



# Inside ISTR

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THIRD-SECTOR RESEARCH

March – April 2020

## President's Column



For this newsletter contribution I was anticipating writing about the exciting agenda for the forthcoming Montreal conference in July. Of course, those plans have gone the way of all events in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. However, even though the conference has been postponed until July 2021 the preparations had been ongoing over the past 18 months and plans for all aspects of the conference were almost completed. Along with the outstanding efforts of the ISTR secretariat, Margery, Megan and Robin, the ISTR Board, and the Academic Committee, many people had worked extremely hard to bring what promised to be an exceptional conference to reality. The local committee in Montreal, made up of a number of members from different universities, had achieved a great deal in their extensive collaboration, drawing on local talents and great locations to ensure we would love our time in Montreal. This will still happen – just a whole year later! One important element of our conferences, the PhD seminar will, however go ahead in virtual form in July. Given that some PhD students may have completed their candidatures before the next conference in 2021, and indeed were looking for the valuable contribution the seminar could make to their progress this year, we felt it could not be delayed. This is going ahead with the generous commitment of ISTR faculty from across the world and the extraordinary logistical capability of Megan Haddock, who has been ensuring the success of PhD seminars at the international and regional conferences for a number of years now.

As an organisation we are very committed to ensuring that our members still have opportunities to engage with other researchers and disseminate their research. We are currently developing diverse means of 'getting together' and engaging about important issues and research related to the third sector via various media platforms. This will rely on members in different parts of the world stepping forward to lead or facilitate webinars and discussion groups. As you will already have heard, the secretariat has also



developed an interactive web page that we encourage you to contribute to, hoping to keep a lively dialogue going through this time of physical isolation due to the pandemic.

This is a time of great upheaval in the daily lives for almost everyone in the world – this is a very unusual and until very recently, improbable claim. There is much personal loss, from death, loss of employment and the demise of business and industry. The need to stay in your home as an act of solidarity to protect your community and limit stress on health resources is on the one hand a simple act, but on the other hand, it is of course fraught with complexities for some and social exclusion for others. Third sector organisations in many cases have had a dramatic increase in the need for their services and support while at the same time seeing a diminution in resources, funding and capacities to continue to offer their services to individuals and communities within which they play essential roles. Governments are pouring funding into health services and ways of minimising the deep economic impact of the crisis and this means that some TSOs will see a substantial loss in financial support. Philanthropy and volunteering are as important as ever, but what are the effects of dramatic changes to daily life? There will be many important research questions arising from the time of COVID 19 and our members will no doubt be at the forefront of exploring answers and understanding now and into the future as no sector will remain untouched by the pandemic.

*Ruth Phillips*  
President

## ISTR News

### Calendar Update

As the conference has been postponed to 2021, The Society is pleased to share our conference plans for 2021 & 2022.

#### 2021

14th International Conference,  
Montreal, Canada

**New Dates: July 12-15, 2021**



Regional Meetings & PhD Seminars **Planned**  
Latin America and the Caribbean – **October 2021**  
Asia Pacific – **November 2021**  
Africa PhD Seminar- **TBA 2021**

#### 2022

15th International Conference, University of Antwerp,  
Belgium – **July 12-15, 2022**



### Research and Networking Forum on Covid-19 and the Third Sector

ISTR invites you to participate in our new research and networking forum, which is designed to provide an active and engaging space for our members to share and discuss new research being carried out on Covid-19 and the Third Sector. This forum is open to all, though you must be logged in to an ISTR account to post. Here is the link: <https://www.istr.org/blogpost/1851131/Research-Networking-Covid-19-and-Third-Sector>

### Resource Page

[www.istr.org/page/COVID\\_Resources](https://www.istr.org/page/COVID_Resources). This page assists third sector scholars by highlighting especially relevant research material, member-public material, and links to other resource compilation pages, all organized by sub-field and region.

### ISTR Listserve

We invite you to join the ISTR Listserve if you are not yet subscribed. It is a great way to share information and an easy way to reach out to your colleagues. <https://www.istr.org/page/Connect>

### Mentoring Program 2020-2021: Applications Now Open

ISTR's Mentoring Program draws naturally from the friendliness and collegiality of its members, and is designed to provide students with career, publishing, and funding advice and professional and networking development. We are seeking both mentees and mentors and believe that "meeting" remotely during the year will be an excellent way to keep our community together. All participants will meet "in person" at the Mentoring Reception in Montreal on Monday, July 12, 2021!

**The call for the 2020-2021 program is open now.**  
**Deadline to apply: May 15, 2020.** <https://www.istr.org/page/Mentoring>

### Call for ISTR Board of Directors Nominations



The 2020 ISTR Nominating Committee invites the ISTR membership and global research community to submit nominees for President Elect and the Board of Directors of the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR).

The Nominating Committee encourages nominations from the Third Sector research community. Those wishing to do so should explain why they believe the person's accomplishments, background, and views would make them a good choice for a leadership position. The nominating committee hopes to nominate a slate of accomplished scholars and practitioners who reflect the diverse membership of ISTR. To achieve this goal, they rely on the membership to forward suggestions and recommendations. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

**Nominations are due by June 1, 2020.**

The positions for which elections will be held are:  
**President Elect** 2 year term (followed by a 2 year term as President) (January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2022)

**At-Large Board Members** (5) 4 year term  
(January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2024)

Please submit nominees to [Secretariat@istr.org](mailto:Secretariat@istr.org)  
To learn more, visit [istr.org/page/2020\\_Nom](https://www.istr.org/page/2020_Nom)

## PhD Seminar Experience: ISTR Networking Notes

### A Virtuous Circle

*By Juan Pablo Winter, 2nd Year PhD Researcher, University of Sheffield, UK*

Some call it the domino effect, a chain reaction that occurs when a small change origins another change, which will then cause another similar change. When the result of each one of these events increases the beneficial effect of the next, the cycle is known as a virtuous circle. This is exactly what happened to me after attending the **ISTR/Wits Africa PhD Seminar** in May 2019 at the Wits Business School in Johannesburg, South Africa.



*Juan Pablo Winter*

Despite being a Chilean doctoral student in the University of Sheffield in the UK, my research was in line with the African seminar, as it looked at organisational behaviour and everyday practices of a community-based organisation in an informal settlement in South Africa. By using critical theory and action research, I was interested in analysing the forms, levels, and spaces of power where a specific informal settlement could organise for social justice and social change.

The main aim of the seminar was to receive theoretical and methodological advice from peers and scholars and to build a network within the ISTR research community. While I was only halfway through my 1st year of PhD, I had the opportunity to meet colleagues at different stages of their research, and from universities from a wide range of countries, including Zimbabwe, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia, Australia, USA, and the UK.

I remember I was working on my methodology chapter, and looking for a case study in South Africa. The discussions we had in small groups with peers and senior faculties allowed me both to network and to improve my research. I also won the 3-Minute Thesis Competition, in which each one of us had to creatively present our research in no more than three minutes using one PowerPoint slide.

Winning the competition allowed me to present my work at the first annual Conference on Philanthropy, organized

by the Wits Business School's **Centre for Philanthropy and Social Investment** in collaboration with the Centre for African Studies at Harvard University, TrustAfrica and Africa Philanthropy Forum. The event was attended by different stakeholders from civil society, the public and the private sector.

After the Conference was over, Dr. Shauna Mottiar, Director of the **Centre for Civil Society (CCS)** in the University of KwaZulu- Natal (UKZN) (and one of the senior faculty members who collaborated during the PhD Seminar), invited me to Durban to get to know their work. CCS has been researching informal settlements for several years, following an approach of co-production of knowledge and action research, very similar to what I was planning to do.

During my visit, I met different academics at UKZN. One of the most insightful conversations was with Dr. Catherine Sutherland, who suggested I could focus my case study on Quarry Road West informal settlement. After a short discussion, we agreed that the characteristics of the place were ideal for my research.

Before leaving Durban, Dr. Mottiar offered me a place as a visiting scholar at CCS. This meant they would set up an office for me, while I conducted my five-month fieldwork. I would also have the opportunity to engage with the different CCS activities and meet and discuss my work with UKZN academics. At the end of my stay, I would present my work in one of their seminars.

In the following next few months back in the UK, I passed my Confirmation Review, completed the Ethics Approval and Risk Assessment Forms, applied for funding, and got everything ready to return to South Africa.

I was back in Durban by the end of January. Amid the protests of students for university fees to fall, CCS was still able to set up an office for me. It was located next to researchers and academics with several publications on urban governance, community-based organisations, and informal settlements.

Moreover, because Dr. Sutherland had been working for several years in Quarry Road West, the location of my case

study, communication with the settlers was great. The area committee of the informal settlement not only permitted me to start my data collection but demonstrated enthusiasm and willingness to participate too.

Last January, my abstract was accepted for presentation at the **14th International Conference of ISTR** in Montreal 2020, where I planned to share the preliminary results of my fieldwork. Now that the Conference is postponed until July 2021, I see it as an opportunity to present the findings and conclusions I expect to have by then.

Overall, I am very thankful for the opportunities that have been provided to me by ISTR during my PhD. Meeting an international community of top researchers and academics with similar interests has been inspiring. Furthermore, the virtuous circle of events happening since the African



PhD Seminar of last year seems to have no ending and continues opening very interesting prospects for both my research and my career.

## Sustaining Civil Society

A recent report published by the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at The Graduate Center, CUNY, offers lessons for philanthropy practitioners from assessing the long-term impact of a series of pooled funds established to support civil society in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. The findings from this two-year, 15-country qualitative research effort are summarized here.

### ***Sustaining Civil Society: Lessons from Five Pooled Funds in Eastern Europe***

*Barry Gaberman, Merrill Sovner and William Moody*

The **Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society** at the **Graduate Center of the City University of New York** undertook a practitioner-academic research collaboration to understand the legacy of the large amounts of philanthropic support for civil society in Central and Eastern Europe. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall felt like an appropriate time for such an examination, especially as the optimistic rhetoric on civil society and widespread support for liberal democracy since that time has eroded.

From 1991 to 2007, US and European private foundations, sometimes working with government development agencies, established the **Environmental Partnership for Central Europe**, the **Baltic-American Partnership Fund**, the **Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe**, the **Balkan Trust for Democracy**, and the **Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation**. While these Partnerships and Trusts shared the same broad aim to support civil society, their structures were tailored to their different contexts, missions and priorities. Each of these five Partnerships and Trusts had been assessed individually, but this was the first attempt to see what comparative analysis across all five might reveal.

Three former US foundation staff, who were inside its executive suites when important decisions were made, took on this research task. They sought to understand the long-term effectiveness of these philanthropic investments in building a vibrant civil society. They embarked on a two-year project to examine the legacy and impact of these five pooled funds, involving desk research, travel to 15 countries, interviews with over 250 people involved in these funds and civil society, and their own past experience as primary sources.





As practitioners, the authors sought to rekindle a conversation among philanthropic practitioners about the importance of building and supporting civil society itself. While funders often see the organizations of civil society in their instrumental function – the things these do and the services they provide – this research looked at the function of civil society collectively as a Fifth Estate in society guarding against the concentration and abuse of power. After the Fourth Estate of the media, civil society has an essential role to play in holding democratic governments accountable to citizens’ interests. In addition, for the most part, philanthropy accomplishes its objectives through the organizations of civil society. It is a symbiotic relationship, and the effectiveness of philanthropy cannot be divorced from the health of civil society.

The resulting report, **“Sustaining Civil Society: Lessons from Five Pooled Funds in Eastern Europe”**, profiled the five pooled funds, compared them to other collaborative philanthropic efforts in the same context, summarized the legacy and impact reported in the interviews, and compiled 20 lessons for philanthropy about what can be learned from past initiatives to build and support civil society. Some of the major findings are summarized here.

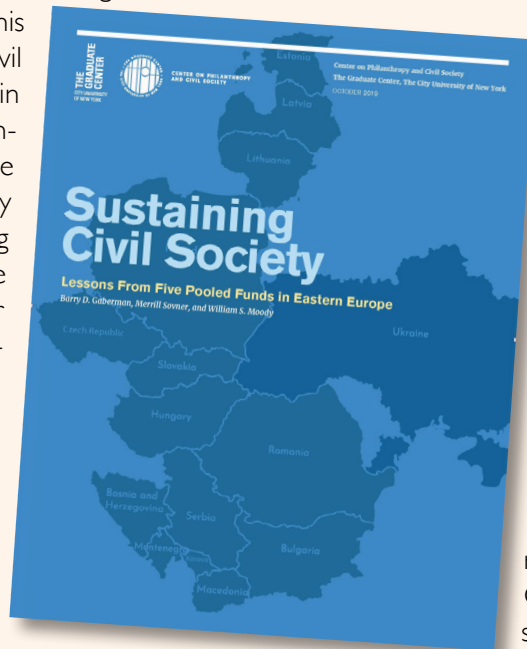
First, important organizations, policies, and practices undergirding healthy civil societies were supported by these philanthropic investments. An impressive core of institutions built in the 1990s through some of these pooled funds now serve as important national grantmakers and intermediaries for other donors. Also, many of the grantee organizations that received core support still operate today, pushing back against the erosion of democratic procedures and norms. In addition, the primary or secondary aim of all of the Partnerships and Trusts was the promotion of an enabling environment for civil society organizations and philanthropy. The resulting legislation for associations and foundations, mechanisms for giving by corporations, the state, or individuals, and cooperation and advocacy frameworks with governments have served as models around the world.

These achievements noted, sustainability of the grantee organizations remains an ongoing challenge. Most of the organizations interviewed cited ensuring financial resources as their biggest headache, even for those under political pressure. Many US donors are no longer active in the region, and similar flexible institutional support is not as readily available. The report captures an array of practices and strategies by civil society organizations to deal with reduced funding and political pressures, including reducing activities, personnel, and overhead costs or taking on commercial income. At the same time, there has been growth in crowdfunding and individual donations. Some organizations have undergone a strategic reorientation, and a number have refocused to work on civic participation, community development and tolerance education rather than litigation and policy advocacy. Others have responded to political pressure with increasing professionalization, such as through financial and administrative audits, as well as supporting staff morale.

The authors also found that more work could have been done to build a culture around the grantee organizations that would support them over the long term. Across the region (and indeed the world), a lack of trust in institutions has emerged as a serious obstacle in today’s political climate. More effort could have been made to overcome mistrust by inculcating civic education and participation and communicating the stories of civil society and build a culture of charitable giving.

Finally, philanthropic institutions, more than any other actor, can plan over the long term and assume risk beyond electoral cycles and financial bottom lines. The authors hope this research will encourage philanthropies to give serious attention to the importance of nurturing vibrant civil societies that can take generations to develop.

The full report is available at [www.gc.cuny.edu/cpcs](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/cpcs). The authors would be delighted to speak with others researching similar topics and themes. Contact Merrill Sovner at [msovner@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:msovner@gradcenter.cuny.edu).





## Voluntas News

### Research in *Voluntas* is reaching wider audiences

*Voluntas* authors, Professors Nives Dolsak and Aseem Prakash of University of Washington, USA, recently published “*Restoring the reputations of charities after scandals*” in *The Conversation*, a forum for public debate that is responsible, ethical and supported by evidence. It springs off their recently published *Voluntas* article (Vol. 31, 94-110) about how allegations of sexual abuse can taint an aid group’s image.

The editors-in-chief of *Voluntas*, congratulate Professor Dolsak and Prakash.



### Open Call for a Special Issue to *VOLUNTAS*

#### Researching the Third Sector: Approaches, Methods, and Applications

##### Guest Editors:

**Mirae Kim, PhD.**

*Assistant Professor*

*Department of Public Management and Policy*

*Andrew Young School of Policy Studies*

*Georgia State University, USA*

**Paloma Raggio, PhD.**

*Assistant Professor*

*Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership*

*School of Public Policy and Administration*

*Carleton University, Canada*

Please send abstracts between 300 to 400 words no later than **May 1, 2020** to [voluntas.method@gmail.com](mailto:voluntas.method@gmail.com). Please follow the instructions below for submission.

Full paper submissions for initial review by the guest editors will be due **October 15, 2020**.

The methodological toolbox of researchers investigating the third sector is diverse in terms of epistemologies, approaches, academic traditions, fundamental assumptions, methods, and practice. However, our conversations and debates often focus on the results of our studies, not the research processes behind the findings. There is an increasing demand for greater transparency in research processes and decisions from peer reviewers, editors, funding agencies, institutional review boards, students, organizations we partner with, and other stakeholders involved in the research endeavor. With this increased demand for greater research accountability, scholars have been asked to justify their methodologies in the research they publish. Yet, there are very few methodological articles published about the process of researching the third sector, its challenges, and implications despite the centrality of methodology for published and peer reviewed research.

To read the full call for papers, click [here](#).