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LAUNCHPAD: THE WORLD'S FIRST PRE-INCUBATION ACCELERATOR PROGRAM FOR SPACE
TECHNOLOGY VENTURE CREATION**Abstract**

The NewSpace era is opening up for new potential businesses opportunities, and there is growing interest in working with space entrepreneurship among students. However, a solution is needed that can accelerate the development of the best space-tech ideas and teams at the universities, to a stage where they are mature enough to be part of the European Space Agency's Business Incubation Centre's incubation programs. This paper discusses the conceptualisation, development and preliminary results of the pre-incubation accelerator program for space technology venture creation, LAUNCHPAD.

In collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education and Research and the European Space Agency (ESA), the Danish Technical University (DTU) is responsible for the newly started European Space Agency Business Incubation Centre Denmark (ESA BIC DK). ESA BIC DK is a part of the greater ESA BIC network overseen by ESA Space Solutions. The center is a national space technology incubation center, which through a 2-year incubation program will provide support for new Danish startups that utilise space technology or satellites in a variety of sectors. Through this initiative, ESA BIC DK aims to promote entrepreneurship among students at Danish universities and facilitate the creation of new ventures, which in turn will become part of the ESA BIC DK Incubation program.

To facilitate this development, ESA BIC DK conceptualised and developed a 12-day accelerated pre-incubation program, named LAUNCHPAD. LAUNCHPAD is built on a constellation of tried and tested elements, from programs at MIT, UC Berkeley, Aalborg University and Aarhus University. The program merge creativity and discipline in entrepreneurship in a new way. The focus is put on creativity, fast-pace, discipline, and customer validation.

A pilot was conducted at DTU Skylab, Lyngby, Denmark in August 2020, gathering 40 participants, assembling into 10 startups. The 12-day program resulted in 8 startups pitching in front of a panel of venture capitalists and investors, of which 5 were evaluated to be at an investor-ready level within 6 months. The high potential startups will continue to get business development support, and help with their ESA BIC DK Incubation program application.

In conclusion, the LAUNCHPAD pilot was a success. The program facilitated the creation of high-quality ventures. Minor adjustments will be conducted. A revamped full-scale version will be organised in 2021, and LAUNCHPAD will enter into the ESA BIC DK portfolio of resources offered by the incubator to the Danish innovation ecosystem.