

## Book Review

Parrotta, J.A. and Ronald L. Trosper, eds. 2012. *Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge: Sustaining Communities, Ecosystems and Biocultural Diversity*. New York: Springer.

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Weighing in at 620 pages with over 70 authors from 33 countries, *Traditional Forest-Related-Knowledge* (hereafter *TFRK*) is an encyclopedic treatment of the topic with something for everyone.

The technically inclined will find it packed full of empirical examples of TFRK in chapters covering ten geographical regions: Africa, Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile), North America, Europe, Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia; Northeast Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Western Pacific as well as in a chapter focused on TFRK and Climate Change. (Central America is mysteriously absent.) Chapters differ in their focus and organization, so those interested in comparisons will have to flip through the pages looking for topics of concern.

Others will find the introduction and Chapter 14 “Ethics and Research Methodologies for the Study of Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge” and concluding chapter of particular interest. In their thoughtful introduction, the editors put TFRK (sacred traditional knowledge in particular) and a mix of conventional ecological and social scientific approaches into productive conversation. The array of conventional scientific approaches (reductionist science, ecology, social-ecological systems, resilience theory; sustainability, ecological economics; and actor-network theory) may strike some as idiosyncratic. But the elements through which they are compared are carefully chosen to reveal the core of TFRK. This is an enlightening treatment of the topic. The chapter on ethics is similarly thoughtful and enlightening. Its emphasis on the difference between responsibility to an individual informant and responsibility to the community to which she/he belongs and which may have rights over and responsibilities for TFRK is particularly

important. This chapter should be read by anyone doing research with indigenous people, or, for that matter, any field researcher at all. The concluding chapter makes a convincing foray into the debate over whether there really is a difference between traditional knowledge and conventional science as well as examining the meaning and practice of sustainability in a useful way.

In any volume this size, there will inevitably be questions about who is and is not cited, definitions of concepts, and what theories are still in vogue. Readers of *IJC*, for example, might have preferred a more robust treatment of property rights. And, alas, identifying debates between chapters depends on the reader's own discernment. For example, the authors of the chapter on Africa call for the documentation and codification of TFRK whereas the authors of the ethics chapter recognize the performative nature of such knowledge. They warn (p. 542): ... *great care should be taken when accessing and recording such knowledge, thereby transforming it into what might be termed non-living knowledge for which no one has specific responsibility to pass on.*

Elements of this key debate about the "preservation" of traditional ecological knowledge are returned to in the concluding chapter. But it is unfortunate that the pieces that appear in this book were not brought together if only by cross-references.

And finally, the elephant in the room. Given its encyclopedic nature, *Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge* could well become a go-to volume particularly for teaching. But to do this, it needs a really good subject index. Astonishingly, it has no subject index at all. (It does have a 23 page author index.) If *TFRK* is to be as useful as it could be, someone, in the best tradition of the commons, needs to start a subject index wiki. This reader would be grateful if the first two index terms were "gender" and "women".