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Rural Futures: A Resource Bricolage Evaluation of Rural Resilience

Topic: This paper takes a resource bricolage evaluation of the resilience of rural areas. Rural areas have experienced challenging times in recent years due to Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, which has impacted levels of rural entrepreneurship and the activities of rural-based SMEs. These challenges have led to questions over the resilience of SMEs, particularly in rural areas, where SMEs often experience limited resources and capabilities compared to urban-based SMEs. As such, this research investigates rural resilience through a resource bricolage lens, with the aim of better understanding how specific resources that are available in rural areas can be leveraged to promote sustainable growth.

Applicability to the conference theme – ‘Sustainable Growth in Unexpected Places’: This research aligns with the ‘sustainable growth in unexpected places’ by exploring how sustainable growth can be achieved in rural areas through developing resilience to challenging economic times. This is explored through a resource bricolage lens, which provides a deeper understanding of how the resources of the place can be leveraged under the principle of ‘whatever is at hand’.

Aim: The aim of this research is to evaluate the resilience of rural areas through the lens of resource bricolage, which can provide a deeper understanding of how the place-specific resource allocation in rural areas can help support resilience, and lead to sustainable growth. This represents the first step in a broader study of Rural Futures, in which resilience to socioeconomic challenges can be enhanced, based on the experiences of recent years. This research phase first aims to undertake an analysis of the nexus of resource bricolage and rural resilience from the relevant literature, before exploring place-specific factors by analysing socioeconomic data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Methodology: As the first phase of a wider research project looking at supporting sustainable growth in rural areas, this paper focusses on evaluating the nexus between resource bricolage and rural resilience. By exploring the resilience literature through a resource bricolage lens, this paper aims to conceptualise resource-based resilience. Resource bricolage is significant in this context as it considers how whatever resources are at hand can be leveraged to find new solutions. As rural-based SMEs are seen to be constrained by resource allocation, this is a notable theoretical lens for this research. The research is undertaken in west Wales, a sparsely populated area which has long been the region with the lowest level of GDP among NUTS2 (ITL2) regions in Northern Europe. This setting is also significant as well-being legislation exists in Wales through the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) in which public sector decision-making must adhere to 7 well-being principles, which includes resilience, cohesive communities and prosperity. Following a discussion of relevant literature and development of a conceptual framework, secondary data from the ONS is analysed to explore rural resilience.

Contribution: This paper contributes to knowledge on rural resilience. While increasing discussions have gained in prominence since the Covid-19 pandemic, and related challenges of Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis, there is very little research that explores rural resilience and how rural places can be better prepared to face future challenges, as well as aiming to develop sustainable growth. The use of resource bricolage as a theoretical lens is unique in this case, as this takes a resource-based view to resilience, which is limited within existing literature. Furthermore, considerations of well-being through the Well-being of Future Generations Act also provide an important contribution to knowledge, as well-being is

increasingly gaining traction as an indication of economic performance, and a more holistic representation compared to GDP.

Implications for policy: Findings of this research lead to the conceptualisation of rural resilience from a resource bricolage perspective. This would allow for a more holistic vision of understanding how rural places can develop greater resilience by understanding how local resources can be leveraged. Such resources could include local skills, knowledge, cooperation among businesses, and the local network. Findings could enhance discussions on resilience in relation to entrepreneurial ecosystems, to understand how various actors can cooperate in leveraging local resources to develop opportunities for increased resilience and sustainable growth. Outcomes of this research would be useful for policymakers in identifying ways that support can be provided to rural areas in facilitating opportunities to become more resilient.

Implications for practice: Practical outcomes from this research would be useful for rural-based businesses, particularly SMEs, as it would provide them with a framework that could be used to explore opportunities to develop resilience and seek opportunities for sustainable growth. Furthermore, it would provide rural SMEs with a greater focus on their resource allocation, and how this can have a bearing on their resilience.

Keywords: Rural resilience, resource bricolage, sustainable growth, well-being