Reflections on ISER Books

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The Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) was founded at Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1961. Its publication arm ISER Books followed five years later. In the nearly 50 years since their founding, ISER and ISER Books have established Memorial University as a recognized centre of academic excellence for social science research on the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador as well as the wider North Atlantic and sub-Arctic rim. ISER Books' multidisciplinary and comparative lenses are particular strengths as globalizing processes link one place to another regardless of distance, size, or difference. In this report we provide a short history of ISER Books. As with any short history, it is abbreviated and incomplete in many respects, though we have tried to locate important changes at ISER Books within the larger intellectual, financial, and organizational changes that Memorial University itself has experienced in this nearly half a century.

In the initial years, ISER Books' first publications were doctoral theses of ISER research fellows in economics and anthropology/sociology. Memorial University, at that time, was without doctoral programs in the social sciences; thus the research fellows accepted by ISER came from other universities where they had completed all course requirements for their doctorates – all that remained was the field research and its funding. ISER applicants submitted proposals of Newfoundland-related research; acceptance by ISER led to two-year research appointments in the province (one year of which was to be spent in field research), followed by the submission of their doctoral theses to their “home” universities. A copy of each accepted thesis was deposited with ISER, and following upon the founding of ISER Books in 1966, first publication rights to the theses belonged to ISER. In the initial years, books to be published were sent to the University of

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Toronto Press (UTP) for printing, but there were problems – reviews in international journals frequently mistook UTP, not ISER, as the publisher, and so our own university printing services undertook the job and did it well.

Through the 1960s, ISER saw its research responsibility in terms of the “uniqueness” of Newfoundland. This is made explicit in an early report submitted to the university president: “The Institute was established to foster and undertake research into the many economic and social questions arising in Newfoundland because of its unique historical, geographical and economic position.”¹ However, in the course of time ISER research was set free from such a restriction. In order to understand analytically such “uniqueness,” comparisons and contrasts with other cultures and their people were necessary, and, furthermore, as a research institution ISER came to recognize a responsibility towards interpreting a changing world (globally) – its meanings and their impacts.

Accordingly, ISER Books now offers a range of titles beyond Newfoundland ethnography, even while that remains an important focus of research and a source of research funding. In part, this has been a comparative extension of familiar ethnographic scenes with books about “coastal communities” or “North Atlantic fisheries,” including Norwegian fisheries and their community life; and, in part, an extension into new ethnographic territories: books about northern Native Peoples, particularly the Inuit and Innu of Labrador, and the Cree of Ontario; there have also been extended explorations in the east Canadian Arctic of Inuit “psychology,” and of white patronage. One book also handled Canadian tutelage of Indian populations across the country.

In all these cases, current questions are taken into account: hence the noted importance of women in sustaining fishing economies, not just in Newfoundland, but in Brazil, Portugal, India, Scotland, Malaysia, and Peru.

Another emerging theme in a handful of ISER Books is the place of applied research, whether it be the community implications of violence or of mental illness, or of AIDS, or of midwifery or menopause, or the community implications of factionalism. A more insistent topic, however, is how communities handle crises in their fisheries; for

1 Memorial University of Newfoundland, Institute of Social and Economic Research, *Report, 1961–1963* (St John's: The Institute, 1963), 1. ISER's reports are held by the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

example, one study examines how fishers, community residents, and state scientists differently construct understandings of a resource crisis, the Cod Moratorium of 1992, and an appropriate response to it. Here the ethnography of knowledge itself becomes a research question: the knowledge of practising fishermen is compared with that of scientists, and strategies are sought for integrating the two, along with the variables of local ecological changes. A related topic, the handling of offshore gas and oil, has caught the attention of ISER researchers, producing ethnography from Norway and Scotland, as well as Newfoundland. A subsequent project looked at the Newfoundland offshore in considerable detail from varied approaches.

ISER authors have also seized the opportunity to expound how they see globalization and extended modernity² influence both the writing and acceptance of the social sciences: thus the effects of “bureaucracy” and “official interpretation” are scrutinized; in one study a question about “advocacy” is brought forward: if practised by a researcher, is it likely to damage the canon of research?

To further encourage intellectual exchange, ISER has long organized seminars, colloquia, and conferences where the participants include visiting scholars as well as local researchers. These are, without exception, significant sources of the intellectual energy behind the making of ISER Books.

Several large, multidisciplinary grants have been awarded to Memorial social science researchers along with colleagues from other universities beginning in the early 1990s, as major Canadian academic granting agencies such as the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) promoted such large-scale, collaborative initiatives. A total of five edited collections resulting from these joint ventures were published through ISER Books. Two initiatives are especially noteworthy in this regard: the Tri-Council Eco-Research Initiative (1994–99) and Coasts Under Stress (2003–08).

The foregoing has by no means covered all of ISER Books, and the constraint of space precludes naming specific book titles and authors; however, one title has a special claim: *Strange Terrain: The Fairy World in Newfoundland* by Barbara Rieti was the winner of the 1992–93 Raymond Klibansky book prize from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

2 See the work of Anthony Giddens.

As of 2009 a total of 97 books have been published by ISER Books: 8 titles in the decade of the 1960s; 22 in the 1970s; 22 in the 1980s; 31 in the 1990s; and 14 from 2000 to 2009. Sixty-nine of these volumes have been monographs and 28 edited collections. All in all, approximately 111,500 books have been sold worldwide.

A measure of success and potential influence is reprinting. Each year several reprints are published in response to demand. While the normal size of the initial edition of a book is no more than 2,000 copies, the call for reprints is still rewarding – one book, Georg Henriksen's *Hunters of the Barrens: The Naskapi on the Edge of the White Man's World* (1973), had reached 14 reprints by 2007, and approximately 15,000 copies have been sold. Currently, 10 books have been reprinted at least once.

In addition to the publishing of books, ISER Books has produced reports and research & policy papers in limited paperback editions. The intention is to draw attention to ongoing research or to parts of completed research that merit specialized readerships; for example, the Newfoundland offshore project published, in the place of a book, 10 reports and 10 research papers.

Yet little would be achieved without efficient marketing by means of review copies sent to international social science journals and at the annual meetings of the relevant social sciences societies, Canadian and American, with an ISER audience; nor are ISER Books displays confined to North America – some years they have travelled far: for example, to the London Book Fair and the Beijing Book Fair. Catalogues have been mailed to 10,000 libraries in the USA and Canada. However, since 2006 the listing of titles is done exclusively through the ISER Books website where ordering can be done.³

Such continuity in ISER Books operations belies a series of significant organizational, membership, and financial changes for both ISER Books and the university. Three are particularly relevant to the history of ISER Books. The first was the creation of ISER Books at approximately the same time as ISER itself widened its disciplinary membership from sociology, anthropology–archaeology, economics, and political science to embrace folklore, history, and linguistics, and

3 A complete list of ISER title is available at: <http://www.mun.ca/iser/books>. For an inclusive listing of ISER titles and their authors, and for the purchase and mailing of books, the postal address is ISER Books, c/o Memorial University, Faculty of Arts, 297 Mt Scio Road, St John's, NL, Canada A1C 5S7; telephone 709-737-3453; email iser-books@mun.ca.

initiatives were taken to explore additional, external sources of funding through contractual and other consultative work.

The second change was a review of ISER resulting from a request by Dr Rosemary Ommer, the director. During December of 1994 a six-member committee reviewed ISER's mandate, including that of ISER Books. Among the recommendations of relevance to ISER Books was the creation of an umbrella organization known as the Faculty of Arts Publications to oversee the journals *Labour/Le travail*, *Newfoundland Studies*, and *The International Journal of Maritime History*, along with ISER Books. At approximately the same time, the new position of manager of ISER Books was created and a new person with experience in the publishing industry brought in to fill it. The former academic position of editor was removed. The manager of ISER Books was also designated as the manager of Faculty of Arts Publications.

The final event was an ad hoc committee reporting to the dean of arts to review ISER Books specifically. This committee was appointed in June 2007 and submitted a report in April 2008. In 2007 the manager of ISER Books had retired and, as well, the board of the journal *Labour/Le travail* decided to move its offices to another university: these events and continuing financial concerns at the university and faculty levels prompted the review. While this committee was reviewing ISER Books and recommending future directions, the dean appointed a senior faculty member to handle the editorial responsibilities of the manager of ISER Books position, mainly to handle the review process for new manuscripts and those currently in process. An advisory committee to provide advice and review recommendations of the academic editor regarding publishing decisions was put in place along with a Faculty of Arts committee of academics drawn from relevant ISER constituencies. The committee's recommendations were aimed principally at streamlining and making more efficient ISER Books' operations.

New forces of change currently engulf the province, Canada, and the world requiring another initiative of academic understanding not unlike that of the 1960s, though the processes are quite different. Earlier generations of editors and managers set a high bar of academic excellence, relevance, and productivity. There is every reason to hope and expect that ISER Books will contribute to this newest challenge for emergent knowledge in the same way.

Little could have been accomplished by an editor working single-handedly – and of course this has not been the case. Right from the beginning, Dean Moses Morgan, later university president, and Dean Leslie Harris were indispensable. Special acknowledgements are also due to some other special persons: first of all Susan Nichol as assistant and then associate editor through many years and Jeanette Gleeson, also through many years, first as publications assistant and then as managing editor, along with Alvin Potter as manager of ISER Books; and to Douglas House for his years as editor. In recent years, the contributions of Irene Whitfield as current manager of arts publications, Dr Wayne Fife as academic editor 2008–09, and Dr Pat Byrne as chair of ISER publications are greatly appreciated. Our appreciation also to Kevin Pittman, Gail Collins, Roxanne Millan, and Janet Oliver for responding when need called; and we thank, too, the copy editors and others for their individual contributions; and now: ISER Books looks towards a fulfilling future.

SOMMAIRE

Créé en 1966, ISER Books est la maison d'édition de l'Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) de la Memorial University of Newfoundland, organisme fondé en 1961. Axé initialement sur la recherche en économie et en anthropologie/sociologie se rapportant à Terre-Neuve, ISER Books n'a pas tardé à élargir son centre d'intérêt au-delà des thèmes et des limites géographiques fixés à l'origine. Les auteurs retracent l'histoire d'ISER Books en tenant compte principalement des changements d'ordre intellectuel, financier et organisationnel qui se sont opérés à l'université Memorial.