

Activity Report 2025

WU Foundation



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A Message from the Chair of the Board of Directors

**DEAR SUPPORTERS,
DEAR FRIENDS OF THE WU FOUNDATION,**

The WU Foundation was established in 2020 with the goal of strengthening the long-term development of WU Vienna University of Economics and Business and advancing excellence in those areas where it has the greatest impact. Since then, our mission has been to realize exceptional projects in research, teaching, and our Third Mission – projects that go far beyond what would be possible as part of the university's regular operations.

For our donors, the WU Foundation offers a reliable, transparent, and sustainable vehicle for making direct contributions that help us build the future of one of Europe's leading business and economics universities. Their support provides us with additional resources for launching new research initiatives, innovative teaching and learning formats, and programs with a strong social impact that would not be possible otherwise.

One of our other key priorities is promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. As the sole owner of WU Start-up Beteiligungs GmbH (WU Ignite Ventures), we make targeted investments in promising startups with ties to WU. In doing so, we strengthen the innovative power of up-and-coming companies and promote sustainable value creation.

On the following pages, you will find selected projects that were made possible by support from the WU Foundation. They show how ideas translate into impact and how targeted support advances scholarship, research, and entrepreneurial thinking at WU in a way that is tangible and highly visible.

A heartfelt thank you to our supporters!

We deeply appreciate your trust and your commitment. With your support, you help us create a space for initiatives that would not be possible otherwise.

Sincerely,
Rupert Sausgruber
Chair of the Board of Directors of the WU Foundation
Rector of WU

A Message from the Chair of the Supervisory Board

DEAR FRIENDS, DEAR SUPPORTERS,

“To found” means starting something new, being a pioneer, and creating spaces where ideas can flourish. So who would be better suited for founding a foundation than a vibrant university that explores new horizons with every research paper, every lecture, and every project?

With the establishment of the WU Foundation, WU Vienna has launched a carrier rocket into new galaxies of knowledge. In its cargo hold, it carries fuel for powering excellence in research, teaching, and Third Mission activities, and its launch bays are filled with vibrant startups brimming with creativity, innovation, and courage, ready to take off. They are incubators of novel ideas that are set to transcend boundaries and shape our future – and they are driven by individuals who want to be at the forefront of visionary developments.

We invite you to join the WU Foundation on this journey. As a supporter, you can be part of our mission, actively shaping its course and helping us create a launchpad for innovation where new ideas become reality. Your support is the fuel that propels this rocket and allows it to safely deliver its cargo, with great success and impact.

Get on board with us! Let’s join forces to create new spaces where the future can take shape – together, we can be bold, curious, and unstoppable.

Sincerely,
Cattina Leitner
Chair of the Supervisory Board of the WU Foundation

Facts & Figures

The WU Foundation was established in 2020 as a non-profit foundation under the Austrian Federal Foundation and Fund Act 2015 (Bundesstiftungs- und Fondsgesetz, BStFG), under the name of "WU (Wirtschaftsuniversität) Wien – Stiftung."

The WU Foundation sets out its **purpose** in its [Articles of Association](#) – in particular, this includes advancing research and teaching, and nurturing and supporting early-stage researchers at WU. Key priorities include funding academic research, teaching, and study projects, promoting the transfer of knowledge between academia and practitioners, and informing the public about advances in science, research, and teaching at WU.

The WU Foundation places particular emphasis on supporting young scholars through targeted funding programs and by financing international research and teaching mobility.

In 2025, the WU Foundation paid out 1.5 million euros to WU, funding projects in the following categories:

- › Excellence in teaching
- › Excellence in research
- › Internationality
- › The Third Mission

The WU Foundation is a non-profit organization. As of December 30, 2025, its assets totaled approximately **86 million euros**, consisting primarily of financial assets and a historic property in Vienna's 19th district, the former University of World Trade (Hochschule für Welthandel) building.



In 2024, the WU Foundation (as sole shareholder) established WU Start-up Beteiligungs GmbH, a company set up to invest in WU-related startups under the brand name of WU Ignite Ventures.

The **governing bodies** of the WU Foundation are the **board of directors and the supervisory board**.

The **Board of Directors of the WU Foundation** is identical to the **WU Rector's Council**. Its term of office corresponds to that of the members of the Rector's Council (currently: October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2027).

Rupert Sausgruber, Chair
Harald Badinger
Bernadette Kamleitner
Margarethe Rammerstorfer
Martin Winner

The **Supervisory Board of the WU Foundation** is identical to the **University Board of WU**. Its term of office corresponds to that of the members of the University Board (currently: March 1, 2023, to February 28, 2028).

Cattina Leitner, Chair
Christine Dornaus, Deputy Chair
Thomas Bieger
Dietmar Griebler
Angela Köppl

The **Budget and Finance Committee** has been established as an additional body of the WU Foundation. The members of this committee are the members of the WU [Committee for Financial Affairs and Campus Management](#), established by the Senate of WU.

The WU Foundation does not employ any staff of its own. Its operational tasks are handled by WU's specialized service units (including Financial Accounting, Campus Management, and the Legal Affairs Office).

As of the end of 2025, WU Ignite Ventures had two employees.

From left to right: Margarethe Rammerstorfer, Harald Badinger, Rupert Sausgruber, Bernadette Kamleitner, Martin Winner



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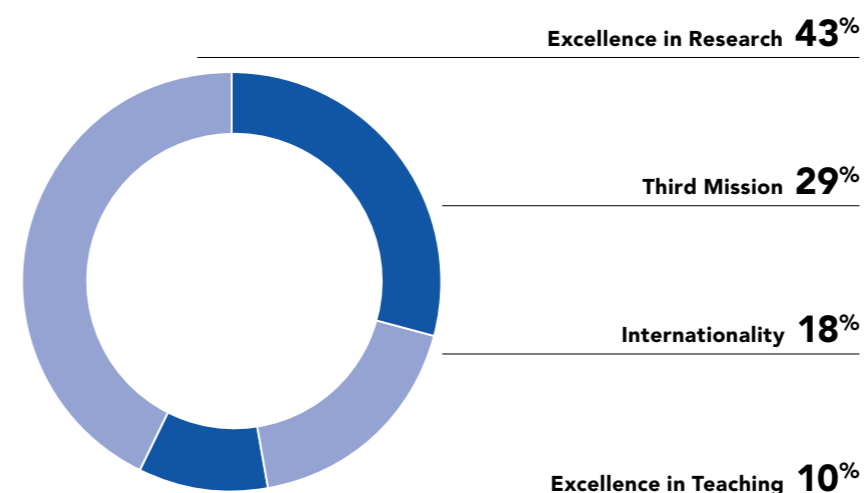
Vienna University of World Trade

BUILDING OF THE FORMER UNIVERSITY OF WORLD TRADE

This building, located on Franz-Klein-Gasse in Vienna's 19th district, is a designated historic landmark. For 66 years, starting from the 1916–17 winter semester, it was home to the prestigious University of World Trade, which was renamed Vienna University of Economics and Business in 1975. During that time, the building served as a major educational center and a hub for pioneering research.

In 2020, the WU Board of Trustees decided to donate the building to the WU Foundation. Currently, the entire building is leased to the University of Vienna.

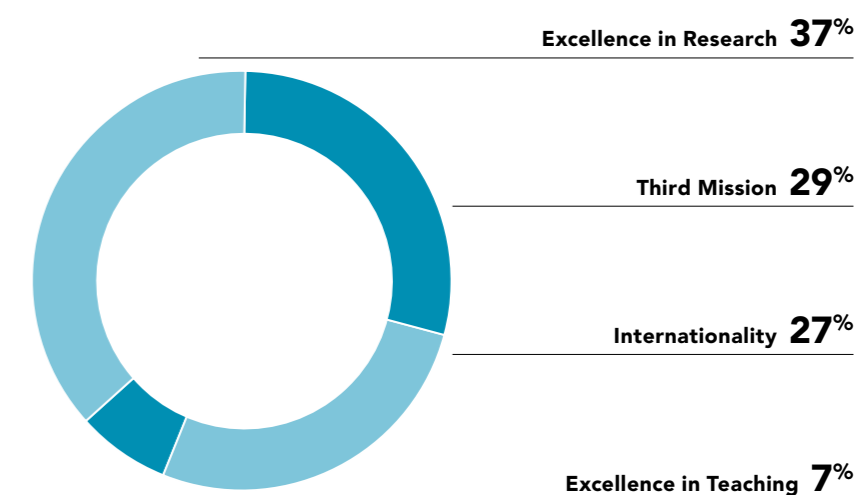
Payouts Made in 2025 and Planned for 2026



In 2025, the WU Foundation granted approximately 1.5 million euros to WU. These funds were used to support activities in the strategic areas of **excellence in research**, **excellence in teaching**, **internationality**, and the **Third Mission**, in line with the WU Strategy Compass. The chart above shows the percentages of the payouts allocated to these four areas.

With the payouts planned for 2026, we want to double down on these strategies (see below).

In addition, the WU Foundation also contributed 300,000 euros to WU Start-up Beteiligungs GmbH in 2025.



WU Ignite Ventures

WU Ignite Ventures is the startup investment arm of the WU Foundation. It gives investors access to early-stage startups with ties to WU. WU Ignite Ventures makes investments as early as in the pre-seed stage, closing a critical funding gap in Austria's innovation and startup ecosystem.

Through transparent pre-seed investments and mentorship from experienced founders, alumni, and experts, WU Ignite Ventures enhances the development quality and market readiness of fledgling businesses, strengthening their chances of success as they enter national and international markets.

As a wholly owned subsidiary of the WU Foundation, WU Ignite Ventures is a player with strong financial resources and a long-term outlook. With six to eight investments per year, WU Ignite Ventures offers investors and partners of the WU Foundation a reliable deal flow and a high degree of predictability for planning ahead. In this way, WU Ignite Ventures plays an active role in strengthening Vienna's and Austria's role as innovation and startup hubs.



Constrect Solutions FlexCo

In October 2025, the first investments were concluded with two selected startups:

Constrect Solutions FlexCo is a Vienna-based startup tackling a problem that the construction industry has been struggling with for years: inefficient, fragmented processes for procuring materials. The startup offers a platform for automating supply chain processes and provides ESG data as a basis for sustainable decision-making.

The WU Entrepreneurship Center has also brought on board an additional strategic co-investor from the construction industry.

Nexo Skeleton FlexCo is working on a patent-pending exoskeleton for orthopedic rehabilitation treatments. This technology combines artificial intelligence, sustainable production processes, and innovative materials to make treatments more efficient and free up much-needed treatment capacity. The company works at the interface of medical technology, AI, and sustainable production.



Nexo Skeleton FlexCo



OUTLOOK FOR 2026

VC Analyst Program

The **VC Analyst Program** is a highly selective venture capital (VC) fellowship for ambitious students, offering them a hands-on introduction to the world of early-stage investing. Participants gain real-world investment experience – they go scouting for promising founders, analyze markets and business models, they get to draft deal memos, and they are involved in making real-world investment decisions.

These activities are accompanied by workshops held together with experienced partners from the venture capital industry and periodic investment-committee-style meetings, which deepen the participants' understanding of professional decision-making processes. With admission limited to no more than fifteen students, the program offers an intensive learning experience, allows participants to take direct responsibility for their decisions, and helps build a qualified talent pool for the Austrian startup and venture capital ecosystem.

Investment Committee

The Investment Committee is involved in the selection of investments and ensures their strategic alignment. The members of the Investment Committee are distinguished by their entrepreneurial experience, technological expertise, and deep understanding of early-stage startups and university spin-offs. The committee prepares high-quality assessments of market potential and risk-return profiles. It also supports selected spin-offs by providing them with access to crucial networks and entrepreneurial expertise, and it offers guidance on how to further develop and refine the investment strategy.

The inaugural members of the Investment Committee are Johanna Konrad (former CSO/COO and board member, kompany), Christian Polster (co-founder, Radar Cyber Security), Hannah Wundsam (managing director, AustrianStartups), and Simon Tretter (co-founder, hokify and yfactory).



Excellence in Research

The WU Foundation supports research at WU in a targeted and effective manner by providing funding for various grant programs that support early-stage researchers in their career development and makes it possible to carry out excellent research projects. The offerings cover a broad range, from grants for helping researchers realize their first independent projects to bridge funding for preparing third-party grant applications and funding instruments that support knowledge transfer from academia to practitioners.

SUPPORT FOR INNOVATIVE PROJECTS BY WU JUNIOR RESEARCHERS

A special funding program is in place to allow junior WU researchers to lead their first research project and gain hands-on experience in key aspects of project planning, proposal writing, and implementation.

The projects that received grants in the reporting year speak to the breadth and relevance of early-career research at WU, addressing key economic, technological, and sociopolitical challenges of our time.

The topics include, for example, an analysis of how trade barriers affect Austrian SMEs, the development of effective measures against the unintentional sharing of contact information during app downloads, and the use of generative AI models in market research.

WU PROJECTS – ENCOURAGING FUTURE-ORIENTED RESEARCH

WU Projects allow WU researchers to generate innovative, publishable research results as part of an independent project. The WU Projects grants also support researchers in doing preparatory work for participating in calls issued by national funding agencies (such as the Oesterreichische Nationalbank or the Austrian Science Fund).



In 2025, the WU Foundation funded four research projects that address key future-oriented topics in the areas of sustainability, policy-making, and equal opportunities. The grant-winning projects analyze the global environmental impacts of the aquaculture industry through a comprehensive survey of worldwide feed and biomass flows, and they look at how narrative frameworks in companies shape responsible supply chain strategies and support organizational change. Another research topic is the effect of female chief executive officers (CEOs) on the recruitment, retention, and advancement of female talent and what this means for gender inequalities in management.

MATCHING GRANTS – BOOSTERS FOR HIGH-PROFILE INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

Matching Grants provide supplementary funding for projects that have already won grants from internationally renowned funding programs (in particular, Austrian Science Fund and European Union programs). Matching Grants offer additional funding for improving the framework conditions that are essential for high-quality project implementation: administrative and coordination requirements can be met, additional costs can be covered, and project teams can dedicate more of their time to core research work. These grants help projects succeed and lay the foundation for subsequent competitive grant applications.

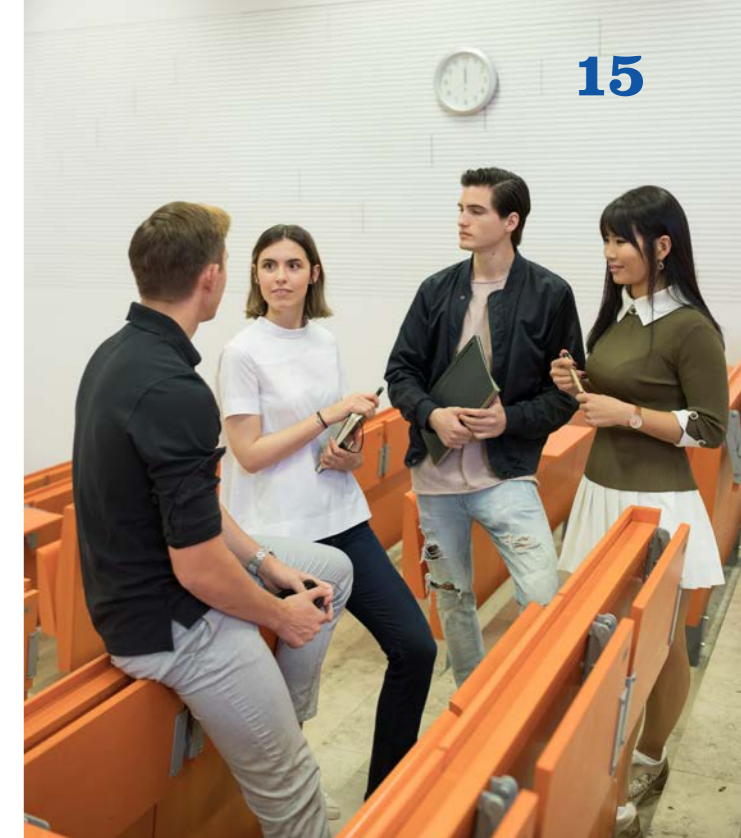
IMPACT GRANTS FOR RESEARCH – RESEARCH THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The Impact Grants for Research support projects that translate quality-assured academic findings (e.g. peer-reviewed contributions, papers at competitive conferences, or publications) into real-world applications. These grants focus on actionable **science-to-practice activities** that generate social impact, strengthen collaboration beyond the campus, and open up new channels for communication and knowledge transfer.

The projects funded in 2025 translate complex academic and democratic policy content into creative, interactive formats. The funding granted makes it possible, for example, to develop an interactive, bilingual learning platform that visualizes the complex environmental impacts of our diet and makes this information accessible to the general public as an open educational resource.

As part of another project, an online tool was developed that aggregates and visualizes global data on the mining industry, presenting it all the way down to the site level in a very transparent way to provide a basis for comprehensive environmental impact assessments.

The third project that was funded focused on strengthening democratic participation by empowering civil society organizations to submit concrete and legally feasible proposals to Austria's national constitutional convention.



THE COMPETENCE CENTER FOR APPLIED AI & SCIENTIFIC COMPUTING

WU's Competence Center for Applied AI & Scientific Computing (AAISC) is a new interdisciplinary center that investigates, develops, and applies cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) methods. It brings together researchers from the Department of Information Systems and Operations Management, the Department of Finance, Accounting and Statistics, and the Department of Marketing, creating a central hub for the development of innovative AI solutions.

Four [Xperimental AI Grants](#) were awarded from WU Foundation funds to support early-career WU researchers focusing on experimental behavioral science research in the field of AI. In addition, several events and networking meetings were organized, including the CFO Forum, which was attended by approximately forty chief financial officers (CFOs) from Austrian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The landmark achievements of 2025 include the approval of a research grant by the Vienna Science and Technology Fund ([WWTF](#)) in the amount of 799,530 euros, additional research grant applications to the WWTF and the [COMET-program](#) more than eleven publications, and the roll-out of a travel expenses chatbot as a practical AI solution for administrative tasks.

Third Mission

WU4YOU

In 2025, the WU Foundation also funded seven WU4YOU scholarships.

WU4YOU supports dedicated, high-achieving high school graduates from less financially privileged families, creating opportunities where they are most needed. WU4YOU enables students to focus on their bachelor's studies without being held back by financial worries. In addition to a monthly scholarship covering the entire duration of their studies, the recipients also benefit from mentoring, coaching, and valuable networking opportunities that support their professional and personal development.

The program is aimed at promising young talent who show strong potential, plan to study business and economics, and are eager to build a strong future for themselves.

IDENTITY FUSION

Building a strong WU community and a shared WU spirit is one of our university's strategic goals. We want to strengthen students' sense of belonging and connection to WU across the entire student lifecycle – from their first contact with WU through their studies and going forward, well beyond graduation. To achieve this, WU takes advantage of all the key student touchpoints. This applies to the way studying at WU is organized as well as to university services, courses, exams, and social interaction. The goal is to turn every face-to-face interaction into a positive and emotionally meaningful experience. In this way, we want to help our students build a trusting relationship with WU to ensure long-term loyalty and support.

Against this backdrop, we launched the Identity Fusion project in 2025. It gives concrete shape to our strategic goals in this area, across all of WU. The project revolves around clearly defined touchpoints, recurring formats, and concrete activities.

In 2025, the focus was on the onboarding of new students and on strengthening and highlighting WU's welcoming culture. As part of a large-scale welcome campaign, we focused on the first-semester experience as a key moment for imbuing our students with a sense of belonging from day one and strengthening their identification with WU through personal, emotionally powerful moments.

Building on this foundation, we launched additional initiatives during study and exam periods to let our students know that WU cares about them and supports them, especially during intense periods of study. At the same time, these activities boost the students' motivation and help them remain grounded and emotionally stable.

Starting in 2026, the Identity Fusion project will be systematically expanded across key stages of the student lifecycle: from the start of the academic journey through formative campus moments to graduation and the alumni phase. Step by step, these efforts will create a consistent WU experience that nourishes a sense of belonging, strengthens loyalty, and consolidates a vibrant community in the long term.

Internationality

VISITING SCHOLARS

Internationality is a central goal of WU across several dimensions: international mobility of incoming and outgoing students, active participation of WU faculty in international conferences and research seminars, global collaboration and co-authorship, and, in particular, research and teaching visits by scholars from leading international universities who come to WU as part of the visiting faculty program. The WU Foundation provides targeted funding for this program, making a significant contribution to WU's internationalization efforts.

From PhD candidates to postdocs to professors, all participants benefit from immersion in an international, interdisciplinary environment and the diverse opportunities for professional and personal networking this creates.

In 2025, the WU Foundation funded or co-funded over 340 visits to WU by international researchers from more

than 35 globally respected institutions, including Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Stanford University, the London School of Economics (LSE), the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, INSEAD, the Wharton School, and Università Bocconi.

ENGAGE.EU

To promote internationality, networking, and cross-border dialog and mobility, the WU Foundation supports the [ENGAGE.EU initiative](#). ENGAGE.EU is an alliance of leading European universities in the fields of business, economics, and the social sciences, distinguished by their extensive experience in analyzing social change. The alliance's goal is to empower students to act as socially engaged European citizens and to have a positive impact on society at large.

In 2025, the WU Foundation's support made it possible to organize networking events and implement innovative projects, for example VR boxes for exploring photo spheres (360-degree views of Campus WU) and virtual classrooms. This is a way for WU and ENGAGE.EU to gain global visibility and create new opportunities for international exchange.

You can experience digital learning spaces and global perspectives [here](#).



Excellence in Teaching

WU has been driving digitalization in teaching for years, aiming to closely integrate physical and digital learning spaces. This creates flexible, future-oriented learning environments that prepare students for an increasingly digital and globalized work environment and make our university more competitive internationally.

The **Future Learning Experience (FLEX)** project was set up to develop and test innovative teaching formats for this purpose, with a special focus on the use of immersive technologies such as virtual reality and interactive 360-degree environments. These technologies enable realistic simulations, promote active and collaborative learning, and create new possibilities for learning beyond traditional teaching formats. A particular focus is on virtual learning spaces, including a digital campus that facilitates international collaboration regardless of the users' physical location.

Initially, the project was established with temporary seed funding from the Austrian Ministry of Science, which has since expired. To ensure the further development of the innovations that have been launched and integrate them into the broader context of university teaching, the WU Foundation supports ongoing work to continue this trailblazing initiative and expand upon what has been achieved so far.



LEGAL AND COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

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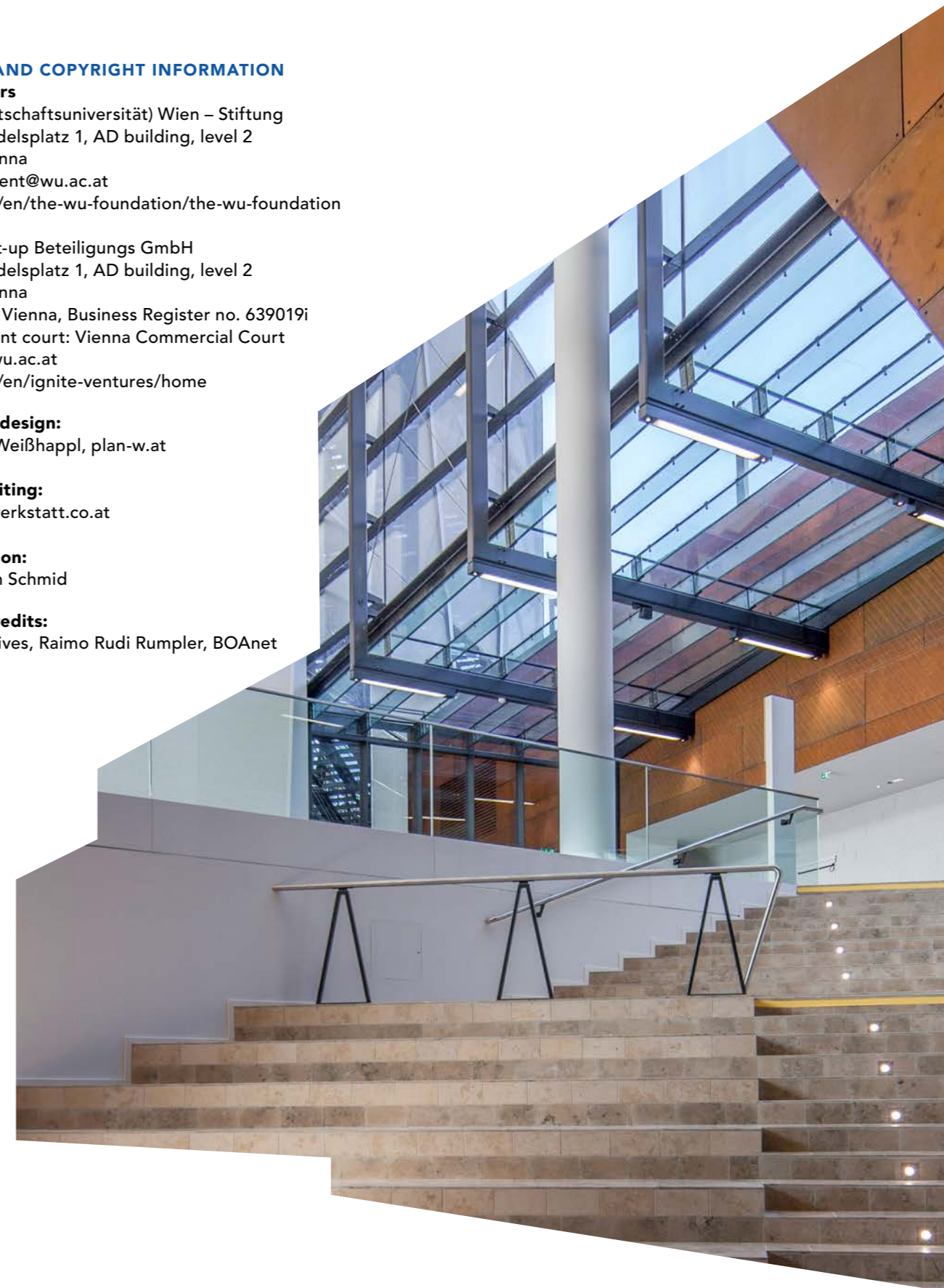
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wu.ac.at/en/the-wu-foundation

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