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Editorial: Decolonising Resilience – Power, Care, Culture, and Sustainability in Contemporary Economies

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Abstract

Resilience has become a central concept in contemporary economic and policy discourse, yet it is frequently mobilised in narrow, depoliticised ways that reproduce extractive logics and colonial assumptions about value, rationality, and progress. This editorial introduces the special issue *Decolonising Resilience: Power, Care, Culture, and Sustainability in Contemporary Economies*, arguing that resilience must be reimagined as a decolonial project. Drawing on insights from behavioural economics, wellbeing research, climate–economy analysis, cultural studies, digital sustainability, and Indigenous knowledge systems, the editorial situates the contributions of this issue within a broader critique of universalist economic frameworks. The papers collectively demonstrate that resilience is socially produced, culturally embedded, and shaped by asymmetries of power across regions, institutions, and knowledge systems. By foregrounding plural rationalities, informal networks of care, cultural economies, ecological governance, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge as economic infrastructure, this issue advances a relational and justice-oriented understanding of resilience. The editorial concludes that decolonising resilience is essential for moving beyond extractive development models and for designing economies that are adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable in an era of compounding global crises.

Keywords: Decolonial Resilience; Sustainable Economies; Care and Culture; Plural Rationalities; Social Capital; Climate and Ecological Governance

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Why Decolonising Resilience Matters Now

Resilience has become a defining concept in economic and policy discourse, particularly in the context of climate change, financial instability, and social disruption. However, much of the contemporary resilience literature remains rooted in technocratic and depoliticised frameworks that emphasise efficiency, optimisation, and rapid recovery. Such approaches often reproduce the very extractive logics that create vulnerability, inequality, and ecological degradation, rather than challenging their underlying causes.

Recent research across sustainability, wellbeing, and behavioural economics highlights the limitations of universalist economic assumptions. Studies on sustainable consumption intentions demonstrate that decision-making is deeply shaped by social norms, collective identities, and cultural context—particularly in non-Western and collectivist societies (Zahra et al., 2022). Similarly, spatial analyses of wellbeing reveal that resilience is not simply an individual capacity but is embedded in social capital, place-based relationships, and institutional environments (Lignier et al., 2023, 2024). Together, this evidence suggests that resilience cannot be reduced to technical adaptation or individual coping; it is socially produced, culturally mediated, and unevenly distributed.

This special issue responds to these insights by advancing a decolonial framing of resilience. Decolonising resilience requires confronting asymmetries of power in knowledge production, valuing care and relationality, and recognising multiple pathways to sustainability grounded in local contexts and lived experience. In doing so, the issue builds on earlier reflections in this journal that framed resilience as partnership (Chaiechi, 2021), transformative adaptation (Chaiechi, 2022), and empowerment across diverse frontiers (Chaiechi, 2023). The present collection extends this trajectory by arguing that resilience must also be decolonised—epistemically, institutionally, and culturally.

Resilience Beyond Extraction: Regional and Ecological Coordination

Several contributions discussed in this editorial, drawing on both the current and recent issues of the *Journal of Resilient Economies*, foreground resilience at the scale of regions and ecosystems. Research on the Yangtze River Economic Belt demonstrates how economic and ecological systems can become misaligned when development strategies prioritise growth over environmental limits. By modelling coordination between ecological resilience and economic performance, this work shows how

regionally grounded policies can correct structural imbalances and reduce long-term vulnerability (Wang et al., 2025).

A complementary perspective is provided by climate–economy research on Iraq, which shows that agriculture remains highly sensitive to temperature increases and drought severity, while non-oil sectors display weaker but still consequential climate exposure (Hassan & Faraj, 2025). These findings highlight how economies shaped by historical extraction and narrow diversification are disproportionately vulnerable to climate shocks. From a decolonial perspective, resilience in such contexts requires structural transformation rather than marginal adjustment.

Seen through the lens of decolonial political economy, these studies underscore the importance of moving beyond inherited development templates toward governance frameworks that respect ecological limits and regional specificity (Escobar, 2018; Quijano, 2000).

Plural Rationalities and the Decolonisation of Economic Behaviour

At the micro level, resilience is frequently framed through assumptions of rational choice, optimisation, and utility maximisation. Such framings, deeply rooted in Eurocentric economic thought, tend to universalise a narrow conception of rationality while marginalising alternative decision-making logics. Contributions engaging with behavioural economics challenge this reductionism. For example, research on ambiguity and framing effects shows that investor behaviour often labelled as “irrational” may instead be contextually rational, once uncertainty, subjective valuation, and bounded cognition are taken seriously (Kiky, 2025). Rather than deviations from rationality, these behaviours reflect adaptive responses to complex and uncertain environments.

This insight aligns with broader critiques emerging from sustainability and wellbeing research. Studies of sustainable consumption intentions demonstrate that economic behaviour is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by moral norms, collective responsibility, and culturally embedded values, particularly in collectivist and non-Western contexts (Zahra, McCarthy, & Chaiechi, 2022). Similarly, evidence from spatial wellbeing research shows that resilience and life satisfaction are deeply embedded in social capital, place-based relations, and institutional contexts, rather than being reducible to individual optimisation alone (Lignier et al., 2023; Lignier et al., 2024). Together, these strands of work underscore a central argument of decolonial resilience: there is no single, universal rationality.

Extending this argument, the decolonisation of economic behaviour requires recognising Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as a legitimate and sophisticated system of rationality rather than a supplementary or localised form of knowledge. TEK constitutes a dynamic and adaptive body of knowledge embedded in governance systems, cultural rituals, and ecological practices that guide decision-making across generations (Berkes, 2012). Its rationality is relational, long-term, and stewardship-oriented—qualities that stand in contrast to the short-term, extractive logic privileged in dominant economic models.

The marginalisation of TEK within economic valuation frameworks is not accidental. As Agrawal (1995) argues, the constructed divide between Indigenous Knowledge and Western Scientific Knowledge reinforces hierarchies of legitimacy and enables selective appropriation while excluding Indigenous epistemologies from formal governance and economic design. Within global economic institutions, this hierarchy manifests in valuation systems that privilege market prices and discount relational, cultural, and intergenerational benefits. As a result, the erosion of TEK is often treated as a cultural loss rather than a systemic economic failure.

Reframing TEK as economic infrastructure offers a powerful corrective. Like financial, transport, or energy systems, TEK enables productivity, reduces risk, sustains ecological capital, and strengthens governance across scales. Positioning TEK in this way contributes to a plural and inclusive valuation paradigm, one that recognises multiple rationalities operating within contemporary economies. This conceptual shift has significant analytical and policy implications: it opens pathways for Indigenous economic sovereignty, supports global environmental justice, and advances regenerative development grounded in care, reciprocity, and interdependence.

Decolonising resilience, therefore, is not only about broadening who is included in economic systems, but also about expanding what counts as rational, valuable, and adaptive behaviour. By acknowledging plural rationalities—from behavioural finance to sustainable consumption to Indigenous governance—resilience emerges as a culturally mediated and contextually grounded process. Such recognition is essential if economic systems are to move beyond extractive logics and toward futures that are genuinely resilient, just, and sustainable.

Care, Culture, and Informal Economies of Resilience

A defining strength of this special issue is its attention to care and culture as foundations of resilience. Research on

international students in regional Australia illustrates how informal networks of solidarity—friendship groups, cultural associations, and faith-based communities—function as resilience infrastructures in contexts where formal institutional support is limited (Sugiharti & Wiroko, 2025). These findings echo wellbeing research demonstrating that social capital is a critical determinant of adaptive capacity and life satisfaction (Lignier et al., 2024).

Cultural economies also emerge as sites of resistance and renewal. Studies of nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta show how local values are negotiated within globalised leisure spaces, transforming nightlife into a domain of cultural resilience rather than mere consumption (Anggraini et al., 2025). Such practices challenge homogenising market logics and demonstrate how identity, belonging, and creativity sustain economic life in ways that conventional metrics often fail to capture.

Digital, Environmental, and Knowledge Infrastructures

Resilience in contemporary economies increasingly extends into digital and informational domains. Contributions on digital sustainability problematise the environmental footprint of content production and call for greater accountability among influencers and media platforms (Ildefonso, 2025). By reframing “sustainable content” as a discipline rather than a marketing strategy, this work expands resilience thinking into the digital economy—an arena frequently overlooked in sustainability debates.

The issue also foregrounds the marginalisation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) within global economic governance. Conceptual contributions reframe TEK not as cultural heritage but as economic infrastructure that supports ecological stewardship, risk reduction, and intergenerational wellbeing. This reframing directly challenges epistemic hierarchies embedded in extractive globalisation and aligns with calls for epistemic pluralism in sustainability governance (Agrawal, 1995; Berkes, 2012).

Towards Decolonial Resilience

Taken together, the contributions to this special issue demonstrate that resilience cannot be engineered solely through technical fixes, policy instruments, or market incentives. It must be reimagined. Decolonising resilience means confronting colonial legacies embedded in economic thought, recognising the value of care and culture, and legitimising diverse ways of knowing and governing.

From regional ecological coordination and climate adaptation, to financial behaviour under uncertainty, to informal networks of solidarity and cultural economies, the papers in this issue reveal resilience as a lived, relational, and contested process. They show that the most resilient economies will be those that centre

sustainability, honour plurality, and move decisively beyond extractive logics.

As argued in previous editorials, resilience is about partnership (Chaiechi, 2021), transformation (Chaiechi, 2022), and empowered futures (Chaiechi, 2023). This special issue extends that agenda by insisting that resilience must also be decolonial—grounded in justice, interdependence, and care. Only then can resilience contribute meaningfully to sustainable and inclusive economic futures.

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