Pressrelease

ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark 2024: The finalists have been announced

Deep-tech startups in the spotlight: Avelo, Decentriq and Stimit secure a place among the finalists for this year's ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark 2024. The winners will be crowned on 7 May at Technopark.

Zurich, 21 March 2024 - The finalists for the ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark are Avelo, Decentriq and Stimit. The winning team will receive CHF 100,000 in funding at the award ceremony at Technopark Zurich on 7 May. But the other two finalists will not be standing on stage empty-handed either - they can expect a prize money of CHF 10,000 each.

A total of forty-five top-class applications were submitted back in September 2023. After selecting the top eleven at the beginning of the year, the jury is now sending its three favourites to the final round for the Pionierpreis 2024, which is considered one of the most important innovation awards in Switzerland and focuses on deep-tech, i.e. startups with highly sophisticated technical projects. The Pionierpreis has been awarded annually since 2001 by Zürcher Kantonalbank and the Foundation Technopark Zurich.

Here is a brief portrait of the three finalists (in alphabetical order):

Avelo (Schlieren) – Every breath counts
Avelo's innovative breath aerosol collector uses existing PCR tests to provide a simple and rapid diagnosis of lower respiratory tract pathogens from breath samples, leading, for example, to better and more targeted treatment of tuberculosis – the fourth most common cause of death worldwide.
Avelo was founded in 2020 by HSG alumna Melanie Aregger (CEO) and Tobias Broger (CTO). The international team of seven people shares an office in Schlieren and comprises molecular scientists, biochemists, engineers and specialist in epidemiology and nanofibers.
"The jury is convinced that Avelo is about to challenge the status quo in the detection of respiratory diseases. With its' robust and user-friendly device, Avelo outperforms existing technologies in respect to ease of use and costs. The expected impact of Avelo's technology on human health - including in the Global South - played a key role in our decision-making process," says Andreas Plueckthun, Professor at the Institute of Biochemistry at the University of Zurich and long-standing member of the Pionierpreis jury. **https://www.avelolife.com/**

Decentriq (Zurich) – New standards in cybersecurity
Decentriq offers a SaaS platform with data protection technologies and advanced AI solutions. It enables companies to work together on confidential data and create insightful statistics or AI models without the need to share raw data. Founded by Maximilian Groth (CEO) and Stefan Deml (CTO) in 2019, the startup already employs thirty-five people.
"Decentriq is setting new standards in creating added value using AI tools from a wide spectrum of protected data sources," explains Christof Bühler, Head of Life Sciences & Physics at Supercomputing Systems AG. "We as jury believe that the startup's unique expertise will make confidential computing usable in a simple and secure way. This will, for example, break open data silos and thus massively facilitate collaboration between different interest groups with sensitive value-adding data. When it comes to cybersecurity, Decentriq is already being mentioned at par with companies such as AWS, Intel and Microsoft." **www.decentriq.com**

Stimit (Biel/Zurich) – Respiratory muscle stimulation for intensive care patients
Intensive care patients lose up to 50 percent of their diaphragm within the first three days of artificial ventilation. Stimit's innovation aims to preserve this vital breathing muscle non-invasively by stimulating the phrenic nerves to activate the diaphragm. The goal is to encourage faster, unaided

breathing and to avoid unnecessary intensive care costs. The Medtech startup, founded by the engineer Ronja Mueller-Bruhn (CEO) and her husband Oliver Mueller, employs a team of fourteen people at its sites in Biel and Zurich.

Emanuela Keller, jury member of the Pionierpreis since 2019, summarises: "Stimits aims for nothing less than a conceptual change in artificial ventilation. We chose this Medtech startup as one of the finalists because it could represent a decisive turning point in intensive care medicine." The Head Physician of the Neurointensive Care Unit at the University Hospital Zurich and Professor of Intensive Care Medicine adds another milestone for the startup: "Stimit has succeeded in developing and industrialising a highly complex product in a very demanding regulatory environment, adapted to the highest safety standards and user requirements." **http://www.stimit.com**

About ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark

The ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark has been awarded annually since 2001 by Zürcher Kantonalbank (ZKB), the largest Swiss cantonal bank, and Technopark Zurich. It is one of the key awards for technology-driven startups in Switzerland.

The Pionierpreis honours deep-tech projects poised to enter the market with innovative implementations, highlighting the dedication and risk-taking spirit of their founders and co-founders. The award, which is endowed with CHF 100,000, rewards besides the winners the nominated finalists with a prize money of CHF 10,000 each. As one of the most significant Swiss innovation awards, the Pionierpreis supports young entrepreneurs in raising further capital and offers a prestigious platform to present themselves and their startup to the public.

Further information: www.pionierpreis.ch

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