



Inside ISTR

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THIRD-SECTOR RESEARCH

July-September 2018

ISTR's Amsterdam Conference Report

ISTR's Thirteenth International Conference was held at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam from July 10-13, 2018, with 675 delegates from 58 countries. This year's conference theme was *Democracy and Legitimacy: The Role of the Third Sector in a Globalizing World*. As in the past, this conference was preceded by the ISTR PhD Seminar, which hosted 50 PhD students and 12 ISTR faculty for discussion, peer-mentoring, professional development and community building. We are grateful for the support of the staff of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Philanthropic Studies Department – Professor Theo Schuyt, Professor René Bekkers, Barry Hoolwerf, and Brigitte Schouten---for their outstanding work to organize a terrific conference.

The conference venue offered wide and open spaces with central coffee breaks, with large rooms that accommodated the entire conference and provided excellent meeting spaces. For the Opening Reception, VU hosted all participants in the main foyer of the university. The reception was well attended and many thanks to the University which provided a big screen to enable the conference participants to keep an eye on the coinciding World Cup Football match.

The Closing Gala was a magical event hosted at the famous Rijks Museum. Thanks to the generous support of the Postcode Lottery, ISTR conference participants were treated to private viewings of some of the museum's most famous pieces, wonderful food, drink, and dance.



Conference participants were also given tickets for canal tours by the External Affairs Office of the City of Amsterdam and many took advantage of this opportunity in the evenings after the conference sessions.

As in past years, the conference featured professional development workshops, regional network and affinity group meetings, a reception for participants in the **Mentoring Program**, plenary sessions, opening and closing receptions, and a Meet the Author book signing and sales event. Several conference sessions featured innovations.

Sessions and Publications

The program included 124 paper sessions, 44 panels, 34 roundtables and 11 posters. The program and conference abstracts can be found on the **ISTR website** (users must be signed in to view full papers). Many papers presented are currently being submitted for Volume XI of the *ISTR Conference Working Paper Series* (the deadline is October 31) and we anticipate that some papers will be published in *Voluntas*. Publishing opportunities are described [here](#).

Plenary Speakers

The opening plenary got off to a beautiful start with a musical performance by a very talented quartet of wind instrumentalists. The opening plenary included welcomes, award presentations, and a keynote plenary address. A



Private viewing in the Rijks Gallery

video of the entire opening plenary & keynote address is available by clicking [here](#).

Opening Plenary Keynote

The plenary address was delivered by Donatella della Porta, Scuola Normale Superiore, and was entitled “Innovations from Below: Civil Society Beyond the Crisis.” Background information about Professor Della Porta can be found on the conference blog by clicking [here](#). Her speech discussed how the long financial crisis brought about challenges for civil society organizations and forced them to address social and political emergencies with declining resources. Nevertheless, these troubled times also saw a resurgence of civil society organizations, with high capacity to build alternative knowledge and social innovations. Bridging literature from social movement studies and voluntary associations, this keynote singled out new visions and practices of solidarity.

Closing Plenary Keynotes: “Transforming Democratic Contexts: Challenges for the Third Sector”

Natalie Fenton, University of London, shared interim findings from the Civil Society Futures (CSF) initiative, of which she is the research lead. CSF is an independent inquiry into civil society in England that considers how civil society can best prepare for the futures that may lie ahead. She discussed emergent social, political and economic strategies developed from new ways of thinking about how economic and social lives connect through attempts to put more power in the hands of more people.

Shih-Jung Hsu, National Chengchi University, Taiwan shared how his research and activism have overlapped. At the conference, Professor Hsu discussed land governance, land use policy, and Taiwan’s sustainable development, and



L/R: Lucas Meijs, Sara Kinsbergen, Theo Schuyt, Tymen van der Ploeg



Professor Donatella della Porta

the methods and practices of environmental and human rights NGOs in Taiwan, of which he has been an active participant. He described, with much emotion, his efforts to help farmers and local residents against land grabbing and forced eviction from the state. His recent book, *Land Justice*, has received the National Tripod Award 2017 from the Chinese Ministry of Culture.

More about our speakers is on our conference [BLOG](#).

Dutch Days and Dutch Plenary

VU organized six roundtables focusing on issues facing civil society in The Netherlands and invited local foundation and civil society representatives to speak. The event provided opportunities for local third sector leaders to visit this part of the ISTR Conference and consider research perspectives on these issues of practice.

Dutch Plenary: “Pluralism in the Polder: (Pre)conditions and progress”

These “Dutch Days” roundtables culminated in a plenary event pulling together the key messages from the “Dutch Days” roundtables reflecting on the relevance, advantages and shortcomings of this Dutch consensus based “Poldermodel,” which can be described as “a pragmatic recognition of pluriformity” or “cooperation despite differences” between different societal actors. Does it provide opportunities for growth within civil society? Or does it hamper initiative? And what future for the ‘poldermodel’ in an era of increasing fragmentation? Following the roundtable, Professor René Bekkers of VU, provided a public lecture entitled “Values of Philanthropy.”

PhD Seminar

Fifty students from 18 countries participated in the 4th International PhD Seminar, which was organized by Faculty chairs, René Bekkers, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The

Netherlands, and Pelle Åberg, Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College, Sweden. The students worked in both plenary and small group sessions, with 12 faculty working in pairs to oversee small groups of students.

Taco Brandsen, Radboud University, The Netherlands, gave the opening keynote about the history of the Dutch third sector, which set the groundwork for the current trends in the field. This engaging talk set the scene for many of the themes of third sector research that students would cover over the course of the seminar.



PhD students at dinner – Emma Taylor-Collins (UK) left and Afnan Koshak (USA) right

Award Presentations

Best Articles in *Voluntas* 2016 & 2017. These articles will be open access and available to the public for August and September. Patricia Mendonça, University of São Paulo, and chair of this awards committee, presented the awards for both years.

2016: Abdulrazak Karriem, University of Western Cape Town, South Africa, and Lehn M. Benjamin, Indiana University, United States, for their article, “How Civil Society Organizations Foster Insurgent Citizenship: Lessons from the Brazilian Landless Movement,” February 2016, Volume 27, Issue 1, pp 19-36.

2017: Jasmin Slootjes, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and Thomas Kampen, University for Humanistic Studies, The Netherlands, for their article, “Is My Volunteer Job Not Real Work? The Experiences of Migrant Women with Finding Employment Through Volunteer Work,” October 2017, Volume 28, Issue 5, pp 1900–1921.

The Emerging Scholar Dissertation Award was presented to Andrew Heiss, Brigham Young University, for his PhD thesis entitled *Amicable Contempt: The Strategic Balance between Dictators and International NGOs*. Tobias Jung, School of Management, University of St Andrews in Scotland and Chair of the Dissertation Award Committee, presented the award. Established

in 2006 by an anonymous donor, the award is given once every two years at the biennial ISTR conference to the author of the best dissertation in the field of comparative study of civil society organizations, nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, and voluntarism and related issues. The winner this year was chosen from among 61 entries from 28 countries. You can read more about Andrew’s PhD thesis [here](#).

The Selection Committee also acknowledges the merit and achievements of the two other finalists.

- Nora Derbal, Freie Universität Berlin, for her dissertation “Charity for the Poor in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1961–2015.”

- Sara Compion, University of Kentucky, for her dissertation “Volunteering and Democratization In Southern Africa: A Structural And Cultural Analysis.”

Best Poster Award. Stefan Toepler, George Mason University, and Publications Committee Chair, presented the award to Andre-Anne Parent, Stéphanie Tourillon-Gingras, and Christian Jetté, Université de Montréal for their poster *The Entre-Maisons Ahuntsic - A Collaborative Project at the Hearth of Low-rent Housing Units*. Click [here](#) to see the award-winning poster!

3-Minute Thesis Award, presented by Ruth Phillips, University of Sydney, Australia and President-Elect of ISTR, to Fanny Dethier for her presentation titled *Seeing Through NPOs*. This new competition for ISTR offered a light-hearted way for **ISTR PhD Seminar** students to practice the art of distilling their ideas down to the core questions and concerns in 3 minutes and one PowerPoint slide. A prize was awarded to the person who made

the case for their research in the most clear and compelling manner, and the winner made her presentation to the entire plenary. But besides the fun, the 3-minute thesis teaches important lessons –



Natalie Fenton

Shih-Jung Hsu

research should be designed to be useful, and in order to be useful (and in order to be funded!) the users need to understand it and believe in it, sometimes in short order.

Professional Development Workshops

This year, the ISTR Conference hosted 7 workshops, 5 of which were geared towards emerging scholars. The expanded workshops came at the suggestion of the PhD Seminar Alumni, who have formed their own group and maintain a **Facebook page** to keep in touch. The group collectively provided suggestions for relevant topics and speakers which were warmly received.

Mentoring Program Reception

Now in its 3rd year, the ISTR **Mentoring Program** connects students and emerging scholars with senior scholars and practitioners to share career, publishing, and funding advice and professional and networking development. During conference years, partners are offered the opportunity to meet in person at a Mentoring Program Reception. This year, more than 60 mentor-mentee matches were made, and many of these had the chance to meet at the Mentoring Reception. ISTR staff have made a best effort to carefully make mentor-mentee matches based on research and career interests and have been delighted to hear that some of these relationships have been fruitful for both parties.

Recent and New Conference Innovations

We maintained the roundtables innovation introduced in



Mentoring Pair at work – Edward Dixon, UK (Mentee) and Monserrat Gonzalez, Mexico (Mentor)

the Stockholm conference, which allows scholars and/or practitioners to discuss a “hot topic” without presenting elaborated papers. Thirty four roundtables were presented at this conference.

The **Conference Blog** was also continued this year and proved to be a great source for information about conference and also the civil society sector in The Netherlands. Several PhD students from VU contributed with blog posts to this end. We look forward to continuing and expanding the blog, including posting post-conference reflections and follow-up information.

ISTR worked with Core-Apps to develop and publish the conference app for both the Amsterdam and the 2020 conference in Montreal. This app pulls the information directly from our core system and automatically generates updates on schedule, and room updates. The app included the full text of abstracts, lists of authors, and allowed the user to search and sort presentations by session theme, type, and date. Data from Core-Apps tells us that the app was downloaded by the vast majority of conference participants and the My Schedule and My Favorites functions, which allowed participants to plan which sessions to attend in advance, were used heavily.

This year we also introduced daily newsletters, sent via the app and by email, providing conference participants with a 1-page overview of events planned for the next day.

Evaluation

More than 200 participants completed the conference evaluation, which is an excellent response rate and provides a high confidence in the results. Seventy-nine percent

(79%) of respondents said the overall quality of the conference was “Excellent” or “Very good.”

Sixty-six percent (66%) of conference evaluation respondents rated the paper/panel sessions as “Excellent” or “Very good.” The comments also generally praised the session moderators, but the comments made clear that more guidance is needed to clarify the role of the moderator.

Conference Support

The Conference would not have been possible without the support from generous funders and our host, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and the following sponsors:

- Novamedia (Postcode Lotteries)
- Ministerie V&J
- Oranje Fonds
- Noaber Foundation
- Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds
- ABN AMRO
- Adessium Foundation
- Kansfonds
- Katholieke stichting ter bevordering van welzijnswerk
- Maatschappij van welstand
- Plan Nederland
- Stichting De Verre Bergen
- VSB Fonds
- VandenEnde Foundation
- Fonds Schiedam Vlaardingen e.o.
- The Urban Institute



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In the spirit of voluntarism, the strong academic program was made possible by the scholarly contributions of 96 reviewers, the Academic Conference Committee, Awards Committees, and ISTR Board and we thank them for their continuing commitment and support for the Society!

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU IN MONTREAL,
7-10 July, 2020!**

Affinity Group and Regional Network Meetings

The ISTR Affinity Groups and Regional Networks held meetings at the ISTR Conference. Several new developments were announced. Click on the links below to read more about discussions in each group and to join the listserves for these networks.

Regional Networks

- Asia & the Pacific/East-Asia Network
- Africa
- Europe
- Latin America & the Caribbean
- CEE & Post-Soviet Countries

Affinity Groups

- Research on Volunteering
- Gender
- Law and Regulation
- Teaching and Learning