

International Studies Association Venture workshop, March 31, 2012, San Diego: "Researching INGOs: Innovations in Data Collection and Methods"

Workshop report, Elizabeth Bloodgood and Hans Peter Schmitz

Our workshop, originally named "NGOs by the Numbers: Innovations in Data Collection and Methods of Analysis" and renamed "Researching INGOs," was held in the Hilton Bayfront Hotel in Room 500 from 8:30am until 5:30pm. Twenty participants, including ourselves, as well as four observers, from North America and Europe participated. K. Chad Clay, from Binghamton University, replaced Amanda Murdie and presented their co-authored paper.¹ The group included six doctoral students, eight Assistant Professors, three Associate Professors, three Full Professors (or their equivalents), and one practitioner working for a major INGO (Oxfam). Two attendees came from Canada, six from Europe, and sixteen from the US.

Workshop preparation

One month prior to the workshop, the workshop organizers circulated a framework document laying out in more detail the impetus for the workshop as well as a number of questions which the workshop participants would be asked to address in their individual papers. The workshop was advertised on the INGO Scholar Ning (<http://ingoscholars.ning.com/>) and through email listservs in order to attract additional interest among potential observers and a wider audience.

Each workshop participant was asked to prepare a ten to fifteen page paper discussing a methodological challenge they have faced when conducting research on NGOs, either as part of their dissertation or in a subsequent project. Authors were then asked to describe how they tackled this challenge, methodological innovations or approaches that helped them in their research, and finally to briefly describe their results. These papers were uploaded onto a Workshop webpage, hosted by Hans Peter Schmitz at the Syracuse University TNGO Initiative. Participants and observers were asked to read all papers carefully prior to the workshop in order to maximize opportunities for further discussion.

Results of discussions at workshop

Participants were given five minutes to provide background on their papers in sets of three or four followed by comments from a discussant and then more general discussion of the overall themes. Ann Marie Clark (Purdue), Wendy Wong (U. of Toronto), Joannie Tremblay-Boire (U. of Washington), and the organizers served as discussants. Discussion flowed naturally and bridged across panels quite smoothly.

¹ Two other invitees had to cancel their attendance (Charli Carpenter and Patrice McMahon)

Several common themes, and questions, that emerged throughout the workshop discussions and within the participants' papers:

- 1) Sense of relative isolation among NGO scholar community and desire for increased interaction, networking, exchange of ideas, data, and finished products.
- 2) Problems that NGO scholars face in conducting research may in part be theoretical—lack of agreement on the basic unit of analysis makes a progressive research program more difficult. Even among participants questions over what can and should be lumped into the same category (NGOs, INGOs, networks, associations of NGOs, religious organizations) and what sorts of questions need to be further debated/answered before moving forward (or whether certain conceptual categories/definition can be considered good enough for productive future research). Lack of agreement upon the basic unit of analysis exacerbates fragmentation among scholars.
- 3) Mixed views on the tradeoffs between offers of anonymity to interviewees, seen as necessary to obtain interviews (particularly on sensitive topics or with important individuals) and to please university review boards, and yet also an obstacle to sharing data more widely and providing sufficiently compelling evidence for top journal publications (particularly when who said it rather than what was said matters).
- 4) Larger concerns for the ethics as well as practicalities of managing practitioner-scholar interactions, as a sense that not all practitioners nor all academics respect members of the other category, and a sense of use/abuse by practitioners might limit access for future scholars, while needing to increase the returns from scholarship to practitioners to help protect relationships and because in the end largely engaged in the same tasks—trying to help NGOs do more things better.
- 5) Strong desire and sense of a need for large, multi-researcher, multi-university research projects, with significant grant resources, but sense that generally scholars too early in their careers to be able and/or willing to manage such a project right now. In the meantime, mechanisms to share data (via a datahub such as an NGO Dataverse, which helps to catalog and centralize empirical studies, or increased interlinking across individuals' research web pages) would help increase access to data.

Post-workshop publication plans

We have plans for four publications emerging immediately (or directly) out of this workshop, although we know that the workshop has already stimulated a much larger quantity of bilateral collaborative work. A number of participants at the workshop met for the first time, and used the workshop as an opportunity to share ideas for future panels at venues such as ARNOVA, APPAM, ISA, and APSA.

Each of the four publications is geared towards a different audience and will showcase different participants and/or aspects of participants' research.

First, the organizers have a contract with Routledge to prepare and publish a chapter for *The Routledge Handbook of International Organization*, edited by Bob Reinalda, to be published in early 2013. As Bob describes it "The volume is intended to give a state-of-the-art overview of particular topics with regard to international organization as an ongoing process. International organization has received increased academic attention and the Handbook is aimed at advanced students, postgraduates, libraries, researchers and policy makers. The Handbook with nearly 40 entries comprises six main thematic sections, discussing: documentation and data sets on international organizations, ideas promoted by these organizations, processes taking place within them, actors playing their roles, structures and change, and evolving international architectures. Entries are state-of-the-art reviews of current research in a particular area. You are asked to provide an original chapter of 7,000 words (everything included). The volume will be fully peer reviewed by an external specialist." We see this as a way of showcasing the advances that have been made in thinking about and researching INGOs to a broad audience, particularly undergraduate and graduate students as they become interested in researching NGOs.

Second, there was great interest among the participants in a symposium, for *International Studies Review* or *Perspectives on Politics*, in which five to seven scholars examine the problems of measurement in regards to NGOs in brief 3-6 page pieces. This symposium would address questions of how to define the relevant unit of analysis, how to count things that move across networks and boundaries, and how to make sense of heterogeneous national and international populations of what are purportedly the same unit of analysis. This symposium would be of interest to IR scholars more broadly as many of these same issues will feature prominently in their own research as non-state actors interact with, or undercut, states increasingly frequently and as "the state" itself becomes a more contested and heterogeneous unit of analysis.

Third, we are pursuing the idea of a special edition of a journal, *Review of International Organization* or *Global Governance* are the first targets, in which a more limited number of scholars examine how their alternative methodological innovations enable us to better address a difficult theoretical question regarding the functioning of NGOs in the international system. The papers will first be prepared for a panel to be proposed for next year's annual ISA meeting in San Francisco. Using comments and recommendations from the participants in panel session, the papers will be edited and submitted for review by the journal. We realize that 'special issues' are becoming less and less frequent and many journals have abolished them entirely. As is the case with our other publication strategies, we may adapt this idea depending on the additional feedback we get from editors and the participants.

Fourth, we plan to publish an edited volume with a press such as Oxford or Routledge, which brings together all of the participants collective wisdom into one book that displays the methodological rigor of NGO scholarship, helps advances a NGO research program, and serves to teach future generations of NGO scholars alternative means to surmount similar methodological challenges. This publication will draw most directly upon the papers prepared for the workshop. While more closely resembling a textbook than an original theoretical contribution to the literature, this book would be very valuable for each of us advising future MA and PhD student. Such an edited volume may also help to attract bright young NGO scholars in the future. We also believe that more serious attention to methodology within NGO scholarship will naturally and directly increase the theoretical contributions from this research, particularly as methodological divisions and challenges have until now fragmented scholars, making theoretical aggregation and complementary research more difficult. We propose a fifteen chapter book, divided into sections on Data Compilation and Creation, Taking Context into Account, Making Meaning Out of Data, and Why Good Research (and Research Ethics) Matters. This book will include contributions by all of the interested participants (but is also open to a small number of new contributors) and serve as a capstone volume for the workshop.

Next Steps

- 1) Roundtable "Community Building among INGO Researchers" to be proposed for the annual ISA meeting in San Francisco to be submitted by June 1, 2012 as the Workshop panel.
- 2) Separate panel proposal on "Homogeneity and Heterogeneity Among NGOs" with selected participants to be submitted by June 1, 2012 for the annual ISA meeting in San Francisco.
- 3) Chapter for Reinalda's edited *Routledge Handbook of International Organization* to be submitted by July 1, 2012.
- 4) Symposium proposal to be submitted to *Perspective on Politics* by June 30, 2012. Should this be rejected, a revised version will be submitted to *International Studies Review* shortly thereafter.
- 5) Edited volume prospectus, with introduction, chapter outline, and participant CVs, to be submitted to Oxford University Press by July 30, 2012. Should Oxford not accept to review the entire edited volume, a revised prospectus will be sent to Routledge.
- 6) Revised chapters from participants in the edited volume due to organizers by September 30, 2012.
- 7) Comments and revision letters sent to participants by November 30, 2012.
- 8) Revised chapters for edited volume sent by participants by February 15, 2013.
- 9) Full edited volume to be sent to press by March 30, 2013.

- 10) Symposium papers sent to organizers and other symposium participants by October 30, 2012.
- 11) Commented and edited symposium papers to participants by December 20, 2012.
- 12) Revised symposium papers to organizers by January 30, 2013.
- 13) Symposium to journal by February 28, 2013.
- 14) Discussion of journal special edition at annual ISA meeting in San Francisco in April 2013.

Appendix I: List of session, attendees and paper titles

Session 1: Biographies (perceptions, self-reflection) - what do we know about (I)NGOs?

Reinalda, Bob (Radboud U., Nijmegen, the Netherlands): Researching INGOs from a combined Political Science & History Perspective

Deloffre, Maryam Zarnegar (Arcadia U.): Abductive Framing Analysis: Towards the systematic collection of perceptual data on international non-governmental organizations

Raggio, Paloma (Syracuse U.): Beyond Answers: Qualitative Data Analysis

Discussant: Wendy Wong, University of Toronto

Session 2: Ethnography - context matters

Siméant, Johanna (U. Paris 1, France): Researching Empirical Strategies in INGO Research: Ethnography in International Solidarity, Public Policy and the Division of Labor in International Activism

Stroup, Sarah S. (Middlebury College): NGOs in Place: The challenges of researching INGOs' National Origins

Duygulu, Sirin (UMass-Amherst): Using Qualitative Comparative Analysis in the Study of INGOs

Discussant: Ann Marie Clark, Purdue University

Session 3: Formal organizations and counts

Kim, Dongwook (Marquette U.): Measuring and Explaining Transnational Human Rights Networking: The Case of the Middle East and North Africa

Vabulas, Felicity (University of Chicago): When and Why do IGOs grant formal access to NGOs?

Balboa, Cristina/Welton, Laurel (Baruch College-CCNY): INGOs in the United States: Data for a city-to-city description

Joachim, Jutta/Schneiker, Andrea (University of Hannover): "INGOs and Private Security Contractors"

Discussant: Joannie Tremblay-Boire, University of Washington

Session 4: Networking, blurring lines, pushing boundaries

Bush, Sarah (Harvard University): Data Opportunities and Challenges in the Study of Democracy Promotion NGOs

Davis/Murdie/Clay (Emory/Kansas State/Binghamton): Shaming, Networks, and Neighbors: One Approach to the Study of INGOs

Hannan, Rossman, Ash (UCLA): Incremental Internet data collection for the systematic study of the diffusion of policy innovations through INGO networks

Büthe/Major/de Mello e Souza: The Politics of Private Foreign Aid. Humanitarian Principles, Economic Development Objectives, and Organizational Interests in the Allocation of Private Aid (published)

Discussants: Elizabeth Bloodgood/Hans Peter Schmitz

Observers in attendance:

Buffardi, Ann; Oxfam/United Kingdom

Kruse, Johannes; University of Bremen/Germany

Santana, Luis Enrique; University of Washington

Shin, Chan Woong, Syracuse University

Appendix II: Budget

Item	Budgeted	Submitted
Room Rental	\$200	
Food & Beverage	\$1,513.60	
Audio-Visual	\$440	
Hotel rooms	\$5,824	\$4,007.12
Per diems	\$1,950	\$1,725
Research assistant	\$2,500	\$2,500
Total	\$12,428	\$8,232.12