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## Interview with Jan Lagerwall

Ingo Dierking<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Editor of Liquid Crystals Today,

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## INTERVIEW

### Interview with Jan Lagerwall

Members of the International Liquid Crystal Society will have noted already the new design and structure of the society's web site. This overhaul was initiated and carried out by Jan Lagerwall and, it should be mentioned, free of charge to the society! I recently interviewed Jan with regards to the motives of his activities.



Dr Jan Lagerwall from the Martin Luther University Halle, Germany.

**ID: Jan, why did you decide to update the ILCS web site?**

JL: In the on-line members database the old web site had a great function that I think was (and still is!) very useful for all members. But apart from that, the old web site didn't have a great deal to offer and the presentation was not very attractive. Much of the information that was posted was rather outdated. The web has much more to offer than what the old web site did so I thought I would modernise it and at the same time add some new features that could be of interest both for ILCS members and non-member visitors.

**ID: Which are the new features?**

JL: Most important perhaps is the Event Calendar. The idea is that all forthcoming events that could be of interest to ILCS members are listed here in chronological order in a condensed way. Only title, date and location are indicated, together with the link to the event web site. Important is that the events are not necessarily strict LC events, but also conferences, workshops and so on, on colloids, general soft matter, biophysics, etc. appear here. I hope that this will be a natural resource for anyone wanting to organise an

event, or for simply planning research travels. Hopefully, collisions between related events, such as the simultaneous organisations of the ILCC and the Liquid Matter conference in 2008, can be avoided this way.

Once a week I check the event calendar and move all events that no longer belong to the future to a separate list, in reverse chronological order, entitled Past Events. The same information is retained there for each event. The reason for this list is that it is sometimes useful to be able to quickly look up when or where a certain conference, workshop, etc. took place. And sometimes the web sites are kept alive also after the event, with proceedings, photos or other interesting post-event things available for download.

Next, there is a section entitled ILCS Research Globally, essentially a kind of summary of the ILCS research network around the world, organised by countries. When you enter the section you get to see a world map, where you can click on the continent that you are interested in. This then takes you to a map of the countries in that continent. Moving the mouse over a country that is represented makes that country highlighted and if you click on it you get to a list of the groups from that country that have web sites. Personal web sites are not listed and in order to be listed the group has to be led by an ILCS member. In the case of companies it is of course sufficient that an employee is an ILCS member.

**ID: Why did you employ these restrictions rather than listing the web sites of all people working with liquid crystals?**

JL: The organisation of this section actually required a fair deal of thinking. First, the lists of groups must be easy to navigate and allow a good overview. This basically rules out including one-person web pages because then the list can get very, very long. And a group where the members all have their own web pages would get strongly over-represented. Regarding the choice to only include groups led by ILCS members, this was a deliberate choice to promote ILCS membership. It costs so little to be a member of the society that I think any researcher with an interest in liquid crystals really ought to be a member. Yet I realised when preparing this section that there are surprisingly many well-established LC

researchers who are not members of the society. I really doubt that this is a deliberate choice. Probably they have simply forgotten to update their membership. I hope that the appearance in the research network section for members can be a small carrot for promoting membership. In any case, I am very interested in feedback and of course open for different solutions if the ILCS members don't agree with my solution.

**ID: When clicking on the world map I see that Europe and the USA is quite over-represented in relation to where LC research is actually being done. Asia is clearly under-represented, with just one Korean group and not a single Japanese group. Why is this?**

JL: This reflects in part the membership situation – several very active Japanese LC researchers are in fact not ILCS members – but even more the fact that many Asian groups lack web sites. Or at least I am not aware of them. I must point out that I rely on the input of the members for making this overview complete. In the navigation bar, within the ILCS Research Globally section, there is a link for adding a research web site. I strongly encourage all readers who know of a web site that should be included but isn't to use this link to make me aware of the web site. American and European groups are generally quite good at preparing web sites, also with an English language version even in cases where the native language is a different one. This of course made it much easier for me to find these web sites.

**ID: OK, back to the new features. Are there any more?**

JL: Yes, there are. The most obvious one should be the new liquid crystal picture gallery. Each month a LC-related picture, submitted by a member or non-member, is featured directly on the home page of the web site. If you click on the picture, or if you go to the Liquid Crystal Beauty section in the navigation bar, you get a larger version of the image together with information about the picture as well as the artist behind it. At the end of the month a new picture is chosen and the old picture is transferred to the gallery where all previous 'pictures of the month' are collected. This feature fills two purposes. First, it allows LC researchers to share the fantastic images that liquid crystals offer with the rest of the world, thereby also adding to the general interest in our research field. Second, it gives everyone interested in such images a good reason to check the ILCS web site on the first day of each month, to see what the new image is and who is being featured. It prevents the web site from getting

static, an aspect of the old web site that was a real problem and – I believe – killed interest in visiting the web site.

**ID: How is the gallery section working? Are you getting many contributions?**

JL: It's up and down. Some months there have been very many pictures submitted, others none at all. Pictures that aren't selected right away remain in competition, so even if someone submits a picture at a time when the competition is unusually strong, it can still get featured the next month or later. I also noticed that some groups are very active at submitting contributions, whereas other groups, which I know as very good 'texture-producing' groups, submit nothing at all. I really hope that also the latter groups will get going because I think the gallery that is taking shape is really becoming something quite extraordinary. It should have a large attraction power also for non-scientists or children, who might then get interested in science. And public engagement is becoming increasingly important. So, to all of you who sit with beautiful LC pictures on your hard disks: submit them to the gallery!

**ID: Who selects the image to be featured?**

JL: Actually, I do it at present. For reasons of efficiency, I think it should be a one-man jury but of course it should not be me for all eternity. My idea is to change it once a year so I will ask someone else to take over the role in 2010. Helen Gleeson has offered to do so, so probably she will be the next jury.

**ID: The web site now also features job announcements. How is this working?**

JL: Also this goes up and down. At times there are several announcements, other times none at all. Mainly PhD positions are being announced, a few post-doc openings adding to this. So far no senior positions or industry positions have been announced. I think many people are not yet aware of the possibility to announce their positions on the web site so I hope this will take off in the future. In particular, the industry might need to be actively informed about the possibility. But this is a task for other people.

**ID: I can see that there are still some other features that are new but we can't fit everything into this interview. We'll leave the rest to the readers to discover themselves. Or is there one final thing you want to point out?**

JL: Well, maybe I'd just like to mention that there is a 'Three most recent updates' box on the home page.

This is useful because it allows you to very quickly check if anything has happened to the web site since your last visit.

**ID: How has the response on the new web site been?**

JL: The response that I have received has been positive throughout, but there hasn't been a great deal of response. I would, in fact, be extremely grateful for more feedback from users because it is difficult to improve the web site further without knowing what the users think. So whether you like or dislike the web site, please let me know about your user experience by clicking the 'Contact Webmaster' link under the 'About the ILCS site' section. I am particularly grateful for suggestions for new features or improvements of the present ones. And of course the content of the web site is relying on ILCS members to submit information about events, jobs, web sites and so on.

**ID: At the start of this interview you mentioned that the old web site's database was very good. What has happened to this in the new version?**

JL: Very little. I thought it worked very well so the only thing I've changed is to give it a more modern graphical design on the first level. Its functionality is exactly as it was.

**ID: Are you planning any further important updates to the web site?**

JL: Not really. Since I'm doing this in my spare time I can't do much more than keep the web site running and updated regularly. One thing that I'm thinking about is

to add an alternative version of the event calendar that is organised chronologically according to deadlines. I think it could be a useful feature to have a list of all upcoming deadlines available a few clicks away. But for this to work I need the input from the users. At present I enter roughly as many events myself as people submit to me, so I am not completely sure about the interest. If only I find such a feature useful it seems rather meaningless to invest time in it. Maybe I'll take this as a good opportunity to trigger response: if you want a deadline calendar then send me a mail and tell me so!

**ID: Apart from giving you feedback and submitting information to be published, is there anything else the ILCS members can do to help further improve the web site?**

JL: Spread the word! It's very important that all members as well as non-members with an interest in liquid crystals know that there is a new ILCS web site and that it is regularly updated. Only with the active participation of many users will the web site become truly excellent.

**ID: Jan, thank you very much for this interview, but even more so for actually investing your spare time for the benefit of our society and to promote the ILCS and liquid crystals in general to the broad public by setting up the new web site and keeping it up to date.**

Ingo Dierking  
Editor of *Liquid Crystals Today*