Introducing Systemic Bricolage as a way to sustain place-based entrepreneurship

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Abstract :

This research introduces the concept of systemic bricolage as a way to sustain place-based entrepreneurship. It explores how bricolage, traditionally viewed as an individual or organizational practice, can be applied at a systemic level to foster entrepreneurship in specific geographical contexts. While bricolage has been extensively studied, its systemic dimension remains largely unexplored. We propose to investigate how bricolage can sustain place-based entrepreneurship under resource constraints, focusing on the interdependence of actors in generating new value within a particular territory. The study uses the case of long-distance hiking trails (GR) in France to examine bricolage practices. These trails, which contribute to local development, often face challenges due to irregular usage and resource constraints. The research aims to understand how local actors use bricolage to sustain their activities and ensure the continuity of the GR system. The paper introduces the concept of "systemic bricolage," providing a definition and process model to highlight its dynamic and systemic dimensions. It identifies three main processes that constitute the cyclical steps of systemic bricolage. We contend that this research contributes to the literature on bricolage and place-based entrepreneurship, offering insights for entrepreneurs and decision-makers to better understand the drivers and dynamics of place-based entrepreneurship and develop sustainable activities in specific contexts.

Keywords: Bricolage; Place-based Entrepreneurship; Proximity

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving regional development and economic growth. However, the differences and inequalities are striking between territories, countries, and regions of the world (Guerrero et al., 2021). These disparities in entrepreneurial activity and its impact on regional development can be attributed to various factors, including differences in institutional frameworks, access to resources, cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship, and the level of economic development. The embeddedness of entrepreneurship within specific socio-spatial contexts has gained increasing attention in recent years (Baker & Welter, 2020; Welter et al., 2019; Zahra et al., 2014). This perspective, shifting away from individual-centric or macroeconomic approaches, focuses on the meso-level dynamics of place-based entrepreneurship (PBE) (Korsgaard et al., 2015; Lang et al., 2014). PBE explores the interdependence between entrepreneurial activities and the geographical, cultural, and social characteristics of a specific territory (Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2019; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). It highlights the role that space and place play in shaping entrepreneurial processes (Korsgaard et al., 2015; Stam & Welter, 2020).

Within the broader discourse on PBE, the concept of entrepreneurial bricolage has garnered substantial scholarly interest. Since the seminal article by Baker and Nelson in 2005, the concept

of bricolage has been revisited and extensively developed in the entrepreneurial literature (Mateus & Sarkar, 2024). Entrepreneurial bricolage, defined as "making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities," (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 333) is inherently context-sensitive. Yet, understanding "at hand" as a broad metaphorical construct (Korsgaard et al., 2021), it takes various forms to overcome resource constraints. Whether individual or collective (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010), occurring within an organization (Halme et al., 2012) or based on the entrepreneur's network (Chang et al., 2024), scholars highlight the interconnection of various dimensions, such as the spatial, social and institutional ones (Korsgaard et al., 2021).

Despite a growing body of research on the role of place in entrepreneurship (Baker & Welter, 2020; Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2019; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013; Stam & Welter, 2020), and more specifically in bricolage (Korsgaard et al., 2021), significant gaps remain. One significant challenge lies in capturing the systemic dimension of entrepreneurial bricolage, highlighting the interdependence of actors to generate new value within a particular territory. This interdependence is central to entrepreneurial ecosystems (Acs et al., 2017; Stam & Spigel, 2018) and plays a pivotal role in fostering PBE.

The aim of this paper is therefore to investigate entrepreneurial bricolage through the lens of place, examining the responses provided by various stakeholders involved in a place-based activity when shortages or failures are identified. We investigate the underlying mechanisms that enable actors to devise solutions ensuring the continuity of the activity. While geographic proximity among actors facilitates spatial bricolage (Korsgaard et al., 2021), we demonstrate that other forms of proximity – constructed or organized (Boschma, 2005; Torre & Gallaud, 2022), are central to these

mechanisms. Our research has been guided by the following question: to what extent, and through which processes, can bricolage sustain place-based entrepreneurship under resource constraints?

In this paper, we aim to explore this phenomenon through a qualitative study, using the case of long-distance hiking in France through the "sentiers de Grande Randonnée" (long-distance hiking trails, referred to as "GR"[1]). We used an embedded design, and carefully selected 10 GR trails to study the variety of their bricolage practices to enrich theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989, 2021). The GR trails rely on a number of stakeholders and contributes to local development, requiring the development of services for hikers. However, the usage of GR trails is often irregular and highly seasonal, making it challenging to sustain stable economic activity. Additionally, these environments are frequently constrained by factors such as isolation, difficult accessibility, or their location within protected natural areas. Hikers often face challenges related to accommodation and supply, which compel local actors to devise improvised or *ad hoc* solutions. This entrepreneurial form of improvisation, or "bricolage," has become a common practice among local actors, enabling them not only to sustain their activities but also to ensure the continuity of the GR system as a whole.

Through this research, we contribute to the literature on bricolage and PBE, introducing the concept of "systemic bricolage." We provide a definition and a process model to highlight its dynamic and systemic dimensions. We identify three main processes, at the actors' level, constituting the successive but cyclical steps of systemic bricolage to ensure system continuity. Finally, our

[1] The acronyms GR®, GRP®, and PR, as well as the trail markers (white/red, yellow, and yellow/red), are registered trademarks of the French Hiking Federation (Fédération Française de Randonnées Pédestres - FFRP). For the sake of clarity, we will use the two letters GR to refer to the trails studied.

contributions are also promising for entrepreneurs and decision-makers to better understand the drivers and dynamics of PBE and develop sustainable activities in specific places or contexts.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. PLACE-BASED AND PROXIMITY LENSES

Our understanding of place is grounded in the literature from humanistic geography and sociology and assumes that "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). Tuan's foundational concepts of space and place are instrumental in distinguishing between transactional, profit-driven ventures that treat locations as mere backdrops and embedded entrepreneurial activities that draw deeply from local resources, culture, and history (Korsgaard et al., 2015; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013).

Place and space play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial activities, opportunities, and outcomes (Zahra et al., 2014). The socio-cultural norms, values, and institutional frameworks of a place significantly influence entrepreneurial behavior and aspirations (Welter 2011). The role of place in shaping entrepreneurial activities is both enabling and constraining (Korsgaard et al., 2015) and the relationship between entrepreneurship and place is not unidirectional but rather a dynamic, ongoing interaction. This approach views entrepreneurs and their environments as co-evolving and mutually shaping each other over time (Muñoz and Kimmitt 2019; Wright et al. 2023).

Place-based enterprises are firmly rooted in and interdependent with place and are committed to a social mission, maintaining balanced goals for both financial and social outcomes (Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). The well-being of the place is a key organizational goal, valued both intrinsically and for its instrumental role in supporting the enterprise's success. Employing a place-based lens

(Cresswell, 2014) provides deeper insights into location-specific issues while also shedding light on the various dimensions of proximity involved.

Beside the spatial dimension, other forms of proximity have proved to be central to improve interorganizational, but also interpersonal, relationships and exchanges (Torre & Gallaud, 2022). We use Boschma's (2005) framework, identifying five dimensions of proximity: geographical, organizational, institutional, cognitive, and social. Geographical proximity refers to spatial distance, while organizational proximity involves shared rules and norms within or between organizations. Institutional proximity relates to common institutional frameworks or values, cognitive proximity involves shared knowledge and expertise, and social proximity encompasses economic relations embedded in social contexts. These dimensions are interconnected and can influence each other, providing a more nuanced understanding of how proximity affects economic interactions and innovation.

2.2. Bricolage as a Mindset

In his seminal work, "The Savage Mind" (1966), anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss employs the analogy of bricolage to describe a particular mode of relating to the environment that involves "making the best use of available resources." The bricoleur thus utilizes "whatever is at hand" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17), rather than seeking to procure resources specifically adapted to a particular application. Baker and Nelson (2005) formally introduced this concept into strategic literature to study how SMEs tend to develop in a context of severe resource constraints. Bricolage is defined as "making do by applying combinations of resources at hand to new problems and opportunities" (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 333).

Entrepreneurial bricolage has three main characteristics: (1) A creative approach using unconventional resources - for example, designing a new service from discarded resources; (2) Refusal to submit to practical, conventional, or social limitations; and (3) a strong bias towards action and improvisation (Baker et al., 2003; Di Domenico et al., 2010; Fisher, 2012).

As a theoretical concept, bricolage has been applied to a multitude of disciplines and contexts, garnering significant attention from scholars, particularly in the literature on social entrepreneurship and innovation (Mateus & Sarkar, 2024). For Lévi-Strauss (1966, p. 18), "what is at hand" consists not only of physical artifacts but also ideas, knowledge, and skills that the bricoleur has taken care to accumulate for potential future use, constituting their "repertoire." The bricoleur can make use of not only personally available resources but also those that can be obtained at low cost or even for free (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 336). Nevertheless, what is "at hand" for entrepreneurs strongly depends on the context (Korsgaard et al., 2021).

Bricolage thus appears particularly relevant in a context of scarcity or resource constraints, with "bricoleurs" refusing to let the lack of quality resources limit their actions (Fisher, 2012; Senyard et al., 2014). Moreover, bricolage does not inevitably lead to imperfect or uninteresting solutions. On the contrary, Levi-Strauss (1966, p. 17) suggests that this practice can sometimes achieve "brilliant and unforeseen results."

Different forms of bricolage have been identified, which can be classified based on the type of resources used and/or the expected results (Mateus & Sarkar, 2024). Our research object leads us to explore two particular forms of bricolage: network bricolage and spatial bricolage. Network bricolage emphasizes the importance of recombining resources found in pre-existing personal and professional networks (Baker et al., 2003; Chang et al., 2024). Baker et al. (2003) develop

propositions in four domains between strategy and improvisation, while Chang et al. (2024) argue that entrepreneurs can overcome resource constraints and drive growth strategies by leveraging, reconfiguring, or repurposing existing network ties to serve purposes beyond their original intent. Spatial bricolage focuses on the recombination of resources at hand in the immediate spatial context (Korsgaard et al., 2021; Yachin & Ioannides, 2020). While local sourcing and community involvement are central, the ability to build an efficient storytelling has also proved to be important.

3. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

3.1. SETTINGS

In order to seize the complexity of the systems in which the GRs are embedded, this research was conducted using an embedded design (Yin, 1984, 2014), on ten sub-units of analysis constituted by ten GRs chosen purposely (see Data Collection). This approach enabled an investigation of the GR system as a whole while also taking the specificities of each of the ten GRs into account. The embedded case study design is particularly well-suited for this research, as it enables us to investigate multiple units of analysis (individual trails) within a single case (the GR network). This method provides a rich, multi-layered perspective on the GR phenomenon, capturing the interplay between various factors that influence sustainability in the long-distance hiking trails development and specific actions related to the bricolage phenomenon.

Our methodology is grounded in Eisenhardt's (Eisenhardt, 1989, 2021) approach to case study research, which emphasizes theory building through iterative data collection and analysis. This approach allows us to examine each trail as a subunit, considering its unique characteristics and context, then compare and contrast findings across the 10 selected trails to synthesize insights to develop a comprehensive understanding of the GR network. By using multiple data sources and

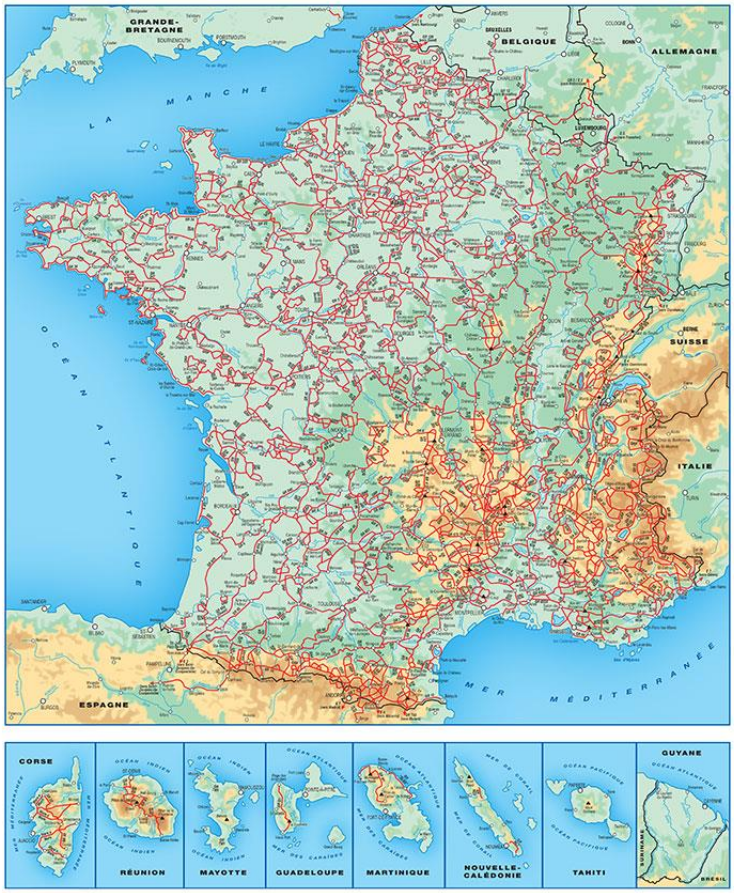
engaging in recursive cycling between data, emerging theory, and existing literature, we aim to develop novel, accurate, and robust theoretical insights into the GR phenomenon. This approach enables us to leverage the rich, real-world context of these hiking trails while maintaining a systematic and rigorous research process.

3.2. Context and Case Study

A GR (or "Grande Randonnée trail") is a long-distance hiking trail, either linear or circular, officially certified by the French Hiking Federation (hereafter FFRP). Each trail is identified by a number, often accompanied by a name reflecting its connection to the local territory. Marked with red and white blazes, these trails offer hikers the opportunity to explore a specific area or region (administrative, geographical, historical, cultural, or otherwise) through long-distance trekking. The first GR trail in France, spanning 28 kilometers, was inaugurated in 1947. Today, the country features an extensive network of over 115,000 kilometers of GR and GR de Pays® trails (Fédération Française de Randonnée, 2024) (Fig 1).

Hiking offers significant advantages for the development of sustainable tourism in rural areas. Alongside other forms of low-impact itinerancy, such as cycling tourism, hiking is a low-carbon activity. It fosters awareness and preservation of natural environments and remains financially accessible – except for high-altitude hiking, which requires more expensive equipment. Hiking also promotes the discovery of new, often less-visited regions, helping to rebalance tourist flows and economic benefits across more and less touristy areas. Additionally, hiking can be practiced during the "shoulder seasons," providing an opportunity to spread out tourist activity over time.

Figure 1. Map of GR trails in France. (Source: mongr.fr)



3.2.1. Organization, governance and main actors

The model of long-distance hiking in France is both straightforward in its purpose and particularly complex due to the number and diversity of stakeholders involved in the creation and management of GR trails. Public and private actors collaborate at various levels and stages of a GR trail's lifecycle to develop itineraries that meet hikers' needs while supporting the local economy. Significant differences can emerge throughout a GR's development, from the initial design of its route to its integration into the tourism sector. Some GR trails are initiated by grassroots

associations, while others are spearheaded by public institutions. Certain trails are designed for sporting purposes, while others are rooted in historical, cultural, or geographical significance.

The table below provides a simplified overview of how GR trails operate in France (Tab 1).

Table 1. Stakeholders Involved in the Functioning of GR Trails

	Institutional Sphere	**Development and Promotion Sphere**	**Private Sphere (profit and not-for-profit)**
Strategic and financial roles	- Europe: funding - State: technical and financial services - Region: elected representatives, technical and financial services - Department: elected representatives, technical and financial services	Regional Tourism Committees Tourism Development Agencies	- European Ramblers' Association (European GRs) - National sports federations - Cultural organizations
Operational roles	- Public inter-municipal cooperation institutions: elected representatives, technical and financial services - Municipalities: elected representatives, technical services	Regional and National Natural Parks Tourist Offices, Territorial Attractiveness Agencies	- Local associations (sports or cultural) - Professional organizations and entrepreneurs: accommodation, rental services, transporters, travel agencies…

In terms of governance and legal structures, we observed significant diversity: in some instances, multiple stakeholders collaborate within a "trail committee" to coordinate and manage the trail; in others, a single association assumes this role. In certain cases, however, there may be no formal leadership structure in place at all.

3.2.2. Hikers in France

Hiking is the most popular sporting activity among the French population. Two consecutive studies conducted in 2014 and 2021 by the FFRP reveal that the percentage of French adults (over 18 years old) who engage in hiking increased from 37% to 56% (Union Sport & Cycle pour la Fédération française de la randonnée pédestre, 2021). Long-distance hiking trails are well-known to the French public (69% of hikers), and the hiker demographic is evolving.

Multiple societal indicators highlight a particularly favorable context for hiking. First, increasing urbanization has progressively removed nature from daily life, fueling the demand for "nature getaways." The growing senior population, a high-potential target group unbound by school vacation schedules, is influencing the demand for leisure activities centered on gentle sports. The "slow movement" culture and health concerns also contribute to hiking's rising popularity. Hikers are willing to spend more to enhance their experience, including expenses for meals, resupply, and luggage transportation (Auvergne Rhône-Alpes Tourisme, 2022), not only during leisure time but also as a primary vacation activity (Atout France, 2019).

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

Our study explores entrepreneurial bricolage through a place-based perspective, focusing on how various stakeholders respond to system dysfunctions within a localized activity. Specifically, we examine the operation of long-distance hiking trails (GR trails) in France and their interplay with their respective territories. Given the significant number of trails, we selected 10 GRs representative of the network, chosen based on their renown and diversity. We did not consider the criterion of visitor numbers, as it is difficult to determine and highly variable depending on the nature, length, and location of the GR.

Among the most well-known GR trails, the GR 20 through the Corsican mountains is the most frequently cited by the French, followed by the GR 34 (the Breton Customs Path) and the GR 10 (the Great Crossing of the Pyrenees) (Union Sport & Cycle pour la Fédération française de la randonnée pédestre, 2021). Globally recognized, the Camino de Santiago is a must-visit destination for long-distance hikers. We then completed our selection to ensure a diversity of hiking practices and environments. However, considering our research question, we chose not to include urban GR trails. Table 2 presents our selection along with key characteristics of the chosen GR trails.

Table 2. GR trails selected for our study

GR Number	**GR Name** (our translation)	**Km**	**FFRP***	**Environment**	**Specificity**
GR 9	From Jura to the Mediterranean	966	1977	Mixed	Tourism-focused GR
GR 10	Great Crossing of the Pyrenees	900	1963	Mountains	Sports-oriented GR
GR 20	Fra Li Monti	179	1971	Mountains	Sports-oriented GR
GR 34	Customs Path	2000	1968	Coastal area	Historical GR
GR 65	Camino de Santiago	1119	1971	Mixed	Pilgrimage route (Le Puy Way)
GR 69	La Routo	542 (France)	2022	Mixed	European cultural GR
GR 70	Stevenson Trail	272	1978	Mid-mountains	Cultural GR
GR 736	Tarn Gorges and Valleys	301	2023	Mixed	Multimodal GR
GR 738	High Crossing of Belledonne	120	2017	Mountains	Sports-oriented GR
GR 965	In the Footsteps of the Huguenots	405	2015	Mixed	Historical GR

* Year of certification

Our approach involves the collection of data from various sources. We collected real time and historical primary and secondary data, to allow in depth analysis and triangulation of the collected data (Miles et al., 2019). Our data collection was organized as described in Table 3.

The secondary data provided descriptive information about the GR trails, helped identify certain stakeholders, and highlighted key issues related to their development. We also used recent studies and surveys commissioned by the FFRP or institutional actors, which included trends and key figures.

Since secondary data alone could not sufficiently identify and define bricolage practices, we conducted 40 interviews with a wide range of stakeholders involved in different GR trails. These stakeholders include institutions, tourism professionals, and individuals working directly with hikers.

Each interview was coded using letters to represent the category of the interviewee, followed by a number indicating the order in which the interview was processed (from the earliest to the most recent). When significant differences were observed among actors in the field, this coding system was adapted to differentiate, for example, between guesthouses (Gi), hotels (H), and youth hostels (Aj). For greater precision, we also recorded the organization each actor is affiliated with and their specific position.

Table 3. Data collection (2022 – 2024)

SECONDARY DATA (Content analysis)		
- Local and specialized press (hiking, trekking, sports and nature tourism) - Institutional websites (regions, tourist offices, territorial attractiveness agencies, regional tourism committees, national and natural parks, etc.) - FFRP websites (national and local branches) - Studies and reports commissioned by the FFRP (2014, 2018, 2021, 2022) - Websites and social media of the studied GRs		
PRIMARY DATA		
Period	**Activity**	**Method**
May 2023 – Oct 2024	40 interviews with GR stakeholders	Semi-structured interviews
March 2024	Hikers' Fair	Visit; Note-taking
Dec 2022	Conference on itinerancy in the Tarn Gorges and Valleys (Florac)	Participant observation
Aug 2023 (5 days)	Participation in an itinerary (GR 34)	Participant observation
Aug 2024 (4 days)	Participation in an itinerary (GR 10)	Participant observation
Aug 2024 (3 days)	Participation in an itinerary (GR 738)	Participant observation

Finally, we incorporated participant observation as a data collection method due to its strong potential for exploring "the realms of subjective meaning" (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 498). Our field participation allowed us to access key information and individuals, as well as to enhance the quality of our interpretations. Two authors, having had the opportunity to undertake long-distance hikes on the GR trails studied, experienced firsthand the situations described in our research. This also facilitated informal discussions, the key points of which were recorded as notes.

3.4. Data Analysis

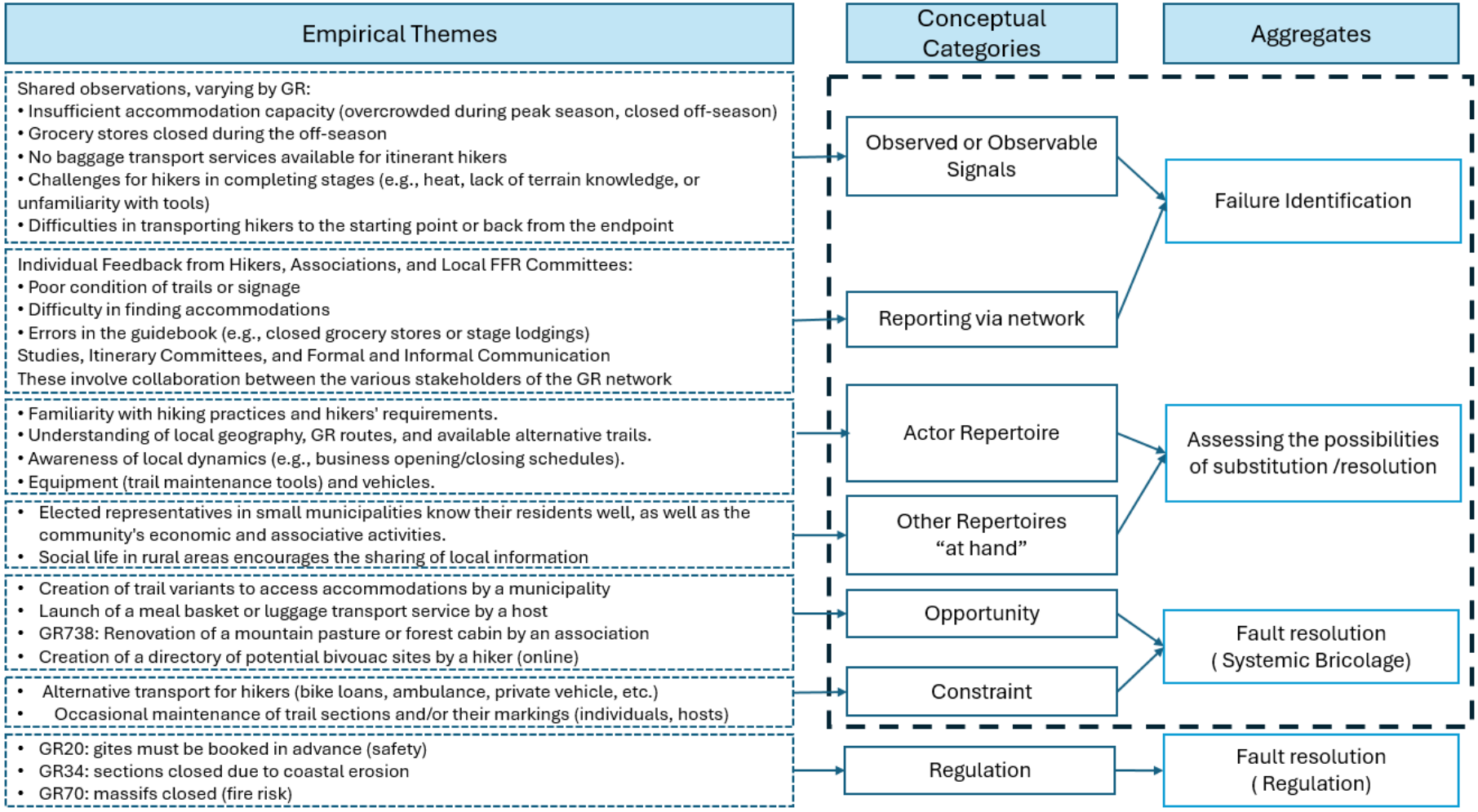
Regarding the processing and analysis of our data, we proceeded in several stages. To identify the processes at play, we initially adopted an inductive approach (Gioia et al., 2013). Keyword-based coding of verbatim transcripts allowed us to identify hikers' needs, the various GR stakeholders,

and the practices they implement to address those needs. These observations were synthesized into the first level of our data structure, titled "empirical themes."

A second round of coding, this time more conceptual, enabled us to highlight key elements observed in entrepreneurial bricolage practices. Finally, a third step led us to identify three major processes (aggregates), which we define as processes characterizing "systemic bricolage." The resulting data structure is presented in Figure 2.

In the second phase, we focused on the concept of proximity within the processes identified during the first phase. While geographic proximity lies at the heart of this highly localized activity, we used the proximity framework (Boschma, 2005) to identify other dimensions of proximity. Based on the same verbatim data, and using a spreadsheet, we coded the combinations of proximities present: G for geographic, I for institutional, C for cognitive, S for social, and O for organizational. An excerpt of this coding is provided in Appendix A.

Figure 2. Data structure



4. FINDINGS

Our findings first demonstrate that the *sine qua non* conditions for the proper functioning of a GR system consist of three key elements: a marked and safe trail, appropriate accommodations, and available supply points (water and food). When maintenance, commitment, or involvement from one or more stakeholders is lacking, certain services may not be provided, leading to system failures. Such failures prevent hikers from completing all or part of the route under acceptable conditions of comfort and safety. These failures can be limited in time or space. For instance, certain stages may become inaccessible outside of peak seasons due to annual closures of accommodations, while some segments of the trail may no longer be passable because they have become unsafe. In all cases, these failures disrupt the functioning of the system and may even jeopardize its sustainability: constrained by such failures, hikers may choose to avoid the route, which risks falling into disuse, ultimately threatening a local dimension of sustainable tourism.

Beyond a mere aggregation of actors, the GR system is thus a localized system, composed of heterogeneous yet interdependent stakeholders.

In the course of our investigations, we identified multiple causes of failure across the various "GR systems" studied. Nevertheless, and despite the often complex conditions for accessing local resources, these systems manage to regain balance through improvisational practices. We identified three successive and complementary processes that enable the resolution of encountered issues, characterizing what we propose to call “systemic bricolage” (see Figure 4). This concept differs from entrepreneurial bricolage in two keyways: first, through the notion of failure – instead of a mere lack of resources – and second, because it involves a multiplicity of interdependent actors.

4.1. Identification of Failures

The first process is the identification of failures. We identified two main sources. First, failures can simply be observed by an actor as part of their routine activities. For instance, employees of Tourism Offices experience hikers' problems on a daily basis:

> *"The issue during the shoulder seasons—take [village 1], which is obviously a highly frequented spot in peak season, so everything is open then. But if you go there now, everything is closed. [...] There's nothing. Not even a grocery store. Everything is closed. And it's not the only [village]." (OT1, 2024)*

In other cases, information circulates among actors through the network. For example, associations managing a GR route may share information during scheduled meetings with other stakeholders:

> *"So, that's the uniqueness of it: we network the territorial actors, we communicate about the trails, about the accommodations. We really act as a sounding board, as my director says, for all the regions." (A3, 2024)*

Each GR system and location has its own organization, which leads to varying degrees of regularity in this type of information sharing. Some systems benefit from dedicated committees for route management or event coordination, while others lack such structures due to insufficient funding or lack of stakeholder involvement.

In all cases, much more informal communication can also serve as a warning. For instance, accommodations owners often know the local hiking club leaders or trail markers, who informally report existing problems:

> *"There's G, the one who manages his guesthouse. I often call him. And he tells me, 'You know, over there… Something's missing. I'm not sure what it is, but something's missing. People are getting lost.' So I take my car, go there, and put up [a new direction sign] to try and fix it." (CR1, 2023)*

The French Hiking Federation (FFRP) cannot be present continuously across all GR trails. If a trail segment becomes impassable or dangerous, reports often come from locals, hikers, or even firefighters responding to incidents. Additionally, a dedicated app for outdoor sports is available to report incidents and usage difficulties. These reports are forwarded to the relevant federations and stakeholders.[2]

Finally, it is important to note that the identification of failures is not always carried out by the actor responsible for addressing them. This brings us to the second identified process: the evaluation of substitution or resolution possibilities to ensure that hikers can continue their activities safely—in other words, to ensure the system continues to function.

4.2. Assessing the Possibilities of Resolution

Addressing a failure involves assessing the options available to the actor who has been informed in order to propose an effective solution. In many cases, the appropriate resources will be found within the system, either directly accessible to the informed actor (as it pertains to their primary activity or falls within their repertoire of responses). In other cases, mobilizing another actor in place, within or outside the network will be necessary. This other actor may be directly responsible for the activity affected by the failure or may provide an alternative solution.

[2] Suricate : https://sentinelles.sportsdenature.fr/ - page consulted on 12/20/2024

To illustrate the first cases, we give examples to distinguish between the concepts of activity and repertoire. The first example involves a situation where an actor adapts the way to approach its activity: an accommodation provider offers its facilities on a "self-service" basis during periods of low activity.

> *"When we are not present, we make the dormitory available. The €55 covers lodging and breakfast. For other meals, you will find products to cook yourself on the sheltered terrace. It's a true little 'grocery' with a price list. […] On-site, you calculate your own bill for what you've consumed, and you settle the balance later via bank transfer or another method […]. It's based on trust." (Service provider's website[3])*

The second example involves the mayor of a small village along one of the GR trails studied. A farmer by profession, the mayor uses his own tools – his repertoire – to maintain the trail and carry out small repairs, ensuring that hikers can pass through:

> *"It's a village without municipal employees […] So it's [the mayor] who cleans certain sections. […] He takes his brush cutter, his tractor, and clears the trail." (Gi1, 2023)*

Lacking specific resources – such as funding for an association to maintain the trail or access to municipal employees for the same work – the mayor draws on his own repertoire to find a solution and keep the trail in good condition. Similarly, a hiking enthusiast who works on a farm combines his knowledge of the route with his professional network to create a volunteer-run grocery store.

[3] https://www.gite-drome-la-grange.com/nuit-randonneur - page consulted on 12/05/2024

This store remains open year-round, sells local products, and saves hikers a 30-kilometer detour to find supplies (Itinérances Occitanes, 2024)[4].

In other cases, it is necessary to call upon other actors. For example, the issue of resupplying cannot often be solved by grocery stores themselves, which close during the off-season due to lack of economic viability. However, other professionals, who operate year-round, can step in to provide small-scale grocery services. According to an elected official:

> *"This could actually be a promising avenue to explore. If there's no grocery store, we could direct hikers to farms instead. Tell them that at a certain place, they'll find bread, or drinks, or food, or charcuterie, or cheese..." (M2, 2023)*

Actors who embrace this idea integrate themselves into the GR system. Sometimes, the association responsible for managing the trail takes the issue into its own hands and substitutes for traditional supply providers:

> *"They've installed small cabins with freeze-dried soup dispensers, really tailored for hikers [...]" (A1, 2024)*

In doing so, the association assumes a secondary role within the system.

4.3. Resolution of the Failure

The actor(s) who possess the means to address the system's failure will respond, driven by personal interest that often aligns with a broader interest in preserving the system as a whole. For instance, accommodation providers may step in to resolve supply issues, as these are critical for sustaining

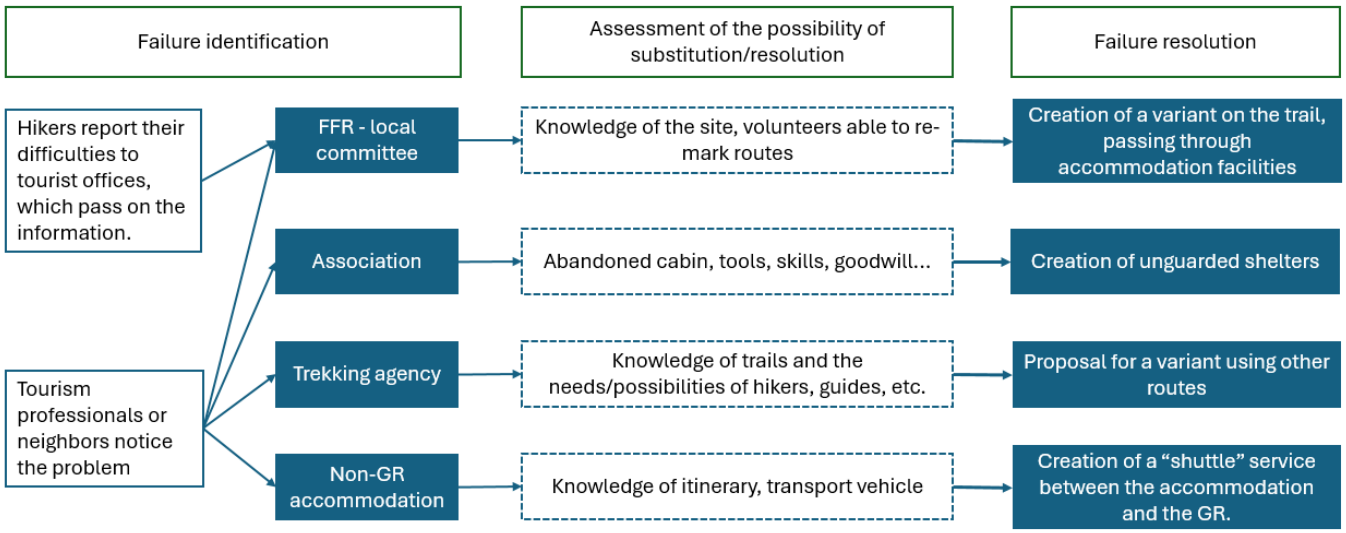
[4] "LE GR 736 dans son côté le plus sauvage", Itinérances Occitanes Magazine, 2ème trim 2024, p.18-27

activity and maintaining the viability of the stopover. Some actors may thus take on dual roles and diversify their activities:

> *"[...] there are hosting providers who offer packed meals. It's quite handy. Or they provide emergency supplies. This is becoming more common, but we can't always list them because, technically, it's informal—they're essentially reselling products without an official label [...]" (Ag2, 2024).*

The solutions implemented in this "make do" manner do not all have the same purpose: some enable the system to continue functioning temporarily, while others become long-term solutions. It is important to note that systemic bricolage does not necessarily imply temporary or degraded solutions. Figure 3 illustrates the case of accommodation shortages along a GR, detailing possible resolution pathways and the actors involved.

Figure 3. Systemic bricolage: the case of accommodation shortages



Our findings allow us to highlight both the advantages and limitations of bricolage solutions in this context, particularly based on how the identified solution fits into the actor's repertoire. When the solution aligns with an actor's existing repertoire and creates synergies with their main activity, the failure can present an entrepreneurial opportunity. Conversely, if the solution generates additional costs, lacks financial return, or yields no particular user feedback, the failure becomes a constraint. In such cases, it is addressed temporarily, potentially in a degraded form, and may eventually lead to another failure in the medium or long term.

We also identify a specific case that is generally not addressed in the entrepreneurial literature because it falls outside traditional organizational forms or economic activities: solutions provided by the user community, particularly through the Internet and social networks. Numerous blogs and Facebook communities, for example, catalog bivouac sites, supply points, and other resources. A Facebook account, for instance, lists thousands of possible overnight spots along the Camino de Santiago, offering a "lived" directory of places where one can spend the night without being "evicted" (church porches, old washhouses, ruined buildings, bus shelters, etc.) (Facebook Compostelle bivouac locations, over 4,000 sites listed). These user-driven activities often provide vital support to the proper functioning of a GR, and we consider it valuable to incorporate them into the concept of systemic bricolage.

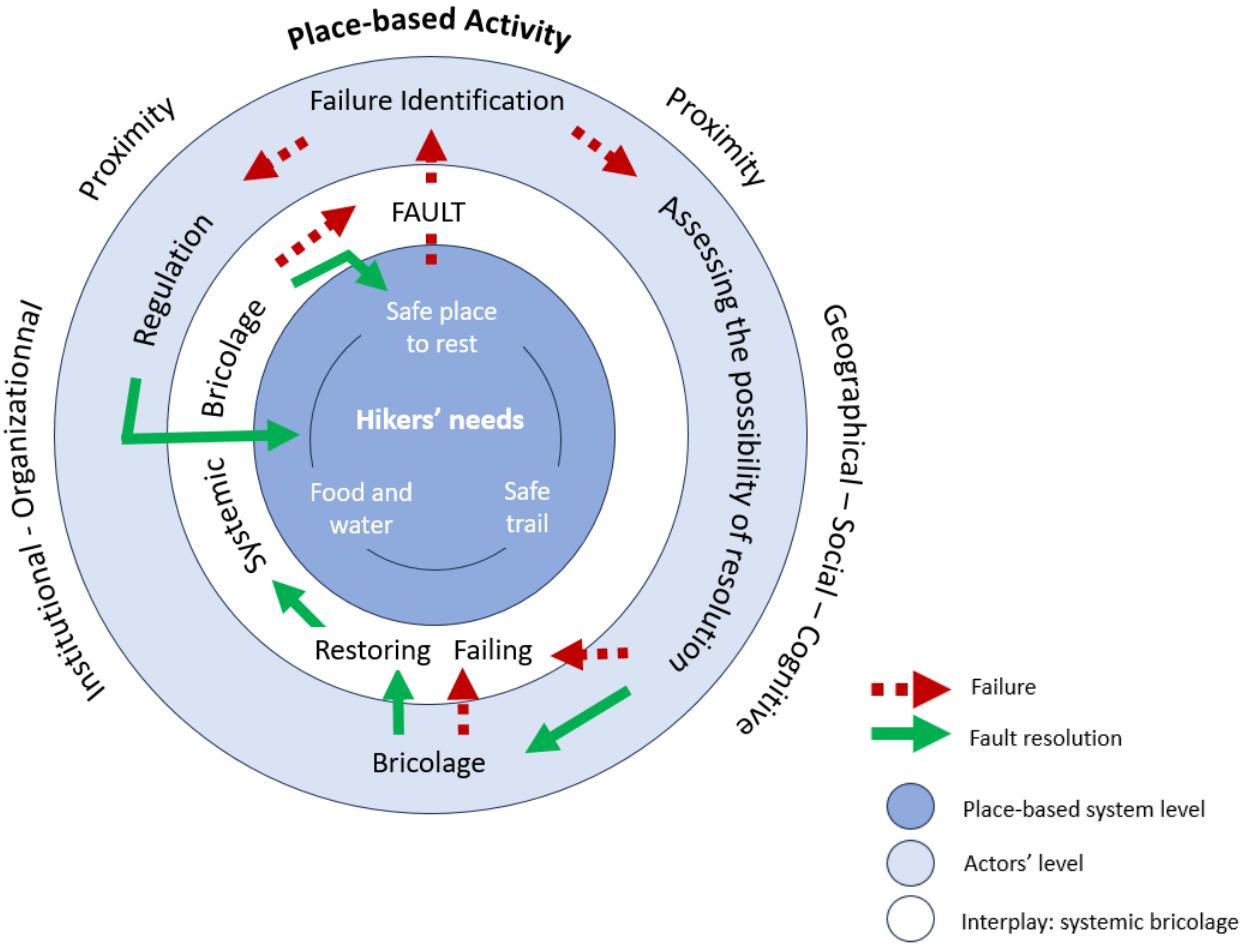
The final point identified in our findings is of a distinct nature: the resolution of failures through regulation. While this does not fully fall within the processes of bricolage, we included it in the data structure because it is complementary and sometimes takes over when no other solution is identified or when solutions fall outside the scope of services. This is particularly relevant in cases involving hiker safety or the preservation of natural areas.

One example of the former is the mandatory reservation system for overnight stays on the GR20, introduced in 2023, whether for dormitories, bivouacs, or rented tents. While this measure may seem restrictive, it aims to protect Corsica's fragile environment and ensure a pleasant experience for all hikers[5]. For the latter case, regulations are well-developed across many GR routes in natural areas. For instance, in the natural reserves of the Pyrenees (GR10), picking plants and making fires are prohibited; bivouacking is regulated (allowed only more than an hour's walk from the park's boundaries or a road access point and only between 7 PM and 9 AM); and hikers must carry out their own waste, among other rules[6].

We provide a figure integrating the processes for better understanding (Figure 4).

[5] GR20 overnight stays https://gr20-infos.com/reservation-des-refuges-du-gr20-pour-2024/ - consulted on 12/20/2024
[6] Regulation « réserves naturelles des Pyrénées - Parc national, réserves du Néouvielle, de Nyer et de Mantet » https://gr10.org/index.php/la-reglementation-des-reserves-naturelles-des-pyrenees/ - consulted on 12/20/2024

Figure 4. A process model of systemic bricolage: The case of GR trails



4.4. The Role of Proximities

The study of proximities in "systemic bricolage" provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in resolving issues related to long-distance hiking. Geographical proximity is the most evident, although it varies depending on the regions and actors (notably in terms of accessibility). It often enables local responsiveness to immediate problems. Cognitive proximity, on the other hand, ensures a deep understanding of hikers' needs and the specificities of the terrain. Institutional proximity, grounded in shared values related to nature and physical activity, creates a common frame of reference. Social proximity, which is particularly strong in rural areas, facilitates the rapid circulation of information and the mobilization of local resources. Lastly, organizational proximity between institutions and associations allows for the effective coordination of actions on a larger scale.

These various forms of proximity combine to create an ecosystem conducive to systemic bricolage, where actors can quickly identify failures, mobilize diverse resources, and implement innovative solutions. For example, in-depth knowledge of the terrain (cognitive proximity) combined with local social ties (social proximity) may enable an accommodation provider to offer luggage transport services in response to an identified need. Similarly, organizational proximity between local committees and institutions can facilitate the creation of alternative routes to connect hikers with new accommodations.

Although we were unable to identify specific combinations of proximities corresponding to particular situations or problems, proximities generally reinforce one another. They act as catalysts for systemic bricolage, enabling the continuous and flexible adaptation of long-distance hiking trails.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

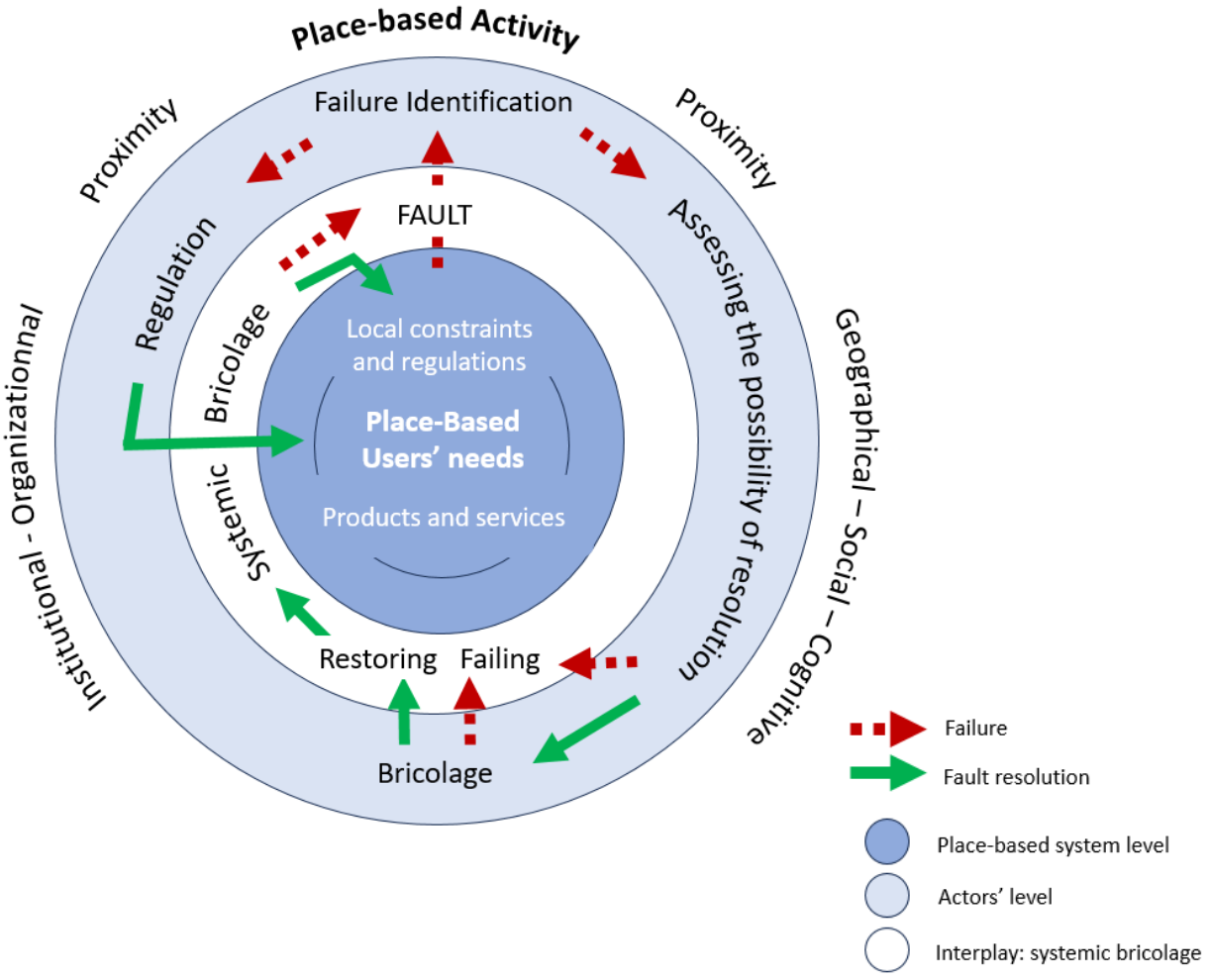
In this paper, our aim was to study the responses provided by various stakeholders involved in a place-based activity when shortages or failures are identified. We were guided by the following question: to what extent, and through which processes, can bricolage support place-based entrepreneurship under resource constraints? We investigated the underlying mechanisms that enable actors to devise solutions ensuring the continuity of a place-based system when facing a failure, or under resources shortage. Our main contribution is the introduction of the concept of systemic bricolage, that is discussed in the following section.

Drawing on previous literature on bricolage (Lévi-Strauss, 1966) and entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Korsgaard et al., 2021), we define systemic bricolage as "an adaptive problem-solving approach, sustaining and enhancing place-based entrepreneurship and activity systems. It encompasses three processes leveraging diverse forms of proximity to creatively combine and repurpose available resources and enables organizations or communities to overcome system failures." (Figure 5).

The first process, failure identification, serves as the entry point of systemic bricolage. It involves recognizing issues that disrupt the system's functionality, either directly by system actors or indirectly through signals shared within the network. This step prompts local actors to respond, often under resource constraints, by devising improvised solutions. The second process, assessment of resolution and substitution possibilities, focuses on evaluating available options to address the failure. This stage underscores the primary goal of systemic bricolage: sustaining and enhancing the functionality of a place-based activity system by leveraging existing resources and

relationships. The third process, fault resolution, unfolds in two possible ways. In the first, systemic bricolage is confirmed when an actor successfully addresses the issue, whether through creative problem-solving or seizing new opportunities. In the second, persistent failures may necessitate external regulation to ensure continuity.

Figure 5. A process model of systemic bricolage (Generic)



Systemic bricolage relies on the combination of geographical, organizational, institutional, cognitive, and social proximities. By mobilizing and reconfiguring existing assets, knowledge, and

relationships in innovative ways, it maximizes the effectiveness of available resources. This process fosters both resilience and innovation, enabling systems to adapt to challenges, maintain operations, and thrive despite inherent limitations.

Systemic bricolage differs from spatial bricolage and network bricolage in several key aspects, while sharing some common elements. When comparing systemic bricolage to network bricolage (Baker et al., 2003; Baker & Nelson, 2005), several distinctions emerge. Network bricolage relies on pre-existing contact networks as resources for the entrepreneur-bricoleur, focusing on the social construction of resource environments (Chang et al., 2024). In contrast, systemic bricolage calls on actors participating in the same system or those capable of doing so, rather than relying solely on established contacts. While network bricolage often aims to support a specific organization, systemic bricolage seeks to maintain and enhance place-based entrepreneurship and activity systems. Additionally, systemic bricolage may integrate new actors into the system during the process of resolving failures, which is not a primary focus of network bricolage. In this research, we also highlight how a combination of relationship roles enables the repurposing of network resources to generate new valuable outcomes (Chang et al., 2024).

In contrast to spatial bricolage, which is defined as the use of resources available within the bricoleur's local spatial context (Korsgaard et al., 2021), systemic bricolage operates on a broader scale that transcends local boundaries. While systemic bricolage involves a geographical dimension and reflects mutual dependency among actors, as well as a shared concern for survival, it is not strictly bounded nor only applicable to rural areas. Instead, systemic bricolage encompasses a wider system of interconnected actors and resources, including users, allowing for a more diverse range of activities. Systemic bricolage represents a more comprehensive approach that incorporates

elements of both spatial and network bricolage while extending beyond their limitations. It considers broader system dynamics, diverse actor networks, and wider resource combinations to address failures and enhance system functionality.

While geographic proximity among actors facilitates spatial bricolage (Korsgaard et al., 2021), we demonstrate that other forms of proximity – constructed or organized (Boschma, 2005; Torre & Gallaud, 2022), are central to these mechanisms, influencing various stages of the process. Proximity, in its multiple dimensions, facilitates the identification of system failures, the construction of a shared repertoire (Lévi-Strauss, 1966), and the resolution of system deficiencies. In identifying failures, organizational proximity plays a key role by providing familiarity with the system, its functioning, and its actors. Geographical proximity allows for direct observation and quick recognition of issues, while cognitive proximity ensures that actors are familiar with the failing function, enabling them to spot anomalies more readily. Furthermore, cognitive proximity allows actors to understand and share knowledge effectively, while social proximity facilitates frequent interactions, leading to the development of a common repertoire - a form of collective bricolage (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010). Finally, geographical proximity supports this process by enabling face-to-face interactions and shared experiences.

In resolving system failures, organizational and institutional proximity foster a collective awareness of the system's existence and the need to preserve it (Korsgaard et al., 2021; Yachin & Ioannides, 2020). This shared understanding drives actors to engage in problem-solving activities. Cognitive proximity allows for effective communication and knowledge sharing during the resolution process. Geographical proximity, akin to the concept of spatial bricolage, enables actors

to leverage local resources and knowledge in finding solutions. We confirm that bricoleurs are, in fact, resource-creators as well as resource-seekers (Chang et al., 2024).

The multi-dimensional nature of proximity in systemic bricolage reflects the complex interplay of social, cognitive, and spatial factors in addressing system failures and maintaining functionality. This approach goes beyond simple geographical considerations, incorporating the intricate relationships and shared understandings that characterize place-based activity systems.

5.1. Managerial Implications

Systemic bricolage offers a powerful approach to PBE through creativity and resource management to support territorial development. By creatively repurposing existing resources, entrepreneurs can simultaneously optimize the specific assets of the place and drive novel solutions. This approach is particularly valuable for small businesses operating in resource-constrained environments. Place-based entrepreneurs should cultivate an environment that encourages experimental approaches to resource utilization, quick adaptation based on users feedback, and unconventional problem-solving. They can rely on and activate various forms of proximity. This fosters entrepreneurial agility, allowing them to rapidly adapt to system failures, should it be a constraint or an opportunity. By doing so, place-based entrepreneurs can create a culture that supports continuous innovation and adaptation to navigate uncertainty.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has certain limitations that also open pathways for future research. First, while we carefully selected our case study and sub-units of analysis within an embedded design framework, the generalizability of our model is inherently limited (Maxwell, 2021; Yin, 2014). However, we provide detailed contextual information to support future studies and enhance the transferability of

our findings. Second, although our research is grounded in rich, multi-source data, the scope of our interviews did not cover the full range of actors for all the selected GRs. Furthermore, these interviews were conducted exclusively in France, which may limit the applicability of our insights to other geographical or cultural contexts.

Our findings point to several promising directions for future research. First, we encourage further exploration of how systemic bricolage varies across different types of place-based systems, in diverse geographical and cultural settings, and for a range of activities. Additionally, future studies could examine the nature and influence of proximity markers (Delorme, 2023) across different types of systems. Finally, the role of relationship heterogeneity (Chang et al., 2024) in enabling and sustaining systemic bricolage offers a particularly compelling area for further inquiry.

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APPENDIX A – PROXIMITY CODING [EXTRACTS]

Bricoleur	**Absent or defective actor**	**Bricoleur's directory**	**Proximity (stakeholders)**	**Bricolage**
Town	Luggage conveyor	Expertise in hikers and itinerant tourism. Awareness of the state of services on the stage.	G (cabs, ambulances), C (hikers)	Solicitation of cab and ambulance companies by local authorities
Hosting providers	Luggage conveyor	Expertise in hikers and itinerant tourism. Awareness of the state of services on the stage. Itinerary knowledge	G (local services), C (hikers)	Luggage transport by accommodation providers
Hosting providers	Grocery, Supply	Expertise in hikers and itinerant tourism. Awareness of the state of services on the stage.	G (local services), C (hikers)	Opening of an emergency grocery store or preparation of meal baskets by hosts
Hikers	Hosting providers	Expertise in hikers and itinerant tourism. Awareness of the state of services on the stage. Technical knowledge	G (local services), C (hikers), S (hikers)	Map of bivouac sites (Facebook)
Group of natural parks	Hosting providers	Knowledge of road conditions. Technical knowledge. Financing.	G (local services), C (hikers), O (institutions, funders)	Creation of bivouac areas
Town	Grocery, Supply	Knowledge of service status, legal and technical knowledge, appropriate premises	G (local services), C (hikers)	Creation of a snack bar on communal premises
Association	Hosting providers	Technical knowledge and materials. Financed by national forestry office. Abandoned huts on a hiking trail	G (local services, local institutions), C (hikers)	Creation of "free" accommodation along the route
Local museum	Hosting providers	Expertise in tourism. Awareness of the state of services on the stage.	G (local services), C (hikers)	Opening of a room in the eco-museum to accommodate hikers.