



All the People

by Ola Segnestam-Larsson

ISTR as an organization and its conferences are all about the people. When thinking about all these wonderful people, engaged in civil society research around the world, a number of them stand out, in particular in relation to the three different ISTR conferences I have participated in.

One such person is Wendy Earles. I met her at my first ISTR conference in the year of 2008. At the time, I was living in Nicaragua with my family in order to conduct data collection for my PhD thesis. Traveling to the conference from Central America to Europe, from Managua to Barcelona was an experience still vivid in my mind.

Being a PhD student in business administration – and at the time located in a foreign country – I had not been spoiled with people interested in engaging in lengthy discussions related to civil society in general or organizational development in particular. The conference, however, served as an oasis and provided me with plenty of opportunities to learn, engage, and discuss with likeminded civil society researchers.

Meeting Wendy Earles was an integral part of that first encounter with ISTR. From the very start, she took the time to introduce this junior member to ISTR, the people involved in the organization and the conference. It was only long after that I came to realize that Wendy was not only a senior member, but also to become the president of the organization.

Another important relationship was established with Roseanne Mirabella during the conference in Istanbul in 2010. A colleague, Johan Hvenmark, and I had written a paper on nonprofit management education in Sweden. As one of the senior researchers in the field, Roseanne provided us with constructive criticism during our paper presentation. She also invited us to participate in a panel at an American conference the following year and offered us to write a chapter in a forthcoming anthology, among other things. Three years later, my colleague and I are still busy following up on all the leads that could be related to the ISTR conference in Istanbul and that very first meeting with the extraordinary Roseanne.

At the conference in Siena last year, I met with Angela Eikenberry for the first time. In addition to being instrumental for my being able to publish an article on the topic of hypocrisy in nonprofit organizations, that first meeting also initiated processes of collaboration between our two universities. Plans are underway to have Swedish students carry out their practicum at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and American faculty to teach classes at Ersta Sköndal University College. Angela is also planning to bring her wonderful family for an extended stay in Sweden this summer.

When thinking about all the people that I have met as a result of ISTR, and Wendy, Roseanne, and Angela in particular, I realize that they have been critical to my development as a civil society researcher. There is also a progression, from the first introduction to the world of civil society research in Barcelona in 2008 to the initiation of institutional collaboration across continents in Siena in 2012; a progression that would not have been possible without ISTR.

I look forward to the next ISTR conference in Münster in 2014 and meeting all the inspiring, old and new people that will continue to promote my developments as a civil society researcher and hopefully present new opportunities to future relationships.

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