

Völkerrechtsblog at 10 Years

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Saying that *Völkerrechtsblog* is a remarkable success story is not an empty phrase we utter on its 10th anniversary. Looking at the blog today, it is hard to believe that it started as a project initiated by a group of PhD students at a kitchen table. Dana has been one of the three co-founders, Raffaella joined briefly after. Having worked in journalism during law school, she felt a strong attraction to the dynamic format. Both of us remember the times with a relatively tiny team and when the blog operated on a very rudimentary WordPress platform. It is hard to put into words what the blog means to us – we academically grew up with the blog, so to speak. It is, therefore, much more than yet another project – it is the context in which we developed as scholars, sharpened our writing skills, and reached out to other scholars, often shyly and hesitantly at first. The blog provided a space for us to be creative, to test ideas, and to set up projects independently.

Importantly, the blog was also the place where we found community, something we felt particularly during the pandemic. Thinking back to the many years we were actively involved also means remembering the many lively discussions and lovely encounters at the Humboldt University during our team meetings, often [continued](#) around food and drinks as the day went on. If we were to name the main factors for the blog's success, the wonderful team and the team spirit that always accompanied the blog's work would feature on top of the list.

While we grew older, the blog also grew and matured. One of the motivations for founding the blog in 2014 was to use the new spaces the internet provided for international legal scholarship. Alongside the joy to experiment also came the wish to challenge and stretch the existing publication formats. Books, journal articles, edited volumes, Festschriften – while our intention was not to question their importance for legal scholarship, our impression was that many of those formats were insufficiently inclusive. They would often build on hierarchies, accepting authors based on their career level. They would also favor authors from established circles without much access from lesser-known colleagues. And particularly in international legal scholarship, the discussion often remained astonishingly non-international.

So in some way, the pursuit of the blog was to provide a forum that was open also to younger scholars, without even emphasizing differences of seniority. It was to provide a forum which colleagues could join without being specifically invited, simply by submitting their blog posts. The blog was also meant to work towards making the international legal debate more international and more diverse, especially by including more voices from the Global South.

Surely, much of these ideas also took shape over time – it might have just started with a sense of rebellion and gained more reflection in the course of the years.

There certainly was a sense of rebellion, also because legal blogs faced [opposition](#) in those first years that today is hardly imaginable anymore. The shorter format and different tone made blogs appear not academic enough to many. Several years later, with blogs being cited inter alia by the German Federal Constitutional Court, those objections have faded.

Even in this initial phase of skepticism, there were also those who hailed blogs as pioneers in the ongoing digitalization and as “[glimmers of hope](#)” in the transition to Open Access. This transition remains bumpy and slow in a discipline that is strongly attached to its traditional publication modes. But it also takes place with significant questions.

Digitalization comes not only with the potential to include but also with a significant risk for new exclusions (see e.g. [here](#)). Regarding access to scholarly publications, commercial publishers have undertaken an “economic re-interpretation” of Open Access, charging authors for publishing instead of readers for access (see [here](#), p. 16). This, however, is only shifting the problem rather than solving it and tends to create new exclusions. Today, the question is no longer how digitalization and the transition to Open Access can be achieved but how it can be achieved in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

To us, Open Access always meant more than simply making scholarship freely available over the internet – it starts with the very knowledge production and also means including voices and perspectives, something the blog has been committed to since its beginning, as mentioned above. We are convinced that actors such as *Völkerrechtsblog* remain important in the struggle for openness and a more equitable and inclusive academic landscape in international law.

Growing and maturing also came with a certain professionalization. Over the years, the editorial team drastically expanded, the workflow became more efficient and streamlined, and the blog even adopted a legal form as a “Verein” (association) under German law. And of course, the appearance of the blog became more professional and modern – and with that, the work “behind the scenes” more complex and demanding.

With the growth and increased visibility of the blog, also new challenges emerged. As co-editors in chief, crisis management became part of our tasks. More than once, we woke up discovering that posts on controversial topics had gone viral; we were also confronted with allegations of plagiarism against authors on the blog.

In some ways, the blog began struggling with its own success: With massively growing numbers of submissions to the blog, its running and everyday business became ever more time-consuming and demanding. As a consequence, we were also confronted with pressing financing issues, and with finding a fair and feasible equilibrium between voluntary and paid work.

Not least, the blog’s success also means that it has become involved in the dynamics of “publish and perish”, something we have [critically reflected on](#) already earlier. As blogging is the new normal and an integral part of scholarly

communication, it also has been added to the expectations scholars can face. After important international judgments or other relevant developments, scholars and blogs today often feel compelled to provide commentary, preferably as fast as possible. Such first reactions on blogs can be informative for scholarly debate and provide a broader public with expert knowledge – but they should not become yet another type of “output” required by evaluation metrics. We hope that blogs will continue to critically self-reflect on their role in such “economization” of academia.

Despite our strong identification with *Völkerrechtsblog*, it was a positive experience for us to hand over the role as editors-in-chief and to leave the editorial team. Knowing that the blog is in good hands made this decision easier. It had been evident that the blog has its own strong dynamic, with countless initiatives and projects emerging from the team such as the [Völkerrechtspodcast](#). After leaving the editorial team, we remain committed as enthusiastic readers (and board members). Observing the blog’s path for the next 10 years will be fascinating – we have absolutely no worries that the *Völkerrechtsblog* will lose momentum.

