
Federal Indian policies which have contributed to the extensive architecture of tribal land regulations have rendered Native American reservations unfit to fully realize economic development potential. With extremely limited investment capital, Tribes can only afford investments in industries with very high marginal returns. Indian Gaming is one such industry in which some tribes have a competitive advantage. The emergence of Indian Gaming and the subsequent federal (and existing) policies have resulted in dire political and social externalities for Native American people. Political consequences related to gaming policies such as the Indian Gaming Reorganization Act (IGRA), have resulted in the compromise of sovereignty. In general, tribes who are allowed to and chose to game have become subjected to state, county and municipal jurisdiction, contrary to age old Federal Indian Policy which established Tribes’ sovereign rights.

Local Economic Alternative Development Strategies (LEADS) serve as an alternative model for development on reservations. LEADS can shape economic development trajectories that are sensitive to the tenets of sovereignty and self determination. This thesis examines the utility of LEADS in guiding tribal economic development for Native American reservations. Specifically, this thesis is a case study of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, a Native American Tribe located around the center of Lake Tahoe and positioned at the borders of two adjoining states.

To examine the potential of the LEADS model on the Washoe reservation, I conducted surveys and community interviews and utilized a combination of secondary data. The results yielded the foundation of this thesis which exemplifies alternative economic development models that protect Native American sovereignty and self-determination while offering stable economic ends.