



Conference

Opening Access, Closing the Knowledge Gap? International Legal Scholarship Going Online

International law is, by definition, a global discipline. Yet in practice, scholarly discourse often remains hampered by the borders of national publishing cultures and fora. The voices that are most audible internationally often come from the same (Western) elite institutions. The internet with its unprecedented communicative potential offers a unique chance to make international legal scholarship more inclusive, participatory – and simply more international. Nonetheless, old dynamics of center and periphery have not been overcome. The COVID-19 pandemic further increased the use of digital technologies for global scientific exchange and collaborations, highlighting their potential and revitalizing debates about open access (OA) and inequalities in knowledge production and dissemination. For those engaged in Open Access debates, the steps taken by publishers and academic institutions during the pandemic showcased the wealth of available possibilities - and their promise for advancing international legal scholarship.

It remains to be seen whether the pandemic will bring the long-predicted “access revolution”, in other words, whether it will have lasting effects in terms of opening up science. It may well be that the lifting of paywalls, which many publishers have undertaken to facilitate access to science in the age of working from home, and the invention of open COVID licenses will turn out to be only temporary phenomena. Undeniably, however, the pandemic is a gamechanger in that it shows that change is possible - and that it can happen very fast. Many things that seemed impossible not so long ago became reality within months.

After nearly two years of online teaching, zoom conferences and writing sprints on the web, it is a good moment to discuss the chances and challenges of the digitalization of international legal scholarship. Is the digitalization of scholarly communication a chance to include more voices and perspectives and to finally overcome the multiple existing barriers? In other words, are we on the verge of realizing the utopia of a global, democratic, and equitable system of knowledge production and diffusion, as propagated by early open access enthusiasts? Or, on the contrary, does the current development further contribute to neoliberal performance absolutism in science and produce new exclusions?

As a digital publication format which has aimed to contribute to overcoming obstacles of traditional publishing and to foster transboundary discourses in international law since 2014, Völkerrechtsblog is pleased to organize a conference on open access and global justice. The conference will explore and further theorize the effects of the digitalization of scholarly communication on international legal scholarship by bringing together different perspectives and experiences. While contributions discussing experiences during the pandemic are welcome, the framework is broader. We are particularly interested in voices from the “Global South”. Where do scholars, blog and journal editors, librarians, teachers, and platform providers see the chances and where limits of digitalization for scholarly communication in international law? We want to question, discuss, and critically analyze the conditions and infrastructure of scholarly communication in international legal scholarship.

Submissions on any of the following topics are welcome:

1) Access to scientific literature/information:

To what extent do paywalls inhibit transnational scholarly discourses? Can OA be a tool to close the “knowledge gap” and internationalize scholarly discourses in international law? Can it even increase the legitimacy of international law as such? What are OA practices in different countries and on different continents? What are possible downsides of OA (e.g. new exclusions with business models charging authors rather than readers)?

2) Publishing infrastructure/scholarly communication: journals

How do journals shape international legal discourses? Do they perpetuate inequalities by upholding the prevalence of dominating voices? Are “citation cartels” an issue, if so, how can they be overcome? Other questions: Predominance of the English language and specific writing styles to the detriment of others/diversity; mainstream vs. niche topics.

3) Publishing infrastructure/scholarly communication: blogs

In a self-reflective and self-critical exercise, we are also interested in reflections about the role of blogs in international law. Often having started as alternatives to traditional journals, have they succeeded in breaking up old structures and hierarchies and enhancing diverse debates? Or, to the contrary, have they driven the “publish or perish” mentality to new extremes? What lessons can be learned to harness blogs for a fruitful and sustainable advancement of international law?

4) Conferences

What are the potentials and limits of “e-conferencing”? Can online or hybrid conferences address the problem that not all scholars have the financial and time resources to travel to traditional in-person conferences? Could the possibility to participate online remedy existing access inequalities? Or, to the contrary, does “e-conferencing” prevent the beneficial confrontation and interaction of conferences?

5) Other questions related to the digitalization of scholarly communication and the digital infrastructure

*Please send your abstract in English of up to 500 words to editorial-team@voelkerrechtsblog.org (please mention the Call for Papers in the subject line). The deadline for abstract submissions is **1 March 2022**. Selected abstract authors will be asked to hand in a paper by **31 July 2022**. Submissions should also mention the affiliation of the authors, contain a short CV (max. 1 page), and, if available, link to their personal home page. In light of the aim of the conference, we are interested in authors from all around the globe and in particular from countries of the “Global South”. In the selection process, we aim to reflect diversity in terms of gender, geography, social status, etc.*

Deadline for abstracts: 1 March 2022

Deadline for papers: 31 July 2022

Conference: 7-9 September 2022

Intended outcome: Journal Special Issue in a legal journal (e.g. Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht/Heidelberg Journal of International Law).