



Universität  
Zürich<sup>UZH</sup>

School for Transdisciplinary Studies

# Promoting Interdisciplinary Learning: Experiences from the School for Transdisciplinary Studies

School for Transdisciplinary Studies, University of Zurich

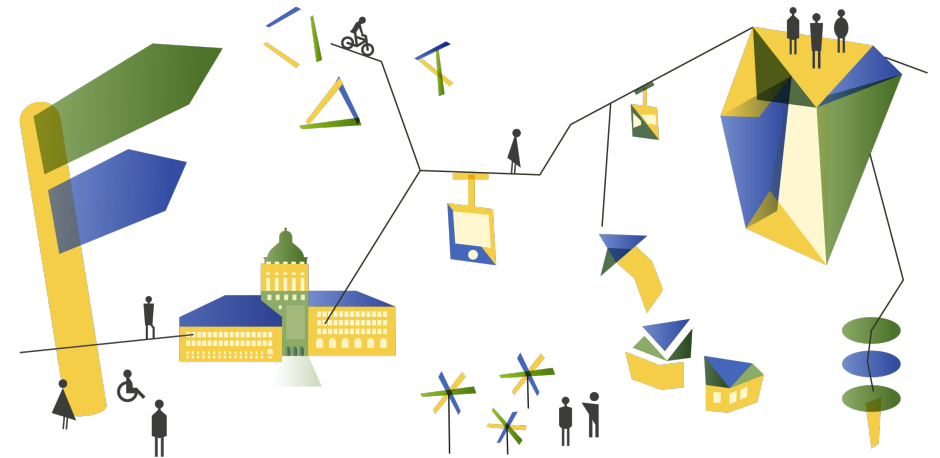
Eleni Spiroudis  
27 March 2024



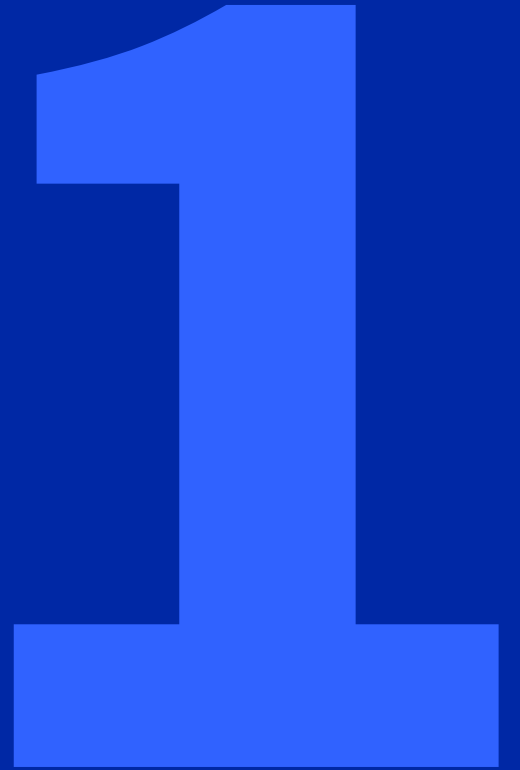
# Content



1. **Background of the School for Transdisciplinary Studies (STS)**
2. **Courses Illustrating Transdisciplinary Practices and Approaches**
3. **Benefits and Challenges of Transdisciplinary Higher Education**
4. **Strategies to Meet the Challenges of Transdisciplinary Higher Education**
5. **Lessons Learned and Conclusion**
6. **Questions for Discussion**



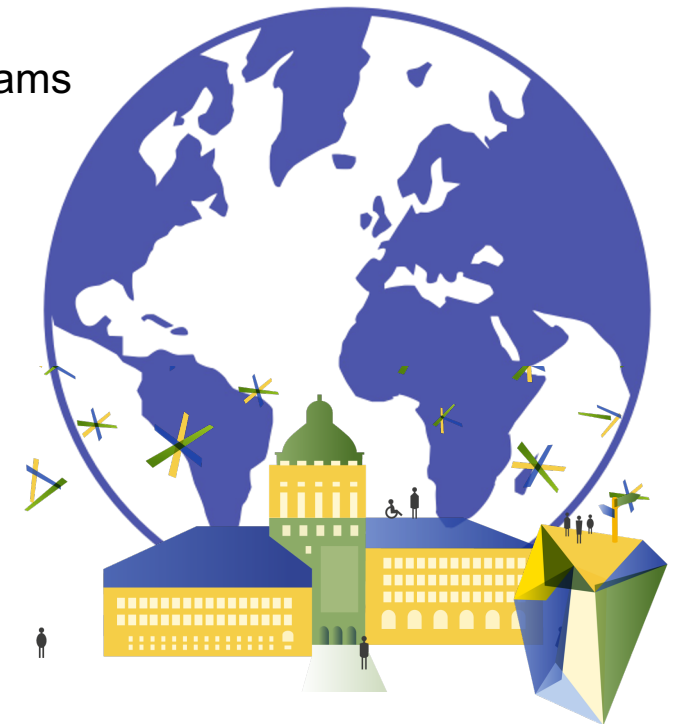
# Background of the School for Transdisciplinary Studies (STS)



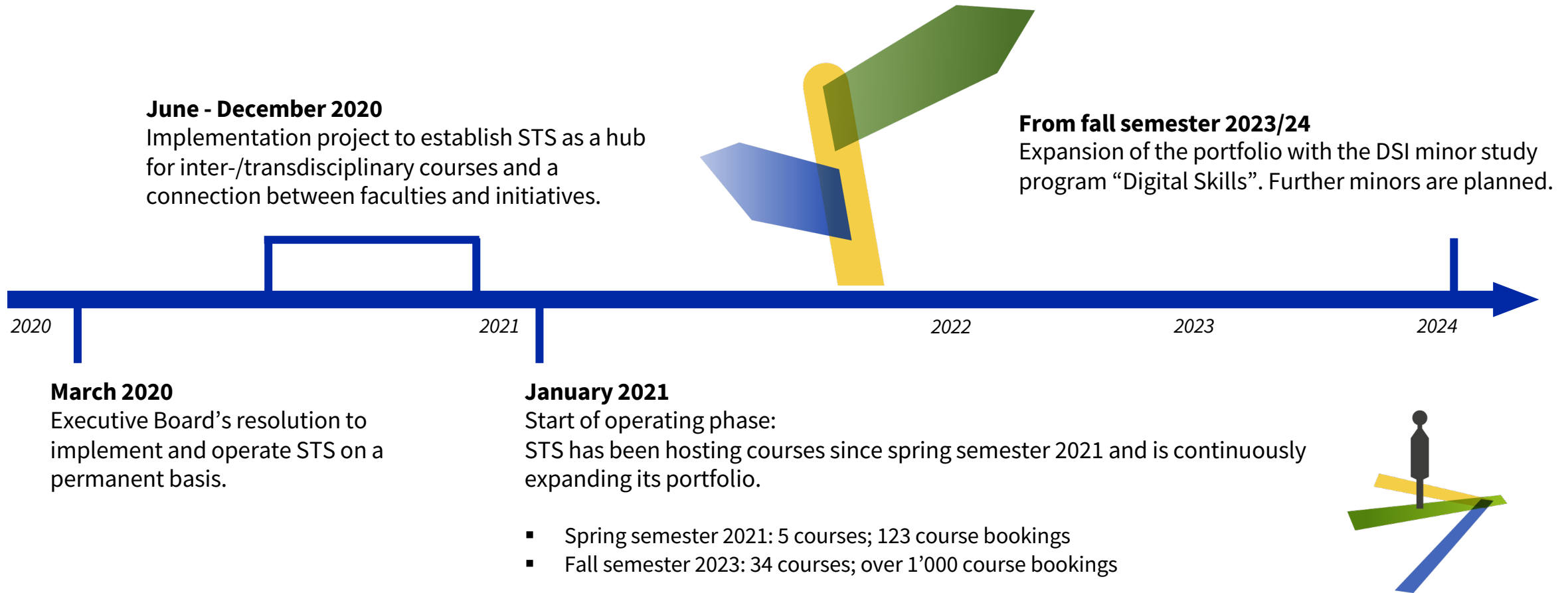
# STS increases the visibility of inter-/transdisciplinary teaching at UZH



- **Modern day's societies are confronted with major challenges**
  - University education is increasingly unable to stay within historically developed disciplinary boundaries
  - Many initiatives and teams at UZH address such challenges in their research with an inter-/transdisciplinary approach
- **At UZH, STS acts as a hub between faculties and inter-/transdisciplinary initiatives**
  - Inter-/transdisciplinary courses are made available via STS
  - STS courses are open to all UZH students and complement their regular study programs
- **Mission statement:** <https://www.sts.uzh.ch/en/About-us/Mission-statement.html>



# STS milestones: from its foundation to a look ahead



# Courses Illustrating Transdisciplinary Practices and Approaches







# Mentoring for the Next Generation

- Students support a socially disadvantaged child to better cope with the challenges in school and everyday life.
- The students are coached by practice partners from established educational initiatives in Switzerland.
- Theoretical part of the course: students learn about the impact and challenges of civic engagement on a societal, personal and economic level.
- Professors from three different disciplines: Business Economics, Psychology, Sociology



[Link to Course Catalogue](#)  
(German only)

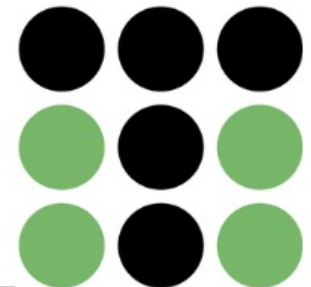


# Innovathon: The Digitalization of Mobility

- Students and teachers from various faculties tackle the complex challenges of the digitalization of mobility.
- Students:
  - address challenges posed by practice partners
  - develop innovative solutions in a “design sprint”-format; solutions are pitched to a jury and the best teams win a prize.
- Hands-on program

---

UZH  
INNOVATHON



---

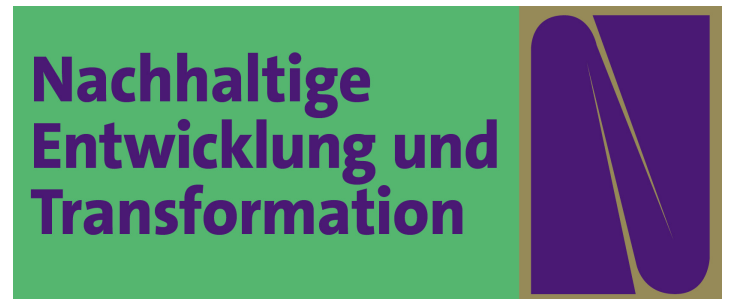
[Link to Course Catalogue](#)





# Study Week: Sustainable Development and Transformation

- Centers around sustainable development and transformation
- Students:
  - engage in real-world projects through a multi-stakeholder process
  - learn to integrate knowledge from various fields and develop strategies for sustainability goals at local and global levels
  - collaborate with diverse peers on case studies provided by practice partners, who also act as coaches.



[Link to Course Catalogue](#)  
(German only)

# Benefits and Challenges of Transdisciplinary Higher Education





# Benefits

## For students

- Holistic problem-solving
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Fostering critical thinking
- Insights from dedicated UZH instructors and practice partners
- Unique educational experience that sets students apart from their peers and opens doors to exciting career opportunities

## For teaching staff

- Understanding of interdisciplinary teaching
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Visibility and profiling as experts
- Innovative teaching methods
- Professionalization and networking

# Challenges

## Institutional Challenges

- Inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration
- Different terminologies, methodologies and epistemologies
- Credit Transfer Eligibility
- Contrast to the traditionally discipline-oriented structures and governance in university education

## Challenges within the courses

- Heterogeneous students
  - Varying prior knowledge
  - Communication barriers
  - Different learning styles and approaches to problem solving
  - Time management and schedule conflicts (different schedules due to different study programs)

# Strategies to Meet the Challenges of Transdisciplinary Higher Education





# Problem-solving strategies

## Institutional Challenges

- Credit Transfer Eligibility
- Transdisciplinary collaboration
- Different terminologies, methodologies and epistemologies
- Contrast to the traditionally discipline-oriented structures and governance in university education

- Institutional support (eg. establishing transdisciplinary units or centers)
- Fostering faculty and student collaboration (e.g. provide platforms for sharing experiences and best practices)
- Creating incentives and opportunities for transdisciplinary teaching (e.g. additional budget, teaching funds)

## Challenges within the courses

- Heterogeneous students
  - Varying prior knowledge
  - Communication barriers
  - Different learning styles and approaches to problem solving
  - Time management and schedule conflicts (different schedules due to different study programs)

- Creating a common foundation
- Team-based learning
- Assessing for diverse outcomes
- Transparency about objectives and expectations
- Flexible course design
- Regular feedback and reflection
- Support resources

# Lessons Learned and Conclusion







# Take-Home Message and Reflection

- Through our experience, we have observed that transdisciplinary practices and approaches to learning and teaching are desired, but not easy to implement at a comprehensive university.
- Building bridges between disciplines is proving to be a challenge.
- Nevertheless, since its establishment in 2021, the School for Transdisciplinary Studies has sought to promote inter- and transdisciplinary learning and teaching by supporting coordination and collaboration among the different faculties at UZH.

# Questions for Discussion





# Questions for Discussion

- Planning and teaching inter- and transdisciplinary courses require (more) time and effort. What motivates teaching staff and course managers to walk the extra mile?
- What strategies can be applied, even on a small scale, to break through discipline-oriented structures, share and co-create knowledge, and enable students to develop a holistic approach throughout their studies?
- What kind of incentives and opportunities for transdisciplinary teaching can a university create?
- Would you like to come forward with your good practices of cross-faculty co-creation?



# Thank you!

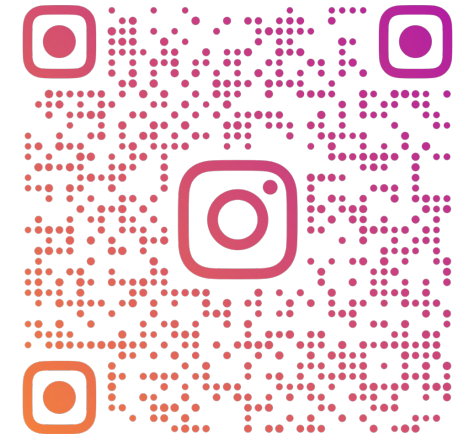
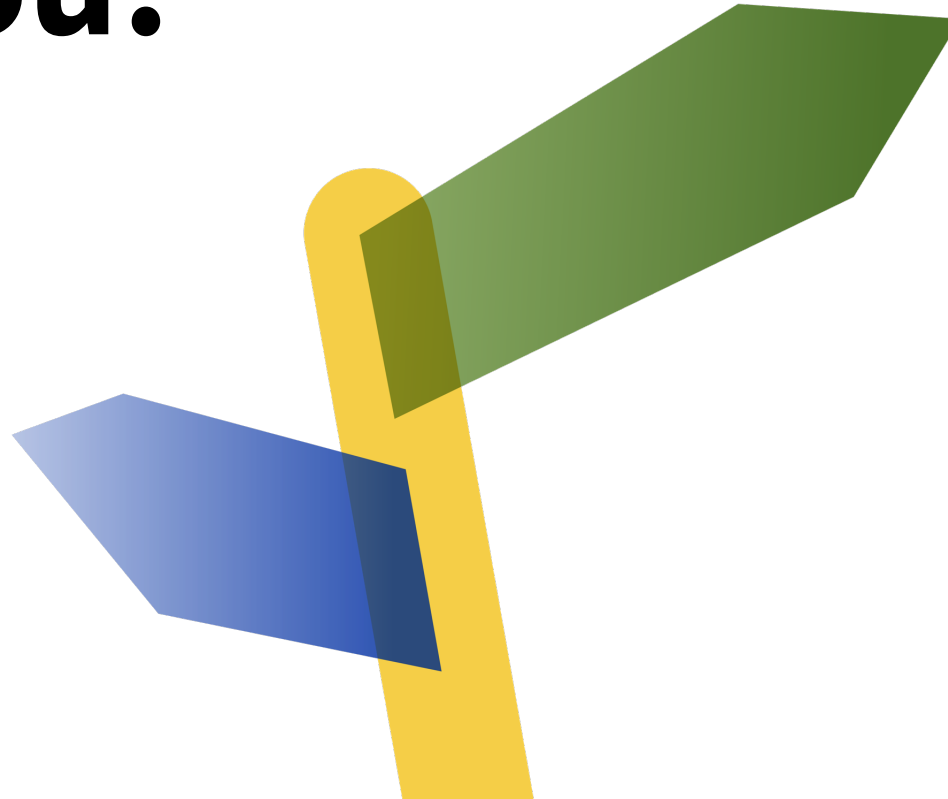
---

**Eleni Spiroudis**

University of Zurich  
School for Transdisciplinary Studies  
Hirschengraben 84  
8001 Zurich

[sts@le.uzh.ch](mailto:sts@le.uzh.ch)

[www.sts.uzh.ch](http://www.sts.uzh.ch)



**UZH\_STS**