

# SILAB innovates to promote innovation in challenging year

Q&A with Dr. Dominique Truchot-Cardot, Medical Doctor, Professor and SILAB Director



**Dr. Dominique Truchot-Cardot, MD,**  
SILAB Director

## Q: What is SILAB?

**A:** SILAB – Source Innovation Lab – was first conceived of about five years ago to create links among innovators and healthcare professionals. We wanted to fill a gap: accelerators or incubators in business fields were common, but we saw nothing to support solutions to hands-on healthcare needs. It's been open just over two years now, in the Beaulieu satellite of the *Institut et Haute Ecole de la Santé La Source*.

Our external mission involves working with young start-ups and organizations with specific innovation needs. We create the conditions for concepts to be discussed, developed, and tested safely and scientifically, to bring ideas to reality. We work with Swiss entities like Innovaud, Innosuisse, as well as internationally, especially through partnerships with swissnex.

Our internal mission is to train *La Source* students, familiarizing them with the process of innovation. Between our external and internal missions is the concept of acculturation. We bring them together for interdisciplinary collaboration, so each side understands the contributions of the other. We put together caregivers who come with real-life problems and people who have the technical background to bring realistic solutions. There are few places like this where they can do that.

## Q: What impact did the pandemic have on SILAB's activities in 2020?

**A:** In terms of research projects and work with start-ups, we've never been so busy. The pandemic accelerated a lot of needs. Many research projects were directly related to the pandemic, in part because there was funding available. But others were forward-looking, anticipating post-pandemic needs, like systems designed to keep track of hospital equip-

ment. There was also a heightened focus on innovation in management, society, ecology, economy. We had start-ups from everywhere – the support from the DGES was key there. We served as an interface to bringing innovations into hospitals, because doors opened based on their confidence in us, which was really rewarding. Our role as an innovation center is more firmly appreciated.

As for our event projects, however – *Défi Source* and 6-labs – the year was a bust.

## Q: What are *Défi Source* and 6-labs, and what happened with them in 2020?

**A:** *Défi Source* 2020 was to be the big event, the great encounter between caregivers and innovators. It was designed to bring together students from an unlimited range of disciplines – from healthcare to business to engineering and more – along with entrepreneurs, patients, healthcare professionals and anyone with ideas for nursing science solutions or a desire to help. The program involves a four-step process: project proposals and team creation; a pitch day; a boot camp for development, prototyping, testing; and a public presentation day. After that, we support promising teams longer term.

Unfortunately, precisely at the exact moment it was to begin, the pandemic hit. To not lose momentum, we thought of holding several small events – parts of what we would have included in *Défi Source* – within mandated restrictions of course. So that became 6-labs, with sessions planned on topics like homecare or economic innovation in healthcare. We had a first, very successful, event in October. We had tables of five or six people from all walks of life – healthcare workers, engineers, students, patients. The DGES supported this initiative, promoting it around all the Institutions of Higher Education. We had students sitting with hospital administrators or university deans – a real

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mix of people who wouldn't necessarily get that opportunity for a close exchange. We planned a second event in November but COVID came back, so we tried a virtual version. The event frankly lost its soul in virtual.

**Q: What was it about the virtual 6-labs event that didn't work, compared with the live one?**

**A:** There were far fewer attendees, so we lost a lot of the diversity. There were a lot of engineers and hardly any healthcare professionals. We lost the perspective of the students – only three or four came. Students were doing all their classes virtually at that time and they were fed up; they saw it like doing another class virtually. And indeed, there wasn't the dynamic sort of exchange where you're working together, challenging each other all on equal footing. It was still interesting, but much less productive. The speed, the depth, the dynamism of the ideas exchange was lacking in the virtual setting. And the conviviality was missing – this is something that is especially important for caregivers when you bring them into this kind of exercise.

We ended up deciding to postpone the remaining 6-lab events indefinitely to concentrate on remaking *Défi Source* for 2021.

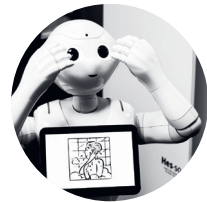
**Q: How are the plans for Défi Source 2021 going, and how will you deal with limits or restrictions, not knowing how the COVID situation will evolve?**

**A:** It's delayed by a year, and COVID is still going on, but we understand it better, have better tools and contingency plans. The first bit, in March 2021, is virtual with teams connected and working through the Innoboard, a digital ideation platform for teams to collaborate and co-create. We will put together teams based on their skills, interests and diversity.

Pitch day is to be a hybrid event, with one person representing each team as we meet in an amphitheatre – keeping numbers within regulations. I hope the environment will still allow for a bit of the "pitch feel" and the energy you get from such an event. Presenting a project while sitting in your kitchen doesn't cut it.

The part where they really work together with each other, supported by coaches, is between April 30 and May 7, so hopefully things will be calmer. However, we have planned it in such a way that we can spread people out, 12 teams of five or six people in separate rooms. They do a bootcamp over an extended weekend and present the work before an expert jury at the end. There will be prizes in the form of support to bring the projects forward, adapted to the project type and maturity. There are no bad ideas – I tell students the biggest risk is to succeed. We're hoping to find ourselves with 10 or so projects to follow and support through the year following the event.

So basically now, we've planned it with a lot of flexibility and pragmatism. If that's what it takes to fulfil our mission and make it happen, that's what we'll do.



Below left:  
A view of a SILAB meeting room.  
Below right:  
The first 6-labs event, October 2020.  
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