

Roland Sigrist  
Cybathlon Director



Illustration: Kornel Stadler

## A new Cybathlon for a new era

It was a difficult situation. We wanted to respond in the right way, but there was hardly anyone who could help. Two months before the Cybathlon, which was scheduled for 2 and 3 May 2020, it was clear that COVID-19 was going to make it impossible for us to organise an international event with and for people with disabilities. Even before the Swiss government announced its ban on events, we had already postponed the Cybathlon to the autumn. The participating teams from around the world were relieved, and so were we. The new date meant that we all had something to aim for again.

We took a moment to catch our breath, but then we realised that we had to come up with a plan. Could we have international teams, pilots and journalists travelling to Zurich for a major event in September? No. Could we postpone the event in the stadium to 2021? Not an option either. The teams can't keep financing themselves indefinitely – student teams in particular are often project-based. Cybathlon would grind to a halt. After the first competition in 2016, which came out of nowhere and was such a resounding success, the community has spent almost four years preparing for the big event – the second Cybathlon.

In these times of uncertainty, I came across a quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: "A crisis is the greatest blessing for people and nations, because it always brings progress. Creativity comes from anguish as the day comes from the dark night."

With this in mind, we decided to see this as a unique opportunity to come up with a new Cybathlon format. The first

thing was to convince everyone involved to embrace our new format, particularly the international teams who took part in 2016. They had been dreaming of the stadium, of the fans cheering them on and the cameras capturing spectacular images from every angle for the whole world to see. Some of the teams were very sceptical to begin with. Later on, they wrote to say how inspiring it was that we were carrying them along and that we weren't giving up on this important project, despite the difficult situation. These words really motivated us and kept us going.

On 13 and 14 November, we will be telling stories – those of the pilots and those of the researchers. The teams will be competing across the globe, completing the courses at their home bases and providing visuals of the races. And yet we will all be united by the same goal: creating a world without barriers. The Cybathlon 2020 Global Edition is an important step in the right direction. I can't wait! ■

Roland Sigrist

### About the author

Roland Sigrist was competition director for the first Cybathlon in 2016 and has been the project's executive director since 2017  
[www.cybathlon.ethz.ch/en/](http://www.cybathlon.ethz.ch/en/) →

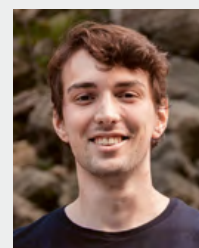
## Making better use of interdisciplinary collaboration

Interdisciplinary thinking often receives too little attention during Bachelor's studies. We attend lectures in physics, chemistry or biology – without giving any thought to the things they have in common, despite the fact that many concepts are universal. This might be for a number of reasons: perhaps it is our unconscious laziness and unwillingness to do the extra thinking that is required, or perhaps we lack the understanding to apply these often weighty concepts in a different context.

Things got better during my Master's studies – working on my own research project for the first time, applying what I'd learned for the first time. And understanding for the first time how important the principles of chemistry are in the field of biology. Everything I'd been taught over the previous several years finally made sense, and collaborating with researchers from other fields presented me with new perspectives and opportunities.

Now that I am working on my doctoral project, interdisciplinary collaboration is more important than ever. Taking inspiration from experts in the field of learning research, having the opportunity to try out new approaches such as storytelling in the lecture hall – and validating theoretical ideas about why these approaches might lead to more successful learning from a neuroscientific perspective – has taken me in directions that I never could have foreseen.

The spectrum of knowledge that you can access through collaboration at ETH is unbelievably diverse. We should draw on this knowledge to develop new approaches to teaching in order to promote interdisciplinary thinking from the start of every student's degree.



Samuel Tobler, doctoral student at the Professorship for Learning Sciences and Higher Education  
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