

Interdisciplinary workshop on  
“Re-configuring ‘expertise’ in times of (digital) disruptions”  
Mainz, April 15th - 17th, 2026

## Outline

In times of multiple crises and deep uncertainties about the future, the role of experts has gained renewed momentum. Experts are requested to give practical advice and orientation in critical moments of decision making. However, what exactly constitutes expertise is subject to intensive and quite controversial debate. While expertise was long understood as a substantive feature of ‘the experts’, recent research in the social sciences conceive of expertise as a relational category, embedded in the moment of making an assessment or giving advice, intended for another actor to implement.

Expertise is usually linked to professional qualification, attributing the status of ‘certified’ experts (e.g. scientists, lawyers, doctors). However, especially due to social media, we are now confronted with a diversity of new actors performing expertise. On the one hand, laypersons partly position themselves deliberately in contrast to traditional experts, for instance by foregrounding personal experience as an indication of own competence, instead of just ‘theoretical’ knowledge. On the other hand, they may function as distributors of certified expertise. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO deliberately approached social media influencers to spread information on the virus and respected measures to a wider audience. Research on “lay expertise” further challenges the epistemic authority of certified expertise by demonstrating the value of integrating experiential (local) knowledge provided by actors “not normally deemed legitimate expert participants in the relevant social domain” (Epstein, 2023).

For expertise to be successfully performed, an extended focus on mediating actors is needed such as media and (digital) technologies. Algorithms can even become “allies” (Allgaier, 2020) in enacting expertise and AI is sometimes even discussed as a non-human expert in its own right. Considering that through digitization anyone can easily spread knowledge claims online, the critical questions of our time are how credibility and authority of expertise are re-negotiated and how expertise can (still) contribute to coping with uncertainties and societal challenges.

The workshop aims at bringing together scholars from different disciplines as well as practitioners to discuss expertise under changing (digital) conditions and in turbulent times of high uncertainties. In four thematic panels, we aim at foregrounding different aspects of the current debate on expertise.

## Organizers

Verena Brinks, Research Group “Digital Cultures”, Institute of Geography, JGU Mainz, Germany  
[verena.brinks@uni-mainz.de](mailto:verena.brinks@uni-mainz.de)

Friedrich Donner, Research Group “Digital Cultures”, Institute of Geography, JGU Mainz, Germany  
[fdonner@uni-mainz.de](mailto:fdonner@uni-mainz.de)

## Session 1

Finding common ground: Reflections on experts and expertise – what is expertise (in your field)? Do existing concepts of expertise still apply? How does the current diagnosis of a crisis of expertise contribute to (new) concepts of expertise? What constitutes 'an expert' in your field?

Panelists: Anna-Maria Asunta Eder, Reiner Grundmann, Melanie Leidecker-Sandmann, Verena Brinks

## Session 2

Expertise and uncertainty: Reflections on the role and limits of expertise in coping with crises, disruptions and uncertainties – How does expertise contribute to critical decision making? How do experts deal with own non-knowledge? What are the limits of expertise? How is legitimacy (and power) of expertise negotiated in society?

Panelists: Amy Donovan, Oliver Ibert, Wouter Lammers, Rolf Lidskog

## Session 3

Expanding expertise: Reflections on new human and non-human actors in performing expertise – In how far do new ('unconventional') experts contribute to (solving) the current 'crisis of expertise'? How does digitization influence expertise and expert roles (e.g. social media, algorithms, AI, collective expertise)? What is the role of media? How to deal with disinformation?

Panelists: Joachim Allgaier, Maximilian Heimstädt, Eva Krick

## Public Keynote: From Monopoly to Multiplicity: Expertise in the 21st Century

Reiner Grundman

Several commentators have declared that expertise is in crisis — some even proclaiming its "death." Proposed causes and remedies vary, yet most share a common assumption: that in complex, policy-relevant matters, scientific experts occupy a central role; that decision-makers should heed their advice; and that experts are losing this influence, with damaging consequences for policy and society.

Drawing on my book *Making Sense of Expertise*, I challenge this standard view through an alternative conceptual framework that distinguishes between different forms of expertise and situates them within broader social change.

I also argue that framing expertise as being "in crisis" is unhelpful. The term implies a temporary disruption that will either resolve into a prior stable order or end in expertise's collapse. Neither captures what is actually happening. Expertise is undergoing reconfiguration. Official expertise faces growing challenges — not only from dissenting scientists, but from citizen expertise and AI systems — yet the impact is uneven across society. At the same time, overall demand for and supply of expertise is expanding, with a far greater diversity of voices participating.

A return to a world in which official expertise holds a monopoly position is, under these conditions, unlikely.

## Session 4

Exploring expertise: Reflections on methodological challenges and innovations in exploring expertise – How can we conduct research on expertise? What are current methodological challenges of exploring expertise (online)? Which new and creative methods can be applied in analysing expertise empirically?

Panelists: Katharina Berr, Friedrich Donner, Søren Lund Frandsen

## Overview Panelists and Affiliations

Joachim Allgaier	University of Applied Sciences Fulda
Katharina Berr	Weizenbaum Institute
Verena Brinks	Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Friedrich Donner	Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Amy Donovan	University of Cambridge
Anna-Maria Asunta Eder	University of Cologne
Søren Lund Frandsen	Copenhagen Business School
Reiner Grundmann	University of Nottingham
Maximilian Heimstädt	Helmut Schmidt University
Oliver Ibert	Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space
Eva Krick	Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Wouter Lammers	KU Leuven
Melanie Leidecker-Sandmann	Karlsruhe Institute of Technology
Rolf Lidskog	Örebro University

## Program

### Venue

Senate Hall, Room 07 232, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Johann-Joachim-Becher-Weg 21, 55128 Mainz;  
Dean's Hall, Room 03 105, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Jakob-Welder-Weg 9, 55128 Mainz

**Date and Location:** Wednesday, April 15th 2026; Senate Hall (Natural Sciences Complex)

Time	Program	Panelists
2 pm	Arrival/ Coffee	
2:30 pm - 3 pm	Introduction to the Workshop	
3 pm - 5 pm	Session 1	Anna-Maria A. Eder, Reiner Grundmann, Melanie Leidecker-Sandmann, Verena Brinks
5 pm	Welcome Reception	

**Date and Location:** Thursday, April 16th 2026; Senate Hall (Natural Sciences Complex)

10 am - 12 am	Session 2	Amy Donovan, Oliver Ibert, Wouter Lammers, Rolf Lidskog
12 am - 1.45 pm	Lunch Break	
1:45 pm - 3:45 pm	Session3	Joachim Allgaier, Maximillian Heimstädt, Eva Krick
3:45 pm - 4:15 pm	Coffee Break	
4:15 pm - 6 pm	Keynote	Reiner Grundmann
7:15 pm	Workshop Dinner	

Location Workshop Dinner: "Weinhaus Michel"; Jakobsbergstraße 8, 55116 Mainz

**Date and Location:** Friday, April 17th 2026; Deans Hall (Law and Economics Building)

10 am - 12 am	Session 4	Katharina Berr, Friedrich Donner, Søren Lund Frandsen
12 am	Light Lunch and Farewell	

The workshop is part of the DFG-funded research project "The relational embeddedness of 'lay experts': Geographies of digitally mediated expertise in time of 'crisis'. More information on the project can be found here: <https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/522487831?language=en>