

Women in ZDMP – Daniela Kirchberger

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Some questions for you

- How did you become interested in STEM?
- How has your experience as a woman studying and working in STEM been?
- What is your working field?
- What message would you give young girls?

How did you become interested in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics)? What influenced your decision in taking this career path?

I decided in my last year at the high school to go to university to study mechatronics. It was a huge surprise for my family and friends, as I attended a women's high school at this time, where you become a secretary or bank assistant afterwards. I was interested in how technical things work already before, but when I made my driving license and got my first car, it came to my mind to do "something technical". There was a project at our local university called "women in science" whose objectives are to encourage young girls to study STEM subjects. I visited the open days organized by them and decided to study mechatronics, I have never regretted this decision.



How has your experience as a woman studying and working in STEM been? Have you faced any challenges?

The first years of studying mechatronics turned out to be very hard. Not only to understand the content of the lectures and learning the enormous number of new things itself, but to earn the respect and the acceptance of the professors and male colleagues. Mechatronics has a drop off rate of 50%, so one really needs to be serious with these studies and put a lot of effort in it. As a woman in this sector, you need to have a thick skin, as there are still ignorant people who think you are not able to do this job as a woman.

After I finished my studies, I started working at PROFACTOR [1]. At the beginning I had to gain experience in the activity fields of the company and find my place in it. I am now project leader of national, international, and industrial projects, and especially when I get to know new partners in the industrial field, I still have to prove that I have the competence to lead the project.

What is your working field and position in the ZDMP project and how has this experience been so far?

I am leading WP7 – Process Quality Assurance, the Gender Action Plan team, and I am responsible for the ZDMP Advisory Board. The working atmosphere in ZDMP is very good, people are (mostly) polite and open-minded. It is a very inspiring team and environment for the development of new ideas of any kind.

What message would you give to young girls and women who are interested in pursuing a career in STEM?

Do not let others influence your decision. It is a lot better than in the past for women who decide to choose STEM, but I think there are still people who want to tell you how to live your life and influence you in a certain way. If you are interested in choosing this path, then do it! There are open days at universities specifically for women, where you can get information.

ZDMP Links

• Work Package	WP 13 - Impact
• Tasks	T13.5 Gender activities

References

- [1] www.profactor.at