

An ever-faster blog?

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2021-04-05T09:00:28

A year ago, the world stood still. Germany – like most European countries – had just entered its first Corona-lockdown. We all went through many different phases since, and this is also visible to some extent on Völkerrechtsblog. While at the beginning as editors we felt almost paralyzed by the situation and decided to slow things down – how to continue business as usual while the whole world was in a state of emergency? –, with time we needed to find a working mode in the pandemic, and gradually also started to engage *with* the pandemic. Almost exactly one year ago, we published a Call for Contributions for a symposium on [“International Law in Pandemic Times”](#) that prompted considerable response. Just like us editors, many authors seemed to feel the urge to overcome the first moments of paralysis and to digest their experience of the pandemic by engaging with it through their disciplinary lens.

The more the merrier?

Interestingly, despite the challenges the pandemic poses on so many levels, ever since we have been receiving a growing amount of submissions and publish a still increasing number of articles every month. Since [our relaunch](#) last autumn, in addition to text-based articles, we now (re-)publish [media content](#) – a very timely addition to our blog in times when unprecedented numbers of talks, conferences, lectures are recorded. Earlier this year, we even started to produce our own [podcast](#). Völkerrechtsblog in 2021 is as rich and colorful as never before.

However, we are also aware that many academics cannot work as they used to in pre-pandemic times, because of care duties, because of the emotional and psychological stress, or simply due to Corona fatigue more generally. Already weeks after the first wave of the pandemic, first studies showed that female researchers were publishing less in this period than their male counterparts, as mainly women were taking up the increased childcare duties (see e.g. [here](#)). This is but one example; after one year we all know that the pandemic affects different groups of people differently and further [increases existing inequalities](#) – also in academia.

But the unusual year has not only shown discrepancies in additional care duties and, correspondingly, in productivity – it has also made many academics question the hasty schedules that pre-pandemically seemed the unchangeable rule. We have heard many times from colleagues – and we’ve said ourselves – that all these cancelled conferences and interrupted travel plans also made us more aware of the toll that the regular academic speed was taking on us. It has been a year of new pressures, but also of an interruption of some previous modes of pressure. For many, it has been a year of increased introspection about how we want to work if we can choose freely.

The chances and challenges of faster publishing

As blog editors, we also have been asking ourselves about the role of the blog in this development. With the ever-faster publication rhythm, is Völkerrechtsblog part of an overall acceleration process that is becoming at times unhealthy? One year into the pandemic, it seems a good moment for a critical introspection/self-reflection on the role of the blog in the current publication landscape.

Thinking about our own role and place in the scholarly system, we inevitably look back to our beginnings. The blog has been around for seven years now. We set off to do things differently than many traditional publication formats: to break with rigid hierarchies, to open up discourses and lower barriers in the academic publishing system – a system that still tends to fortify the dominance of voices from wealthy institutions in the so-called Global North and to exclude others. Very much in line with early Open Access enthusiasts (see e.g. the [Budapest Open Access Initiative](#)), we considered the internet to be a space of opportunities for a fairer and more democratic system of knowledge production and dissemination.

We have come a long way in these seven years, and we think that it is no overstatement to say that we have contributed, in modest ways, to opening up and diversifying discourses in international legal scholarship. We do not only provide Open Access to peer-reviewed academic articles (read here our Open Access Statement); we also actively seek to diversify the authorship on the blog in terms of gender, geographic representation and age.

The skepticism and criticism blogs were facing in early years seem hardly imaginable today (see a nice overview of the development [here](#) (in German)). For a while, blogs were at best seen as rebels with refreshing ideas, but not as serious academic formats. Today, blogs are part and parcel of the scholarly publication system and occupy an important role in accompanying legal developments more directly than print publications can. Blogs have also contributed to an understanding of science as a continuous and collaborative process – the short and flexible blog format allows testing ideas and receiving feedback in comments or responses.

Yet there are also risks. We listen carefully to debates about a neoliberalization of academia, and the attention economy as one aspect therein. We see the task to collectively resist an ever-growing pressure to produce output and impact, and we take seriously the questions this raises for blogs: above all the question of the right pace. While we don't think that less traditional formats or the sharing of research with a general audience are per se at odds with serious scholarship (in that connection, see e.g. [this](#) debate on Twitter recently, prompted by [this article](#) (both in German)), the line between the emancipatory aspects of blogging and the co-optation by a problematic academic acceleration can seem thin. Who is able to keep track of and read all that is being written, or listen to everything that is being streamed and recorded nowadays?

More content, better structures – and still a slow blog

At times, it feels like the carousel is spinning too fast. Not only are our resources to respond to submissions and assure a careful editing process limited. But we also

wonder about what amount of content is right for our readership, and how to assume a responsible role in the overall structures of academic publishing.

One year of the pandemic, and seven years since our foundation, we do not have final answers to these questions. In discussing them, we often return to a self-description from the first years – the time of setting up our internal structures: we then coined the expressions of offering a space for a “second round of reflection” and of being a “slow blog”. A “second round of reflection” meant that we were aiming less for an immediate appraisal of judgments or political events, but rather for blog posts that reflected about wider implications, with a little delay and having seen the first reactions. Calling ourselves a “slow blog” furthermore meant that we adopted a system of peer reviews and of a careful editing process for each text. And “slow blogging” expressed our vision of combining the promises of more spontaneous academic writing with the attention to quality and careful crafting of content.

Today, our “slow blog” has become much faster. The professionalization that has been possible thanks to the [support by the DFG](#), but also the years of experience and the incredible energy of the team have made the blog run more smoothly – and have made the amount of content grow. Four years ago, we were sometimes wondering how to fill the blog – now we are often wondering how to fit in all the content without overloading us and readers. In this period of academic self-reflection, we seek to re-embrace the vision of a slow blog, without doing away with all the new and fabulous possibilities. We make an effort to give priority to quality over quantity. Our vision is academic writing that not only produces but engages.

In this endeavor, we would love to hear from you – about your visions for academic publishing, and your ideas how to balance openness and all the possibilities for academic content with a healthy speed.

