



*Laura Scheiber dedicates her career to social inclusion and education, third sector initiatives and social movements aimed at empowering marginalized youth by resisting unfair and unjust social processes.*

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## Member Insight

by Laura Scheiber

My path to ISTR began with its flagship publication, *Voluntas*. My dissertation study, which focused on the learning trajectories of social entrepreneurs in Brazil, was significantly shaped by a handful of *Voluntas* articles. My research straddled several fields and during the initial stages of my literature review I was pulling from diffuse publications in the areas of education, sociology, the third sector and social entrepreneurship. At times the literature felt rather disjointed, so much so that I questioned if the connections I was making across these fields made any sense. Then I discovered *Voluntas*, which, much to my delight, welcomes a wide breadth of topics and fields. What a relief to read a myriad of articles in the same volume that fluidly pulled together diverse areas of expertise. The articles inspired and reaffirmed the direction I wanted to take my work.

After defending my dissertation from Teachers College, Columbia University, I was on the hunt for an intellectual community where I could share the findings of my research and contribute to professional fields near and dear to my heart. I was fortunate to have one of my articles published in *Voluntas*. What a thrill and honor to have the opportunity to publish the findings of my study in a journal that was so pivotal to my doctoral work. I found the review process to be a positive no-nonsense exchange, and I am grateful for the rigorous feedback from reviewers that ultimately made my article stronger.

Wanting to dive deeper into the ISTR community, I became a member in 2015 and attended the 2016 ISTR conference in Stockholm, Sweden. I must confess that I haven't always had the best experience with conferences. I often find them a bit overwhelming and somewhat isolating. There never seems to be sufficient time or space for quality interaction or opportunities to really get to know fellow conference goers. I am happy to say that my first ISTR conference was a delightfully different experience.

Thanks to my wonderful colleague from *Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais* and fellow ISTR member, Armindo dos Santos de Sousa Teodósio (Téo), he introduced me to an outstanding group of Brazilian academics and practitioners. Marlei Pozzebon, Airton Cardoso, Mario Aquino Alves, Paula Chies Schommer, Lara Simielli, Gabriela de Breláz, Carolina Anidon, Morgana Martins Krieger, Patricia Mendonça, and Vander Aquiar are just a number of new friends and colleagues I met in Stockholm. They generously invited me to join them at key conference events, sessions, and must-see sightseeing activities. Brazilian culture never ceases to amaze me in terms of its warmth and receptivity. Certainly ISTR's Brazilian members are no exception.

The conference in Stockholm opened up opportunities for new friendships and professional partnerships. I am thrilled at the prospect of a number of proposed collaborations that evolved out of conversations following conference sessions. I really appreciated the diverse breadth of topics and fields that the ISTR conference sessions encompassed, as well as its balanced mix of practitioner and academic-oriented presentations, both of which were equally valued. Attending the sessions helped me gain a broader perspective on the many exciting topics and approaches currently taking place in the third sector. During my paper and roundtable sessions, I was grateful for the thoughtful questions and I learned valuable insights from colleagues' comments that will help push my work forward. I came back from the conference feeling inspired and invigorated.

So now what? Having the opportunity to contribute to ISTR's Member Insights has encouraged me to reflect on my prior work and future ambitions in the third sector and where ISTR fits into this path. I began my career over twenty years ago when I took a job as a case manager at a non-profit organization in Chicago. I worked with previously homeless families living in public housing projects. I will never forget the children and teenagers with whom I worked and the day-to-day injustices they faced, like inequitable educational opportunities, racism and incessant violence due to gang warfare and police violence. Since then, I have dedicated my career to social inclusion and education, third sector initiatives, and social movements aimed at empowering marginalized youth by resisting unfair and unjust social processes. Most of my work has been situated in academia, thanks to wonderful research opportunities at Teachers College, Columbia University and *Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais*. Looking forward, my aim is to make meaningful connections between my research world and my practical work in the third sector. I am fortunate to be collaborating with a number of amazing non-profit organizations dedicated to empowering some of the world's most vulnerable populations. Is the work challenging? Absolutely. But I am grateful to ISTR because I finally found my intellectual home, which will undoubtedly offer invaluable resources in my efforts to intersect my academic and practitioner worlds. I feel inspired by the ISTR community and am grateful to my "new home" for its invaluable supports that encourage all of us who make up this community to keep on.