

Press release

2003 master plan for city-centre university district

New LEE building opens at ETH

Zurich, 13 October 2014

After four years of construction, the time has finally come: the first ETH building from the 2003 master plan will officially open today. The Department of Mechanical and Process Engineering (D-MAVT) and the KOF Swiss Economic Institute at ETH Zurich will now share one of Switzerland's most sustainable university buildings.

For the first time in 20 years, ETH Zurich is opening a new building in the city-centre university district. Offices with space for around 450 work stations, four seminar rooms, a lecture hall, an events room and a media room spread out over ten storeys and three mezzanine floors are available to staff and researchers from the Department of Mechanical and Processing Engineering and the Swiss Economic Institute. Students can use work spaces in the entrance areas and on the individual floors. The four lower levels are home to cultural and school administration archives, a large computer centre and a special room for conducting KOF surveys. The two urban gardens planted on the roof create an attractive space for students and researchers at ETH to meet or relax. To ensure that lectures can use the most diverse and innovative teaching methods possible, all rooms are equipped with the latest technology and the seminar rooms have portable furniture.

Sustainable and accessible

In addition to innovative building services and teaching techniques, sustainability plays a central role in the new ETH building. Ambitious sustainability targets were set down during the competition phase for the LEE building, and the entire building was constructed and certified according to Minergie ECO guidelines. The construction phases were continuously evaluated according to health criteria (natural light, acoustic insulation and indoor climate) and building ecology (materials, building concept) and adapted accordingly. All construction materials are free of harmful substances and GL-certified (good indoor climate), and the air inside the building is free of pollutants and allergens. The white ceiling panels are thermoactive and heat or cool the rooms as needed. All rooms feature dimmable, energy-saving LED lighting.

The building structure was designed to follow a modular and multi-purpose arrangement to allow ETH Zurich to adapt the LEE building to new organisational forms and educational concepts in future without significant effort or expensive construction work.

The LEE building was also designed to be accessible throughout, with wheelchair access on all floors, including the entrances to the urban garden and numerous restroom facilities. There are hearing (induction) loops in the lecture hall for the hearing impaired, as well as space for wheelchairs.

First building from the 2003 development plan

Since the end of the 1970s, ETH Zurich has been exploring how the plots of land between Leonhardstrasse and the Mechanical Engineering (ML) building could be used more effectively. The 2003 development plan formulated by the City of Zurich for the university district provided the opportunity to build more densely and therefore create more urgently needed space. Roman Boutellier, Vice President for Human Resources and Infrastructure at ETH Zurich, is pleased that the first building from this development plan is opening today: "The LEE building allows mechanical engineers to free their laboratories in adjacent buildings from administrative work, which can now be performed in the office spaces in the LEE building. And the KOF also has an attractive space in which all its activities can finally be brought together. The new building is a major positive development for all of ETH Zurich."

Urban quality

Planning for the LEE building started 10 years ago. The public competition was launched three years later and won by young architect Fawad Kazi, and construction began in 2009.

The director of ETH Zurich's Building and Construction infrastructure division Drazenka Dragila-Salis is pleased at how the new building has enhanced the urban quality of its surroundings: "The LEE building fits naturally into the cityscape. It has even led to some important and valuable urban rehabilitation by visually integrating ETH Zurich's heritage-protected former district heating plant (FHK) just behind it, and thereby contributing to the plant's preservation."

Additional information

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