

Online Workshop, May 27th & 28th 2021

**OBJECTS OF EXPERTISE**  
**THE POLITICS OF SOCIO-MATERIAL EXPERT KNOWLEDGE IN WORLD SOCIETY**

If anything, the Corona pandemic teaches us the profound influence of expertise on our daily life. We are willing to decrease social contacts to a minimum and risk our economic well-being because a distinct group of experts provides us with their, partly competing expert knowledge.

Objects of various sorts – models, curves, masks – play a decisive role here. They serve “as centering and integrating devices” (Knorr Cetina, 1997, p. 9) for research, governance, and public debates; they make tangible what otherwise remains, for many of us, intangible; and yet, they are contested and continually acquire new properties.

While Covid-19 is surely an extreme case, objects of expertise have become central in policy fields as diverse as public health, the environment and security politics. They are currently being studied in multiple disciplines such as International Relations (IR), Public Policy, and Science and Technology Studies.

This workshop aims at exploring several questions, among them, what are the functions and roles of objects of expertise in world politics? Who designs these objects and what are the politics of their creation? What do objects of expertise unveil and what do they black-box? How do objects contribute to create as well as to disturb existing order? How and why do political actors delegate decisions to objects of expertise?

**Practicalities**

- The workshop is held on Zoom. You will receive a separate invitation per email.
- We have no formal discussant to save time and to create a lively discussion. We encourage everyone to take notice of the circulated papers and provide feedback, especially to those that are work in progress.
- Individual papers will be presented for ten minutes, after which there is 20 minutes time for Q&A and comments. We allocated more time for the opening and closing talks to cover some cross-cutting themes.
- As chair you are free to either go for a minimal role and look after the time, or you can structure the discussion and point to emerging themes.
- During the meetings: Please turn your camera on and mute your microphone. If you want to ask a question or make a contribution, please enter an “X” in the chat box or enter the question directly. Please feel free to use the chat box for other communications with the participants.
- This is the workshop #: #objexbielefeld

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021

09:00am – 09:15am	<b>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION</b>	
	<b>Opening-Up Objects of Expertise</b> Alejandro Esguerra and Holger Straßheim, <i>Bielefeld</i>	
09:15am – 10:45am	<b>OBJECTS OF EXPERTISE, OBJECTS OF IGNORANCE</b> CHAIR: DELF ROTHE, <i>IFSH HAMBURG</i>	
	<b>Between Expertise and Ignorance: State Monitoring of Unauthorized Residents</b> Christina Boswell, <i>Edinburgh</i>	
	<b>Unknown and unseen: the ‘not-yet-ness’ of knowledge and the making of governance objects</b> Katharina Glaab, <i>Oslo</i>	
10:45am – 11:15am	Break	
11:15am – 12:15am	<b>ENGINEERING AS WORLD POLITICS</b> CHAIR: THOMAS MÜLLER, <i>BIELEFELD</i>	<b>WHEN OBJECTS OF EXPERTISE TURN DIGITAL</b> CHAIR: AUDREY ALEJANDRO, <i>LSE</i>
	<b>Making the global climate malleable: the implications of geoengineering for the structure of the international system</b> Olaf Corry, <i>Leeds</i>	<b>Planet Politics 4.0: EU Copernicus and the imaginary of a 'Digital Twin Earth'</b> Delf Rothe, <i>IFSH Hamburg</i>
	<b>Making instruments of intervention - the international politics of climate engineering expertise</b> Ann-Kathrin Benner, <i>IFSH Hamburg</i>	<b>Producing Truths in the Global Factory: Digital Supply Chain Management Tools as Objects of Human Rights Expertise</b> Christian Scheper, <i>Duisburg</i>
12:15am – 01:15pm	Break	
01:15pm – 02:15pm	<b>AMBIGUANCES OF OBJECT PERFORMATIVITY</b> CAIR: STEFAN AYKUT, <i>HAMBURG</i>	<b>SEMANTIC OBJECTS OF POLICY ADVICE</b> CHAIR: LAURA PANTZERHIELM, <i>DRESDEN</i>
	<b>Numbers as Artefacts. The Performativity of Quantification</b> Katja Freistein, <i>GCR Duisburg</i>	<b>The ambivalent promise of narrative: reflections on a new governing tool in policy advice and communication</b> Frank Gadinger, <i>GCR Duisburg</i> and Sebastian Jarzebski, <i>Neues Handeln</i>
	<b>Keeping military expenditure data ambivalent: how states influence the form of number games in world politics</b> Thomas Müller, <i>Bielefeld</i>	<b>Boundary objects of expertise: Evidence instruments and their constituencies</b> Arno Simons, <i>DZHW Berlin</i>
02:15pm – 02:45pm	Break	
02:45pm – 04:00pm	<b>HISTORIES OF EXPERTISE</b> CHAIR: KATHARINA GLAAB, <i>OSLO</i>	
	<b>On magic bullets and the rise of modern international expertise: Policy designs against cholera at the International Sanitary Conference of 1892</b> Luis Aue, <i>WZB Berlin</i>	
	<b>Designating the climate: The geopolitics of climate science, 1945-1961</b> Bentley Allan, <i>Johns Hopkins</i>	
09:00pm – 09:30pm	<b>ONLINE GET TOGETHER: BIELEFELD IN A BOX</b>	

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2021

09:00am – 09:15am **IDENTIFYING CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**  
ALEJANDRO ESGUERRA AND HOLGER STRASHEIM, *BIELEFELD*

09:15 – 10:45am **INFRASTRUCTURING WORLD POLITICS**  
CHAIR: OLAF CORRY, *LEEDS*

**Oceans, Objects and Infrastructures**

Christian Bueger, *Copenhagen*

**Training certificates Infrastructuring ICT Expertise**

Anna Leander, *Geneva*

10:45am – 11:15am Break

11:15am – 12:45pm **REPRESENTING OBJECTS IN DISCOURSE**  
CHAIR: KATJA FREISTEIN, *GCR DUISBURG*

**WHEN OBJECTS MAKE FUTURES**  
CHAIR: Christian Scheper, *Duisburg*

**How International Organizations turned a genital Ritual into a Global Health Policy: The resemantisation of male circumcision as a practice of world politics**

Audrey Alejandro and Joshua Feldman, *LSE*

**Predictive policy assemblages**

Stefan Aykut, *Hamburg*

**A risky object? How microplastics are represented in German media**

Ruth Müller and Sarah Schönbauer, *Munich*

**IPCC as “Map-Maker”**

Silke Beck, *UFZ Leipzig*

**Knowing and Governing through Human Rights: The UN ‘Human Rights Based Approach to Programming’ as an Object of Expertise**

Laura Pantzerhielm, *Dresden*

**Carbon Budgeting: Assembling the Future and Assigning Responsibility in a Warming World**

Eva Lövbrand, *Linköping* and Johannes Stripple, *Lund*  
| cancelled

12:45pm – 01:45pm Break

01:45pm – 02:45pm **REFLECTION: OBJECTS, EXPERTISE AND WORLD SOCIETY**  
CHAIR: MATHIAS ALBERT, *BIELEFELD*

**Expert knowledge in World Society - an institutional view**

Ole Jacob Sending, *Oslo*

**Publication Strategy**

All Participants

## Toward a Conceptualization of Objects of Expertise

This workshop gives center stage to objects of expertise and the ways in which they are involved in the politics of world society. Expertise is usually defined as specialized knowledge that has gained authority by both professionals and political actors (Strassheim, 2015). Epistemic communities hold such “recognized expertise” within a particular domain (Haas, 1992, p. 16). International organizations, for instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) ground their authority on specialized knowledge (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). Extending these conventional theories of expertise, objects of expertise, in a first approximation, can be defined as an array of socio-material entities that constitute specialized knowledge, and that is used and (collaboratively) worked on to convince both professionals and political actors of claims to expertise.

Two developments in current theorizing motivate this workshop. First, recent advances in International Relations (IR) have conceptualized problem construction as a process of constituting objects (Allan, 2018; Corry, 2013; Lövbrand and Stripple, 2011; Sending, 2015). Collectively, this body of work suggests viewing problems of world politics such as the corona pandemic, or the depletion of the ozone layer not as given but as something that is rendered known and governable through distinct practices. For climate change, Lövbrand and Stripple (2011, p. 188) draw attention to the “seemingly humble and mundane mechanisms (e.g. techniques of notation, accounting, auditing) that have turned carbon” into a coherent object of governance. Foregrounding objects poses the question by which means objects emerge, how they gain attention, and how they attract efforts of governing. In other words, conventional approaches examine how, for instance, an epistemic community knows of an object and how its members channel this knowledge into policy processes. In contrast, studying world politics as an assembly of objects means investigating how expert knowledge takes part in constituting objects such as the “ozone” including the practices, institutions, technologies, etc. From an object centered perspective, the question is “how those elements are combined into stable configurations that constitute the landscape of problems and issues” (Allan, 2018, p. 16).

While some objects of expertise are relatively stable, others are in a state of indeterminacy (Knorr Cetina, 1997); they are objects-in-formation (Laube et al., 2020). Enigmatic and elusive on first encounter, they develop their status gradually over time, by prompting decisions and demanding positionings. The current corona pandemic can serve again as useful reference. On 11 February 2020, the WHO announced a name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19. Since then, virologists but also social psychologists and legal experts continue to characterize COVID 19 and its effects. An object of expertise is in the making.

The second development concerns the interest in the socio-material dimension of expertise and its artifacts. Early work in STS has laid out in detail how scientific knowledge production depends on and is intertwined with the material environment of the laboratory including instruments, inscription devices, model organisms etc. (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Latour and Woolgar, 1979). Recent scholarship has mobilized these insights to study governing practices (Aykut, forthcoming; Bueger, 2015; Voß and Freeman, 2016). Among other things, artifacts of knowledge such as indicators, models, or surveys have been analyzed to study the political work of these objects of expertise (Boswell, 2018; Freistein, 2016). An intriguing example relates to the rise of scenarios. The IPCC, in particular, has developed a new generation of emissions scenarios that involve highly problematic speculative technologies, a fact that often goes unnoticed (Beck and Mahony, 2018). Thus, such objects are part and parcel not only of describing a reality but bringing possible futures about (Aykut et al., 2019; Esguerra, 2019). Others have highlighted how digital supply chain management tools – from sustainability management software to so-called ‘worker voice tools’ – begin to monitor ecological and social impacts of business operations (Scheper, 2015, forthcoming). These tools or devices transform how governing is realized. In security politics, advertising tracking devices are a means to deepen the grip of military security matters (Leander, 2019). Security expertise can be contained in, reproduced by, and disseminated through a material object such as SanctionsApp (Biersteker, 2018), or satellites (Rothe, 2017). Perhaps, what unites this scholarship is an interest in the ways in which objects of expertise co-produce political order. While objects might appear as apolitical tools, they are performative as they suggest and form specific policies.

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