

PhD Seminar Report

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The third ISTR PhD Seminar took place at Ersta Sköndal University College in Stockholm from the 26th to the 28th of June 2016, i.e. on the days before ISTR's 12th International Conference was organized at the same venue. All in all, 51 PhD students from 26 different countries participated.

Ever since the first ISTR PhD seminar was organized in Siena in 2012 one of the aims has been to provide doctoral students from the wide variety of disciplines that are represented in studies of civil society and the third sector with an opportunity to get extensive feedback and intellectual and methodological advice on their PhD projects. Additional aims are to introduce the students to main theories and developments in the field, to reflect upon publication- and career strategies, and to provide a unique opportunity to network with junior and senior scholars within the ISTR research community. To approach these aims, a faculty team of twelve experienced researchers from a range of different disciplines and countries was successfully recruited. The faculty team included Oonagh Breen (Ireland), Kinman Chan (Hong Kong), Paula Chies Schommer (Brazil), Carolyn Cordery (New Zealand), Anna Domaradzka (Poland), Angela Eikenberry (USA), Adalbert Evers (Germany), Lewis Faulk (USA), Matthias Freise (Germany), Johan Hvenmark (Sweden), Maria Radyati (Indonesia) and Pelle Åberg (Sweden).

The seminar started with a welcome event on Sunday, June 26th, which was followed by a joint dinner in a classic Swedish restaurant. The main program started on Monday morning when the students came together in pre-defined working groups of eight or nine participants. In addition, each group was joined and supervised by two members of the faculty.

From Monday morning until the start of ISTR's international conference at lunch on Tuesday 28th, each working group worked on the different PhD projects. Each student got the chance to present his or her PhD project and discuss key questions and theoretical and methodological issues on a peer basis with the other group members and with the faculty. Besides these working groups, the PhD seminar contained three semi-plenary sessions on Monday where the students could choose depending on their own primary interests. One of the sessions was organized by Carolyn Cordery on the topic "Getting Published" where tips and tricks on how to get published in peer-reviewed journals were discussed. The second session focused on "How to plan a post-doc career abroad" and was organized by Matthias Freise. The final option in this smorgasbord was the session "Scientific career and family" organized by Anna Domaradzka. Both the first and the last of these three sessions were actually topics covered in the same manner during the second PhD seminar in Münster in 2014. However, the issues of getting published as well as how to combine family life with a career in academia is so topical to many PhD students that they are well worth returning to with new groups of PhD students. After the final working group sessions on Monday, a keynote speech was given by Prof. Peter Frumkin who, based on his own pitfalls and successes, in a joyful manner provided a handful of advice to aspiring scholars in the field of third sector and civil society research.

After another session in the working groups on Tuesday morning the seminar ended with a wrap up session where everyone discussed the experience of being part of the PhD seminar. Constructive comments were given and overall the experience appears to have been very positive for the participants. After this wrap up session, participants and faculty alike moved on to the ISTR international conference.

What we take away from this PhD seminar is the fantastic value of this arena for PhD students, who in many cases are based at institutions and departments where the study of civil society and the third sector most often is not mainstream. The interest is even so vivid from those who have participated previously that an alumni network has already started to form. Hence, the most straightforward conclusion to draw is that the efforts of ISTR directed at PhD students should continue.

The next PhD Seminar will take place in the days preceding ISTR's 13th International Conference in Amsterdam in July 2018.