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# Bricolage for self-sufficiency: an analysis of alternative food networks

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**Abstract:** In this article the bricolage concept is applied to compare the organisational dynamics of two alternative food networks (AFNs) in Riga and Bristol respectively. It is argued that bricolage is a useful concept to understand the dynamics of AFNs. The concept “bricolage” refers to the free use of any materials at hand. Bricoleurs accept that these materials might not be ideal, but nevertheless use them as long as they offer characteristics that help to reach the AFN goals (which, for the AFNs featured in this article, are establishing a functioning farmers’ market, and founding a market garden). Such use of “what fits” and “what’s at hand” may lead to new and unexpected ways how these initiatives operate. The article argues that bricolage is a liberating concept in the organisational study of AFNs because it frames them as characteristically dynamic and constantly active in relation to changes in local contexts. Bricolage thus helps determine the nature of AFN dynamism.

**Keywords:** alternative food networks, bricolage, adaptation, trajectories.

## Introduction

Industrial food supply chains are associated with social and environmental externalities, which have become the subject of extensive research. Many studies highlight the need to transform agro-food systems and to create (or recognise) operational alternatives. Consequently, there has been a steady growth of interest, during roughly the last two decades, in the issues related to alternative food networks (AFNs) (Goodman 2004; Tregear 2011). In this article, AFNs are initiatives employing innovative or alternative organisational and economic models which perceive food practices (in some sense located outside of conventional agro-food systems) as the central, or one of the central elements of their activities. The popularity and promises of AFN have enthused scholars to collect inspiring case studies and raise questions including: What conditions are needed to facilitate the emergence of alternatives (Thorsøe and Kjeldsen 2015)? How do these networks operate

(Dubuisson-Quellier et al. 2011)? How could they be scaled-up (Nost 2014), and studied (Holloway et al. 2007)? etc. However, attempts to offer a meaningful answer to these questions have so far illustrated the difficulties of introducing a strong theoretical framework covering the enormous diversity of initiatives located outside conventional agro-food pathways. This has facilitated the emergence of a critical stance towards AFN theorisation and sometimes towards AFNs themselves (Edward Jones et al 2008, Howard and Winter 2011, Guthman 2008). Critics claim that conventional and alternative provisioning are unjustifiably presented as competing systems (Holloway et al. 2007; Sonnino and Marsden 2006), that key concepts associated with AFNs are romanticised (Tregear 2011; DuPuis and Goodman 2005) and that despite extensive research, only limited insight into the mechanisms that would allow the replication of promising alternatives elsewhere is given.

This article introduces the bricolage concept to explore new theoretical and methodological grounds that allow the unstructured and often unintended diversity of AFNs to be acknowledged. The following research question is raised in this article: How do AFNs handle a process of organisational development and functional adaptation in the light of shifting local contexts, available resources and emerging opportunities? With this question, the multidimensional nature of the tension between the moving context and founders' intentions, knowledge and abilities (i.e. the conflict that constitutes AFNs) is included as a key trait in conceptualisation. Analysis of this complexity requires instruments that recognise undefined trajectories, reflexivity and active-passive agency. These characteristics can be found in a concept used in entrepreneurial studies – namely bricolage, or what some researchers call “*making do*” (MacMaster et al. 2015; Di Domenico et al. 2010). The concept refers to practice whereby agents utilise any materials that come to hand, test the solutions, accept imperfections and continue to improvise. Bricolage is, therefore, a helpful tool in illuminating the organisational dynamics which AFNs exhibit when adapting to shifting contexts (e.g. funding, market demand, and availability of equipment or workers). Such dynamics are characteristic of AFNs because, firstly, AFNs are distinct from conventional enterprises due to the broader social or environmental objective at the heart of AFN practice; secondly, the ability to achieve such goals depends on changing constellations of external and internal actors and circumstances; and, thirdly, while such changes are common for many enterprises, for AFNs they are embedded and locally unique in detail. The article suggests an organisational focus is needed to help understand the functional and operational characteristics of AFNs. Bricolage as a theoretical and methodological tool offers this focus.

Organisation dynamics emerge from the confrontation of goals and context, manifest in the materials accessed, accumulated and used by AFNs. “Materials” are objects located in contexts with meanings that can be easily reinterpreted. By contrast “resources” are valuable materials with fixed meanings. “Materials” and “resources” are used here to describe both physical (for example tools, pieces of fabric, building bricks, etc.) and social (roles, contacts, etc.) inputs that can be used to achieve new ends. The ability to attach new meaning and interpretation to materials represents a means to achieve specific tasks. In this article, broader principles behind AFNs are also considered, such as the links that tie chains of bricolage and maintain social organisation within AFNs. This

requires an understanding of the use of social resources and a significant share of the analysis section is dedicated to this task.

Early work saw AFNs as an opportunity for rural development. The emerging field of urban food studies is opening up new empirical and theoretical work on AFNs with relevance also to rural cases. In particular, urban food studies are exposing rural-urban synergies through AFNs, including the cases reported here: the Kalnciema Quarter (KQ) in Riga and the Community Farm (CF) near Bristol, which featured within the SUPURBfood project<sup>i</sup>. This article extends analyses in SUPURBfood by developing new perspectives on how the AFNs' efforts to follow alternative routes and alternative goals can be interpreted. AFNs are not necessarily systemic (i.e., embedded and mutually linked to food systems). Instead, each of these initiatives is interpreted as a unique structure built upon available materials, contextual opportunities, threats, inspiration, etc.

The introductory section of the article is followed by a review of scholarly discussions on AFNs. A section on bricolage follows that introduces its theoretical reasoning and discusses the main principles of "making do". Two sections describing methodological considerations then follow: the first introduces the two local case studies; the second outlines data used for the subsequent analysis. This latter is sub-divided into four sections linked to AFN bricolage activity: redefinition, stock-piling, momentum and transformation. The article ends with a discussion about what implications bricolage thinking has for interpreting AFNs.

### **Common approaches for AFN analysis**

AFNs have been well-documented and critically reflected upon. Tregear, in an overview of existing research, summarises the characteristics of AFNs by: (i) their embeddedness in a specific locale, (ii) the orientation of their alternative towards economic viability for the actors involved, (iii) the fundamental desire of their networks to improve ecological sustainability, and (iv) their efforts to improve social justice (Tregear 2011). Most studies articulate the alternativeness of AFNs by regarding at least some of these characteristics. Despite the richness of evidence, the proliferation of alternative models of food provisioning has not captured some essential traits of AFNs, nor has it been able to offer a set of mutually accepted concepts that could be associated with AFNs. It seems that the opposite has been achieved – studies have revealed the weaknesses of current theorisation (Holloway et al. 2007). This statement resonates with the recognition that the categories used by researchers often have more than one context-dependent meaning (see Morris and Kirwan 2011; Tregear 2011; DuPuis and Goodman 2005) and that distinctions between alternative and conventional is becoming ever more blurred (Jonas 2010; Galt et al. 2015; Grivins and Tisenkopfs 2015). Such critiques augment observations that many of AFNs would be short-lived without public funding, which is normally given in response to social or environmental benefits which accompany AFN practices. According to Sonnino and Marsden, the critique of alternative *"encourages the search for new conceptual and methodological tools to explore the nature and dynamics of the alternative sector. From an empirical and theoretical political perspective, there is also an urgent need to develop a more rigorous theoretical framework around alternative food networks"* (2006, p.184). Holloway et al. continues the same idea by stating: *"Methodologically... we encounter a need*

*to be able to formulate a strategy for working through very different examples of food production-consumption to assist in moving towards a fuller understanding of how they are assembled and how they function in their specific local context” (2007, p.2).*

Given this, in this article the focus on AFNs is shifted from their roles in food system to the principles guiding the way that AFNs function and interact with context. The proposed shift requires a rethinking of the central elements that define AFNs. Practices used by an AFN for generating change and realising its functions may not correspond to trajectories set in conventional agro-food systems. This is because AFNs are innovative in terms of their goals and in terms of how they interpret the agro-food system and, therefore, do not have predefined tracks that would ensure success. In contrast to conventional food enterprise development, AFNs are faced with a wider range of possible operational destinations. AFNs may not be able to call on conventional tools to support their development – such as loan capital, market research data, or food chain infrastructures designed for other types of economic actors. Furthermore, as it is shown by the cases analysed in this article, AFNs have important social/ environmental goals *at the heart* of their operation. As a key reason for operating in food systems these goals influence their ability to be competitive.

Clearly, there are cases when conventional actors are forced to diverge from their intended paths – because they pursue new opportunities or encounter difficulties. However, the difference between AFNs and actors representing the conventional agro-food system is that after deviation from their path, the latter will seek to return to the original trajectory under new circumstances, meaning that actors will return to practices that are compatible with tools designed to support them. The deviation is short-term or opportunistic. By contrast, AFNs do not necessarily have a fixed trajectory to return to. Thus, to become self-sufficient (being able to secure resources needed for an initiative to function), AFNs must constantly make do with what they can find *at hand*, or invent/construct, or generate resources socially: this is bricolage.

### **Bricolaging an AFN**

Thinking only about the outcomes promoted by AFNs imprints on them a linearity that might cause reductionism in overall AFN analysis. This is because the pursuit of envisioned outcomes while remaining viable may be a difficult task when there is no established pathway for development. Therefore, the mutual relations between an AFN's goals and contexts are dynamic – an AFN's day-to-day struggles to overcome emerging hindrances might cause shifts in goals.

In general, agro-food systems have well-defined sets of roles, models of interactions, trajectories, development stages (Miller and Friesen 1980; 1984; Quinn and Cameron 1983; Smith 2007). This is different for AFNs. AFNs must find a path that allows them to compete in the system that has been designed for other types of goals – thus they have to creatively identify materials and resources within local contexts and use them to their advantage (MacKenzie and Pardo-Guerra 2014). The creative restructuring of potential building blocks may result in a redirection of the planned trajectories and goals (Di Domenico et al. 2010). This is a process of bricolage. In the context of conventional entrepreneurship, some authors refer to bricolage as “making do” (Di Domenico et al.

2010; Baker 2007), while Baker et al. (2003) use concepts of “strategic improvisation” and “toy store” (Baker 2007) to illustrate a similar process of dynamic organisational development. “Tinkering” presents a possible translation for the French verb *bricoleur* (Beckett 2016), meaning to experiment with things in order to build a broader understanding of how they work. In organisation studies, authors using these concepts see bricolage as an exception – as a strategy for the smallest entrepreneurs or as a short-term route to achieve specific goals. Used with this meaning, bricolage is close to other important theoretical notions, such as innovation or improvisation, both of which are used to interpret change. Innovations or “new combinations” that offer adaptive new technical, economic and social solutions (Neumeier 2011) is a common concept used to interpret AFNs and activities surrounding them (Kirwan et al. 2014; Neumeier 2011). However, the concept is used to examine separate events and is not applied to interpret a continuous process. In this article, the concept of bricolage is used closer to its original meaning proposed by Levi-Strauss where it is not a solution for particular tasks but rather a path on its own – a continuity of solutions. For an organisation such as an AFN, which pursues a novel trajectory or follows no clear path, bricolage becomes the principal approach through which organisational and operational progress is achieved.

The term bricolage was introduced by Levi-Strauss who compares it to modern myth making – a knowledge production process which in his book “Savage Mind” is used to illustrate an alternative to modern science (1966, pp.15-18). The alternative offers knowledge arrangements that do not necessarily differ from those postulated by science. Yet the method of knowledge acquisition differs – modern science is theoretical while bricoleurs operate in ‘reality’ and learn from practice. Thus the solutions offered by a bricoleur rely only on what is accessible to her. Levi-Strauss states:

*“The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’, that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or deconstructions.” (1966, p.17).*

In contemporary studies, the concept refers to agents using any resources that come in handy, improvising and testing solutions, accepting imperfection, and constructing the existing practices as open to re-interpretation, relying considerably on the feedback of the relevant stakeholders. It is a gradual, incremental, iterative, interactive path of development, which may be labelled as an emergent co-shaping of forms, functions, attributes/traits (Garud and Karnøe 2003; Ciborra 1996). The concept has been used to analyse the success stories in resource poor environments (Baker and Nelson 2005), e.g. by social enterprises (Di Domenico et al. 2010) or start-ups (Baker et al. 2003), development of new sectors (Aldrich and Fiol 1994) and in relation to the social construction of

technologies (Garud and Karnøe 2003) and technological change (Ferneley and Bell 2006; Ciborra 1996).

Bricoleurs collect 'bits and pieces' that may become handy in the future (Phillips and Tracey 2007). The materials used for bricolage hold two characteristics – they have been used, and can be used again for different purposes (Levi-Strauss 1966, p.35). This means that 'making-do' requires a certain contextual sensitivity, and being attuned to available materials (MacKenzie and Pardo-Guerra 2014). The first step of bricolage is to make an inventory of available tools and materials. Thus the bricoleur is more likely to use materials with which she is familiar (Ferneley and Bell 2006). Instead of examining what these materials actually signify, she looks at what they could potentially signify (Levi-Strauss 1966), and she draws from commonly reoccurring materials and rearranges them in a unique order (Baker 2007).

These statements lead to two conclusions. First, the arguments show that bricolage is a dynamic practice-orientated concept that describes ongoing processes where materials are constantly rediscovered and redefined. Second, the effect of bricolage is likely to be fragmented and intertwined (Ciborra 1996). The result of bricolage will look unstructured and messy, at the same time taking a shape that integrates all potentially incompatible materials and allows an AFN to balance its goals with what is possible.

### **Two examples of bricolage**

In this article the process of bricolage is illustrated by examining two AFNs – (i) Kalnciema Quarter (KQ) in Riga (a private enterprise located in the city, organising farmers' markets, hosting festivals, concerts, cinema, exhibitions, design shops and a restaurant); and (ii) The Community Farm (CF) near Bristol (a not for profit co-operative that manages a farm, operates a retail vegetable box scheme and is committed to building a support community around the farm). The AFNs featured here are constantly looking for solutions that could help them improve their self-sufficiency, by which is meant their on-going operational viability and the balancing of economic and social goals. As suggested, the two cases were selected because both participated in the SUPURBfood study and inspired discussions about a need for a new approach to AFN analysis. However, it is emphasised that this article is exploratory: it does not seek to compare the cases but to apply a new approach to interpreting them. The differences between KQ and CF help to test the strengths and weaknesses of the bricolage approach. Finally, the cases represent distinct contexts in Western and Eastern Europe, thereby adding to understandings of AFN diversity.

Several data sources are used in this article: for the KQ case, data were gathered using participant observations, semi-structured interviews and desk research; for the CF case, desk research, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an on-line survey were conducted. In both cases data were collected between 2014 and 2016. Analysis, discussion and consultation with SMEs demonstrated a puzzling blend of activities seemingly chaotic yet often successful. Such observations inspired the introduction of the "bricolage" concept.

For the analysis, four central themes have been selected: redefinition – how meanings of materials are redefined; stock-piling – how AFNs pile up materials; momentum – how new opportunities are grasped; and transformation – how these manoeuvres change original AFN trajectories. The categories used for the analysis are a synthesis of grounded findings and theoretical suggestions. The first three categories are mentioned by other researchers who have used the concept of bricolage, and in their studies these categories have emerged as critical elements of the bricolage process. The fourth, analysis category – transformation – is new and represents the authors' perspective on how AFN functioning signifies the shifting nature of these networks. This last category shifts analysis from how AFNs function to why they pursue their aims. ***Kalnciema Quarter in Riga***

KQ is registered as a limited liability company, originally created with the goal to regenerate and manage a cluster of wooden buildings now included in the UNESCO World Heritage area in Riga. The name is used to refer both to the territory (a yard amid several wooden buildings) as well as the activities that are held in the space.

Throughout its development, KQ has striven to create a place that engages city-dwellers, based on values associated with a sustainable lifestyle, creativity and authentic connections to cultural heritage. Attempts to achieve both of these social goals and to secure economic viability have resulted in the organisation of a variety of activities, including weekly farmers' markets, free concerts, work space to rent, art exhibitions, participation in academic research projects, renovation of wooden houses, and, recently, maintaining an online global social media platform to exchange information about farmers' markets elsewhere. The events attract both local people and tourists.

The weekly farmers' market is one of the most visible activities at KQ operating successfully since 2009 (making KQ the most long-standing non-municipal market in Riga). The vendors include local producers and farmers selling regional specialties from around the country, particularly at markets dedicated to specific cities or regions in Latvia. To operationalise their commitment to the quality and traceability of produce being sold, the organisers of KQ have developed a quality assurance scheme, involving on-site inspections of farms.

Despite the diversity and success of the activities, KQ is constantly struggling to overcome its resource limitations: constrained space, uncertain finances, and very limited support from the city authorities.

### ***The Community Farm in Bristol***

The CF in southwest England is "*an organic, not for profit [vegetable] growing community*" (The Community Farm, 2014), which occupies 22 acres (9 ha) of agricultural land, although only about a quarter of this area is cultivated. Members bought an existing seasonal fruit and vegetable retail delivery (veg-box) scheme and wholesale business from a private enterprise, having established the CF as a not-for-profit co-operatively owned organisation in April 2011. The CF currently employs 15



people and delivers organic vegetables throughout the Bath and Bristol area and is owned by its 500 members who are able to vote at the annual general meetings.

The aims of The Community Farm are to:

- (i) Transform farming through organic production on member-owned land and 'healthy' food distribution direct to members' homes;
- (ii) Grow vegetables and fruit in the most sustainable way;
- (iii) Link a diverse membership to where their food is produced;
- (iv) Contribute to the resilience of food security, the local economy, and to the development of a self-sustaining, low-carbon food and farming system;
- (v) Increase knowledge of growing, giving hands-on experience and the chance to acquire new skills offered to people from all walks of life.

The CF creates opportunities to learn about food production by involving volunteers. It has a social role, offering apprenticeships to participants in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation programme. The CF is also committed to improving the environment, aiming to minimise carbon emissions and managing the land in line with organic principles.

### **Analysis of bricolage**

The following section has been structured within the four central themes identified as characteristic to bricolage. The sub-section "Redefinition of accessible materials" illustrates how selected AFNs reinterpret materials to which they have access. "Piling up the materials" explains how AFNs ensure they have access to materials/ building blocks. "Generating the momentum" analyses the timing of bricolage. "Transformation of results" presents bricolage processes in the light of an AFN's self-perception. These categories are presented as part of the strategy AFNs use to pursue self-sufficiency and are illustrated with examples collected from the two case studies.

#### ***Redefinition of accessible materials***

Bricolage refers to the use of available materials – the process of stripping original meanings and adapting materials for new needs, or their re-arrangement in pursuit of new goals. In both case studies bricolage is practice-oriented towards innovation and gradual development that is intended to allow the AFN to flourish in a resource-scarce environment and be self-sufficient. Choosing bricolage as a solution requires the AFN to manoeuvre between accessible materials to reshape them so they become a substitute for what is needed (but not available). Manoeuvring and reshaping means that this path is unpredictable; it requires a flexible and creative mind-set and constant involvement (which might mean both constant evolution as well as revision of plans). Therefore, bricolaging is vulnerable to failure. In the cases analysed here, several successful and unsuccessful ways have been observed when the meaning of materials has been redefined. Both KQ and CF have a strong leadership that recognises the need to search for solutions and is willing to act.

Physical objects and social relations can both be found in the bricoleur's tool-box and re-interpreted by the bricoleur, to be used as building blocks to move towards the intended goal. On occasions, KQ organisers invite people who share their values to participate in co-creating the KQ's space (redefining: supporters become participants), which leads to regular shifts in mutual relations. Farmers' market customers are encouraged to produce and sell their own artisan products in the market (redefining: customers become vendors). Consequently, KQ fills the demand for new products, ensures that there is a growing pool of potential vendors and attracts new clients. In other cases, KQ staff share their market insights to assist potential vendors (redefining: market managers become consultants, mentors), which leads to improved competitiveness among stallholders, as well as ensuring that KQ has enough vendors to meet the ever-changing consumer demand. However, there are also less common routes of role reinterpretation – a botanical study group holds its lessons in the KQ thus adopting a new role as gardeners (redefining: pupils become gardeners, carers). These examples illustrate how the KQ leaders use all the available materials to constantly fill existing or potential organisational gaps in the farmers market.

Similar practices are evident at the CF, an AFN that blurs the conventional distinctions between customers, shareholders and workers. The CF relies extensively on different volunteering opportunities. These include an arrangement with the social services department at Bristol City Council to offer formal apprenticeships (redefining: the farm becomes an educational and social institution) to socially excluded individuals, some of whom have since found jobs in commercial horticulture (redefining: excluded individuals acquire mainstream roles as apprentices and farmers).

KQ is principally associated with its farmers' markets. To diversify its offer and to ensure the retention of its clients, KQ also organises thematic farmers' markets offering Lithuanian, Italian or food of other national origins. A competitive challenge arose in the form of a historically significant annual market well-known as the biggest yearly event for Latvia's artisan producers. On the day of this market, KQ used its contacts in the city's arts and community development circles to shift its focus to fashion, by show-casing a number of Latvia's new designers (redefining: farmers market became fashion market). This successful adaptation has since been repeated. On different occasions KQ tried to extend its expertise in establishing artisan/farmers' markets even further after KQ leaders were invited to organise a market outside the KQ neighbourhood (redefining: to remove from the KQ market being equated with its usual location). However, after several attempts this innovation was abandoned as unsuccessful.

Due to its democratic governance structure CF takes longer to respond to new opportunities. However, shareholders can be also a source of capital in times of need and were approached by the CF leadership in 2013 for additional funding following a poor growing season and subsequent harvest (redefining: shareholders become a safety net). Thus, when presented with challenges, both AFNs have tried to reinterpret available skills and resources in ways that allow them to overcome their inherent limitations.

Finally, a lack of resources can also introduce simple forms of redefinitions of meanings, for example when adding curtains to a former garage window in order to transform it into a pop-up yoga studio, or using a pile of tyres as a structure in which to create compost. In these cases, AFNs use materials to which they have access and creatively redefine them to quickly solve their needs.

These solutions make AFNs look fragmented in their activities. However, these fragments are intertwined and can become a standardised solution if repeated on multiple occasions which consequently will lead, to the emergence of new materials which then constitute new directions of action.

### ***Piling up the materials***

Bricolage is a response to scarcity of materials – under which we also include the services of people, as described above – requiring the use of what is at hand. Bricoleurs are forced to compensate for missing resources and rethink the meaning of existing materials. However, the essential requirement for materials remains. This leads actors to stock-pile materials during periods when these are accessible. In practice this might include stores or garages of second-hand materials, for example. More abstractly, stock-piles could be understood as collections of different relations, contacts, accessible legal forms and other experience. An effective bricoleur recognises the future potential that can emerge from her current interactions with the context. Furthermore, she recognises possible need in materials that could be used for bricolage. These materials then hold their original meaning for as long as their utility or period of need remains unspecified. It may also be the case that many stock-piled materials are never used, while others are repeatedly re-employed to resolve challenges.

An example of how material stocks can be used appears in the redefinition of the farmers' market as Latvia's fashion designer market, described above. This would not have been possible if KQ had not cultivated new and strong relations within Riga's artists' and designers' communities (piling: collecting contacts). On the one hand, these contacts are a result of the openness of charismatic representatives of KQ. On the other hand, it is a result of their long-term attempts to popularise their AFN with regular cultural programmes and concerts. Previous KQ activities opened a momentum to introduce new directions of action and a skilful bricoleur – the KQ's director - seized the opportunity.

CF events are structured and organised as an intrinsic part of the farm's operation, such as on seasonal volunteer days (piling: keeping a database of occasional volunteers who are called upon for seasonal harvesting), and a mutually beneficial experience is evident: volunteers enjoy their day out and feel they are contributing incrementally to a new type of food system which benefits the city. The CF mobilises ideologically-motivated supporters to cover periods of intense, short-term labour requirements. Another form of material stock-piling at the CF relates to land (piling: land). The area of the farm is much larger than the area under cultivation. The CF, through its organisational structure which situates the owner of the land as a shareholder in the company, allows it to retain at hand a large area of useable land during a time of consolidated production. Recent market experiences have forced the CF to rethink the financial viability of its wholesale and

livestock operations. However, the resultant excess capacity of land is not liquidised, but kept at hand for future possibilities and market opportunities.

Another example of the accumulation of resources is the collection of legal forms the KQ has (piling: official statuses). To an outsider, KQ might appear as a unified commercial entity. However, the relations of various legal forms beneath the surface are complex. These forms have been created as a response to the need to separate different practices of AFN and to ensure that there is a possibility to choose the proper legal form for every taken action. These forms create a pool of resources that can be used depending on the types of projects planned and that ensures that the AFN has a range of legal incarnations which can be fitted to conditions required by funders.

### ***Generating the momentum***

Bricolage is an ongoing process – on the one hand, it normalises some solutions, transforming them into common ways of doing things. After organising the first thematic market, KQ has since been holding regular, theme-based markets. On the other hand, solutions introduced may be temporary, requiring constant maintenance and improvements. Thus bricolage requires sensitivity to opportunities, interpreting the prevailing contexts and being able to re-shuffle fixed structures. Every step AFNs take may initiate new contextual and internal arrangements associated with threats and opportunities. Each such solution introduces new participants and practices, reveals new fields of relations and reshapes at least some aspects of context. Each such step AFNs take opens new layers of materials and allows institutionalising or reassembling what has been already subject to bricolage. This is what in this article is called momentum – new layers of opportunities and meaning emerging from already established solutions.

KQ collaboration with researchers offers a good example of *momentum*. Some of the Latvian research team members have been clients of the KQ farmers' market since the market was established. Through this connection, opportunities arose for KQ to participate in SUPURBfood (momentum: joining the research), generating further ideas for collaboration, including the involvement of researchers in the development of MarketHopper (an app to locate farmers' markets around the world) (momentum: using research to introduce a new product). KQ later invited the researchers to participate in discussions with the city council to negotiate support for KQ's activities (momentum: researchers invited to be consultants). Thus relations initially based on researchers' objectives to access data through participatory inquiry, led to the development of closer and reciprocal relations with KQ, whose staff drew on research expertise and systematic methods to consolidate relations with the city council.

The CF also reveals AFN relations to policymaking. During 2015, Bath and North East Somerset, the local authority responsible for the area where the CF is located, publicly launched its local food strategy (BANES 2014). This document outlines a trio of objectives, namely to promote the local rural economy, reduce the environmental impact of the agricultural and food industries, and to tackle health inequalities linked to food. The CF is featured within the strategy document and has been able to present itself as falling into the first two strategic categories. The council approached

the CF to investigate the feasibility of supplying into the public sector catering requirement, and to households with low incomes. The food strategy was a momentum that redefined the contexts of the relationship between the authority and the CF (momentum: policy change). Unfortunately, the CF was commercially unable to meet the requirements of the public sector supply tender. In this respect, the CF displayed difficulty in balancing its commercial, social and ideological objectives, although it has gained new allies through the process of engagement with the public sector.

### ***Transformation of results***

The final section of this analysis is dedicated to changes in AFNs that are caused by following undefined paths. The literature describing bricolage does not offer an examination of how the outcome of bricolage should be interpreted, or when/if the obtained result can be interpreted as a success. Focusing on a modest task, such as the cultivation of new contacts or the development of new events, could offer a simple formula to estimate results, but may not reveal the true meaning of what has been achieved. For example, the music festival organised on CF land brought negligible financial benefit to the farm business, while MarketHopper did not manage to reach the level of subscription that was anticipated. By contrast, KQ's fashion market, and the CF's communication with its volunteers seem successful. What these statements lack are details about how these separate activities form a greater survival strategy and, most notably, which trade-offs of the AFN's goals had to be accepted in order to maintain self-sufficiency.

In some cases, bricolage appears to have brought on-board new goals. For example, KQ's original aim was to purchase and restore wooden buildings. When it proved difficult to finance its objectives, KQ used its space to introduce the farmers' market which eventually became the most promoted and recognised of its actions. KQ eventually incorporated "*food*" into the narrative describing AFN's goals. In this case, the shift in the self-representation of KQ was intentional and does not exclude its original goals although these have become less prominent. In other cases, trade-offs could have more dramatic effects on the original goals or cause much more visible shifts in overall communication. Thus the goals themselves can be one of the materials redefined in the process of bricolage.

The CF operates on a changing blend of public and commercial income. To do this, it is adaptable and open to new ideas and experiments, and integrates a strong social aim within its operation. However, by the winter of 2014 the CF was facing unsustainable losses and had to significantly consolidate its production area, its market channels, and lost some of its staff. The need to be profitable forced the CF to prioritise a market-oriented approach and at least partly redefine the way it defines its social goals.

Another example is CF participation in alcohol and drug rehabilitation. This initiative emerged only after the establishment of the CF and has been a way for CF to access additional funding. Currently it has been fully integrated into the CF story. Similarly, when KQ mentors farmers in their development of innovative products it is presented as an integral part of the KQ's role, and not as

something which was started to improve the quality of products offered in the market and a way how KQ can ensure that it has access to merchants.

All of the activities AFNs have introduced represent a search for a balance between viability and vision. This search can have a significant influence on AFN structures and the interpretation of the mission or their goals. Usually, shifts in goals are less visible and, following discussion with AFNs representatives after they have occurred, appear to have been successfully integrated in the overall AFN's narrative. This phenomenon can be described as shifting narratives, whereby optimal goals achieved through bricolage are defined only post-factum. This does not mean all AFNs drift far from their original goals, although there are examples of this because AFNs need to secure their survival first, and then consider their goals in the light of continuing operation. However, it means that success cannot be measured simply by assessing achieved goals – goals might be blurred by opportunity.

### **Discussion**

Despite the wealth of illuminating AFN research emerging in recent years, this article claims that the explanatory power of these studies is limited. This is because, although AFNs balance goals that differ from conventional actors, they have nevertheless been presented as functioning according to a similar organisational logic as that which drives conventional firms. In order to fully understand AFNs we need to embrace a perspective that does not presume conventional development paths.

In order to understand AFNs it is not enough to consider separate snapshots of their activities. Researchers should also concentrate on the evolving structures that AFNs generate in order to achieve their goals and how these structures then affect AFNs in the future. This article analyses AFNs as dynamic entities that operate in dynamic local contexts. AFNs face constant changes in material availability, and the solutions introduced by AFNs have to be constantly adapted. Goals may also change. In their daily efforts to survive, AFNs integrate their organisation, context and goals by trading materials from one of these three categories to another. To analytically grasp this researchers need approaches that can capture long-term qualitative dynamics and the current instruments for AFNs studies need to be revisited.

It could be argued that the process and result of bricolage will always be the generation of something new. The bricoleur is always redefining and attaching new meanings to existing materials. By doing so, she is generating momentum and introducing new ways to solve problems and introducing new ways to interpret existing stocks of materials. However, these innovations might be limited by cultural boundaries. As Levi-Strauss suggests, the bricoleur does not create new materials, but reshapes what is already there. The bricoleur's ability to recognize materials as being such is always rooted in her own network of knowledge/ culture. Thus there are certain limits to what can be expected from the bricoleur and these can be expanded only by introducing new materials. The outcome of bricolage might be the redefinition of original objectives and transformation of future pathways.

### **Conclusions**

This article has illustrated how AFNs use bricolage, relying on the resources at hand, to face new challenges. In order to handle organisational development, AFNs redefine the meanings of materials to which they have access; they use these materials to introduce new activities or to reshape the existing ones. To do so, AFNs stockpile materials. Finally, AFNs monitor how their chosen paths open new layers of possibilities and materials that lead to new cycles of redefinition and accumulation to continue to improve their practices. Through the process of rethinking of what AFNs can do, AFNs also reshape their goals. All of this is done to ensure AFNs' self-sufficiency. This strategy allows AFNs to functionally adapt to the limitations they face. The described processes are a dynamic strategy of organisational development for those without a predefined path, operating with scarce resources.

Bricolage secures AFNs' abilities to function while maintaining relative independence from mainstream market paths. Although the results of bricolage may seem fragmented and chaotic, they can become institutionalised in a broader system of relationships/ domains or within the AFNs themselves, thereby providing a certain (or temporary) level of stability and security. Even so, stability may not last because eventually local contexts will force an AFN to re-adapt. The bricolage-skill of the AFN lies, therefore, not just in making do on a day-to-day operational level, but also in being able to interpret and balance the trade-offs between, on the one hand, economic viability and the desire to act within the limits of its self-defined aims and, on the other hand, deciding to take on board new goals. Consequently, it might be difficult to assess the efficiency of bricolage at one set point.

In conclusion, bricolage with its main activities of materials redefinition, stock-piling, momentum and transformation offers a fresh view of AFNs. Although there is clear agreement that AFNs represent alternative ways for how food systems could function, when it comes to analysis, a new analytical frameworks have been called for (Sonnino and Marsden 2006; Holloway et al. 2007). This article has illustrated that a lens of bricolage allows the identification of new (long-term organisational dynamics, re-interpretation of goals) and the reinterpretation of existing elements (role of AFN leadership) to explain how AFNs function. Thus bricolage is not simply a descriptive tool – it reveals new AFN characteristics that hold high analytical potential and here, the concept has been used to create new understandings of how AFNs function. By adopting this approach, a more complex picture of AFNs can be presented, one that explains ways how an AFN is embedded in its local context, how it interacts with surroundings, and how it (re-) shapes itself.

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