

GRUSSBOTSCHAFT

Dear friends of Legal Informatics,

The volume you have before you signals that we have again taken a critical step in our yearly quest to find out what is new out there. The work, a written outcome of the IRIS conferences, serves to tell us what is important in Legal Informatics and in legal life at large. Together, the conference and this publication will help us to keep our basic method sharp.

One of the key components of that method is keeping abreast of new knowledge crucial to our professional competence. In fact, we can say our job requires justifiable doubt: we have to venture forth and identify what is new and important vis-à-vis what we know already. The advances in IT in recent decades have only heightened the importance of this ambition in law and administration. In a piece I wrote in the Yearbook of Nordic Legal Informatics back in 1990 with my teacher, Aulis Aarnio, I described Legal Informatics as a field essential to the discipline of Law. The intervening years have borne out the salience of this observation many times over.

In the Nordic countries, Legal Informatics emerged as a field of Law in the 1980s, primarily thanks to the efforts of Peter Seipel and Jon Bing. We held the first joint Nordic conference in Oslo in 1985. Like IRIS, but unlike the practice in most fields of law, the conference became an annual event. Yet even then we set our sights farther afield; we wanted to be truly international. It is theory and practices that are essential to our work, and these are not “domestic affairs”. We can see the development of the constitutional state in Europe driving a burgeoning need for legal information and legal knowledge. This being the case, IRIS has been – and will continue to be – an important international event for Nordic scholars.

Yes, theory. IRIS is a gathering where theory – from legal theory to the general doctrines of different fields – has always played an important role. We do not confine ourselves to particular provisions in the law and how they should or should not be interpreted. The broad scientific vista we embrace is one thing that has defined IRIS from its very outset. The conference figures significantly in enriching the scientific capital of Legal Informatics.

During the last 25 years we have been witnessing the new role of EU in our legislative environment in Europe. EU is the new powerful motor in legal life. Guidelines, directives, regulations and Curia cases follow each other even by massive way. The old idea that the legislative machinery is and must be slow has lost its old significance. We must all the time follow what is going on. It is one elementary part of our basic method. And in this movement elementary is also the need of desire for comparative knowledge. In many countries, even Nordic countries, we have almost lost our comparative legal skills. Many teachers in Law faculties still point out the old key role of domestic law. However law is increasingly an international product. IRIS has been and is a significant window to a new legal world. Law as an information rich science by a new comparative way. From the Nordic point of view that is something elementary. We can say that IRIS is a modern legal information source for Nordic participants too.

In recent years IRIS has begun to work with Weblaw, and this cooperation has greatly benefitted the participants. Not only have we enjoyed a meticulously edited annual publication, but we have also seen an upturn in publications in the field more extensively. IRIS and Weblaw reinforce one another. What was a single important event has become essentially a year-round process thanks to Jusletter IT. Erich and Franz were quick to see the synergy to be had here. This is something which we should start in Nordic countries too.

One particularly important element in IRIS has been its relatively open format. The Legal Informatics family has had the opportunity to gather around and discuss important topics in a welcoming camaraderie. This is as good as it gets in scientific cooperation. And this is what good science always needs.

I will finish here with one wish for the future. If our presentations could be given bilingual abstracts, this would improve information searches and the exchange of scholarship across language boundaries.

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