

10 promising startups emerging from universities right now

By **Phoebe Smith** - July 26, 2021



What makes the ideal breeding-ground for a startup? The research, learning and serendipitous nature of a university would appear a clear winner. Yet, the route from academia to disrupting the startup ecosystem is often unclear. How does a student go from handing in a dissertation to founding the next big venture?

Currently Europe, which is lagging behind the US in nurturing university entrepreneurship, has some work to do in this area. As described by Nathan Benaich in a recent FT article fittingly titled 'Universities in the UK and Europe have a start-up problem': *"There are multiple glitches in the system. Spinning out startups from universities comes with adverse peer pressure, multiple administrative frictions, long delays"*.

The result? Of 116 venture capital-backed European unicorns, only four are university spinouts.

Thankfully, the need to foster innovation is something European universities are increasingly acting upon and, despite the slow start, there are already success stories to tell. In this article we explore 10 of the most promising university spin offs from the European ecosystem.



Voliro – Zurich-based Voliro has developed advanced flying robots used for inspection of ageing critical infrastructure such as bridges, silos, storage tanks, ship hulls, and pipes. Traditionally, these areas are often difficult to reach and expose humans to high levels of risk such as falling from height or entering confined spaces. A spin-off from ETH Zurich, last year the company raised an **approx. €1.9 million seed round** led by Alpana Ventures, with participation from BackBone Ventures, Zürcher Kantonalbank, and a group of very prominent Swiss Angels.



Echopoint medical – Second up is University College London spinout Echopoint medical. Founded in 2018, this medtech startup is significantly improving the accuracy of current treatments for heart disease, saving healthcare costs and preventing unnecessary operations for patients that could be treated with medicines. In 2020, the team raised €3.5 million to develop optical sensing technology, helping doctors and heart disease patients navigate this 'grey zone' where the need for treatment is unclear.



their technology.

Earlysight – Geneva-based, EPFL spin-off **Earlysight recently closed €2 million for its approx. €2.7 million seed funding round**. Founded in 2019, Earlysight has developed a medical device that can observe early-stage retinal diseases such as glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy to make early detection and treatment a reality. The company will use the funding to to grow rapidly and commercialise



Dimpora – Also from Switzerland is Zurich-based Dimpora, an ETH Zurich spinoff creating fully biodegradable outdoor textiles. On a mission to protect outdoor enthusiasts without damaging the environment, Dimpora has recently secured €1.9 million in funding to continue to make eco-friendly outdoor textiles that allow users to enjoy nature fully and responsibly.



Earlybird and a renowned group of Angel investors to grow their technological advantage and market faster while supporting their international partners like Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Microsoft.

thingsTHINKING – Founded in 2017, thingsTHINKING is a spin-off from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. This AI, deeptech startup has created an innovative platform called Semantha which uses cutting edge, natural language processing approaches to improve customer experience and adapt to unseen tasks. This year, the team raised an impressive €4.5 million funding round led by



VitreaLab – Austrian university spin-off VitreaLab is a photonics startup shaped by top-level engineers. Inspired by quantum technology, VitreaLab provides integrated optics solutions, ranging from simple lighting to visionary display products. The team have recently **raised a seven-digit round of funding to**

increase efficiency and brightness of smartphone displays. However, they hope to tackle even more ambitious goals like holographic displays in the near future.



LatticeFlow – Despite progress and years of research, AI solutions can behave unpredictably and are unreliable when deployed into real life scenarios. Swiss startup LatticeFlow is looking to change this. Founded in 2020, they're empowering organizations to build and deploy robust AI they can understand and trust. Last year, the LatticeFlow team raised an [approx. €2.3 million financing round](#) led by btov and Global Founders Capital and are planning on using the funding to continue supporting enterprises to assess and improve their AI models and datasets.

Hedera-22 – Belgium-based Hedera-22 is developing an innovative strategy to accelerate and improve the discovery of new biomolecules useful for human medicine and the agro-industry. A spin-off from Uliège, the company has recently [raised €1 million](#) in a round led by Globachem, an international, family-owned agrochemical company. Koen Quaghebeur, CEO of Globachem, commented: *"Hedera-22 will not only produce new molecules for the whole agro sector but also for the pharmaceutical sector. We believe that this kind of companies is certainly necessary in these fast changing times."*

Axiles Bionics – Axiles Bionics is on a mission to improve the quality of life of amputees by developing the newest generation robotic ankle-foot prosthesis. After 10 years of research in advanced robotics and human biomechanics, this [Brussels based spin-off](#) from Free University Brussels, is developing the AMP-Foot for lower limb amputees which aims to improve natural gait and posture during daily activities. In 2019, the company successfully completed an impressive €2.4 million Series A financing round to continue to build the future of lower limb prosthetics.

Phononic Vibes – Phononic Vibes is introducing a new patented technology in noise control and isolation, with a circular economy approach. The Politecnico di Milano spin-off engineers meta-materials with novel and unmatched properties for use industries like construction. In 2020, the startup [closed a €2.3 million funding round](#) to invest in product development, expand their client portfolio and grow the team.

By the way: If you're a corporate or investor looking for exciting startups in a specific market for a potential investment or acquisition, check out our [Startup Sourcing Service!](#)

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Phoebe Smith is passionate about impact and innovation-based startups looking to empower people and solve real problems. Also a content and story-telling fanatic, she's currently Digital Content Lead at startup Bridge for Billions, having made her way over to Madrid, Spain, from the UK.