MIND FOUNDATION

Ten years – the twenty before them – and what a psychedelically inspired culture of consciousness could look like ten years from now

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On November 26, 2026, the MIND Foundation officially turns ten. The anniversary year opens on October 2 with Rolf Verres – physician, psychologist, pianist, and for twenty-two years Medical Director of the Institute of Medical Psychology at Heidelberg University Hospital – reading from his new book, Drogen und die Kunst zu leben ("Drugs and the Art of Living," Schattauer). The series "10 Years of the MIND Foundation" runs through April 2027. This first post explains why we begin with Heidelberg rather than Berlin, and with a book and a person rather than a balance sheet. The balance sheet will come too – in the form of the 10-Year Impact Report.

A Line That Runs to the Present – Without a Founding Myth

Organizations like to tell their story starting from the date of their founding. Ours begins earlier, and elsewhere. In 1985, the Göttingen psychiatrist Hanscarl Leuner – who had worked with LSD in psychotherapy since the 1950s and had also developed Guided Affective Imagery – co-founded the European College for the Study of Consciousness (ECBS), a deliberately multidisciplinary association. Our guest, Rolf Verres, was there from the start. Trained in medicine at Heidelberg University and in behavioral therapy at Stanford under the pioneering social psychologist Albert Bandura, he was looking for a field that would not force him to choose between depth and surface, and that was still open enough to be shaped. Under his leadership, between 1991 and 2013, the Heidelberg institute became one of the few places in German university medicine where altered states of consciousness could be discussed and researched without apology or quasi-religious embellishment.

In 1996, Rolf Verres organized the second ECBS congress – “Welten des Bewusstseins” (Worlds of Consciousness) – in Heidelberg. That is where we met. Counting my student years, I went on to work at the institute for eighteen years, first as a music therapist and doctoral candidate in medical psychology, then as a researcher and lecturer. Heidelberg University’s motto, semper apertus (always open), was not decoration at the Institute of Medical Psychology but a lived working culture. And Heidelberg had an older history with psychoactive substances, too: in the 1920s, Willy Mayer-Gross and Kurt Beringer had studied mescaline and other substances at the Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic. A few hundred meters from our offices, moreover, Karl Jaspers had insisted in 1913 that a patient’s experience must first be described before it is explained. When Rolf Verres and I later presented our own project in the university’s research magazine, we placed it in this lineage (Jungaberle & Verres, 2003; see also Jungaberle et al., 2008).

Salutogenesis as a Radical Working Orientation

If one idea traveled intact from Heidelberg to the MIND Foundation in Berlin, it is salutogenesis. I debated it, in concept and in data, with medical students, and I measured the salutogenic “sense of coherence” in longitudinal studies (Kröninger-Jungaberle & Grevenstein, 2013). Aaron Antonovsky did not ask what makes people ill but what keeps them healthy under strain – and his answer was precisely this sense of coherence: the experience that one’s own world can be perceived as comprehensible, manageable, and, above all, meaningful (Antonovsky, 1987). In medical psychology, this question sits exactly at the interface that George Engel described as the biopsychosocial model – biological, psychological, and social processes as mutually constitutive, not as separate departments of a material and a mental world (Engel, 1977).

Beginning in 2002, Rolf Verres and I applied this orientation to a subject that medicine had until then approached almost exclusively through the lens of how illness develops – pathogenesis. The RISA study – “Ritual Dynamics and Salutogenesis in the Use and Abuse of Psychoactive Substances” – was a subproject of Heidelberg’s Collaborative Research Center 619, “Ritual Dynamics” (2002–2013), in which scholars from history, religious studies, anthropology, and medicine worked on shared questions with different instruments. And there we were – the medical-psychology exotics in a largely cultural-studies environment. Our question was easy to ask and hard to answer: Why does drug use lead some people into misery, while others remain occasional users for decades and experience inner and outer growth along the way? We looked for the resources and competencies that enable people to deal consciously with risks, and we understood rituals not as archaic relics or the romantic games of lonely postmoderns, but as social techniques that create norm- and value-guided spaces for action and experience – and that can, in doing so, reduce harm. In this reading, abuse often appears as the product of dysfunctional “rituals” – behaviors embedded in strong contexts that steer the individual – or else as a weakly “ritualized” pattern of use (Jungaberle & Verres, 2003; Jungaberle et al., 2006).

The method followed the question. RISA combined questionnaires, interviews, group discussions, participant observation, and film recordings, and it followed individual case histories for up to ten years. Our declared principle: watch, stay open to the participants' view of the world, hold theories in abeyance. This phenomenologically inspired habit, oriented toward mixed methods – the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches – is the second thing that traveled to Berlin. It is the reason the MIND Foundation has never settled for a purely pharmacological, neurobiological, or – on the other side – philosophical explanation of people's circumstances, behaviors, and states of consciousness. What psychedelics do with people – and what people do with psychedelics – deserves, in our view, a transdisciplinary gaze that accepts practice and theory as two ways of being in the world, without arriving prematurely at convictions and truths (Jungaberle et al., 2018).

There is a third legacy, one that is named less often: a self-reflexive stance. Rolf Verres has never pretended to study psychoactive substances only from the outside. As he described the manuscript while he was still writing it, the book contains two consecutive chapters – one on why he is grateful to these substances, and one on why he no longer uses them. In our conversation for MIND Magazine in September 2025, he used the well-known phrase "controlled loss of control" to describe his own relationship with psychoactive substances – a formula that names attraction and discipline in the same breath. A science of consciousness that cannot say where its researchers stand is not more objective. It is merely less transparent – and less relevant.

What Traveled to Berlin

In 2013, still at the institute, I founded FINDER e.V. with colleagues – at first to take REBOUND, a life-skills program that had grown out of an EU project I led, out of the academic "laboratory" and into people's real lives. On November 26, 2016, the MIND Foundation began as a project within FINDER, which I chaired for seven years; in March 2020, its activities passed entirely to the newly founded MIND Foundation gGmbH.

From the start, I had set myself a horizon of twenty years and divided it in two. The first decade was to belong, wherever possible, to clinical research and clinical training – to the careful, critical initiation of dialogues and debates. That has largely been delivered: through four major conferences – the Drug Science Conference 2017 and the INSIGHT Conferences of 2019, 2021, and 2023 – with participants and partners from more than forty universities; through our now internationally known training in psychedelic therapy, the Augmented Psychotherapy Training (Gründer & Jungaberle, 2021); and through our involvement in the EPIsoDE trial of psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression, led by MIND co-shareholder Gerhard Gründer at the Central Institute of Mental Health in Mannheim and at the Charité (Mertens et al., 2026). Who trains the therapists who are supposed to work with these substances? The U.S. Food and Drug Administration put that question to a public hearing in September 2026. For us, it also has a biographical answer: a line of training that runs from Leuner through Verres into the seminar rooms of the APT. Rolf Verres accompanied this decade from the background – and the salutogenic orientation he helped shape is something I brought early into all of our projects.

The ninth international APT cohort starts on November 7, 2026, in Berlin – applications close October 15.

A Book That Keeps the Memory

Drogen und die Kunst zu leben: Orientierungshilfen zum Umgang mit psychoaktiven Substanzen ("Drugs and the Art of Living: Guidance for Dealing with Psychoactive Substances"; Verres, 2026) was published on September 12. The title picks up Verres's earlier book Die Kunst zu leben ("The Art of Living") on cancer and the psyche (Verres, 2003). The new book draws on decades of conversations with people about

their experiences with cannabis, LSD, MDMA, mescaline, and ayahuasca, and on the author's medical, scientific, and psychotherapeutic practice. It neither glorifies nor demonizes. It asks what people seek in these substances, where risks begin, what dose, set, setting, and ritual actually mean and do – and how, out of all this, a stance of one's own can develop that is sober and workable in everyday life. Its extensive chapter on longing, fulfillment, substitute gratification, and escape carries RISA's question to a general readership.

For the MIND Foundation, the book has a further significance. Rolf Verres was a friend of Albert Hofmann, the discoverer of LSD, whom he met when Hofmann was already past eighty. He opened a door to Albert Hofmann for me as well – and he worked with Leuner, with the consciousness researcher Ralph Metzner, and with the psychiatrist Stanislav Grof. Leuner, Hofmann, and Metzner are no longer alive. What remains of that generation's questions, errors, and achievements has, in part, become a matter of memory and critical analysis – and Rolf Verres has written down and appraised many of those memories. In this sense, the book is also a piece of the MIND Foundation's prehistory, kept by someone who was there before us and has stayed connected to us all along.

- **The book: "Drogen und die Kunst zu leben" at the publisher's site (in German)**

The MIND Foundation's Second Decade: Shaping – and Enduring – the Tension Between Clinical Practice and Community Mental Health

Clinical mental health remains the focus of our work. The road through phase 1 to phase 3 trials toward approval and reimbursement of psychedelic therapy is not finished, and we intend to keep walking it (Gründer et al., 2026). But the salutogenic question does not end at the clinic door. Most people who seek altered states of consciousness have no diagnosis – and the spaces in which they do so have multiplied: enormously varied in quality, idealized or commercially exploited, consciously designed or assembled from a multitude of scientific, cultural, and esoteric contexts.

In the second decade, we are therefore adding a community mental health pillar to the clinical pillar of our organization – for mental health outside the clinic, in communities and everyday spaces. We are currently discussing numerous study ideas that we want to implement with university partners around the world. Whether these will become longitudinal studies, platform trials, or program evaluations – or all of the above – we do not yet know. How can psychedelic experiences be offered safely, purposefully, and at the same time open-mindedly in spaces that are not clinical – with the clinical system as a reliable point of reference rather than the only legitimate frame? How can a rigorous yet context-sensitive science of human flourishing with psychedelic experiences be built?

The bridge between clinical mental health and community mental health matters: these substances can bring material to the surface that is deeply distressing, and a structured medical setting with responsible therapists is the right place for some processes that begin elsewhere.

What we mean by community mental health goes back to a long tradition, but it also lies close to what Rolf Verres and I have discussed since 2002 under the heading of integration: the fit between a boundary experience and a person's self-image and everyday life. The fit between experience and the fulfillment of lifelong basic needs. The tension between ecstasy and social responsibility. The possible existential depth of psychedelic adventures versus the possible shallowness of "consuming" these molecules. Without integration as a value and an orientation, an experience is simply over.

I would add that integration should be discussed far more often together with integrity – with a person's awareness of their own motives, of the ever-present danger of self-deception and the self-serving distortion of how we perceive the world, and with the willingness to bring individual experiences into social contact

in a way that others can bear. A culture of consciousness in Thomas Metzinger's sense begins where we stop believing ourselves and the grand myths and instead invest in the phenomenological process of self-observation – paying sufficient attention, along the way, to the often perception-distorting urgings of our self-regard (Metzinger, 2023). And the risk we have also named is real: a society in which far more people have these experiences can lose its appetite for rational argument and public negotiation – as many subcultures of the 1960s and 1970s showed when they preferred the overwhelming "experience" to the corrective of reason and, not infrequently, slid into credulity and deference to authority. A community mental health pillar built by a science organization is, among other things, our answer to this risk. One of the MIND Foundation's six values, the scientific approach – scientific rigor and critical thinking – reminds us to hold in suspension the things we cannot know for certain, rather than escaping into powerful metaphysical patterns of explanation.

The INSIGHT Conference in its tenth-anniversary edition will mark the formal start of this second pillar. The series that begins on October 2 is the run-up.

The Evening

Like every event in the series at the INSIGHT Forum, the evening has three parts. It begins on Friday, October 2, 2026, at 6:15 p.m. with the Transratio: Rolf Verres and I open a musical-poetic space between piano and word, so that listening comes before speaking. At 7:10 p.m. the Ratio follows: Rolf Verres reads from his book and then talks with Andrea Jungaberle and me about the personalities and moments that have shaped psychedelic research and therapy over the past decades. From 8:30 p.m. the Communitas follows: the evening belongs to the audience – open exchange with the author and with one another. Afterwards, Rolf Verres will sign his book.

The evening will be held in German, at the MIND Foundation's premises, Boxhagener Straße 78, 10245 Berlin. Doors open at 6:00 p.m.; tickets are €15, and reduced tickets are available. Seating is limited.

Get your ticket for October 2

Further events in the series "10 Years of the MIND Foundation" will be announced on an ongoing basis – the quickest way to hear about them is our newsletter.

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