. The main actors are

the federal government, the states and the social insurances. There are nine federal states, each with their own rules, several social insurance providers, and complex funding streams. And on top of that are the interest groups, such as medical associations, chambers of commerce and patient organizations.” In short, “it’s challenging.”

It’s a challenge that the FHL team tackles with great passion. Their goal: To unite stakeholders from the healthcare sector, business, academia and advocacy groups—patients and healthcare professionals are also often included—in a politically neutral space to brainstorm joint solutions and kick-start implementation. This participatory and goal-oriented process aims to create solutions that will benefit us all. It sounds a bit as if the system itself were the one on the operating table.

Take this afternoon. Twenty-five stakeholders have traveled here from across the country. The participants range from representatives of the Austrian Health Insurance Fund (ÖGK) and the Ministry of Health to general practitioners and IT experts from social insurance providers. This is the third of the Health Missions, aimed at Digital Transformation. The focus is on new approaches such as Hospital at Home and telemedicine in primary care, as well as on platforms, health data and artificial intelligence. They’ll also be looking at transformation and change management: preparing organizations, employees and existing structures for the digital future—without neglecting high-quality, patient-centered care.

“Health Missions describe our overarching thematic priorities,” explains Franz Tschida, an expert in agile transformation and co-creation processes. As innovation lead at Future Health Lab, he oversees cross-sector collaboration and develops engagement formats for citizens. The other two Health Missions are Optimized Patient Pathways (01) and Actively Shaping Health (02) (see box).

The Future Health Lab has created a new, innovative approach to the healthcare system of the future. It brings together experts from the healthcare sector, the public sector, business, academia and civil society to develop sustainable solutions. As State Secretary for Health I am delighted that the Future Health Lab has been established and is driving innovation.

Ulrike Königsberger-Ludwig, State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection

Each Health Mission has its own impact strategy, its own programs and projects. Health Mission 01, for example, is a joint initiative with the Ministry of Health in cooperation with Gesundheit Österreich GmbH. It examines citizens' perspectives on the planned realignment of patient pathways in the healthcare system, under the motto "digital before outpatient before inpatient." More than 60 citizens and patients, as well as stakeholders from patient advocacy groups and healthcare providers, took part in four workshops and numerous interviews. The results are now being integrated into a detailed concept. For FHL there is no doubt: "We are firmly in favor of more intensive, structured participation and co-creation by patients and citizens," says Tschida.

The process for each Health Mission is similar. Broadly put: in a Mission Meetup, stakeholders for the respective Health Mission come together to identify problems, gaps and potentials. FHL's team of experienced process facilitators then structures the results and invites participants to Deep Dives to discuss and devise solutions for concrete challenges such as telemedicine. After further re-tooling and more meetings, the insights ultimately lead to projects, of which there are already more than 30. The hope is that successful innovations will be implemented in the healthcare system.

"Rigorous innovation processes, a multi-perspective community and a protected space are our cornerstones," explains Franz Tschida. "That's why it works." This outlook has clearly convinced the ÖGK, which has been on board from the start, and the responsible federal ministry: Both provide significant funding for FHL, as do mission partners ranging from AstraZeneca and Boehringer Ingelheim to the Vienna Chamber of Labor and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. "And all the partners are still on board; no one has dropped out so far," Romana Ruda notes, not without pride. "We've delivered on what we promised." More exciting project partnerships are underway, for example with ORF, Marie Med and other companies from the sector.

What works so well today was "no walk in the park" at the beginning, as Christine Spornbauer, an FHL innovation manager, puts it. When the organization was first being set up, she was convinced to join by Siegfried Meryn, founder and initial sole shareholder of FHL. "A true enthusiast," as Spornbauer describes him, Univ.-Prof. Dr. Meryn, whom everyone here just calls Freddy, is a leading figure in the Austrian healthcare sector: He is one of the country's most renowned internists, a medical expert at ORF, an author—and a devoted social entrepreneur. Which brings us back to CAPE 10, home of FHL.

Meryn founded CAPE 10 with the mission "to improve healthcare, education and participation opportunities

BETTER PATIENT PATHWAYS

As part of its **Health Mission 01**, "Optimized Patient Pathways" (launched in September 2023), FHL is developing citizen engagement methods and working with partners to improve care for people with chronic conditions and helping to better shape patients' journeys through the public healthcare system. The goal is for patients to receive the best treatment at the right care location with digital services making it easier for them to navigate through the system. The initial focus is on systemic solutions for Type 2 diabetes, sleep disorders, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and chronic kidney disease (CKD).

MORE PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

While the first Health Mission looks more at structural issues, **Health Mission 02** focuses on the individual: "Actively Shaping Health" (started in September 2024). This mission is dedicated to improving health by: promoting greater health literacy among people and employees throughout Austria; maintaining individual health amid the climate crisis; and expanding programs for prevention and early detection. Here, too, solutions and innovation programs are being implemented with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to achieve the widest possible impact.

DATA THAT HELPS

Health Mission 03 "Digital Transformation" focuses on new approaches in care, such as Hospital at Home and telemedicine in primary care, as well as platforms, health data and artificial intelligence. Another focus is on transformation and change management, which aims to prepare organizations, employees and existing structures for a digital-ready future. The central question remains: How can digital technologies at "points of care" help increase efficiency and quality without compromising high-quality, human-centered care?

for children affected by poverty in Austria.” CAPE 10 does this by hosting various social and healthcare institutions in approximately 5,000 square meters of space. Up to 650 children come and go each day. There’s more: In addition to a primary care unit (PCU) for children and adults, an ENT specialist and a pharmacy, the facility also houses social enterprises such as Obdach Ester—a day center for women experiencing homelessness—Licht ins Dunkel and the CAPE 10 Foundation, which owns the building. Another unique feature: Revenue from the leasing of an event space goes toward funding CAPE 10’s social projects, thereby contributing to the realization of social and educational programs.

No wonder, then, that Meryn and Impact Hub joined forces when founding FHL: Meryn brought his ideas, experience and networks, while Impact Hub contributed its expertise in strategic innovation processes and building vibrant ecosystems. When co-founder Hinnerk Hansen talks about “Freddy,” you can hear the admiration in his voice: “He’s a creator,” Hansen says, “and someone who wants to give back.” In early 2025, the collaboration culminated in a joint venture; since then, Meryn and Impact Hub have been equal partners in FHL. And this in a sector that Hansen attests has “great disruptive potential.”

FHL has recently taken the logical next step of opening its doors to innovators in the healthcare sector. To date, 17 health startups are involved in the program: Most are from Vienna, others from Graz, Linz and Salzburg, and there’s even one from Munich looking to expand to Austria. The founders meet regularly at FHL to work, exchange and innovate. “We’re still at the start,” Romana Ruda observes. “But it’s a good start.”



Working together to find solutions: Workshop participants at Future Health Lab



My motivation for founding Future Health Lab was to create an independent, safe space for innovation where key stakeholders in our healthcare system can come together as equals. Austria’s healthcare system needs new forms of collaboration, a willingness to change and the courage to act—to ensure modern, equitable, and sustainable healthcare for the future.

Univ. Prof. Dr. Siegfried Meryn – Founder, Future Health Lab

A GUIDE TO PARTICIPATION

Participation is still largely a foreign concept in the healthcare sector. The prevailing attitude is still that we act for people, not with them; that patients are “merely” sick, and we don’t need to listen to their experiences, expertise or ideas. To provide more guidance on how we can improve this, Iris Schönherr and Franz Tschida led the FHL team in publishing a white paper on “Innovating Together: Collaboration and Participation in Healthcare,” in the summer of 2025. It presents methods and models for developing effective solutions for the healthcare system through the use of collaborative innovation and participation. Getting stakeholders involved generally means broader acceptance, thus making solutions more efficient and accessible.

“We are strong advocates of participation,” says Managing Director Romana Ruda. When others talk about participation, that often means only involving users at the end of a process. “But we need to bring people in right from the start, when we’re still trying to understand the problem,” says Ruda. “You have to work with a potential target group to make sure that you’ve understood the problem correctly before you can open up the room for ideas. Because it’s not just about developing solutions for the target group, but with the target group. The white paper aims to serve as a starting point for this.”

WE ARE A SAFE, CREATIVE SPACE

Managing Director Romana Ruda on the collaboration with Impact Hub, her expectations for Future Health Lab and the challenges of "Development 2.0."

If you had to dream up a managing director for Future Health Lab, you'd be hard pressed to do better than Romana Ruda: a lawyer specialized in medicine with 20 years of professional experience in the public health system. She has held roles at the Main Association of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions, the Ministry of Health, the Vienna Regional Health Insurance Fund, and the Austrian Health Insurance Fund (ÖGK). Her role at FHL, she says, "is the logical continuation of my entire professional career. I've always been concerned with the question: What will it take for us to shape and innovate healthcare infrastructure—this cumbersome system—even just a little?"

Did you know about Impact Hub before you started here, Romana?

No. I didn't even know that something like social entrepreneurship existed. But after meeting Siegfried Meryn and Hinnerk Hansen for the first time, it was immediately clear to me what complementary skills were at play. I'd go so far as to say that Impact Hub wouldn't have come up with the idea of focusing on the healthcare sector if the other side hadn't contributed its expertise regarding the system, processes and responsibilities.

What expertise does Impact Hub bring to the table?

Everything related to partnerships, community and space management, as well as personnel and financial management. I'm very grateful to be able to rely on the group's infrastructure. It's a perfect symbiosis. Plus, I have great sparring partners in Hinnerk and Jakob, especially when it comes to strategic direction and goals.

What role does founder Siegfried Meryn play?

His role has changed over time. At the beginning, he was the sole managing director; later, we ran FHL together, before Freddy stepped back to focus on his diverse responsibilities and handed over the operation-

al managing director role to me. Today, he gifts us his network and his spirit—he knows an incredible number of people in the field, which consistently leads to great contacts for us.

FHL is funded by partners, primarily by the Ministry and the ÖGK. Does this lead to dependencies?

Actually, the opposite is true. Our USP is that we serve as a bridge to the public sector. Despite our collaborations and partnerships, we are not subordinate to any of them. Of course, it is vital that our activities contribute to health policy goals and strategies. However, we have the advantage of being more open and creative, which our contacts at the Ministry always note as a major plus point.

There are no expectations?

Not in the sense that a concrete result must be implemented within twelve months. The Ministry and ÖGK view Future Health Lab as a neutral facilitator, as a safe, creative space where critical topics can be discussed with people that aren't otherwise in their bubble.

So FHL fills a gap?

Yes. The responsibilities and mandates of the public sector are legally regulated and defined. There is no mandate and little leeway beyond official negotiations to, for example, sit down with representatives from the pharmaceutical industry and discuss a shared topic. There are also basically no structures, processes or resources for engaging in an organized dialogue with founders. They have their core businesses, which demand an enormous amount of their time and energy day to day, leaving scant energy or resources for innovation, creativity or participation.

What is the motivation for companies like AstraZeneca and Boehringer Ingelheim to join FHL?

A wholly positive one, because alongside their core business of developing innovative medicines, they



Networking, exchange, creating solutions together. Personal connections are good for our health in more ways than one.

also aspire to contribute to and systemically shape relevant issues. To be sure, there were initial reservations—we're familiar with the public sector's concerns. But after some discussions, we soon realized that our industry partners align perfectly with our vision and don't view us as a lobbying arm. Our long-standing joint projects and activities testify to the success of these partnerships.

These partners must also be of interest to the fledgling health startups at FHL.

Of course. For both our partners and the projects within the scope of our Health Missions. That's why we've created new formats or further developed existing ones, such as our Partner Breakfast, which allows founders to pitch to our partners and, in return, learn a great deal from and with them about regulatory frameworks in the Austrian healthcare system.

Is bringing startups into the FHL ecosystem a strategic move?

Yes, but it also stemmed in part from our own expectations. Impact Hub has been doing this for many years, and naturally the idea of integrating startups into our lab was appealing from the outset. But our approach had to be different: We worked with organizations and partners to build cross-sector collaborations and foster openness to new ideas. Only now, when this foundation has been laid, are we actively reaching out to startups. I'm glad to see how well the Founders Pass has been received. The next move could then be to pave the way for a similar offering for health professionals later this year.

After three years, shouldn't you consolidate first?

We're still in a developmental phase—let's call it 2.0. This year, we're at a critical juncture because our ex-

isting collaborations, especially with our strategic partners, need to be extended for the next period. We have to renegotiate those agreements at a challenging economic time. But I'm confident we'll succeed, because Future Health Lab delivers proven added-value and benefits.

Do you have any idea where you'll be in five years?

To be honest, I don't have concrete visions about how big the team will be, or how many projects or partners we'll have. My expectation is that, in five years, no one involved in healthcare system innovation will be able to ignore us. That it will be a given that innovations for the public healthcare infrastructure will be found at Future Health Lab or be developed in collaboration with us.

And will more Health Missions be addressed?

In my view, the most important topics are currently being covered—the key aspects are addressed by the three Health Missions. The topic of care, for example, is currently part of our first Health Mission, "Optimized Patient Pathways." Of course, it might evolve dynamically to the point where it becomes its own Health Mission. But as I said: In my opinion, our current focus areas are broad enough to accurately reflect developments in the healthcare system as we move forward.



ROMANA RUDA

is the head of Future Health Lab and has been a leader in the Austrian healthcare system for over 15 years. This experience combined with her extensive network allows her to foster collaboration and drive innovation in the health sector.

PROFILE: FUTURE HEALTH LAB

Location: 1100 Vienna
Opened: 2023
Space: 624 m²
Employees: 13
25+ current projects
60+ involved partners
400+ citizen participants

SELECTED PARTNERS:

- AstraZeneca
- Austrian Cardiological Society
- Austrian Economic Chambers
- Austrian Health Forum
- Austrian Health Insurance Fund (ÖGK)
- Austrian Health and Nursing Association
- Austrian Institute of Technology
- Austrian Society for Urology and Andrology
- Austrian Trade Union Federation
- Boehringer Ingelheim
- Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMASGPK)
- GSK
- idorsia
- Federation of Austrian Industries (IV)
- Joanneum Research
- Kärntner Gesundheitsfonds
- LISVienna
- Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft
- MSD
- Mavie Med
- MyAbility
- ORF
- Roche Diagnostics
- Schachinger Logistik
- sclable
- selpers
- University of Applied Sciences Vienna
- Vienna Business Agency

A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Future Health Lab is operated as a public-private partnership by the Federal Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, the Austrian Health Insurance Fund, and Impact Hub. The close collaboration across organizational boundaries makes it unique: Innovations are developed together with key stakeholders, tested on a small scale, and systematically integrated into healthcare, i.e., to improve patient pathways, care for the chronically ill, and develop new digital services.

THE WOW FACTOR

Direct exchange among all stakeholders in the field of education—that is Education Lab’s top goal. At the new Lab on Karlsplatz, collaboration is a key factor for developing innovations for schools and kindergartens—and getting them to the places where they’re needed most.

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It's a Thursday evening in March, one of the first summery days of the year. The sun streams lavishly through the large, arched windows on the ground floor of Maderstraße 1. For just under a year now, Education Lab has found its home here, just steps away from Karlsplatz. It is shortly before 5 p.m., and the room is already filled with visitors who want to help close a gap, specifically, the gap between developing effective ideas for the education system and their widespread adoption all the way down into individual schools.

The City of Vienna initiated Education Lab as an innovation center for the sector, and Impact Hub is bringing it to life. For the kickoff event of the yearlong "Close the Gap" program, around 30 people have gathered this evening to hear insights, take part in small group discussions, and maybe even jot down some ideas to take home with them. Participants from other parts of the country can join online as part of the hybrid version of the event. They can listen to personal testimonials and join in on digital break-out sessions. The format is designed for educators, school administrators, educational initiatives, government officials, researchers and business representatives. Other people who are interested in the sector are welcome as well. "You don't need to prepare anything," the invitation states. "Come with your perspectives and experiences. Go home with new contacts and ideas."

Bringing together the most diverse actors in the field of education for direct exchange—that is the highest goal of Education Lab. Together, relevant stakeholders aim to create more space and visibility for educational issues and to collaborate on the development of solutions. The Lab makes its space available free-of-charge to educators, allowing meetings among colleagues to take place in an inspiring and creative environment. At the same time, the high-ceilings and light-filled rooms serve as a capacious space for gatherings and trainings for the educational community. Education Lab works on a broad range of activities, such as organizing forums on topics like "Rethinking Kindergarten," and enabling experienced educators to share their insights in "Senior Buddies" workshops. It's also working to establish a community of practice, a Teaching Quality Academy, and a cognitive science meet-up. Their "Education Lab Venture Fellowship" is a mentoring program that supports the strategic development of nonprofit educational organizations for an entire year.

The windows facing the street are outfitted with wide benches piled high with plush pillows and chunky knit blankets. From the sidewalk looking in, you can see clusters of seating areas and a curving light installation suspended from the ceiling, forming the letters "el." The colors are dominated by bright white, pale wood and sunshine yellow. Each of the Education Lab's roughly 30 partner organizations is represented by a labeled flow-

erpot on a brightly painted shelf. In addition to the main room, there is a gallery with individual workspaces as well as rooms for groups of various sizes. A bulletin board featuring the outline of Vienna is covered with cards marking the locations of various educational projects that can be found throughout the city. A speech bubble, stuck jauntily to a mirror, reads: "But what if it does work out?"

How do you design a space that is meant to foster both coziness and creativity, and that can appeal to a wide variety of groups, encouraging them to connect? Co-founder Hinnerk Hansen joined up with designer Alex Riegler to create the unique interior design. "We were looking for a location that could be reached from virtually anywhere in the city in under 30 minutes," he says. After finding the space by the Karlsplatz public transportation hub, the

Events at Education Lab are open to all guests, big and small.



founding team had the freedom to shape the ground floor from the layout to the finishing touches. “The planning was largely centered on the philosophy of collaborative spaces, so creating opportunities for participation and facilitating collective intelligence,” says Hansen. That, and the “wow factor” when you first step inside. That was also important for him.

The concept for the space strives to show experienced and aspiring educators, educational initiatives and other dedicated stakeholders in the sector the appreciation that they deserve. The Education Lab is their space. Behind every detail is thoughtful consideration about how the design can encourage collaboration. There were questions, though, about how much literal transparency the space should provide. Initially, Hansen wondered whether the large, street-facing windows might undermine a feeling of privacy. But the opposite turned out to be true. “Many people tell us how much they appreciate the openness,” he says. “It piques people’s curiosity when they see Bettina Emmerling, city councillor for education, sitting inside. Or that 30 schoolchildren are here on a visit. The place sparks interest and sticks in people’s minds.”

In its very first year, the Education Lab welcomed nearly 10,000 visitors. The active community has members from 30 percent of the schools in Vienna. “We’re in the midst of a successful process to build awareness,” says Caro Hödl, who is in charge of communications. She’s sitting on a window bench together with Julia Pichler, the director of Education Lab, and Theresa Valenta, who oversees the community. “I think anyone who comes to us—whether for an event or just to chat with others—quickly senses the added value that Education Lab offers.” Theresa Valenta nods. “I hear from many educators that they feel a need for more exchange and guidance, that they’re struggling with issues they’d like to handle differently. But often, their schools or kindergartens lack the willingness and openness to change.” Like Valenta, Julia Pichler also worked as a teacher as part of the “Teach for



HOBBIES FOR LIFE

Tomoko is folding little bunnies with the kids today. One ear points straight up, the other is folded down to make it “flop,” as bunny ears do. She draws a little face and—voilà! It’s done. The eight first- and second-graders gather around the table, giggling. In this room on the Gablenzgasse in the 15th district, the kids are taking part in a weekly origami class lead by Tomoko, an instructor who hails from Japan. It is part of a diverse after-school program that offers activities ranging from dance and pottery to table tennis. The courses are run on weekdays in a former kindergarten located in the courtyard of a public housing complex as well as in nearby gyms.

These free recreational activities are run in city districts where there are particularly high numbers of families who are at risk of poverty. Behind these programs is the social enterprise Hobby Lobby, one of the Education Lab’s 30 partner organizations. It was founded in 2019 by Rosa Bergmann, a graduate in social economics and a Teach for Austria fellow. After two years of working to promote equality in education at a middle school in Vienna, it became clear to her that the lack of recreational opportunities is a striking, negative factor for socioeconomically disadvantaged children. “Many people in our society don’t realize that we acquire 70 percent of our knowledge in the informal sphere, outside of traditional educational institutions,” says Bergmann. “The kind of recreational opportunities children and young people have—or if they have any at all—is crucial for their future development.”

Seven years after its founding, Hobby Lobby has established five locations in Vienna. Adding up all the branches across Austria plus one each in Germany and Romania, there are 15 altogether. In Austria, Hobby Lobby offers 13,000 free spots for children and young people in its courses. “But still, there are more names on our waiting lists than on our participant lists,” says Magdalena Reiter-Reitbauer, who is responsible for public relations. Hobby Lobby finances its work through a mix of public funding, private donations, foundation grants and corporate partnerships. The course instructors volunteer their time. “It’s wonderful to see how they build a rapport with the children and can share their passions and hobbies.”

This Wednesday at the location on Gablenzgasse, a teenager is eagerly assisting with the origami group as well as the chess class taking place next door. He is a product of Hobby Lobby himself, having attended classes there as a child. Now, through the in-house Youth Leaders program, he is being trained to become an instructor. He wants to get involved, take on responsibility and pass on what he learned at Hobby Lobby: self-confidence, personal achievement, acceptance. And, of course, how to have fun.

Austria” social leadership program. The program places college graduates from all disciplines in schools and kindergartens for a minimum of two years to help children from educationally disadvantaged families reach their potential. “I felt like I could really make a difference in my classroom environment,” says Pichler. She grew up with two deaf parents and experienced early on “what it means not to have the same opportunities.” Education Lab aims to bring more equality and social mobility into the educational system. This includes empowering educators, providing them with professional development and organizing cross-disciplinary exchanges. “All educators should be the best they can be,” says Julia Pichler. “We connect them with one another. For a long time, being a teacher or early childhood educator was a lone-wolf endeavor. Fortunately though, now the awareness is growing that we can only achieve educational innovation together.”

Before the Education Lab opened, there was no physical space in Vienna for a network of professionals from just that field. “We often hear that we’re creating something here that many people have been hoping for,” says Theresa Valenta. Caro Hödl adds in, “It also helps that we have a political mandate from the city, yet we maintain a neutral role.” The Education Lab is seen as a bridge and a point of connection, as a pool of experts and a sparring partner when it comes to issues like cultural diversity in schools or disseminating innovation in teacher education. School development, new didactic principles and methods, onboarding educators, multilingualism, and even establishing a common language in the field—these are the topics that Education Lab stands for.

Studies show that about half of Austrian educators are at risk of burnout or feel extremely overwhelmed. “We’re still in the early stages with this issue,” says Julia Pichler, “but we’ve set ourselves the goal of gathering relevant information through interviews with key stakeholders.” The next step would be to work together to figure out how to bridge this gap. What do educators need? Who needs to be brought to the table to help bring about lasting change? “The principle of meeting on equal footing works wonderfully,” Pichler observes time and again. “Everyone can freely express their opinion here, regardless of hierarchies. They gain access to people with whom they otherwise wouldn’t be able to come in contact. That brings a whole new dynamic to the table.”

The kickoff event for “Close the Gap” is itself drawing to a close. The clatter of cutlery can be heard in the background, and empty glasses are being lined up on the counter. At the tables, participants are placing their Post-its, contacts are being traded, and casual conversation carries on. Many were already familiar with Education Lab, but for others, it was their first encounter. Pichler had mentioned earlier in the afternoon that the

first, in-person experience is particularly important. A glance around at the smiling faces, the easy atmosphere, the lively conversations—it seems safe to assume that we'll soon be seeing many of these faces here again.



JULIA PICHLER

is the head of Education Lab and has been working in education for nearly 10 years, from the classroom to policy development. With her experience in bringing innovation into schools and kindergartens, she designs programs and is cultivating a community for Vienna's educators.



Playful methods inspire creative solutions at Education Lab.

PROFILE: EDUCATION LAB

Location: 1040 Vienna
Opened: 2025
Space: 550 m²
Employees: 13
430 members
9,475 visitors
>30% of Vienna schools involved

SELECTED PARTNERS:

- City of Vienna
- COOL
- Federal Ministry of Education
- Federation of Austrian Industries (IV)
- Foundation for Economic Literacy
- Founders Pledge
- Hobby Lobby
- IFTE
- Innovationsstiftung für Bildung
- KiWi – Kinder in Wien
- MAD/Mellow Yellow
- MEGA Bildungsstiftung
- Minality
- NeBÖ – Netzwerk elementare Bildung Österreich
- ÖBV – Österreichischer Bundesverlag Schulbuch
- ovos play
- Schule im Aufbruch
- St. Nikolaus Stiftung
- Teach For Austria
- The Things We Learn
- UNICEF
- University College of Teacher Education in Vienna
- University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Vienna/Lower Austria
- Vienna Board of Education
- vindobini
- Vision61
- Wiener Bildungsserver
- WienXtra
- wirkt.

RETHINKING PRESCHOOL

How can early childhood education in Vienna be further developed? Since 2026, Education Lab together with the City of Vienna have been organizing regular, topic-based forums, where educators, administrators and experts discuss key issues and develop solutions. The focus is on equitable opportunities for a strong start, language, working with parents and staffing. The results are directly incorporated into the "Rethinking Kindergarten" reform and concretely contribute to the further development of early childhood education in Vienna.

A THINK TANK WITHOUT TABOOS

To bring educational innovations into schools and kindergartens, we need dialogue between all relevant stakeholders. Deputy Mayor and City Councillor for Education Bettina Emmerling talks about a place where new ideas can be explored openly and free of hierarchical constraints.

Ms. Emmerling, Education Lab was established on the initiative of the City of Vienna. How would you describe its mission in a few sentences?

Education Lab is unique in Austria and a real think tank in the field. It brings together a variety of pioneering initiatives, allowing them to be more widely shared and opening up the possibility for them to learn from one another. Educational innovation happens in many places, but to bring it together and steer it in the right direction, that's where we need an institution like Education Lab. We want to foster collaborations, create impact for children and young people, support kindergarten and school staff, and thus help Vienna move closer to its goal of becoming the educational capital of Central Europe.

You speak of a "think tank." What is being worked on at Education Lab that does not yet exist in the current system?

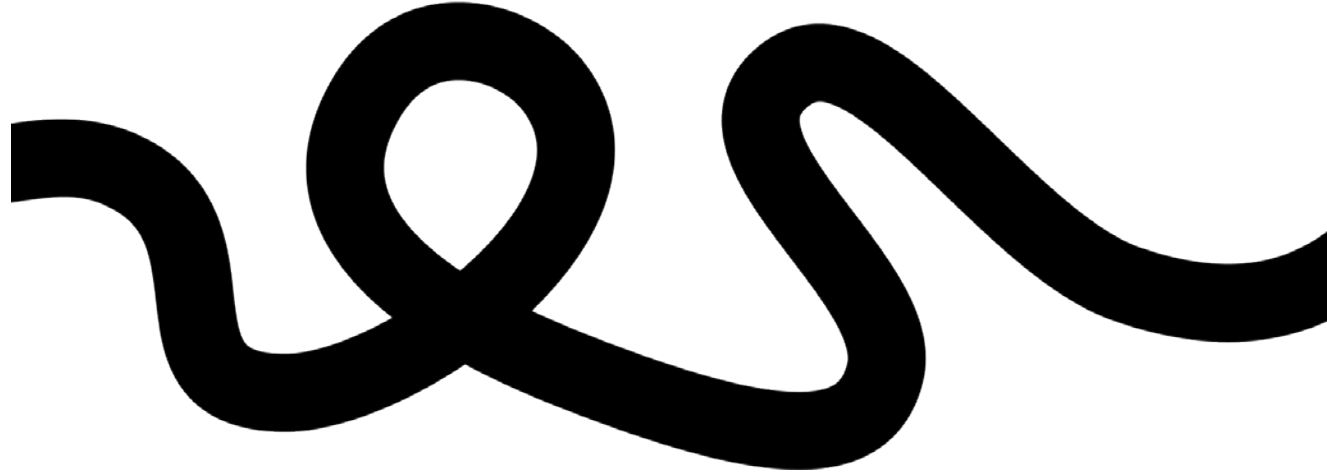
With Education Lab, we're creating a space where discussions can take place without taboos and where people can work together on new ideas. It's a place where education is being developed in a cross-disciplinary way. That's new. The Lab also helps to bring these approaches more quickly to the places where they can make the most impact: to the children and educators themselves. Let me give you a concrete example. The Education Lab Venture Fellowship supports nonprofit educational organizations in Vienna to strategically develop their programs, providing support with their structures and personal guidance as they transition from theory to practice.

Vienna aims to become the "Capital of Education in Central Europe." What specific role does Education Lab play in this journey?

It offers space, programs and a network for everyone who is actively shaping the field—from pedagogues and leaders in educational institutions to independent



City Councillor for Education Bettina Emmerling kicks off the "Kindergarten Neu Denken" reform at Education Lab.



initiatives. Representatives from government, politics, academia and business are also invited. Education Lab actively promotes exchange and collaboration within this community.

Education Lab covers a wide-range of topics from preschools to schools and beyond. How can priorities be set without getting overstretched?

The thematic priorities are developed in collaboration with stakeholders in the field. For example, the focus can be on language proficiency, inclusion or school autonomy. The current emphasis on early childhood education is particularly important to me.

Where do you currently see the greatest opportunities for more equality in the education system?

For me, kindergarten is very important as it's the first educational institution a family comes in contact with. That is why I launched the "Rethinking Kindergarten" reform in early 2026. And we not only want to rethink the educational framework, but also increase the attractiveness of the profession. I want the motivation that people have for choosing this profession to flourish again and for that to shape their everyday lives. I want there to be space to actively nurture talent. To achieve this, educators must be freed from administrative tasks. Multiprofessional teams should support educators' work and make their daily life easier.

If you look ahead three years, how will you know that Education Lab has truly made a difference?

When as many innovative approaches as possible have reached the places where they belong—with children and educators. My goal is for other countries to look to Vienna when it comes to educational innovation, and want to learn from us. I see Education Lab as a driving force in making this a reality.



BETTINA EMMERLING (NEOS)

holds a degree in environmental systems science. From 2015 to 2025, she served as a member of the Vienna State Parliament and the Vienna City Council. Since March 7, 2025, she has served as deputy mayor of the City of Vienna and is the city councillor for education, youth, integration and transparency. Equal opportunity and upward mobility through education are among her most important political priorities.

15 YEARS OF IMPACT HUB IN NUMBERS

Reach

150+ employees

450+ partnerships

5,000+ members

60,000+ followers on social media

175,000+ guests at over 12,500 events & workshops

13,000,000+ clients and beneficiaries

Value Creation

1,084 new startups founded

214+ million euros in investments facilitated

9,903 new jobs created

30+ million euros in own-investments into the ecosystem

64 multi-partner projects delivered (*public & private*)

The data and information presented here are based on annual community surveys and long-term analyses conducted between March 2011 and August 2025. The final dataset comprises 1,125 survey respondents, 716 company records and 5,011 member records from Impact Hub, Climate Lab, Future Health Lab and Education Lab, after duplicate entries were removed and individual outliers were corrected. The results were independently analyzed and compiled by the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, in consultation with Impact Hub Vienna. The final study and publication were supported by the ERSTE Foundation and the Vienna Business Agency.

Programs

83 startup programs offered (*43 national, 40 international*)

716 supported startups, in total

67 % of these startups are still active today (*average age: 7 years*)

42 countries, from where the start-ups originated

50.6 % of startups have women in the founding or leadership team

Community

5,011 members since 2010

77.3 % are founders or co-founders

144,945 hours of peer support (*feedback, mentoring, consulting*)

77,732 valuable new connections made

42.6 Net Promoter Score

Impact

How our community makes an impact through their businesses:

37 % social

35 % financial

28 % environmental

9 out of 10 companies align with the SDGs

THE MAGIC OF MEASUREMENT

Those who do good shouldn't just talk about it—they should measure it! The global Impact Hub Network and Impact Hub Vienna, in partnership with the Vienna University of Economics and Business, have been collecting data for over 15 years to demonstrate their effectiveness. Now comes the next step in their development.

Nowadays, anyone who merely claims to be making the world a better place might as well just pack up and go. For years, it was more than enough for social organizations to simply state their goals and activities in order to collect grants, awards and donation checks. In recent years though, that has fundamentally changed. Today, investors and partners—and increasingly, the organizations' own employees—demand evidence-based proof of the effectiveness of an organization's activities. This is where we start to see terms like impact logic and impact measurement, the IOOI model and Theory of Change flying around (see box). Or as Alyona Asyamova puts it between sips of coffee, "It's complex."

She should know. Specializing in social methods and public policy, the impact strategy manager was the first in the Impact Hub's history—which is no stranger to pioneering endeavors—to work on an impact logic, which she did together with Dr. Peter Vandor, a researcher at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU Vienna). Initially, the work was done for the global Impact Hub Network. "With that, we broke new ground for the network and many other organizations," she says. "But we're still building on that today."

Asyamova, who now works as an independent consultant, was working on an impact strategy and change process at the global organization in the early 2010s. The expert quickly became convinced that, "to confirm our hypotheses, we needed evidence, proof. We had to measure our impact." But how? "It became clear early on that we needed to team up with a university, because data collection always requires an outside perspective. This is both for reasons of credibility and transparency, as well as the fact that with the growing size of the organization, an external evaluation was

needed." At the time, the topic of impact measurement was still in its infancy, and there existed only scattered literature on the subject. While logic models such as IOOI and the Theory of Change did exist, there was as yet no impact measurement or impact reporting in the social entrepreneurship sector.

So they decided to do it themselves. She found a partner in Dr. Peter Vandor of the WU Vienna. Back then Vandor was the academic director of the NGO Academy; today he is the director of the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation. Together they developed an initial Theory of Change based on existing impact frameworks within the Impact Hub network, drawing on the participation of Impact Hubs in Amsterdam, Zurich, London, Madrid and Caracas. "Then everything had to go through a governance process," recalls Asyamova, "as every Impact Hub should be able to weigh in on it." A noble approach, but not so easy. One reason? So many time zones! "With Impact Hub teams from San Francisco, Singapore and Milan, just try to find a time that works for everyone." Nearly impossible, but she managed.

The result was a "monster Excel sheet with hundreds of entries" of individual insights and trade-offs which, after

IMPACT LOGIC

Many social organizations use the IOOI model to better understand the logic behind their impact, also known as a Theory of Change. The four letters stand for Input, Output, Outcome and Impact. Inputs refer to the resources used, such as personnel, time and money. Outputs are the specific measures designed for relevant target groups, who then ideally change their awareness and behavior (Outcomes) which then leads to something changing at the highest level of society (Impact). This logic is substantiated by concrete indicators that are measured accordingly. Based on this data, an organization can determine whether their impact logic “works,” if adjustments are needed, or whether an entirely new approach should be pursued. It is an iterative process that continues indefinitely.

being cleaned up, had to be sent through the process all over again. “It was all incredibly complicated,” she admits. “But also incredibly important.” This is evident in the fact that the basic principles of the impact logic established back then still remain valid to this day, albeit in a more mature and refined form.

“Back then, the impact logic of the Impact Hub Network was more focused on coworking and collaboration than it is today,” recalls Dr. Peter Vandor. “Above all, we tried to measure the initial ‘bounce of the ball.’” This meant measuring the direct impact that Impact Hubs made for their members and the indirect impact that came through their interactions with them. “In the end, that was the only area within our sphere of influence. We only wanted to describe what the members at the time were doing for their respective target groups. That reduced the complexity to a level where we could work with scientific soundness.”

Based on this, Vandor and Asyamova jointly developed a survey for the members and the staff. “And then something magical happened,” says Asyamova enthusiastically. “New insights emerged.” In addition to very positive feedback, the learnings included the significant role that hosts play and the importance of trust—which is ultimately what’s needed to “discuss one’s business model with a stranger.”

Now it’s time to launch the next stage of the impact logic process: an independent Theory of Change for Impact Hub Vienna. To this end, Asyamova has analyzed the last few years’ worth of impact metrics collected by WU Vienna for the global network, gathered qualitative data through interviews, and incorporated it all into an initial draft. She is also working on linking Impact Hub’s impact logic with ESG logic (see next interview).

“When we talk about impact, we tend to neglect the social and environmental aspects, especially when it comes to inputs,” she says, referring to the resources that are needed for the impact process. “Where do the laptops come from? Where does the electricity come from? How sustainable are our suppliers? What about salaries, working conditions and transparency? Where does this pencil come from?” After all, social enterprises like Impact Hub also have a duty to fulfill their social responsibility toward people and the environment, even if they are not required to do ESG reporting. And as Impact Hub also provides consulting on these topics, their credibility depends on it. Asyamova takes a final sip of coffee. “Walk the talk,” she says with a wink and disappears out the door and into the streets of Vienna.



ALYONA ASYAMOVA

built up and led the area of impact strategy and measurement for the global Impact Hub Network for many years. Today she consults organizations on strategy, impact, sustainability and innovation.



THE NEXT STEP FOR SUSTAINABILITY

As early as 2024, Impact Hub had developed a sustainability roadmap with the overarching goal of climate neutrality by 2030. They have now teamed up with the consulting firm 36° Sustainability to take a closer look at their own environmental and social performance, in line with ESG principles. A conversation with 36° project manager Roman Mesicek, an experienced sustainability expert.

Mr. Mesicek, you've known the Impact Hub since its inception. How would you assess its significance for Vienna and Austria?

In my previous role as managing director of respACT, a platform for sustainable business, the topic of social entrepreneurship was part of my daily work. Thus it made sense to delve into this field, even though hardly anyone knew exactly what it was back then. In this respect, the topic has gained recognition thanks to Impact Hub. They've also been able to do a lot with companies, thanks in part to their extremely neutral stance toward all partners. To this day, you practically can't avoid Impact Hub in this field. Its significance for the city and the country is immense.

Now the Impact Hub is starting a new chapter and will issue its first ESG report (Environment, Social, Governance) in 2026. Why?

Even though sustainability has recently been significantly deprioritized at the European level, it remains an important issue. For Impact Hub in particular, it was especially important to address this topic as it is a very relevant part of its partnerships with other companies. After all, companies that are subject to reporting requirements must also obtain the corresponding data from their partners. Plus, it was high time for Impact Hub and the Labs to address issues such as their own carbon footprint. For those with such high aspirations for social transformation it is crucial to not only fulfill their responsibility toward the environment and humanity, but also to document it. All of the stakeholders who were involved in the process were very interested in the topic.

How did the process unfold?

We held one workshop with internal stakeholders at Impact Hub as well as at each of the three Labs, and then one with selected support staff. In accordance with a European standard for sustainability, we conducted what is known as a "materiality analysis." This means that we used a participatory process to identify which environmental and social issues are material for the Impact Hub Vienna Group. The focus is primarily on the value chain and how to align it with the Theory of Change in a management context—so looking at the inputs rather than the impact, which is what most people focus on. To put it bluntly: We weren't interested in the cool people with their cool projects at the Impact Hub, but rather in the resources required to keep the lights on.

Were external stakeholders involved?

Yes, we conducted two additional workshops with representatives from key partners: Erste Bank, Vollpension, the Ministry, the Essl Foundation, the Vienna Business Agency, and the Climate and Energy Fund, the last of whom funded half of the process. It was a great step to take.

What was the end result?

A list of topics and corresponding metrics that Impact Hub will now track.

And in terms of content?

At the forefront is their focus on climate and the circular economy, which has a significant influence on how procurement is managed. Impact Hub already has a

procurement policy that specifies which products can be purchased based on which criteria and which can not. For example, some products must be refurbished or have a corresponding certification. They also already have a baseline of data on waste and waste separation that can be built upon.

What about emissions?

For direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions—such as electricity—this isn't a problem. It becomes more difficult, however, when we talk about employee mobility or the guests traveling to and from events.

Are there also social indicators?

Yes. One example is diversity within the stakeholder group: Do only college graduates have office space? How well-integrated are people with immigrant backgrounds? But other topics also come up here as well, such as accessible communication and training hours per employee. They've also already carried out an anonymous survey around burnout, which the standard doesn't require but of course can be included in the reporting.

Is your work here done?

We managed the process and made a proposal for a dashboard, which management is now working on. Tracking and compiling the data is also the responsibility of Impact Hub. I expect the first results to come in the spring of 2027.

Do you have any further recommendations?

Now management is integrating the results into their strategy, planning and corporate culture. In my view, it's important to involve all employees in a transparent process and keep them actively engaged. In any case, there's a lot of potential here that the ESG reporting can set in motion.



Roman Mesicek

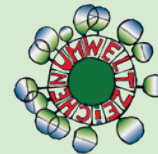
has been working with companies, universities and organizations to strategically anchor sustainability and social responsibility in their day-to-day operations for 25 years. He taught at the University of Krems for 13 years and is now a managing partner at ThirtySix Degrees Sustainability Consulting GmbH.

HIGH STANDARDS

Impact Hub was certified as a Verified Social Enterprise in 2026. Following an assessment by an independent Impact Board, the Austria Wirtschaftsservice GmbH awards the label to companies that contribute to society.




The Austrian Ecolabel is an independent, environmental certification that is awarded by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management. Criteria include raw material use, energy consumption, emissions, waste and recyclability.



In 2025, the auditing and consulting firm EY named Hinnerk Hansen "Entrepreneur of the Year" in the Social Entrepreneur category. For 20 years, EY has been presenting the award to individuals who are shaping the future with their ideas and passion. It is one of the most prestigious awards for entrepreneurship in Austria and beyond.



YOU'RE INVITED!



Here's to the
people who
want to make
a difference.

To those
who dream,
believe, and
act.

Here's to you.



Please, take a seat! If you too would like to join a strong and vibrant community in making a difference and creating innovative solutions to the greatest challenges of our time, you are invited! Whether you are an entrepreneur or philanthropist, a business or a government agency, a foundation or an NGO, there is space for everyone. The larger we can make the network for positive impact, and the more tightly we can weave it together, the greater will be its power.

We thank everyone who has accompanied, supported, challenged, driven, praised and criticized us over the years. Without the involvement of so many people, organizations and companies, Impact Hub as we know it today would not have been possible. We bow to you in gratitude, and would be delighted to welcome even more partners to join us on this journey toward a future where everyone can thrive. The time has never been better, the need has never been so great.

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Lindengasse 56/18-19
1070 Vienna, Austria
T +43 (0) 1 522 7143
vienna.hosts@impacthub.net
vienna.impacthub.net

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