



UNIVERSITÉ  
DE GENÈVE



Universität  
Zürich <sup>UZH</sup>

## Strategic partnership between the Universities of Geneva and Zurich

UNIGE and UZH join forces to meet the challenge of the digital revolution, by strengthening collaborations in research and training, and encouraging more student exchange.

## PRESS RELEASE

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The Universities of Geneva (UNIGE) and Zurich (UZH) have concluded a strategic partnership agreement to explore the impact of the digital revolution and the unprecedented challenges it represents for society. The agreement will intensify existing collaborations in the fields of research and training, promote mobility between the two institutions and facilitate joint participation in European programmes. A seed fund of CHF 400,000, supported equally by the Universities, will enable the first joint projects to be initiated. Pursuing their common missions of service to the cities that host them, both universities want to stimulate a strategic vision thanks to the creation of a common center, the Digital Society Policy Institute.

The digital revolution is transforming society in depth, radically changing the way both public and private enterprises operate. The impact of digital technology on employment, on issues of privacy and data protection, as well as on the very nature of the democratic process, need to be addressed.

«Our universities must provide a rigorous academic perspective, rooted in a multidisciplinary approach to studying the many profound impacts of digital technology, with the goal of enhancing the social benefits and managing the attendant risks. Digital technology is not just a tool, it's changing our society» says Yves Flückiger, Rector of UNIGE. «In our universities, we not only want to study this change, we want to be part of shaping it, too.» adds Michael Hengartner, President of UZH. «Our strategic partnership with UNIGE is a great opportunity to intensify our cooperation in this field, while strengthening research and training around digital technology at the national level.»

### Smart Cities and a Digital Society Initiative

Research initiated in the strategic partnership between the two Universities, independent of commercial or technical constraints set by the main actors in the sector, can affect many domains. Geneva and Zurich are both cities with exceptionally large amounts of open data available to researchers, and are therefore natural candidates for the development of research on Smart Cities. It is one of the research directions that the new strategic partnership will pursue, along with digital democracy, online citizen science, digital health solutions and the legal issues occurring in cyberspace.



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Michael Hengartner, President of the University of Zurich and Yves Flückiger, Rector of the University of Geneva.

Both universities are already pursuing strategies for digital transformation: The UZH Digital Society Initiative, which relies on a network of researchers across the University, has established an important knowledge base for digitization which covers a wide range of fields such as law, health, democracy, economics and the promotion of technical innovation. This initiative also aims to engage the public in direct dialogue about the opportunities and risks of the digital world. Echoing this strategy, UNIGE is currently running « a broad consultation on its digital strategy, so that it best meets internal needs, but also to the expectations of society. Our colleagues in Zurich have initiated a similar public dialogue. It is an excellent moment to coordinate our efforts », notes Jacques de Werra, Vice-Rector of UNIGE, in charge of the University's digital strategy.

In the area of citizen science, both universities want to go beyond the collection and analysis of data by the public. The democratization of science happens not only through the delegation of such tasks, but by associating citizens to the definition of research projects. In this area, two entities will collaborate closely: the Zurich Citizen Science Center, a partnership between UZH and ETH Zurich, and the Citizen Cyberlab, developed by UNIGE in collaboration with CERN and UNITAR (the United Nations Institute for Training and Research).

### Developing mobility

The partnership between UNIGE and UZH also aims to foster dialogue and exchange between two cities and two regions that participate in the identity of Switzerland. In the field of training, greater student mobility between the two universities will be encouraged, along with the joint supervision of doctoral theses. In the field of research, more exchange between young researchers and the sharing of scientific and technical information and data will be prioritized, as well as the development of research projects within European funding programs. Common courses using virtual classrooms will be considered, as well as the organization of conferences and seminars around specific digital themes.

UNIGE and UZH are the only two universities Swiss members of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). This network of 23 research universities from ten European countries is a major player in area of European higher education, promoting the development of favorable conditions, especially for fundamental research and teaching.

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