

The Polar Law Symposiums

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The Polar Law Symposiums are by now well-established academic events. They have been held annually in several countries of the polar regions, both north and south, they have been well-attended, and they have been and continue to be in the forefront of law and policy debates relating to the Arctic, Antarctica, and even the Third Pole.

The Symposiums have been convened in Akureyri (Iceland) five times 2008-10, 2013, and 2016; once in Nuuk (Greenland) 2011; twice in Rovaniemi (Finland) 2012 and 2017; twice in Hobart (Australia) 2014 and 2019; once in Anchorage and Fairbanks (the USA) 2015; and once in Tromsø (Norway) 2018.¹ Following an initial planning meeting in 2007,² the use of the label 'polar law' has multiplied.

As these lines are written in November 2020, the Polar Cooperation Research Centre at the University of Kobe in Japan is conducting the 13th Polar Law Symposium online. The plan is to hold the 14th Symposium also in Kobe but in-

person in autumn 2021, provided the ongoing covid-19 pandemic will no longer be leading to travel restrictions.

In a welcoming message at the opening of the virtual Symposium (2020polarlawsymposium.org/welcome-message-from-the-convenor-at-the-opening-of-13th-pls/), Professor Akiho Shibata stated as follows: "Despite the continuing difficulties around the world caused by COVID-19, ... the 13th Polar Law Symposium has successfully opened entirely online, with a total of 288 registered participants. This is the largest registration number ever achieved in the history of the Symposium. ... we have 25 uploaded individual presentations either by slideshows or by video viewing, five seminars for on-demand video viewing, and 13 live events planned with 28 oral interactive presentations and lectures."

The hundreds of Symposium participants belong mostly to academic institutions and NGOs, plus a scattering of government and IGO representatives. They stem from Arctic countries, Australia, New Zealand, and other States with economic, political, research

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¹ For more detailed information about each one of these Symposiums, see "www.polarlaw.is/en/polar-law-symposium".

² About the history of early polar law developments in Iceland, see Gudmundur Alfredsson and Agust Thor Arnason, "Fullveldið og heimskautarétturinn" (Sovereignty and Polar Law) in Fullveldi í 99 ár. Safn ritgerða til heiðurs dr. Davíðs Þórs Björgvinssonar (99 Years of Icelandic Sovereignty. Essays in Honor of Dr. David Thor Björgvinsson), Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag (The Icelandic Literary Society), 2017, pp. 267-280.

and security interests in the polar regions.

The themes addressed at the Polar Law Symposiums cover a wide range of polar law. Interdisciplinary approaches are common; the emphasis is not only on relevant areas of global, regional, domestic and local laws and related policies and practices but also on comparative law and the cultural, economic, and political considerations that do or should influence the making of new laws.

Specific issues discussed at the Symposiums include the following: sovereignty and boundary disputes on land and sea, dispute settlement, colonialism, self-determination, self-government, the rights of indigenous peoples and other human rights, land and natural resources rights, gender, human security, environmental law, pollution, climate change, the melting ice, fauna, flora and biodiversity, sustainable development, good governance, traditional economic activities, identity and cultural heritage, education and languages, the law of the sea and maritime law, transport, tourism, NGOs, the Arctic Council, the West Nordic Council and other global, regional and sub-regional IGOs, the Antarctic treaty system, search and rescue, and geopolitics and security. Undoubtedly, the list of issues will grow longer in the years to come.

Most of the presentations made at the Symposiums are published in *the Yearbook of Polar Law*, which first appeared in 2009, and since then every year (www.brill.com/pola). Articles are subject to blind peer reviews, while sections with short papers and book reviews are not reviewed. The editors-in-chief are Gudmundur Alfredsson, Julia Jabour, Timo Koivurova, and Akiho Shibata. One or more local or special editors supervise each year's volume.

The Yearbook is supplemented by a book series, *Studies in Polar Law*, also published by Brill Academic Publishers in the Netherlands (brill.com/view/serial/SPLW?rskey=8W0zMf&result=1). Three books have so far appeared: Kamrul Hossain, Jose Miguel Roncero Martin and Anna Petrétei (editors), *Human and Societal Security in the Circumpolar Arctic. Local and Indigenous Communities* (2018); Antje Neumann, *Wilderness Protection in Polar Regions, Arctic Lessons Learnt for the Regulation and Management of Tourism in the Antarctic* (2020); and Timo Koivurova and Sanna Kopra (editors), *Chinese Policy and Presence in the Arctic* (2020). A new textbook on polar law is under preparation and will be edited by Natalia Loukacheva.

As mentioned above, the use of the 'polar law' label continues to increase, along with its components of Arctic law and Antarctic law, and the Symposiums

have certainly contributed to that growth. Other publishing houses (Edward Elgar, Routledge, Springer, and others) and organizations (f.ex. the Nordic Council of Ministers) have also published materials on polar law or closely related subjects. An open-access journal, *the Review of Arctic Law and Politics*, is published in Tromsø and edited by Øyvind Ravna (arcticreview.no/index.php/arctic). The University of the Arctic runs a Thematic

Network on Arctic Law (www.uarctic.org/organization/thematic-networks/arctic-law/), led by Kamrul Hossain, Leena Heinämäki, and Karolina Sikora. Polar law issues are also increasingly seen on the agendas of the multitude of global, regional, national, and local conferences held each year about the Arctic, Antarctica, and the Third Pole. Further evidence of success is the ever-increasing number of 'polar law' hits on Google!



Polar Law Symposium 2017, Rovaniemi, Finland