

## ISTR Conferences Open New Research Connections & Opportunities

### Four Takeaways from 4 days at Amsterdam

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The 13th ISTR International Conference in Amsterdam was a very productive encounter for me. I had attended two Asia Pacific editions of the conference in Tokyo (2015) and Jakarta (2017). However, I was attending the international conference for the first time. I was not only new to the conference, but also Amsterdam was the first European city I had visited.

I left the Bangkok airport with a mixed feeling. While I was excited about the opportunity to meet some of the authors whom I had been following and reading for a long time, my heart was pounding with nervousness to present in front of distinguished academics of the sector. In this post, I highlight four takeaways from the conference.

**Learning:** Overall, the conference in Amsterdam was full of learning. Sessions were very insightful and very wide-ranged. I was able to attend roundtables discussing good practices in nonprofit education to emerging research areas in the third sector. It was wonderful to explore the diversity of interest and myriad aspects covering a wide range of topics concerning the Third Sector.

**Methodology Development:** One of the important personal learning takeaways from the conference was definitely the 'Building the Data Science Toolkit' session. It is always exciting to know that you are not only the one who is working on a certain research idea. Megan LePere-Schloop's work of using machine-learning to categorize NGOs in Ghana was identical to my efforts of to classify NGOs in Nepal. The only difference was she was using machine-learning while I was using a simple excel-based intervention. I realized the extent of my efforts could be streamlined using the emerging machine methodologies.

In addition, Brent Never's introductory tour to spatial methods helped me see the potential limitations of using simple linear regression on geospatial data. After attending the session, I ended up reanalyzing my own data overnight. The next day, I was able to sit with Brent again to compare the results from the old analysis to the newly-learned analysis.

**Mentoring Program:** The ISTR Secretariat connected me with my mentor, David O. Renz, from the University of Missouri -Kansas City. Dave and I were able to chat ex-



tensively on my career aspirations and the direction of my future research. Dave asked very crucial questions relating to my work and motivated me to explore further in my research. The mentorship session and additional two meals I had with Dave helped me learn a lot about his expertise and was able to see areas where I could ask for his guidance and support.

**Meetings and Networking:** The Amsterdam conference also allowed me to understand ISTR as an organization more clearly. It was wonderful seeing a very vibrant community of scholars and practitioners from all around the world and have the opportunity to get to know fellow ISTR members. In addition to the members meeting, several other breakout sessions, like the Storytelling Workshop and strategies to pursue a postdoctoral position professional development workshop were quite insightful.

In addition to meetings, I think one big takeaway from the conference is the ability to establish a network that is active beyond the conference. Earlier last week, I received feedback from Christopher Pallas about one of my working papers. It would have been impossible for such connections to happen without meetings like ISTR conference.

The 13th ISTR international conference has officially ended. However, the benefits of the conference are just beginning to materialize. I am starting my brand new mentorship relationship, am exploring new research areas, strengthening my methodological understanding, and most importantly, nurturing all the crucial connections initiated during the conference.

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<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-0024-9>