

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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Theorizing Volunteering for Development: How ISTR XII in Stockholm Sparked an Intercontinental Collaboration

At the XII ISTR Conference in Stockholm in 2016, Nichole Georgeou from Western Sydney University delivered her paper in a panel on theoretical frameworks in volunteering for development. Nichole spoke on *'Theorising international volunteering for development: civil society or market society?'* and was unpacking the conflation between development volunteer placements and volunteer tourism. During the questions, Benjamin Haas, from the University of Cologne, commented that using gift and reciprocity theory might be a useful method to advance theorising new trajectories of engagement in volunteering for and in development.

Nichole and Benjamin continued their discussions in a Swedish beer garden, and agreed to embark on an exciting theoretical project that aimed to understand current trends and new trajectories within volunteering for development, such as voluntourism, state funded youth volunteer programs and student volunteering. These new models blend state funding with neoliberal individualism, the non-profit sector and the for-profit sector, thus disrupting the traditional notion that volunteering occurs within civil society. Nichole and Benjamin presented the results of their collaboration at this year's ISTR XIII conference in Amsterdam with their paper *'Power, Exchange and Solidarity: Towards a (new) theoretical conceptualization of volunteering for development'*. Their paper sparked a lively and very fruitful academic debate and they are currently revising it with a view to publication this year.

Both Nichole and Benjamin appreciated the advan-

tages of writing a joint paper over such a vast distance. The distance and time factors actually facilitated the writing process as a late-night draft in one country became the first thing to do for the co-author who was starting a new day. They both worked on refining the synthesis of ideas through their joint collaboration and look forward to continuing their scholarly writing partnership across time and space. Their collaboration would not have been possible without ISTR XII in Stockholm (and a sunny Swedish beer garden).



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