

**Bricolage: potential as a conceptual tool for  
understanding access to welfare in  
superdiverse neighbourhoods**

Jenny Phillimore, Rachel Humphries, Franziska Klaas  
and Michi Knecht

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### **Highlights**

- The term bricolage is used extensively in a range of fields in particular around subculture, enterprise and institutions, and environments of scarcity
- There is a clear emphasis upon making do, restricted resources, innovation, imagination and necessity, but also reordering, subversion and transformation
- While some see bricolage as an opportunity others view it more as a second best option, perhaps the kind of process that individuals or firms adopt in the early stages of addressing a challenge – once more established they may no longer bricolage
- Bricolage is sometimes considered to be a highly localized activity that can quickly respond to changing circumstances
- There is much emphasis on the importance of specific and specialized knowledge sets as well as skilful combining of resources in the actions of the bricoleur
- To ensure a critical function of the bricolage concept and a clear analytical and empirical demarcation from neoliberal 'strategies of self-empowerment', welfare bricolage requires contextualization within historical and emerging 'reforms' or withdrawals of welfare states to bear the broader politics of health care provision and their country specific effects in mind

### **Gaps**

- Little attention has been paid to defining what successful bricolage might look like
- Studies of bricolage do not generally explicitly outline what is meant by resources – given the wide ranging nature of this term (see Hobfoll 2011) some understanding is needed concerning the types of resources utilized and when, why and how different combinations are enacted
- Bricolage has not been utilized in diverse contexts and no consideration has been given to how processes of bricolage may vary according to locality, policy or welfare (or other) regime
- The concept of bricolage appears to have been neglected in welfare or health studies
  - The transformative power of welfare bricolage practices enacted by both users of health care systems and providers is understudied

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## Introduction

The scientific and policy challenges emerging from the complexity associated with delivering welfare in an era of superdiversity have been noted (Ahmed and Craig, 2003; Law, 2009; Vertovec, 2007; Vickers et al., 2012) as providers struggle to communicate with, understand and meet the needs of service users. After decades of failure to address the inequality affecting minority populations and deprived areas, the emergence of superdiversity and the associated fragmentation and transience of new migrant populations have compounded problems faced by providers who lack the knowledge to collaboratively design and deliver services that promote equal outcomes (Phillimore, 2011; Vickers et al., 2012). Declining resources associated with austerity, combined with the backlash against multiculturalism (Grillo, 2010), means that it is politically, financially and practically impossible to offer tailored welfare services for everyone in superdiverse areas. A new approach to apprehending needs and developing solutions is required to reshape the future of European welfare in an era of unprecedented population change.

The UPWEB project seeks to advance knowledge on welfare state futures through the development of innovative research approaches with users and providers, generating new conceptual and practical insights into the concept of welfare bricolage focusing on health in four European countries. Introduced to the social sciences by Lévi-Strauss, developed by Derrida and widely adopted, bricolage is an analogy referring to the pragmatic deployment and redeployment of material and ideas re-patterning daily life beyond structural or systemic intention or ideology. Bricolage was, for Lévi-Strauss, a characteristically modern process, playing out in sub-cultures (Hebdige, 1979), media and education (Papert and Harel, 1991) and research methods (Wibberley, 2012), but not yet welfare research. To promote a shift beyond the reification of ethnicity (Bradby, 2003), often treated as an essentialized cause of poor health (Bhopal, 2012), we argue that superdiversity and change are key features of welfare research. In this paper we explore the ways that the concept of bricolage has been used in complex and/or resource poor environments and think about its potential to help us understand health-seeking behaviours in superdiverse areas. We give some consideration to the politics associated with using bricolage in conjunction with the neo-liberal responsabilization of healthcare, and propose a number of tactics for a politics of bricolage that does not inherently serve neo-liberal agendas. We begin by defining bricolage and describing the way it has been utilized to date.

## What is bricolage?

Levi-Strauss (1962) uses bricolage to describe the difference between the French handyman (Monsieur Bricolage) who uses non-specialized tools for a wide variety of purposes dealing with pre-constraints and limits, and an engineer with 'his' specialized tools. In *The Savage Mind* (1962), Lévi-Strauss used 'bricolage' to describe the characteristic patterns of mythological thought. In his description bricolage is opposed to the engineer's creative thinking, which proceeds from goals to means. Mythical thought, according to Lévi-Strauss, attempts to re-use available materials in order to solve new problems. Jacques Derrida extends this notion to any discourse: 'if one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is bricoleur' (Derrida, 1967: 360). Deleuze and Guattari (1972) identify bricolage as the characteristic mode of production of the schizophrenic producer. To

some extent the bricoleur has been associated with primitive cultures and the engineer with modern, but Lévi-Strauss decisively contested the distinction between bricolage and scientific thought, and today, Science and Technology Studies and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) have re-imported 'bricolage' and tinkering into the very heart of techno-scientific practice. Rapport and Overing (2014) talk of bricolage as the putting together of multiple cultural forms to innovate and create something new or more fit for purpose. Bricolage is frequently viewed as being associated with originality and innovation, and the act of bricolage as embodying individual agency and consciousness, while the socially and politically structured dimensions of bricolage are less investigated. In an interpretation of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari describe humans as bricoleurs 'skilfully operating among networks of signs which we did not invent and do not control' (1972: 344). The Integlot website refers to bricolage as shoddy work, do-it-yourself, tinkering and activities undertaken at micro (home) level. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* provides the following definition

**bricolage, bricoleur** A bricoleur is a kind of French handyman, who improvises technical solutions to all manner of minor repairs. In *The Savage Mind* (1962) **Lévi-Strauss** used this image to illustrate the way in which societies combine and recombine different symbols and cultural elements in order to come up with recurring structures. Subsequently bricolage has become a familiar term to describe various processes of structured improvisation.

In the extensive field of entrepreneurial bricolage the definition 'making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities' (Baker and Nelson, 2005: 333) appears frequently. In a wide range of fields including entrepreneurial bricolage, organizational bricolage, management bricolage, policy studies and studies of technology and bricolage the term is strongly linked with sociological institutionalism, particularly when exploring how change and persistence in organizations occur simultaneously. Bricolage is often used to provide the link between structure and agency (Campbell, 1997; Cleaver, 2001; Andersen, 2008). There is a putative divide in the literature between academics who apply the concept to local level institutional changes and those that apply it to macro social and economic transformation.

## The use of bricolage

Since its original conception, bricolage has been applied in a range of different domains and to a variety of phenomena, including sociological ethnography (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Katovich, 1995; Weinstein and Weinstein, 1991) and qualitative methodologies (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005); women's studies (Gray, 1982), interpersonal relationships (Conville, 1997), subculture studies and popular culture (Hebdige, 1979; Taylor, 2012; Whiteley, 2010) complex information systems design (Lanzara, 1999), explanations of the formative processes in teaching (Dent and Hatton, 1996; Hatton, 1989; Rynes and Trank, 1999), law making (Hull, 1991; Tushnet 1999), institution building (Lanzara, 1998) and evolutionary genetics, biology and economics (Campbell, 1997; Duboule and Wilkins, 1998; Hirabayashi, 1996; Hirabayashi and Kasai, 1993; Jacob, 1997; Lavorgna et al., 2001). In the entrepreneurship literature, bricolage has been used to explain the concept of market creation (Baker and Nelson, 2005) and nascent firm growth (Baker et al., 2003). In the innovation literature, bricolage describes how robust designs can be created in uncertain environments (Ciborra, 1996; Garud and Karnoe, 2003). Improvisation theorists also include Chao (1999); Innes and Booher (1999); Weick- (1993).

The use of the term 'bricolage' seems to have increased more outside than within academic discourses, along with concepts such as entrepreneurship and innovation which have had increasing influence on public discourse in the past decade and in policy and research agendas. One reason for its proliferation may be the more recent focus on practice in these fields (particularly in public policy and administration) which was previously, for the most part, taken for granted. The growth in interest in bricolage is certainly attributable to its association with postmodernity (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1993), and the breakdown of cultural hierarchies, as seen in mixing and remixing. It is interesting to note that gendered critiques have only just begun to emerge from the empirical literature (Hester, 2005). There are a limited number of articles that address how bricolage is related to questions of power (de Certeau, 1984; Irani et al., 2010).

In cultural studies bricolage is used to mean the processes by which people acquire objects from across social divisions to create new cultural identities. In particular, it is a feature of subcultures such as the punk movement. Here, objects that possess one meaning (or no meaning) in the dominant culture are acquired and given a new, often subversive meaning. For example, the safety pin became a form of decoration in punk culture. In social psychology the term 'psychological bricolage' is used to explain the mental processes through which an individual develops novel solutions to problems by making use of using previously unrelated knowledge or ideas they already possess. The term, introduced by Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks, Matthew J. Karlesky and Fiona Lee of the University of Michigan, draws from two separate disciplines. Psychological bricolage, therefore, refers to the cognitive processes that enable individuals to retrieve and recombine previously unrelated knowledge they already possess. It is an intra-individual process similar to Karl E. Weick's notion of bricolage in organizations, which is akin to Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage in societies.

In *Life on the Screen* (1995), Sherry Turkle discusses the concept of bricolage as it applies to problem solving in code projects and workspace productivity. She advocates the 'bricoleur style' of programming as a valid and under-examined alternative to what she describes as the conventional structured 'planner' approach. In this style of coding, the programmer works without an exhaustive preliminary specification, opting instead for a step-by-step growth and re-evaluation process. In 'Epistemological Pluralism', Turkle and Papert write: 'The bricoleur resembles the painter who stands back between brushstrokes, looks at the canvas, and only after this contemplation, decides what to do next.' (Turkle and Papert, 1992: 13).

Hebdige (1979) discusses how an individual can be identified as a bricoleur when they 'appropriated another range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings' (1979: 17). The fashion industry uses bricolage-like styles by incorporating items typically utilized for other purposes. For example, sweet wrappers are woven together to produce a purse.

### *Bricolage in education research*

In education and the discussion of constructionism, Seymour Papert discusses two styles of solving problems. He describes bricolage as a way to learn and solve problems by trying, testing, and playing around. Kincheloe has used the term bricolage in educational research to denote the use of multi-perspectival research methods. In Kincheloe's conception of research bricolage, diverse theoretical traditions are employed in a broader theoretical/critical pedagogical context to lay the foundation



for a transformative mode of multimethodological inquiry. Using these multiple frameworks and methodologies, researchers are empowered to produce more rigorous and praxiological insights into socio-political and educational phenomena.

Kincheloe theorizes a critical multilogical epistemology and critical connected ontology to ground research bricolage. These philosophical notions provide research bricolage with a sophisticated understanding of the complexity of knowledge production and the interrelated complexity of both researcher positionality and phenomena in the world. Such complexity demands a more rigorous mode of research that is capable of dealing with the complications of socio-educational experience. Such a critical form of rigour avoids the reductionism of many monological, mimetic research orientations (see Berry and Kincheloe, 2004; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005).

### *Entrepreneurial bricolage*

In entrepreneurial research bricolage is used as a method of innovation in a resource scarce context. Studies of entrepreneurship have emphasized the significance of bricolage especially as a way to mobilize resources. Most research has taken place in developing countries, in 'new firms' or start-ups or in corporate transitions. Bricolage is a relatively new concept in entrepreneurship literature and still requires more development. A forerunner of these ideas has been attributed by Fisher (2012) to Rice and Rogers (1980) who elaborate on 'resource repackaging, transposing, and recombining' which they argue can be considered forms of 'creative reinvention'. Most of this work deals with maximizing economic value in resource constrained environments (Baker and Nelson, 2005: 354). The theory of entrepreneurial bricolage suggests that the patterns that an entrepreneur adopts with respect to enacting or testing and counteracting limitations will shape the relationship between bricolage activities and growth of the firm. Bricolage activities can enable entrepreneurs to overcome resource constraints, but they can also lock the firm into a self-reinforcing cycle of activities that limit growth.

Baker and Nelson (2005) identify two types of bricolage: parallel and selective. Firms engaged in parallel bricolage start with diverse resources usually not intended for use by others, and create a new opportunity, usually not within the terms of the institutional and regulatory environment, using amateur or self-taught skills and involving customers and suppliers in hands-on operations. Selective bricolage refers to those firms which used parallel bricolage during some period, rejecting it at a later phase once the business was established or transition completed. They also conclude that firms using parallel bricolage are not likely to grow while firms adopting bricolage narrowly or temporarily when experiencing environmental resource limitations, but abandoning the tactic when resources become available (or are enabled following initial bricolage) are likely to experience growth.

Baker et al. (2003) introduce the concept 'network bricolage' as 'dependence on pre-existing contacts at hand'. They suggest that a new area of business is more likely to be shaped by network bricolage rather than the founder's prior work in knowledge-intensive industries. Furthermore network bricolage is instrumented during post-founding experiences: ranging from recruitment and office equipment to financing the business. Burgers et al. (2014) focus on the role of bricolage as mediator between internal and external resources within an organization. They illustrate that using bricolage enables corporate entrepreneurs to mobilize, redefine and recombine existing resources

available via social connections inside and outside their organization, resulting in better performance.

Halme et al. (2012) define the term 'intrapreneurial bricolage' as entrepreneurial activity within large organizations characterized by creative bundling of scarce resources. They identify three elements of bricolage: (1) the refusal to enact constraints; (2) the utilization of the means at hand; (3) resourcefulness as a mind-set. In particular they argue that bricolage is not only about resource integration, but rather a particular way of addressing challenges and opportunities, underpinned by a related knowledge base and world view. They introduce the idea that 'bricoleurs' may have to work under the radar as their methods can be somewhat unconventional.

Vanevenhoven et al. (2011) view bricolage as a successful behaviour for an entrepreneur because by using readily available resources and prior knowledge they can reduce uncertainty and exploit an opportunity. This may involve stretching out norms and regulations to 'discover' something new or to innovate. Sritar (2012) finds that the internet and social networks are amongst the most important resources in entrepreneurial bricolage, also noting that mobile phones are a key driver of activity.

In information systems, bricolage is used by Claudio Ciborra to describe the way in which strategic information systems (SIS) can be built in order to maintain a competitive advantage over a longer period of time than standard SIS. By valuing tinkering and allowing a SIS to evolve from the bottom up, rather than implementing it from the top down, the firm will end up with something that is deeply rooted in the organizational culture, specific to that firm and much less easily imitated.

### *Social bricolage*

Sahra et al. (2009) introduce the idea of the 'social bricoleur' and contrast this to the engineer and social constructionist. Social bricoleurs are motivated to address social needs. Because of their localized and sometimes tacit knowledge, social bricoleurs are uniquely positioned to discover local social needs where they can leverage their motivation, expertise and personal resources to create and enhance social wealth. Social bricoleurs are especially clever in assembling and deploying resources in pursuit of their chosen causes. What differentiates social bricoleurs from other social service providers is the unique manner in which they identify local opportunities, marshal necessary resources, and deliver services to the disadvantaged. Social bricoleurs have 'intimate knowledge of both local environmental conditions and locally available resources'. They perform important functions; without them, many invisible or unrecognized social needs would remain unaddressed. The solutions they develop are sometimes small in scale and limited in scope yet they help solve local social problems. They derive their power to act from being in the right place at the right time, possessing the skills to address needs that larger organizations are perhaps not even aware of.

In organizing their ventures, social bricoleurs typically require neither external nor specialized resources. They often rely on whatever resources are readily harnessed (Weick, 1993). This characteristic differs markedly from other types of social entrepreneurs, who typically depend on numerous external suppliers to achieve their objectives. Independence from others also enables social bricoleurs to operate freely from resource suppliers who sometimes attempt to constrain their efforts or impose their own agendas (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Social bricoleurs are said to be able to respond quickly to changing circumstances. However, reliance on readily available resources and improvisation rather than formal planning sometimes prevents social bricoleurs from addressing

larger needs and scaling up their operations or expanding geographically. Thus, while their unique local knowledge and capacity to improvise enable innovation, their scope can be limited by lack of knowledge about needs and opportunities outside their realm.

### *Institutional or organizational bricolage*

Cleaver et al. (2013) attempt to develop an understanding of how state and citizens interact to produce local institutions, suggesting hybrid arrangements are formed through bricolage. This perspective portrays governance arrangements as negotiated and structured, benefiting some and disadvantaging others. They use ideas of 'situated agency' to define bricolage practices: 'they are not just creative processes in which every outcome is possible: they are situated in social life and shaped by routines, traditions, social norms or culture' (Koning and Benneker, 2012, 3). Lanzara (1998) is cited by many later articles as developing the idea of 'institutional bricolage' (with Weick and Ciborra). He states that bricolage may be seen as a second best strategy yet is the only way to build and innovate in situations characterized by high uncertainty, risk aversity, lack of trust, political conflict, and resource shortage: 'it is a way of coping with complexity'. Spicer et al. (2014) extend the theory of bricolage in organizations by arguing that bricolage is a relatively arbitrary activity which means it is subject to limitations. They argue that bricolage is constrained by organizational values.

Organizational bricolage is defined as a process whereby a new organization is shaped by drawing on organizational forms that are to hand in a particular environment. Symbolic resources are seen as vital, largely because the process of bricolage is often constrained by lack of resources and by established values. Sehring (2009) sees bricolage in an institutional/organizational context as situated between path dependency and the development of new, alternative paths, which are never completely new but a recombination of existing institutional elements and new concepts. Linder and Peters (1995: 133) state that institutional designing often takes the form of 'tireless tinkering' based on two strands. The first is a decisional strand with an emphasis on producing solutions to problems and the second, a dialogical approach, with an emphasis on the socially embedded process of institutionalization. The main organization and management contributions relating to bricolage point to organizational resilience, improvisation and sense-making, entrepreneurship and the utilization of technical systems and artefacts (Dumedjian and Ruling, 2010). Bricolage extends over time, combining building up a 'stock' of resources and developing intimacy with 'what is at hand'. It is 'sense-making', as organizational symbolism describes bricolage as a process by which a member of an organization makes sense of and orders the world against a background of material and social constraint (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1990: 291). It is resilience which combines a coherence of identity with the capacity to act. Finally it includes bricolage as 'ritualized ingenuity' (Coutu, 2002).

### **Related concepts: 'tinkering' and 'assemblage'**

The term 'tinkering' has also got potential to help us think about individuals' health-seeking behaviours and is sometimes used in comparable ways. Mol et al. (2010) discuss tinkering as a practice utilized by elderly persons seeking to negotiate multiple goods when trying to maintain personhood in the face of ageing. De Laet (2012) talks of the practice of terminological tinkering in anthropology – wherein anthropologists refuse to adopt the terms of actors, instead accounting for practices in their own terms. In her much cited work on hackers and open software developers,

Gabrielle Coleman (2009) describes practices of ‘legal tinkering’ and tinkering with technology as a practice that constitutes and secures public spaces - a public that defends the right to alter technology through argument and bricolage.

While bricolage is thought about as a specific logic and politic of social practice, the concept of ‘assemblage’ underlines the heterogeneity of elements reconfigured together – social practices and things, legal-material-social-symbolic constellations. The concept goes back to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who specifically stress how assemblages are in flux, producing difference and thus intimately connected to (super)diversity. Assemblage is sort of an ‘anti-structural’ concept that orients analytical sensibility towards the emergent, contingent, and ephemeral (Marcus and Saka, 2006). Like bricolage, assemblages are not reducible to a single logic; like bricolage, assemblage tries to capture contingency and shifting forms in the process of re-ordering the world. But assemblages are much more material than bricolage. Following Deleuze and Guattari, American anthropologist Paul Rabinow defines assemblage as ‘a distinctive type of experimental matrix of heterogeneous elements, techniques, and concepts’ (Rabinow, 2003: 56), and Watson-Verran and Turnbull (1995) describe assemblages ‘as an amalgam of places, bodies, voices, skills, practices, technical devices, theories, social strategies, and collective work’ (Watson-Verran and Turnbull, 1995: 117). Global assemblages, in the perspective of Collier and Ong, make visible ‘(...) how actors – including social analysts – define and respond by assembling inverse resources in a contingent and provisional manner, with varying effects on emerging forms of modern ways of living.’ (Collier and Ong, 2005: 81).

## Key themes

A number of themes emerge from the literature on bricolage, all of which are highly relevant to the development of a new concept of welfare bricolage. **The themes can be summarized as resources, knowledges, and experimentation and innovation.** Beginning with resources we see that in whatever domain it is enacted, bricolage is frequently associated with a response to a lack of resources. It is often presented as an approach addressing the lack of *appropriate* resources and in particular a way of overcoming challenges and turning them into opportunities. We can distinguish between bricolage as a process of mobilizing resources and overcoming constraints and the role of the bricoleur as an individual who acts as a mediator between different kinds of resources. Whether looking at the process or the enactor it’s clear that bricolage involves creativity: discovering under-utilized or hidden resources or recombining existing resources to tailor them to the challenge. While there is some literature that portrays bricolage as a second rate approach to dealing with problems, there is possibly a broader discussion of bricolage as opening up new opportunities which may, or may not, have limitations depending on the perspective of the commentator. It is possible that bricolage might be used in situations where there are ample resources, as a creative alternative or addition to mainstream approaches. While functional resources are not directly discussed, indeed knowledge and networks are most often referred to and are discussed below, the role of the internet and mobile phones is highlighted in work around entrepreneurialism.

As noted much of the bricolage literature features in some way the importance of distinct knowledges and practice. In the absence of resources, bricoleurs rely heavily on their own knowledge base and that of their social contacts. There is an element of localism in the way that such

knowledges are discussed, which is sometimes seen as a problem, with the implication that bricoleurs can lack the big picture. Bricoleurs are situated in social life and their ideas are shaped by routines, traditions, social norms or culture. They frequently make use of previously unrelated knowledge or ideas they already possess. While their efforts are generally seen as small scale, they are important in that they are driven from the bottom up, rather than being implemented from the top down, ensuring that outcomes are culturally specific and unique. Indeed bricoleurs are said to possess a sophisticated understanding of the complexity of knowledge production and the interrelated complexity of both researcher positionality and phenomena in the world, which mainstream institutions may lack. Because of their closeness to the problem they are addressing they are uniquely positioned to understand needs and lever action through their motivation, expertise and personal resources. Bricoleurs derive their power to act from being in the right place at the right time, possessing the skills and knowledges to address problems that others may be unaware of. The bricolage literature as yet does not acknowledge the possibility that bricolage could occur simultaneously at global and local levels, as individuals with transnational connections make use of global resources to address local problems or vice versa.

Finally bricolage is seen as inherently innovative and in fact the only way to build and innovate in situations characterized by high uncertainty, risk aversity, lack of trust, political conflict, and resource shortage – in short bricolage is a mechanism for coping with complexity. Although the local nature of action is sometimes seen as a limitation, bricolage is also discussed as an approach that is potentially transformative. It is a way to learn and solve problems by trying, testing, and playing around, to subvert original meanings or uses of resources, to innovate with limited resources and to be free of constraining structures and thus adapt or respond to a problem or changing environment quickly. Bricoleurs are portrayed as inevitably independent and sometimes radical, to the extent that their activities must remain hidden given that they question conventional ways of doing.

### **Strengths and weakness of the bricolage concept**

The theoretical uses of bricolage seem to be inspired by its capacity as a term to examine spontaneity, experimentation and modification. It is also described as a 'grammar', a 'script' and a framework on which to identify previously hidden activities, behaviours or orientations. Bricolage is most commonly used to imply the agency of the actor, and more recently discussion has shifted towards the situated actor with particular histories and perspectives. Kincheloe (2001: 687) focuses on bricolage as a source of creativity which brings unique insights and notes that bricolage is particularly sensitive to complexity: 'bricoleurs use multiple methods to uncover new insights, expand and modify old principles'. Rogers (2012: 14) discusses how bricolage enables the pushing of knowledge boundaries and addresses 'the plurality and complex political dimensions of knowledge work'. In one instance focusing upon research on bricolage in practice Horlick-Jones et al. (2007) found that 'processes of practical reasoning in lay understanding and in scientific work are not wholly distinct activities'. This is a central current of the discussion following Lévi-Strauss, who rehabilitated the bricoleur vis-à-vis the engineer. The practical turn in science and technology studies then showed, that in the heart of science, the lab, technology is much less systematic trial and error and much more contingent tinkering than previously thought; that tinkering is the rule in how science is done and not the exception. This mainstreaming of the term does not undermine the definition of the concept of bricolage, but instead resituates it – from a marginal to a central practice.

What is perhaps most surprising about the use of bricolage is the proliferation of its use with very little critique of the term itself. It seems to have been taken up in many fields of literature without a sustained attempt to define its limits. This emerges in some of the debates and tensions surrounding innovation and improvisation, but is not extrapolated to the wider concept. Due to the intrinsic malleability at the heart of the concept it seems to be paired with other words to make new concepts very easily. There is an underlying assumption in the institutional and organizational literature that bricolage is unquestionably positive and that it leads to growth. There is little discussion, however, of what successful bricolage might look like, and even less discussion regarding how one might know, or measure, successful bricolage. Notable exceptions to this include Weick, who tries to posit what 'successful' bricolage looks like (Weick, 2001); Fernely (2006) who presents guidelines for how to encourage bricolage and Hendry and Harbone (2011) who try to assess the efficacy of bricolage. Here it seems that the definition of what exactly bricolage looks like, and what the limits are, is under contestation. A general criticism has emerged from recent articles that previous research did not explore symbolic or ideational resources as part of bricolage processes. Many also do not engage with the political nature of bricolage as a process to stimulate change. There is also little examination of the unintended and potentially negative consequences of bricolage. As yet there appear to be no attempts at identifying the limits of bricolage as a concept, i.e. what bricolage is not.

### **Bricolage and the superdiverse neighbourhood**

Superdiverse neighbourhoods are by definition complex, transitional, and transnational. Furthermore, many of the most diverse areas in Europe are highly deprived and as such may be argued to provide the kind of resource poor environments in which bricolage is necessary to overcome emergent, highly localized needs and challenges which are little understood by mainstream institutions (see Phillimore, 2011; 2015). Other neighbourhoods (such as Edgbaston, Mouraria, Neustadt and Savja in the UPWEB projects) are superdiverse but better resourced. Exploration is needed to examine whether in the presence of multiple resources, both socio-economic and transnational, individuals use bricolage. They may harness their rich pool of resources to find creative alternatives or additions to existing approaches, or to identify new solutions to enduring problems.

There is potential for bricolage to help us make sense of practices associated with the diversification of diversity. The focus on agency and in particular the agent as situated also has relevance for the superdiverse. At the present time there is little knowledge in any of bricolage literature about how cultural, legal, spatial etc. contexts affect the use of bricolage (Vanevenhoven et al, 2011). Arguably with so many different cultures, ideas and beliefs present in superdiverse neighbourhoods together with complex social problems there is lots of potential, or greater necessity, for individuals to make use of bricolage. Craciun's talk of moral bricolage in relation to the ways that Romanian Americans made use of the traits from both cultures they thought most desirable and then melded them into a 'particularly worthy ethnic identity' (2013: 729) is possibly the only application of the concept to migrants.

We might argue that superdiversity in itself provides more opportunities for bricolage. The presence of people of different ages, belief systems, educational levels, cultures, languages, experiences with

associated knowledges, networks and institutional awarenesses may widen the range of resources available for mixing, remaking, combining and re-imagining. This also calls to mind the much older discussion (that maybe needs to be rehearsed and further developed in the context of superdiverse neighbourhoods) about the ‘strength of weak ties’ in supplying people with resources, information, and support (Granovetter, 1973). Freeman (2007) uses the concept of epistemological bricolage to describe the process (note *process*) used to explain the way that policymakers learn knowledge across different epistemological domains – he describes such knowledge as ‘complete’. He focuses on three developments in bricolage: upon actors and interest, ways of thinking, and highlighting that knowledge is negotiated. There is much potential to begin developing an understanding of the processes of bricolage through exploring epistemological differences from different life experiences, cultural, religious and other experiences and identities. The field of organizations and entrepreneurship also offers opportunities for helping us to think about bricolage as innovation and perhaps a way that newcomers, and others with constrained circumstance and resource access, attempt to address challenges. Empirical evidence is cited that shows how bricolage can produce brilliant unforeseen results or poor performance. It seems that there is some degree of risk involved but in constrained circumstances there may be few alternatives. In education research the bricoleur is described as someone who explores through approximations, expediencies and reflections (Starr-Glass, 2010). In new or constrained circumstances this approach may be relevant within superdiverse areas.

### **Bricolage for understanding welfare and health-seeking**

There are a number of policy and political contexts to welfare provision that suggest potential for using bricolage as a lens through which to understand the processes in which people living in diverse areas access welfare. These include the neo-liberal emphasis on self-help, the re-focus on the local and the notion that people should be empowered to help themselves, the reality of austerity cuts and the idea of doing more with less (so-called efficiencies). Further, and particularly pertinent for superdiverse neighbourhoods, is the attempt to restrict access to welfare for those perceived as undeserving – a category which frequently includes the long-term unemployed, to some extent the disabled or the ‘incapacitated’ as well as migrants. There are a number of assumptions regarding bricolage that can be identified from the literature: bricolage is not radical; non-teleological; partly purposeful; partly unintentional; it entails small adjustments. Due to the underlying notion that bricolage is viewed as a ‘second best’ solution it has often been applied to instances where there is a crisis, in resource poor environments, or is ‘hidden’ in larger organizations. There is a literature which clearly argues that bricolage takes place in times of crisis but also times of stability. Its application in resource poor environments and hidden nature can have resonance in deprived areas, in times of welfare state shrinkage and welfare restriction. But it also offers potential to bring innovation to static health systems designed for a homogenous population half a century ago in some countries, and based on the now redundant male breadwinner model of family life. Finally bricolage offers a possibility to connect resources from across the world and to highlight agency in health-seeking, whether this is mobilized in times of crisis or as an imaginative way of improving quality of life.

Bricolage refers in Lévi-Strauss terms to ‘making do’. De Certeau also refers to making do and states that bricolage focuses upon the ways in which we practise everyday activities (note again the emphasis on process), tailoring them to our own interests and rules through ‘innumerable and

infinitesimal transformations' (1984: 2). Bricolage is a tactic whereby individuals make the most of available resources as part of a strategy. That strategy may be to use the resources they have at hand in order to be healthy, to seek health or to address a health problem. The two references we found on health were to tinkering rather than bricolage, but talked of the notion of everyday tinkering with health recommendations when faced with a constant series of choices about how to deal with chronic illness. Guell talks of this tinkering as 'a strategic use and rejection of advice to suit personal preference or situational convenience' (2012: 525). Livingston (2012) sees improvisation as constitutive for the work of a South African cancer ward and, extrapolating from her case study, as constitutive of African bio-medicine more generally. Approaches may be different in superdiverse populations or places where shortages of resources (or the knowledge about how to access them) mean individuals may be less strategic and more focused on 'making do' as implied by bricolage.

### **Towards a Politics of Welfare Bricolage**

To develop a two-dimensional understanding of the Politics of Welfare Bricolage, which would refer both to the politics the concept might generate in making certain relations visible and masking others, and also to the politics implied in doing bricolage, the UPWEB-Project Group must consider the following questions:

- How can we ensure a critical function of the 'bricolage' concept and maintain a clear analytical and empirical demarcation from neoliberal 'strategies of self-empowerment'?
- How can we ensure that the concept of welfare bricolage serves to describe the transformative power which can be exercised by people at the margins of health and welfare systems, working within systems and even those who are familiar with systems and secure in their access to mainstream services? How their practices shape and transform existing structures?
- How can we show that not only the users of healthcare systems, but also the providers do bricolage in the 'welfare system' in whatever partly or fully neo-liberalized form it comes? Public and private health providers are struggling to make ends meet (see Phillimore's work on migrant maternity (2015a; 2015b)). State agencies may also find themselves compelled to develop adhoc solutions; (see Padilla et al., 2009; Rao and Shapiro-Anjaria, 2014).

For the moment it remains an open question what are the politics of bricolage, and which tactics do we need to understand the practices of welfare bricolage as innovative, multi-facted and valuable without at the same time legitimizing or even justifying the withdrawal of the welfare state? To make these conflicting aspects explicit we propose different tactics when researching the practices of bricolage:

#### *Tactic I*

The research on bricolage requires critical contextualization. If the broader neo-liberal context of research is depicted and bricolage is associated with - to some extent - marginalized subjects and their precarious situations, it may become more clear that bricolage is often linked to environments of scarcity. We can focus on the ways that people insert themselves into the cracks and fissures that neo-liberal health policies create (see Newman (2012) on perverse alignments).

Extension to Tactic I:



We should draw attention to the historical and emerging developments of welfare ‘reforms’, or withdrawal of welfare states, and country specific modifications (which also relate to the transnational politics of the European Union, see for example the Stability and Growth Pact and the ‘sixpack’ reforms) in order to bear in mind the broader politics of health care provision and their country specific effects.

### *Tactic II:*

The practices of bricolage can be understood as tactics of resistance but not of a resistance out of choice (although the better resourced may choose them) but out of necessity, which appears to be without genuine alternatives in the context of the responsabilization of healthcare. Hence, the withdrawal or absence of the welfare state does not produce passive subjects, but rather subjects who deal with the situation and are neither to be romanticized nor heroized. However, bricolage may also be triggered by complex health conditions or by different health beliefs. We must distinguish triggers for bricolage and ask the question – resistance to what?

#### Extension to Tactic II:

Moreover, bricolage can be researched as the politics of a tactical or experimental way of transformation, which creates new and alternative forms of access to information, which empowers and shares knowledge. In this respect the notion of pre-figurative behaviours may be useful (Jordan, 1987).

### *Tactic III:*

The starting point of researching bricolage is the fundamental claim of the right to health. If we conceptualize health and the access to health care as a basic right we can both criticize the tendency to privatization of health (in both senses: the privatization of health care systems and the privatization of individual health) without paternalistic perspectives on marginalized or deprived groups, and simultaneously value the practices of bricolage as a way of resistance, so to say as a practical claim to that right.

## **Conclusions**

The concept of bricolage has not yet been applied to health and welfare; however, it offers great potential. Given the challenge of resource scarcity and the opportunity of multiple knowledges and transnational connections in superdiverse areas, developing the concept of welfare bricolage may help us to understand the ways that people seek, utilize and combine resources to tackle health concerns that may not be wholly addressed by state provision if they are addressed at all. The notion of bricolage as a creative, innovative and individualized process may offer an alternative discourse on the health seeking behaviours of people from minority or vulnerable groups to that of passive victim. Understanding bricolage may provide insight into new ways of configuring healthcare so that it can more effectively meet the needs of an increasingly complex population facing increasingly complex health concerns. But bricolage also offers potential to reinforce neo-liberal ideas around self-help and responsabilization and provide justification for further withdrawal of the welfare state. Considerable work is required to develop the notion of welfare bricolage further. This will include

outlining some basic parameters for identifying bricolage: when it is in evidence and when not. Further, once identified we might seek to highlight the nature of successful bricolage and consider whether there are different approaches to bricolage in different contexts (for example resource constrained and resource rich contexts and at local, national and transnational levels) for different people. The UPWEB project seeks to address some of these concerns. With its location in four countries, in the context of four different welfare regimes, the project will provide data from residents and providers which, through a combination of inductive and deductive systematic data analysis, will enable the identification of diverse approaches to bricolage as well as the drivers underpinning residents' bricolage strategies.

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