

## Book Review / Compte-rendu

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**Indigenous Economics: Sustaining Peoples and Their Lands.** By Ronald Trosper. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2022. 272 pp. ISBN: 9780816546626.

In *Indigenous Economics: Sustaining People and Their Lands*, Ronald Trosper explores the concept of relationality as a foundational principle to identify and understand the meaning of “economic development” within Indigenous communities (p. 3). In 2009, Trosper authored *Resilience, Reciprocity and Ecological Economics: Northwest Coast Sustainability*, which discusses reciprocity as the solution to social dilemmas stemming from common pool resources. This theme extends to Trosper’s 2022 publication, *Indigenous Economics*, where he delineates that relationality is what drives reciprocity as a solution to the dilemmas presented by common goods. Furthermore, *Indigenous Economics* offers a sustainable alternative to Western neoliberal economic development by emphasizing relationships between humans, communities, and nature.

As an economist and member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Trosper leverages his professional and research experience to outline the rationale behind Indigenous relational economics (IRE) as an alternative to mainstream economies. At its core, IRE challenges mainstream notions of economic development, centred on industrialization and commodity ownership and its contributions to environmental crises, and embraces wealth defined through strong relationships with others and nature. Despite colonial efforts to eradicate Indigenous ways of being and knowing, Trosper highlights prevailing examples of Indigenous relational economies and the benefits of this approach to economics. *Indigenous Economics* argues for development through “enhancing relationships” (p. 2), which leads to additional material goods and services shared among all in those relationships. Trosper emphasizes that, “the aim of good living is to increase the value of all relationships without harming them” (p. 5).

Trosper (2022) begins *Indigenous Economics* by outlining, “five examples of successful relationship building” (p. 7) In Chapter 1, Trosper highlights international examples of Indigenous Peoples employing relationship building to protect their land and foster stewardship, illustrating the mutual benefits for Indigenous communities and others involved, improved relationships with nature, and increased participation in land governance. Trosper’s examples include Indigenous Peoples in

Ecuador fighting against water commodification, Pikangikum First Nation in Ontario advocating for a co-developed forest management plan, Haida First Nation in British Columbia pursuing co-development of a conservation area and timber harvest plan, Māori tribes in New Zealand navigating colonial legal systems to relinquish legal ownership of a river, and a coalition of US tribes securing co-management of land around Bears Ears National Monument with the federal government.

Throughout the book, these cases are used to illustrate relational Indigenous economies and their positive impact while also revealing barriers posed by colonial governments or neoliberal companies hindering Indigenous self-determination. In each case, Indigenous communities fight for land protection and self-governance while navigating colonial institutions. Troster highlights the co-management of the Bears Ears National Monument as “innovative” when this only meets the minimum requirements outlined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2008). Troster optimistically refers to these cases as examples of how Indigenous communities have built relationships with colonial governments and private organizations to influence decisions impacting their land. Moreover, Troster demonstrates that by employing the principles of IRE, Indigenous Peoples have seen better outcomes for their land and people. However, these cases also demonstrate how many barriers Indigenous Peoples face to exercise their rights due to ongoing colonialism. Troster uses these cases to illustrate IRE theory and philosophy throughout the book.

The following chapters include both an explanation of Indigenous relational economic theory and an argument for IRE as a solution for governance challenges. Troster begins, in the first two chapters, by outlining the philosophy and worldviews that comprise IRE and how standard economics emphasize individual preferences that determine outcomes. In contrast, IRE highlights that unique relationships impact individual preferences and motivations. Troster expands on these lines of thought in Chapter 3 to explore how strong relationships lead to relational goods like trust, cooperation, and social capital, through emphasis on understanding, consultation, emotional balance, persuasion, acceptance, and reliability. The fourth chapter contrasts mainstream economics and IRE views on land and property, revealing that IRE rejects private property, recognizing the agency of non-humans, and emphasizing complex territorial systems with varying rules based on relationships to the land.

The next three chapters of the book build upon the theory and philosophy behind IRE to demonstrate its governance benefits such as addressing overexploitation through relationship-based approaches, examining leadership, sustainability, and co-management. Troster then examines the relationship between Indigenous communities and state bureaucracies, highlighting how co-management arrangements are established through relationship-building in the case studies, revealing the challenges to relationality posed by states. Throughout, Troster argues that the case studies outlined in Chapter 1 are examples of using relationship building to address common pool dilemmas. While these examples demonstrate Indigenous Peoples building relationships and trust with colonial governments to govern resources, they also highlight the barriers these governments pose to Indigenous self-determination and land governance.

Trosper also situates his work within the broader literature on the social economy. In Chapter 7, Trosper argues that the existence of non-profit corporations, co-operatives, and other social economy organizations in the “third sector” leaves room for IRE approaches to exist within existing economic paradigms. Moreover, it is evident that the philosophy behind IRE aligns with broad definitions of the social economy. For example, Jack Quarter, Laurie Mook, and Ann Armstrong (2017) define the social economy as the connections between self-governing organizations “that are guided by their social objectives in the goods and services that they offer” (p. 4). As outlined by Trosper, IRE relationships and relational goods align with the social economy’s focus on “social objectives” (Quarter, Mook, & Armstrong, 2017, p. 4). In Canada, as noted by Sengupta, Vieta, and McMurty (2015), Indigenous-led social enterprises integrate social, economic, environmental, and cultural goals into their operational processes. However, it is crucial to avoid conflating IRE with the categorizations in the social economy literature. The values of IRE extend beyond social economy organizations and predate colonial economic systems. Therefore, it can be colonial and paternalistic to characterize IRE as a subset of the social economy. Moreover, while there are some existing examples of IRE, as identified by Trosper, IRE necessitates transformational systemic changes and decolonization to be fully realized.

In the afterword, Trosper summarizes his comparison of mainstream economics and IRE to present IRE as a viable alternative. Trosper highlights that equity is critical in IRE but further research on this topic could explore how relationality fosters equitable outcomes for marginalized communities. Additionally, further analysis of the case studies in *Indigenous Economics* could focus on the need for colonial state governments to adopt relationality in their interactions with Indigenous communities and redefine legal and political systems to remove barriers for Indigenous Peoples exercising their rights (Borrows & Coyle, 2017). Trosper’s case studies demonstrate one-sided relationship building with Indigenous communities working to navigate colonial systems. Going forward, applying these findings can hold colonial governments accountable to removing barriers for Indigenous Peoples adopting Indigenous relational economic systems.

Overall, Ronald Trosper’s work, *Indigenous Economics*, not only offers a crash course in the philosophy of IRE, but a solid argument for the benefits that a relational approach offers and the solutions it presents for common dilemmas and crises in mainstream economics. Trosper grounds IRE theory and demonstrates its practical applications and positive outcomes through modern case studies. While there are opportunities to build on this work, Trosper ends his book with a poignant note of caution and urgency. He concludes that, as the dominant economic system weakens and experiences crises, Indigenous Peoples can continue to recommend relationality as a more sustainable alternative; however, in the meantime, “whether the river” or the natural world “survives is an open question” (p. 218).

## REFERENCES

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