

About Me

My name is Jens Kober, and I am 44 years old. I grew up near Stuttgart and have lived/worked/studied internationally in the US, Kenya, France, and worked for the last 11 years at TU Delft in the Netherlands. Six months ago, I joined the University of Stuttgart as a full professor and additionally spend one day per week at Fraunhofer IPA.

My research focuses on machine learning and AI for robot manipulation, with a particular interest in enabling domain experts without a robotics background to efficiently teach robots new skills.



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Why I Want to Become a Board Member

Alongside my research, I have always invested significant time in community building. Working at the intersection of robotics and machine learning, I have been active in both fields and often served as a bridge between them.

My service activities include editorial and organizational roles across major robotics and machine learning venues. From 2016 to 2021, I co-chaired the IEEE RAS Technical Committee on Robot Learning, helping to build the community during a period of rapid growth.

In 2020, I co-founded the ELLIS Unit Delft and served as co-director until leaving Delft. My main goal was to bring together machine learning researchers across faculties, connect fundamental and applied research, and strengthen links with industry. The unit has since grown into one of the largest in the ELLIS network. Since 2023, I have served as Secretary of the Robot Learning Foundation, helping shape the future of the Conference on Robot Learning for both academia and industry.

I have also gained practical experience in governance and financial management. I served on the board of a semi-professional classical choir, where I was involved in concert organization, and I managed finances for the IEEE International Conference on Advanced Intelligent Mechatronics (2021) and Robotics: Science and Systems (2024), both hosted in Delft. To support these events, we established a local non-profit foundation, for which I served as Treasurer. I particularly enjoyed budgeting, bookkeeping, financial oversight, and navigating tax and compliance requirements.

These experiences motivate my candidacy for the role of Treasurer. More broadly, I am passionate about supporting scientific communities and have substantial experience in leadership, organization, and community development.

Ideas for DGR

Interest in robotics is growing rapidly, yet it remains surprisingly difficult to identify the right expertise for specific challenges. DGR is uniquely positioned to create a comprehensive map of the German robotics ecosystem, highlighting expertise across academia and industry. Such a resource would not only increase Germany's international visibility but also facilitate matchmaking for research collaborations, innovation projects, and industrial applications. Beyond providing information, DGR should serve as an active connector between requests and the most suitable members.

I strongly believe that in-person networking is essential for building a thriving community. My vision is therefore not only an annual German Robotics Conference but also dedicated activities for younger roboticists. DGR could support students from high school through PhD level by connecting them with mentors and by organizing boot camps, summer schools, and competition-related activities.

Finally, the board alone cannot build a national community. DGR should quickly establish an active network of working groups focused on events, roadmaps, advocacy, communication, ecosystem mapping, and industry-academia collaboration. I would also like to support the development of regional DGR chapters that bring roboticists together through local activities and events.