

# The role of public actors in the promotion of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area in Corsica

*Le rôle des acteurs publics dans la réalisation des activités éco-touristiques  
en zone rurale et de montagne en Corse*

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we consider the role and the contribution of public economic actors in the development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas. The theoretical frameworks used are stakeholder theory and network theory. Empirical research has been carried out since February 2016 with local stakeholders in a rural mountain village as well as with public entities. The methodology is based on grounded theory.

The theoretical report deals with the conditions required for the production of innovation to become an innovation management process. The ma-

anagerial contribution concerns a recommendation to public bodies about structural holes favorable to the management of innovation in ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas within a built territory. The methodological contribution shows the relevance of the grounded theory approach to distinguish the various stakeholders and their contributions to the promotion of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area.

## Key-words

*Stakeholder theory; Network theory; Grounded theory; Production of innovation*

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, il s'agit d'envisager le rôle et la contribution des acteurs publics dans le développement d'activités éco-touristiques en zone rurale et de montagne. Les cadres théoriques mobilisés sont la théorie des parties prenantes et la théorie des réseaux. Une recherche empirique est menée depuis février 2016 avec les acteurs locaux d'un village rural en montagne ainsi qu'avec des acteurs publics. La méthodologie concerne celle de la théorie enracinée.

Les résultats obtenus concernent un apport théorique, un apport managérial, ainsi qu'un apport méthodologique. L'apport théorique traite des conditions pour que la fabrique de l'innovation se transforme en un processus de management de l'innovation. L'apport managérial concerne une préconisation auprès des acteurs publics à propos de la fabrique de trous structurels favorables au management de l'innovation d'activités éco-touristiques en zone rurale et de montagne au sein d'un territoire construit. L'apport méthodologique

montre la pertinence de l'approche par théorie enracinée pour distinguer les différentes parties prenantes et leur contribution à la réalisation des activités éco-touristiques en zone rurale et de montagne.

## Mots-clés

*Théorie des parties prenantes ; théorie des réseaux ; théorie enracinée ; fabrique de l'innovation*

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## INTRODUCTION

We have carried out our research in the rural and mountainous areas of the island of Corsica. Corsica has an area of 8,680 square kilometers (5,395 square miles). It is at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea and boasts many assets, so that tourists can find a rich and diversified offer there.

However, Corsica's tourism offer is mainly of the resort kind and it struggles to revitalize villages and hamlets in rural and mountainous areas. Of course Corsican authorities have looked into this problem and developed a project known as "the Mountain and Rural Areas Bill".

Separately some private individuals owning a village's chestnut forest have made a commitment to renovate that forest and say that what they are doing comes within the development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas. They act in collaboration with various public bodies: The Corsican Office of Agricultural and Rural Development (ODARC), the local Chamber of Agriculture, the European Union's LEADER program and the LAG (Local Action Group) of the LEADER program. A number of nonprofit organizations are also involved.

This article will consider the role and contributions of public entities in the development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas.

We have drawn upon the theoretical frameworks of stakeholder theory and network theory. Empirical research has been carried out since February 2016 with various stakeholders. The methodology is based on grounded theory.

This paper falls into three parts. We begin by presenting the theoretical frameworks of stakeholder theory and network theory. Then in the second part we develop the context of the research as well as grounded theory methodology. The third part is devoted to presenting and discussing the results.

## 1. STAKEHOLDER THEORY AND NETWORK THEORY to describe the role and contributions of the various stakeholders

In view of the issues considered in this study, stakeholder theory and network theory are relevant because they allow us to identify the various economic actors, their roles and contributions to the promotion of intangible cultural heritage within an ecotourism approach in Corsica's rural and mountain areas.

### 1.1. The various stakeholders

Stakeholder theory is about the relations between groups of individuals, or between principals and agents. According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders are individuals or groups of individuals who may affect or be affected by the achievement of a corporation's purpose.

Freeman (1984) proposes an operational approach in order to identify stakeholders, issues, and the participation process. The author suggests a framework to study stakeholders in three steps which are:

- 1) drawing a corporation's stakeholder map in a given context,
- 2) observing and analyzing the process of possible negotiation—the author stipulates that the identified process is about concrete issues, brought up and discussed by stakeholders,
- 3) initiating and maintaining a dialog with participating, cooperating stakeholders (Freeman 1984). We believe it is useful to mention that Freeman (1984) also talks about the governance of stakeholders at three levels: the rational level which is about identifying stakeholders and their respective interests; the level of processes used to take into account stakeholders' interests when it comes to elaborating, applying and controlling strategy; and the transactional level, to do with the management of interactions between an organization and its stakeholders.

For their part, Wheeler and Sillanpaa (1997) class stakeholders according to their degree of involvement and affectation into four categories:

- 1) primary social stakeholders are groups and individuals who are affected by an organization's decisions and who take an active role in their elaboration;
- 2) primary non-social stakeholders are those stakeholders who play an active role in an organization's decision-making process, but are mostly unaffected by its decisions;
- 3) secondary social stakeholders' well-being largely depends on an organization's decisions, but they cannot influence those decisions;
- 4) secondary non-social stakeholders have limited influence on an organization's decisions and are relatively unaffected by them..

## 1.2. The networks used by the various stakeholders

Granovetter in his seminal 1973 article, "The Strength of Weak Ties" points out that people have multiple ties which make up social networks. The latter are a way of accessing resources which may be useful for individual or group action.

The author distinguishes between strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties result from contacts with family

relatives or close friends, whereas weak ties are maintained with people with whom one rarely comes into contact. According to the author, it is weak ties that provide information and opportunities to an individual.

Other scholars have shown that the quality of information as well as resources may vary with the typology of ties. For example, in their work on weak ties, Hansen, Podolny and Pfeffer (2000) show that the existence of weak ties is positively correlated to team performance, when the realization of a project is linked to the collection of simple coded data. For their part, Haunschild, (1993), Gulati and Westphal, (1999) show that strong ties have a positive effect when it comes to transferring complex and tacit knowledge.

As for Burt (1992), he sheds light on the quality of the networks that players (people or organizations) are members of. He introduces a concept which is central to that author's theory, that of structural holes, meaning the absence of nonredundant contacts. Such a situation makes it possible to create a role as an intermediary to maintain the tie between people. That intermediary can facilitate people's access to the resources they need in order to act. The author adds that if the structure has many structural holes, the player acting as an intermediary will bring to the social networks that he or she is a part of, more varied information as well as opportunities for the network's members.

In our empirical approach, the stakeholders act within a *territory* which may be observed by drawing on Dupuis (2013) and Debardieux's (2003, 910) contributions. Dupuis (2013) defines the territory in terms of a patrimonial district, "*as a geographically limited area endowed with some level of coherence, but where various types of historical, artistic, natural and ethnological heritage can be found*". Debardieux (2003, 910) defines a territory as "*a layout of symbolic and material resources capable of structuring the practical conditions and the existence of an individual or a social group, and to inform that individual or social group about their own identity*". He adds that the territory may be built or prescribed.

As far as our study is concerned, it is important therefore to take into account the effects of ecotourism activities carried out by stakeholders on the territory.

Based on the contributions of stakeholder theory and network theory, we propose to present the re-search design in Table 1 below.

## 2. METHODOLOGY: the context of our empirical research and grounded theory

We present the context of our research, then consider grounded theory.

### 2.1. Context of our research

This research focuses on a little Corsican village situated on the territory of Castagniccia which is part of “Pieve di a Serra” not far from the lagoons of Urbino and Diana as well as the Tyrrhenian Sea. From a religious point of view, a *piève* is defined as a “*brotherly area*” and has existed since the Middle Ages, marked by values of solidarity and well-being, in other words a shared sensation that the area is “*a place where we feel all right*”. Such values and the search for well-being have been

maintained by this Roman Catholic brotherhood since the 15th Century.

Together with the Piève’s other villages it forms part of a cohesive group linking the mountain, the plain and the sea.

30 people live in Pianello year-round. From the month of April and until early November, natives return to live in their houses in the village, so that the population increases fivefold and all generations are represented during that time. This form of family tourism has existed since the 1960s.

This has consequences in such diverse areas as maintenance of houses and valuation of local culture in all its varied forms: the Corsican language, gastro-nomy, songs, or poetry through cultural and spiri-tual events such as for example Saint Vincent’s Day.

The village is also known to hikers who since time immemorial have walked the Mare a Mare trail and stayed overnight in the village hostel.

Like the Piève’s other villages, Pianello is marked by the activity of livestock grazing on outdoor lands and the chestnut forest. Approximately one-fifth of

<p><b>Issue:</b></p> <p>The role and contribution of public entities in the development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas.</p>
<p><b>What to observe?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The various stakeholders: public entities, private individuals, nonprofit organizations, (Freeman, 1984).</li> <li>2. The typology of economic actors (Wheeler and Sillanpaa, 1997).</li> <li>3. The efficiency of the various actors’ social networks, weak ties, strong ties, the efficiency of the network(s) with structural holes, the social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Hansen, Podolny and Pfeffer, 2000; Haunschild, 1993; Gulati and Westphal, 1999; Burt, 1992).</li> <li>4. Ecotourism activities carried out by stakeholders on the territory (Dupuis, 2013; Debarbieux, 2003, p.910).</li> </ol>
<p><b>How to observe?</b></p> <p>Methodology: data collection and data processing using grounded theory.</p>

Table 1 – Research design

the village's territory is covered by old orchards and chestnut trees. In fact this little village boasts one of the oldest chestnut forests in Europe. Over one thousand chestnut trees are to be found here; some reach 13 meters in circumference and are said to be over 700 years old.

Chestnut trees have played a key role in the lives of populations in rural and mountainous areas. A whole range of uses, traditions, habitats, rules, farming and artisanal techniques, as well as economic and commercial relations have developed around it. And the culture built on close-knit relationships from the point of view of families as well as from a socio-economic standpoint, also reflects this.

Today, the biggest agricultural activity is cattle and pig farming.

From an administrative point of view, cooperation between France's small villages can be fostered by a public body linking various municipalities in a given area, known as "*syndicat intercommunal*" (literally "intercommunal syndicate"). Over the past few years, the village's municipal team together with the Bravona intercommunal syndicate has developed a local land management policy: restoration and reclamation of river banks, cleanup of paths, and setup of hostels for the summer season. In this context it was decided in 2006 that the chestnut forest should be an integral part of agricultural, forest and tourism development. The Office of Agricultural and Rural Development in Corsica—going by the French acronym ODARC—conducted a study of the renovation of the chestnut forest which led to the creation in 2009 of a nonprofit organization whose members are all landowners and known as ASL E Bertecchie, devoted to the protection and reconstitution of the forest, as well as the management, improvement and reclamation of agricultural and grazing land.

## 2.2. Research Methodology

In this paper we examine the role of public entities in the development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas. To that end we use the research design in Table 1 above, as well as the methodology of action research and that of grounded theory.

### 2.2.1. Grounded theory to identify various entities

For this empirical research we have used grounded theory. In this section we will present first the main points of grounded theory and then the various steps of the coding process using grounded theory.

The grounded theory approach is useful to produce theoretical inferences and relate concepts together (Strauss and Corbin, 2004). However the theoretical sampling, sample size, time interval and ethical dimensions must all be taken into account.

As regards the sample, we draw on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), who explained their vision of the sampling process by clarifying the notion of theoretical sampling. The goal is to decide which orientation to choose for the collection of data in order to guide the formulation of an emerging theory. To that end, the researchers simultaneously carry out data collection, coding and analysis.

Rather than choosing statistical parameters to decide on sample size, we opt for Glaser and Strauss's (1967) criterion of theoretical saturation: data collection stops when the categories of analysis have reached a saturation point: new data does not add new sense to what is already understood. Another consideration is time interval. In our approach, moments of data collection are sampled. Our decision is based on the longitudinal approach of action research.

Times of data collection and data analysis are given in Table 2 below.

Finally researchers need to consider ethical dimensions during the sampling process. Respondents who accept to take part in our research are then informed about our decision to interview other economic actors involved in the chestnut forest renovation project, who agree over the phone, and are interviewed either by telephone or via Skype.

The stages of the coding process, based on grounded theory, are data collection, data processing, and the coding process. We present data collection and processing (2.2.1.) then the coding process (2.2.2.).

TIMES OF DATA COLLECTION
February 2016 – end July 2018
September 2016 – end July 2018
February 2016 – end July 2018
End February 2016 – June 2017 – July 2018
June 2017 – end July 2018
June 2014 – February 2018 – July 2018
February 2018 – April 2018 – June 2018 – July 2018
February 2018 – April 2018 – June 2018 – July 2018

Table 2 – Times of data collection

### 2.2.2. Data collection and data processing

There are many methods of data collection. Individual interviews, open-ended questionnaires, exchanges via e-mail or Skype, telephone interviews, documentary analysis, as well as a log are used.

The sample is comprised of various actors of the village of Pianello and other villages. It is also comprised of entities such as nonprofit organizations, as well as public entities, political actors, catering professionals, the hostel manager, and guesthouse managers. In all, we interview 60 people and carry out 20 focus groups.

People respond on a voluntary basis to our demand for an interview. The study takes place between February 2016 and the end of November 2018.

Participants are: Pianello’s chestnut forest landowners and their president, ODARC professionals, Chamber of Agriculture professionals, local elected representatives, ODARC and Chamber of Agriculture representatives, the farmer chosen by the chestnut forest landowners, five members of the *Association pour la Corse* (Association for Corsica) organization, four chestnut tree sponsors, some village inhabitants, the mayors of the neighboring villages, the president of the *Foyer Rural* (rural community center), farmers, the president of the LAG (Local Action Group, in charge of implementing the LEADER program), and the person employed by the LAG to implement the details of the LEADER program.

As with the interviews, documentary analysis led to the filling of summary forms as well as memos.

The non-participant observation took place in situ from September 2016 to end July 2020.

In the framework of grounded theory, theoretical sampling, sample size, time interval and ethical dimensions are considered.

### 2.2.3. The coding process

The coding process takes place within the grounded theory process such as it is explained by Miles, Huberman, (2003), Saldana (2009) and Garreau, Bandeira-De-Mello, (2010). Three levels of coding are used: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

With open coding, one of the researchers identifies the interesting elements in the data, transcribes them and writes down their thoughts, ideas and intuitions, as well as emotions following the interviews with the various respondents. Their know-how and creativity have contributed to the creation of a summary card as well as a log. The summary card contains the following information: 1) date and locus of interview, person interviewed and situation, 2) issues discussed, 3) the research question and hypothesis or hypotheses the interview was about, and 4) the new hypotheses or intuitions the contact suggested about the situation. These cards comply with Miles and Huberman’s recommendations.

Each stakeholder's various times of action	Identity of the various stakeholders	Status
Since 2006	<i>Office du Développement Agricole et Rural de la Corse</i> (ODARC; Corsica's Office of agricultural and rural development)	Public institution
Since 2006	Chamber of Agriculture	Public institution
2009	ASL E Bertecchie (organization whose members are chestnut forest landowners)	Nonprofit organization
2009	Association for the foundation of Corsica AFC-Umani	Nonprofit organization
Since 2009	The farmer installed by the chestnut forest landowners	Private actor
Since 2011	Local press, Information bulletin of <i>Association AFC-Umani (Fondation pour la Corse)</i>	Public media, Nonprofit organization
Since 2009	<i>Association AFC-Umani (Fondation pour la Corse; Fondation for Corsica)</i>	Nonprofit organization
Since 2009	Landowners of the chestnut forest	Private actors
Since the beginning of term	Elected representatives of municipal team	Political actor
Since 2016	President of <i>Foyer Rural</i> (Rural community center)	Member of Nonprofit organization
Since 2000	Hostel manager	Management of the hostel entrusted by the village mayor
Over many years	Guesthouse owners	Private actor
2010	The farmer installed by the chestnut forest landowners	Private actor
2016-2020	LEADER program	Public actor
2018	President of the Local Action Group (LAG), in charge of implementation of LEADER program, some LAG members, the person running the group.	Public actor
Since 2009	Local actors	Private actors, elected representatives, members of nonprofit organizations from the village <sup>1</sup>

**Table 3** – Each stakeholder's various times of action, the various stakeholders themselves and their status

<sup>1</sup> Local economic actors are: 1) the president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie, 2) private individuals – the owners of the chestnut forest, friends of the village, sponsors of chestnut trees –, 3) both year-round and non-permanent inhabitants, 4) local elected representatives, 5) foyer rural (rural community center), 6) the hostel, 7) visitors to the chestnut forest (schoolchildren, nonprofit organizations, tourists), 8) village house owners, 9) guesthouse managers, 10) brotherhood members.

The log allows the researcher to express an opinion on the spot, and to analyze it (make a memo of it), then to relate the “data” with the data collected during the interview and the analysis of documents. Finally, double coding with the second researcher allows us to confirm the codes and categories especially during open and axial coding. Data and memo analysis allows us to stay in touch with the data, to reflect as we go through collection, to formalize hypotheses, and to introduce comparison processes in order to have a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Carrying out open and axial coding simultaneously has allowed us to identify categories, concepts and their properties. The principle of first and second axial coding is about exploring the links between the conceptual categories resulting from open coding. Open coding is based on reading each interview and establishes links between interviewees’ verbatim responses; it then leads to memo-writing.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Result

Data collection and analysis based on grounded theory relies on the theoretical frameworks of the various stakeholders and network theory.

Table 3 below presents each stakeholder’s various times of action, the various stakeholders themselves and their status.

Table 3 above presents a multiplicity of economic actors over time within the territory of the village. We observe a management situation such as defined by Girin (1990, b): a beginning, an unfolding process, an objective, a resource to be preserved, a multiplicity of actors, and a result.

With this table and the management situation concept, we propose to describe the stakeholders’ contribution to the realization of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area.

### 3.1.1. Stakeholder contribution to ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas

The analysis of stakeholder contribution is structured around three stages of the management situation: the beginning, the unfolding process, and the result.

For the first two stages we identify the cartography and status of each stakeholder: public entities, private economic actors, nonprofit organizations (Freeman 1984).

For all three stages, we then observe the role of various public entities in the promotion of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas within a territory located in Corsica.

To that end, we draw on Granovetter’s contributions (1973) which are helpful to qualify the nature of stakeholders’ ties. We consider strong ties based on the work of Haunschild (1973), Gulati and Westphal (1999), and then weak ties based on the work of Hansen, Podolny and Pfeffer (2000).

We also refine the quality of networks maintained by the various stakeholders thanks to contributions by Burt (1992). Finally we operationalize stakeholders’ contributions by using Wheeler and Silanpaa’s classification (1997).

We propose in the following paragraphs to talk about the beginning, the unfolding process and the result of the management situation.

At the beginning, the management situation is initiated by ODARC<sup>2</sup>, the Chamber of Agriculture and two chestnut forest landowners. ODARC is a public entity among the administrative bodies of Corsica. Its objective is to contribute to sustainable land management in rural and mountainous areas. It aims to develop agricultural and grazing land protection programs in rural and mountainous areas and to motivate young people to return to those areas.

*“We have analyzed the situation and taken part in a financial and technical feasibility study of the*

<sup>2</sup> ODARC is the Office of Agricultural and Rural Development in Corsica.

*valuation of the chestnut forest as well as the installation of a young farmer”, “we also support the biomass project that the farmer has put forward”, “we focus our action on the education of young people to motivate them to come back to the land”.*

In its strategic development program, ODARC associates two chestnut forest landowners<sup>3</sup> who create the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie.

The Chamber of Agriculture also plays a role in the protection of the chestnut forest. It is a public entity whose mission is to protect chestnut trees against the gall wasp and assess the farmer’s activities. *“We apply treatments on the chestnut trees on a regular basis. The results aren’t immediate, or guaranteed. What’s happening at the village is a wake-up call, it’s a good thing, let’s hope what we’re doing will bear fruit.” “We also fund the polling of the trees and cleanup and we regularly carry out checks on the polling and cleanup on the ground”.*

The fact that a chestnut farmer has set up his activity is the result of the cooperation between two landowners, ODARC and the Chamber of Agriculture. *“We defined a development strategy with the president of the organization, and we agreed on the recruitment criteria for the farmer: motivation, skills and sustainable development”.*

The president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie, searched for the chestnut forest landowners. After he had identified them, he organized a meeting where he communicated about the chestnut forest’s farming and development strategy. *“I relied on the deeds to identify the landowners, then I organized a meeting with them and I presented the development strategy. I made it clear that there were no financial interests but rather the need to protect the chestnut forest and to give it added value.”*

Later during the unfolding process of the management situation, other stakeholders emerge. First local actors and tourists, but also the LEADER program as well as the Local Action Group implementing the program.

Among the local economic actors we may distinguish 1) the president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie, 2) private individuals: chestnut forest landowners, friends of the village, sponsors of chestnut trees, 3) year-round and non-permanent inhabitants, 4) local elected representatives, 5) the rural community center, 6) the hostel, 7) visitors to the chestnut forest (schoolchildren, nonprofit organizations, tourists), 8) village house owners, 9) guesthouse managers, 10) brotherhood members.

The notion of local actors is important because they are stakeholders who share a vision of valuing the chestnut forest; they are nearly all year-round residents and natives of the village (with the exception of tourists). For them, in the framework of the unfolding process of the management situation, the resource to be preserved is the chestnut forest. The goals to be achieved are the protection and valuation of the chestnut forest, the development of ecotourism activities, and the assessment of the resulting impact.

According to the local actors, valuation of the chestnut forest could be a lever for economic, social and cultural development. The question for them is, *“How can the rehabilitation of the chestnut forest be a way to instill a new dynamic in the village’s cultural, social, economic and religious life and to protect its natural, cultural, religious and property heritage?”*

We conduct our interviews with local actors around that question within the framework of our research methodology based on grounded theory.

We then carry out categorization by observing the links that result from the first axial coding. The second axial coding enables us to identify five issues which are: 1) transmission to future generations, 2) who will take over after the current generation? 3) development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas, 4) knowing tourists’ expectations, and 5) structuring an offer.

We talk below about each of those issues mentioned and developed by local economic actors.

<sup>3</sup> The two landowners are appointed President and vice-president of the nonprofit; one of them dies in 2016. The vice-president is then appointed president of the nonprofit.

The first issue is transmission to future generations. The president of ASL E Bertecchie, the president<sup>4</sup> and the members of the rural community center, all consider this to be a fundamental preoccupation. *“We must identify our intangible cultural heritage. It is one of the objectives of the rural community center: to educate, to develop awareness, to give life to our intangible cultural heritage in order to pass it on to future generations.”*

What local actors are doing for the chestnut forest is in line with UNESCO’s approach to intangible cultural heritage.

UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as *“traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts”*. UNESCO goes on to stress that the criteria are linked to the protection of intangible heritage, as well as education and public awareness.

The second issue is the next generation. In this village located in a rural and mountainous area this is a real problem because the village’s year-round population is 30 inhabitants, whose average age is 70.

Elderly people reside in the village year-round and are involved in local life. They are members of the municipal team and have an entrepreneur’s frame of mind. One of them launched the idea of saving the chestnut forest, another was at the origin of re-launching the rural community center.

The younger people, who are in their early 50s, are involved in the local life and the valuation of intangible heritage notably through the rural community center.

For local actors, the next generation is synonymous with social, cultural and economic dynamism in this rural mountainous context. And the next generation can rely on the development of ecotourism, which began with family tourism and might extend around the year to tourists with a passion

for nature and authentic relations, seeking well-being and quiet.

The development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas and the resulting impact is the third issue.

In the summer, the local population increases five-fold. Family tourism has existed for several years as we have seen. The village is also on a hiking trail, the Mare a Mare, and welcomes hikers in its hostel located close to the church.

The hostel can accommodate up to 18 hikers. Tourists can also find accommodation at guesthouses. In the event of total capacity being surpassed, house owners have decided to open their house to tourists.

Local actors talk about the development of activities around the year in the context of a rural and mountainous area: *“The development of the hostel throughout the year can create a job and the activity can induce some economic benefits; as far as nature is concerned, it would be useful to communicate with tourists who go bicycle touring, or kayaking down the rivers and rappelling, fishing, camping, and hiking, to remind them of the impact of those activities on the environment and the fragility of the ecosystem.”* They add that they *“must avoid the pitfall of simply looking picturesque”*, and also talk about *“the need to develop coordination between the various existing structures: the hostel, the community center, the producers, the sheep and pig farmers, and people who live in the plain.”*

They also talk about managing the effects of tourist flows on the ecological, social, cultural and religious environment of the village. They think about the impact of ecotourism on the village’s capacity in terms of waste management, water management, and management of parking areas, the ability to propose local produce (cold cuts, cheese, citrus fruit, chestnuts and chestnut flour), accommodation and catering capacity, and offering cultural or sports activities or outdoor activities, while preserving the ecosystem and well-being of the host

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<sup>4</sup> The new president of the rural community center arrives in June 2018.

population: “*We can’t manage a permanent flow of tourists surpassing the village’s capacity in terms of water, electricity, and waste management, parking areas and impact on the environment and local social life*”.

*“It is obvious that we can’t have 200 people every day as is the case with the homage to Anne Frank’s tree.”<sup>5</sup> “Other events cause many people to come, many village natives and hikers and also some tourists, for example Saint Vincent’s Day is celebrated at a time and in a place where our old ones meet, and on the path used to take the livestock to and from summer pastures. It’s a time when families come together and reinforce their ties; the confraternel di a Serra<sup>6</sup> plays an essential role, and members of the community center happily bring their own contribution. It’s also a way of contributing to ecotourism activities; but of course it’s impossible to organize events of that size every day. We should give priority to events all through the year and inventory our accommodation and catering capacity.”*

Local actors add that they “*must take into account some indicators to assess the impact of those activities from an economic, social, cultural and environmental point of view*”.

And they want to preserve the local, cultural, social and ecological environment: “*It’s up to us to think about what indicators we want to assess the impact, taking into account the work done by researchers on this question, and our experience as well as that of our elders*”<sup>7</sup>.

We find in the words of local actors three dimensions of ecotourism<sup>8</sup> (Dehoorne and Transler, 2005): respect for the host population’s culture, relations of exchange and the discovery of gastronomy and local produce. They also take on board the village’s accommodation and catering capacity, as well as impact assessment indicators (Leroux, 2010).

The fourth issue is knowing tourists’ expectations.

A real-life test is carried out in June 2018 with a group of 14 tourists. Ecotourism activities are proposed as the tourists’ needs are expressed: visit to the chestnut forest, hikes, gastronomy as well as activities of a spiritual nature: visit to the church and the chapel. Those activities are proposed on an *a la carte* basis and decided in agreement with the tourists.

At the end of the stay, a satisfaction survey is conducted. Semi-structured interviews are put together around Leroux’s indicators (2010) and the dimensions of tourism developed by Transler and Dehoorne (2007)<sup>9</sup>.

The fifth issue that emerges is structuring an ecotourism offer.

Local actors produce what constitutes the territory’s brand identity, with content that relates to the village’s natural, environmental, cultural and religious resources, as well as the surrounding area: chestnut forest, *maquis* (the thick scrubby underbrush typical of Mediterranean shores), river, mountain, etc. They operationalize ecotourism activities based on what is available: chestnut forest, the built environment, sports activities, rivers, discovery of fauna and flora, local produce and gastronomy, hiking the Mare a Mare trail, the village, transhumance (taking the livestock to and from summer pastures), visits to the church and chapel, brotherhood processions during various events related to agricultural and shepherding activities.

These elements contribute to the creation of a value chain for the consumer. For the tourists, the village, its environs, the chestnut forest, the accommodation and catering structures, the warm welcome offered by the locals are so many assets in terms of “*breaking away from their daily life, of needing to evacuate stress, needing to feel connected to nature*”.

<sup>5</sup> This is a cutting from the horse chestnut tree that Anne Frank describes in her diary as her only contact with the outside world, that she could see from her hiding place.

<sup>6</sup> The brotherhood of the Piève.

<sup>8</sup> In local actors’ reflections, we find Leroux’s indicators, see Appendix 3: Table 8: The link between local actors’ verbatim responses based on indicators, from Leroux (2010).

<sup>8</sup> Appendix 1: Table 6: The six points of ecotourism based on Dehoorne, Transler, (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Appendix 2: Table 7: The link between the tourists’ satisfaction survey and the dimensions of ecotourism.

again, of seeking well-being, of linking sports and good health, of authentic relations with the locals, and good local produce”.

As a result, those elements which make up the territory's brand identity meet the customers' expectations. Said expectations revolve around four main areas: 1) offering consumers the possibility of breaking away from their daily lives, 2) proposing authentic relations, occasions for peaceful exchange with the host populations, 3) stimulating consumers' senses: providing sensory experience by getting them to use their five senses: first sight, then hearing; then come the sense of smell, the sense of touch, and the sense of taste, to create a link with the consumer; consumers' experience is defined by their interaction with the host population and the village's surroundings, and 4) immersing the person in a universe which makes sense

The public targeted by the commercial policy is already defined based on the territory's brand identity, local actors' demands in terms of ecotourism impact assessment, as well as the expectations of tourists that come to the village and those tourists who were interviewed on the boat crossing between Bastia and Savone since 2014.

Brand identity and commercialization come within an innovation making process. According to Fernez-Walch and Romon (2017), innovation is a dynamic process which starts from individual initiative and is supported by a group. The authors state that innovation is a deliberate process “*which is conducive to the implementation and the adoption by an individual and a group of individuals of a new product*”. The product may represent a process, know-how, a business model, a service, a good, etc. In the framework of the beginning of the management situation, making an innovation starts with two public entities and two owners. Later, during the unfolding process, it is supported by local actors.

However, developing the making of innovation, in other words managing it, is not a straightforward business. The making of innovation can become efficient if this process gets to the innovation

management stage, with a structured offer taking on board commercialization techniques. From that point of view local actors might rely on the European Union's LEADER program and the Local Action Group. Since 2018, these public entities have emerged during the unfolding process: the LEADER program, and the Local Action Group in charge of implementing the LEADER program in the Oriente plain area.

The term LEADER is in fact not an English word but a French acronym describing the approach of European decision-makers. It stands for “*Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale*” (“*Links between actions for the development of the rural economy*”). “*It provides support to rural territories for actions related to strategies defined locally by public and private partners who are brought together in Local Action Groups (LAG)*”.<sup>10</sup>

LEADER is a European project which aims to support pilot projects in rural areas. Eligibility criteria are governance, innovation, exchanges of best innovation practice carried by a network, as well as the development of inter-territory and transnational cooperation projects.

The authors of the LEADER program give the following precisions about innovation and assessment of action: “*The integrated and innovative character of the 2014-2020 strategy must be described by future structures which will need to emphasize what is expected in terms of innovation. This character is reinforced by the need to establish performance indicators showing the expected change and impact from the action: Technical action (usage for development); action in partnership (support to various types of actors such as local governmental bodies, decentralized cooperation, industries, NGOs, etc.); financial action (competitions, etc.); methodological action (seeking leverage, leading to funding that may in turn trigger other ones)*”.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the authors of the program stress the three main components of LEADER: a strategy, a partnership, and a territory.

<sup>10</sup> [URL: [https://webmail.ctorse.fr/OWA/WebReadyViewBody.aspx?t=a...ido=BAABAAAA&attcnt=1&pspid= 1416037840381\\_172269578&pn=1 P](https://webmail.ctorse.fr/OWA/WebReadyViewBody.aspx?t=a...ido=BAABAAAA&attcnt=1&pspid= 1416037840381_172269578&pn=1 P)].

<sup>11</sup> [URL: [https://webmail.ctorse.fr/OWA/WebReadyViewBody.aspx?t=a...ido=BAABAAAA&attcnt=1&pspid= 1416037840381\\_172269578&pn=1 P](https://webmail.ctorse.fr/OWA/WebReadyViewBody.aspx?t=a...ido=BAABAAAA&attcnt=1&pspid= 1416037840381_172269578&pn=1 P)].

LEADER program demands	Constituting parts of innovation-making by local actors
1. The strategy: to determine what must change (challenges, objectives and priorities) in order to create the conditions of a development based on the local population's needs and participation.	A strategy: brand identity and definition of indicators to assess the impact of activities from the economic, social, cultural and environmental point of view.
2. The solid local partnership federating the various actors on the territory.	A partnership: coordination with existing structures: the hostel, the community center and the nonprofit organizations of the piève of the Oriente.
3. A territory that is homogeneous and coherent with respect to its various levels of geographical organization.	A territory built by local actors.

**Table 4** – A comparative approach between the three main points put forward by the LEADER program and the constituting parts of innovation-making by local actors

*“1) the strategy will mainly determine what must change (challenges, objectives, priorities) in order to create the conditions for a development based on the local population's needs and participation, 2) the solid local partnership federating the various actors on the territory and 3) a territory that is homogeneous and coherent with respect to its various levels of geographical organization.”<sup>12</sup>*

LEADER is a program that focuses on ecotourism activities in rural areas. Table 4 below draws a comparison between the demands of the LEADER program and the constituting parts of innovation-making by local actors.

We can see from Table 4 how the LEADER program is implemented at local level by the local actors.

At local level, the program is carried by a local action group (LAG) comprised of public bodies and private entities or individuals. It works on the basis of a participating, bottom-up approach.

We have focused on the LAG whose members represent the plain of L'Oriente because the local actors are from a village situated in the plain of L'Oriente.

The group is made up of 14 people: They are the president of the “*communauté de communes*”<sup>13</sup> of the plain of L'Oriente, with two elected representatives, totaling 3 people; the president of the tourist office also with 2 elected representatives, totaling 3 people; professionals of agriculture/agritourism: 3 people; tourism professionals: 2 people; actors representing the environment: 1 person; and engaged citizens: actors of the territory who act to motivate and mobilize people in their village: 1 person; actors who motivate and mobilize the LAG: 1 person.

The presence of public entities and private individuals fits the requirements of the LEADER program. They are co-opted into the LAG according to various criteria: exercising a political mandate for a public body, involvement of private actors in the local economic dynamic, as well as in the knowledge of the

<sup>12</sup> [URL: [https://webmail.ctcorse.fr/OWA/WebReadyViewBody.aspx?t=a...id0=BAABAAAA&attcnt=1&pspid=1416037840381\\_172269578&pn=1 P](https://webmail.ctcorse.fr/OWA/WebReadyViewBody.aspx?t=a...id0=BAABAAAA&attcnt=1&pspid=1416037840381_172269578&pn=1 P)].

<sup>13</sup> In France a “*communauté de communes*”, literally a “community of communes”, is a public entity federating various municipalities (“*communes*”) to carry out certain tasks together; it is somewhat different from the intercommunal syndicate.

environment. The engaged citizen is designated on the basis of his or her involvement in cultural or social activities in the village. In the framework of this study, the president of the community center represents the engaged citizen up until June 2018. One person is in charge of motivating and mobilizing the LAG.

In 2018, local actors discovered the LEADER program and the LAG during a meeting set up by the president of the community center, who is a member of the LAG as an engaged citizen.

The LEADER program and the LAG talk about ecotourism activities in rural areas. Collection and analysis of the language used by the LAG are based on grounded theory. We carried out categorization by observing the links resulting from the first axial coding. A second coding was carried out, from which five issues emerged: 1) a political approach to the notion of territory, 2) a scientific approach to ecotourism, 3) the LAG's coordinating role with professionals of tourism in a rural and mountainous area, 4) a normative, planned approach to managing the development of ecotourism activities, and 5) the informative approach.

The first issue is the political approach to the notion of territory in the project presented by the LAG. This project was turned down by the LEADER program: *"the project presented was turned down as a result of both the somewhat vague character and the political dimensions of the notion of territory; I spoke with a contact person at LEADER and I talked about the dimensions of their program on the basis of the notion of ecotourism; that second project was accepted"*.

The scientific approach to ecotourism is the second issue. Following this rejection, the main person who motivates and mobilizes the LAG presents a scientific approach about ecotourism, relying on its dimensions (Dehoorne, Transler, 2007): *"I had established a second project, I couldn't articulate it, I discussed it with someone whose research bears on the development of ecotourism and he showed me how to make a connection"*. *"Taking into account the requirements of the LEADER and the dimensions of ecotourism, I detailed the technical features, I presented them to the LAG members who approved*

*them"*, *"Then I presented the project to the LEADER program who approved it too."*

The third issue relates to the LAG's coordinating role with professionals of tourism in rural and mountainous areas: *"We created information cards listing all the producers in local supply chains, accommodation and catering structures; and we made them available for the various tourism professionals, as well as tourists"*.

The fourth issue is the normative and planned approach to managing the development of ecotourism activities by the LAG: *"We produced information cards and made them available to project promoters, and to be eligible, each project promoter must meet the standards of the LEADER program"*.

*"There are some project promoters, we present them to the LEADER who allocate budgets or not; there is some money, but we have no control on allocation, our job is to guide project promoters, some projects have been submitted; from the time that a project is accepted, it takes two years to get the funding."*

The fifth issue is the LAG's informative approach with project promoters: *"We meet project promoters and we associate them with our approach"*.

These discussions with promoters take place mainly at the end of meetings in the villages of l'Oriente.

We present below the results of the data analysis of language used by ODARC and the Chamber of agriculture, based on grounded theory. This has led to the emergence of two issues: planned management, and the assessment of action taken by the nonprofit organization ASL E. Bertecchie: *"We defined a roadmap and we are developing the strategy as planned"*, *"We carry out checks of the polling of trees and the cleanup on the ground."*

The second axial coding with selective coding introduces two central categories: the socio-economic organization and the built territory.

The socio-economic organization is analyzed by drawing on Mauss's contribution on the subject of the Kula (1973), and Levi Strauss's contribution on the subject of the savage mind (1962).

The Kula is a permanent exchange cycle which shapes a society's social, economic and cultural life. This exchange system is based on the triple obligation to give, to give back, and to receive.

Following Mauss's work (1973), Godbout (2000) adds that people who are in an exchange system based on the Kula accept uncertainty. Godbout stresses that the giver does not expect immediate reciprocity from the receiver, but puts the consequences of his action in a different time and place than the ones that he made the gift in. In other words the expectations of the giver are projected in a prospective approach, hoping that the coming generations will enjoy lasting benefits.

Typical sentences illustrate the gift and counter-gift based on the Kula: *"We're doing what we're doing with pleasure, hoping that coming generations will benefit", "we enjoy a very rich natural and cultural potential; when we develop it, we're not expecting immediate return, what keeps us going is giving hope and guiding young people in what they might invent to transmit this heritage and live in the village". "We can't be sure of an immediate result; further down the road, I hope we're sowing good things for young people and the coming generations."*

Based on Mauss's contributions, and given the context of the issues that emerged from the analysis of local actors' data, the goal of ecotourism activities is to organize the villagers' as well as tourists' social, spiritual, cultural and economic life.

Participant and non-participant observation, as well as data analysis indicate that the exchange system is based on bricolage. Bricolage represents the acquired, incorporated, tacit and complex knowledge that people draw upon to engage ecotourism action.

The notion of bricolage is observed in light of the concept of the savage mind developed by Levi Strauss (1962). The author introduces a difference between the savage mind and the modern mind: the end goal of the modern mind is yield or profit, whereas the savage mind shows that people in a rural

environment put together solutions, knowledge, and values, allowing them to adapt to their natural surroundings, as well as to space and time.

The author adds that the savage mind produces knowledge that is necessary to social, economic, cultural and spiritual life that people need to adapt to their environment (place, time, space).

*Local actors make it clear that it is important to use the Corsican language to transmit skills and tacit and complex knowledge: "valuation of intangible cultural heritage: culinary traditions, paghjela<sup>14</sup>, chiami e rispondi<sup>15</sup>, tales, the brotherhood, place names of the chestnut forest, the village and surroundings as well as the moving of sheep to and from summer pastures are all components of the intangible cultural heritage, transmitted through the practice of the Corsican language."*

The exchange system based on the Kula and the savage mind shapes and builds the territory. Debarbieux (2003, 910) defines the territory as *"a layout of material and symbolic resources capable of structuring the practical conditions and conditions of existence of an individual or a social group and to inform that individual and that social group about its own identity"*. He adds that the territory may be built or prescribed. As regards the preoccupations of the village's local actors and the kinds of action that they take in the framework of the management situation, the territory takes the form of a built territory.

In the built territory, actors take on board various aspects: the countryside, the coast, the historical and psychological connection with time. The built territory is the product of a combination of various characteristics that can be found in local actors' comments (see Appendix 3), in their activities as well as in the action they take during the management situation.

At the end of our presentation of the beginning and the unfolding process of the management situation, we identified each stakeholder's cartography and status (Table 3). The result of the management

<sup>14</sup> Polyphonic songs.

<sup>15</sup> *Chiami e rispondi*: tale that is sung and improvised when two poets confront each other.

situation underlines the actions of local actors in a built territory whose foundations are the Kula and the savage mind. Their goal is to protect the chestnut forest and develop ecotourism activities throughout the year. In this management situation, we also find public entities whose goals differ from those of local actors.

We propose to show the contribution of various actors to the promotion of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas in a territory built by local actors. More specifically, based on our study and the design of our research (Table 1), we propose to underline the following issues: the typology of various stakeholders and the efficiency of stakeholder networks to carry out ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas.

Wheeler and Sillanpaa (1997) propose a classification which allows us to identify a typology of stakeholders:

1. **primary social stakeholders** are individuals who are affected by the organization's decisions and take an active role in their elaboration.
2. **primary non-social stakeholders** take an active role in the organization's decision-making process but are largely unaffected by its decisions.
3. **secondary social stakeholders**, whose well-being depends largely on the organization's decisions but cannot influence those decisions.
4. **secondary non-social stakeholders** have little influence over the organization's decisions and are largely unaffected by them.

A typology of stakeholders during the management situation to carry out ecotourism activities based on Wheeler and Sillanpaa's work is thus proposed in Table 5: Typology of stakeholders during the management situation.

stakeholders Decision Level	ODARC	Chamber of Agriculture	LAG	LEADER	Local actors <sup>16</sup>
<b>Local administrative body</b>	Primary non-social stakeholders	Primary non-social stakeholders	Secondary non-social stakeholders	Secondary non-social stakeholders	Secondary social stakeholders
<b>Municipality</b>	Primary non-social stakeholders	Primary non-social stakeholders	Secondary non-social stakeholders	Secondary non-social stakeholders	Primary social stakeholders
<b>LEADER (European Union)</b>	Secondary non-social stakeholders	Secondary non-social stakeholders	Primary social stakeholders	Primary social stakeholders	Secondary non-social stakeholders

Table 5 – Typology of stakeholders during the management situation

<sup>16</sup> The local actors are: 1) the president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie, 2) private individuals – the owners of the chestnut forest, friends of the village, sponsors of chestnut trees –, 3) permanent and non-permanents inhabitants, 4) local elected representatives, 5) the community center, 6) the hostel, 7) visitors of the chestnut forest (schoolchildren, nonprofit organizations, tourists), 8) village house owners, 9) guesthouse managers, 10) brotherhood members.

Analysis of Table 5 above allows us to make a connection between the typology of stakeholders and their contribution to the promotion of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas in a territory of Corsica. Local economic actors have an impact on the promotion of ecotourism activities. Expressed in terms of Wheeler and Sillanpaa's classification (2017), they appear in the form of primary social stakeholders; they are affected by the organization's decisions and play an active role in their elaboration. The language used and the actions carried out by two public entities, the LEADER program and the Local Action Group, show that they are secondary non-social stakeholders. In view of the actions carried out by local actors, they have limited influence over the decisions taken by the organization, and in the short term are largely unaffected. Finally, at the beginning of the management situation, two other public bodies, ODARC and the Chamber of Agriculture, have an influence over the creation of the nonprofit organization ASL E. Bertecchie, but are not affected by the decisions. However, during the unfolding process of the management situation, the normative, accounting assessment that these two entities make weighs on the functioning of ASL E. Bertecchie. As a result, the roadmap and the strategy launched by ODARC and followed by the Chamber of Agriculture are not adapted to the concrete problems that local actors face when they want to carry out ecotourism activities. In Wheeler and Sillanpaa's parlance, these two public entities are primary non-social stakeholders: they play an active role in the organization's decision-making process but they are unaffected by those decisions. As for tourists who come to the village, they directly contribute with local actors to the promotion of ecotourism activities.

However, the classification of tourists varies according to local actors' strategy and their interactions with them. Tourists may have one of two profiles: 1) primary social stakeholders, meaning they are affected by the organization's decisions and play an active role in their elaboration, or 2) secondary social stakeholders, whose well-being depends largely on the organization's decisions.

To refine our approach to the role of various actors in the promotion of ecotourism activities, we also draw on network theory, specifically contributions

from such authors as Granovetter (1973), Hansen, Podolny and Pfeffer (2000), Haunschild (1993), Gulati and Westphal (1999) and Burt (1992).

We borrow from Granovetter (1973) the notions of strong tie and weak tie to identify stakeholders' contributions.

During the management situation, local actors maintain strong ties. The president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie has maintained a dialog with local actors for more than 30 years. Through these strong ties, he has built social capital based on trust, the spirit of being at the service of a group as well as individuals, and the provision of moral support to the farmer: "*Without X's moral support, I couldn't have taken up the challenge*". Notably the president has maintained strong ties with local elected representatives, guesthouse professionals, the hostel manager and the president of the community center.

Given his strong ties and experience, his tacit knowledge of intangible cultural heritage and the ecological environment – mountain, hiking trails, rivers, songs, poems –, he plays an active role in the promotion of ecotourism activities; he communicates to tourists the necessary complex and tacit knowledge.

The president of the community center also maintains strong ties with the members of the center and local actors. He develops cultural and religious activities with the members of the center, so as to develop awareness of the wealth of environmental, cultural, social, historical and spiritual heritage of the village. He makes available to members and local actors of the Piève the resources of the brotherhood for the celebration of the various cultural or religious events. He can also draw on conference speakers to talk with villagers about various issues to do with the intangible heritage of the village and its environs.

He cares about federating local actors around authentic relations. Finally, as a member representing the engaged citizen in the Local Action Group, he maintains weak ties with the president of the LAG. He communicates necessary, complex and tacit knowledge to the people who live in the village and in the Piève.

The municipal team and the mayor also support activities proposed by the president of the community center. The strong ties maintained by local elected representatives with the president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie, the community center and the hostel are based on the fact that these people are natives of the village and care about local initiatives while preserving the environmental, cultural and social ecosystem.

During the life-size test with a group of tourists in June 2018, the promotion of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area was possible thanks to the support of the municipal team, the president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie, and the hostel manager. Some of the local actors maintain weak ties with public bodies. More specifically, the president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie maintains weak ties with ODARC and the Chamber of Agriculture. However, these public entities' directives do not really take into account the evolution of daily reality which the farmer, the president of the organization and the landowners have to face.

ODARC and the Chamber of Agriculture cooperate on the basis of planned project management. This normative, planned governance does not suit the needs in the field and the actions taken by the two bodies are counter-productive. *“There are so many standards and specifications, it's no longer possible to envisage doing differently than the directives, the results can become counter-productive; there are concrete measures to be taken, we know it, but they can't do it because it becomes political.”*

The president of the community center and the president of the nonprofit organization ASL E Bertecchie maintain weak ties with the president and the main person motivating and mobilizing the LAG. Such weak ties do not provide the resources that local actors need to have codified knowledge about commercialization and digitalization techniques to be used to put forward the offer of ecotourism activities. Knowledge codified by the LAG bears on ecotourism standards and eligibility criteria which we have mentioned in this article. The LAG talks about the promotion of ecotourism

activities in a determined, normative way which does not meet the needs of local actors.

The lack of resources needed by local actors to develop innovation management is also linked to the absence of structural holes in local actors' networks with public bodies. This is to do with an absence of dialog between public bodies and local actors about the development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas.

### **3.2. Discussion of results: contributions and limits**

In our discussion of results, we stress a theoretical contribution around four points, a managerial contribution, and a methodological contribution. We then present the limits of our approach.

The theoretical approach is that one of the conditions of innovation management success when it comes to ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas is for public entities to take into account the invariants of local actors' socio-economic organization, and also to go from a prescribed territory logic to one where dialog with local actors around the built territory is favored. (Debarbieux, 2003, 910).

In view of the results of the empirical study about the typology of the various stakeholders, our theoretical proposal is articulated around four points: 1) a link between strong ties and transmission of tacit and complex knowledge about the promotion and impact assessment of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area, 2) a link between strong ties and the production of innovation on a built territory, 3) the notion that the conditions for innovation management success rest on the quality of weak ties maintained by local actors with public entities, 4) the notion that the conditions for innovation management success rest on the existence of structural holes (Burt, (1992).

1) We find a link between strong ties and the transmission of tacit and complex knowledge about the promotion and impact assessment of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area. The empirical study confirms that strong ties with local actors have a positive effect when it comes to transferring

complex and tacit knowledge (Haunschild, 1993; Gulati and Westphal, 1999). This positive effect is related to the creation of innovation around the construction of brand identity, as well as the definition of customer segments and indicators to assess the benefits of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area.

2) The second point is the link between strong ties and the production of innovation in a built environment. The empirical study establishes that the strong ties maintained by local actors play a part in the production of innovation; this innovation is self-organized and also organizes the territory which is a built territory. The attributes of this built territory are two of the foundations of the socio-economic organization of the territory: the principle of gift and counter-gift, and bricolage.

The territory in question is in the Piève of the Oriente plain, and it seems to be “*a geographically limited area endowed with some level of coherence, but where various types of historical, artistic, natural and ethnological heritage can be found*”. The construction of brand identity by local actors and their reflection about the impact of ecotourism activities on their ecological, social, cultural and economic environment operationalizes Dupuis’s approach (2013).

The actions taken by local actors show that they do so on a built territory. In the built territory defined by Debarbieux (2003, 910), the socio-economic system as well as actions taken by local actors around brand identity and assessment of actions on their ecological, social, cultural and economic environment echo Debarbieux’s approach.

Debardieux distinguishes the built territory from the prescribed territory. Analysis of communication mode and interactions between local actors shows that strong ties contribute to the production of innovation in a social territory built around the Kula and bricolage.

However analysis of the interactions between local actors and public entities underlines the tendency of public bodies to put land management in a prescribed territory: standards, eligibility criteria, and the notion of planned project all refer to the prescribed territory.

In our empirical study, the territory is, on the one hand, built by local actors and on the other hand, prescribed by public entities. However our theoretical contribution is that one of the conditions for innovation management success when it comes to ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area is that public entities should take into consideration the invariants of local actors’ socio-economic organization, as well as that public bodies should go from a prescribed territory logic to one where dialog with local actors around the built territory is favored.

3) The conditions for the success of innovation management rest on the quality of weak ties maintained by local actors with public bodies. Weak links maintained with the LAG could support innovation management in so far as the LAG can develop codified and simple knowledge with local actors. In our study, and given local actors’ needs, that knowledge concerns marketing and digitalization techniques to make the brand identity visible to customers targeted by local actors.

4) The conditions for the success of innovation management rest on the existence of structural holes (Burt, 1992).

To support the dialog between public entities and local actors, we recommend a managerial contribution to public bodies in charge of the development of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area, such as the actors of the LEADER program and of the LAG. Such a contribution concerns the creation of structural holes. In order to create structural holes, the three following points are required: 1) to integrate the notions of uncertainty and complexity in the management mode of public policies around ecotourism activities, 2) to take into consideration the notion of territory built by local actors and co-create with them knowledge that will be useful to innovation management, 3) to assess the quality of the role of intermediaries between local actors and public entities.

We now detail these three points below.

1) To integrate the notions of uncertainty and complexity in the management mode of public policies around ecotourism activities.

“Uncertainty” here is in the sense that the system of gift and counter-gift includes several dimensions: uncertainty about when to give back, the quality of the counter-gift, the quality of the person or group of people who take part in it, and complexity because local actors confronted with the elements of nature and the complexity of human relations find informal solutions, outside of standards and procedures.

2) To take into consideration the notion of territory built by local actors and co-create with them knowledge that will be useful to innovation management

The second requirement is that public actors should take into account that local actors produce tacit knowledge in a built territory. Local actors perceive the territory as a territory built around a social system based on the Kula and the construction of knowledge. They take uncertainty and complexity into consideration. To move forward with local actors, it would therefore be interesting to train public entities on approaches facilitating the construction of knowledge with local actors, such as for example the action research approach developed by Lewin.

3) To assess the quality of the role of intermediaries between local actors and public entities.

It is relevant to co-construct, together with public entities and local actors, an indicator of the effect of action research on the promotion of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area. This indicator takes into account the diversity and variety of information and opportunities provided by people who play an intermediary role between local actors and public bodies.

To allow public entities to operationalize our managerial contribution we recommend action training around the concepts of management situations, stakeholder theory and network theory, and the concept of action research.

Finally, the concept of management situations is useful to identify the role of the various stakeholders in the promotion of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area.

In view of our study which is about the contribution of public entities to the development of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area, we began by identifying a management situation. In that framework we drew on the contributions of various authors to stakeholder theory in order to organize our observation of the cartography of the various stakeholders (Freeman, 1984) and each stakeholder’s role in the promotion of ecotourism activities (Wheeler and Sillanpaa, 1997). Likewise, we refined our observation with the contributions of network theory authors—more specifically, to understand the resources mobilized by the various stakeholders. To that end, based on Haunschild (1993) and Gulati and Westphal (1999), our analysis is that strong ties have a positive effect when it comes to transferring complex and tacit knowledge.

Finally, based on Burt’s contribution (1992) to the quality of the network(s) that people are members of, we identify a lack of structural holes which does not allow the emergence of actors whose intermediary role is to provide to local actors the resources they need to transform the production of innovation into innovation management.

We therefore recommend the creation of structural holes so as to develop a quality network that will facilitate innovation management with local actors within the dynamic of a built territory.

The last contribution of our study is of a methodological nature. We have used the grounded theory approach and developed data collection and analysis techniques. This approach is relevant to distinguish between the various stakeholders and their contribution to the promotion of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area. In addition it also allows us to consider that a person’s intention is not only rational in the sense of a functional usefulness, and that we must consider that what people feel, believe, and do, is linked to the forms of social relations between actors within a given social situation (Burt, 1992).

However there are also limits to our approach, related to the immersion of one of the researchers in the territory, the construction of the sample, and the contextualization of the study.

One of the researchers was totally immersed in the territory of the Piève. As a result, in such a situation, it is important to be able to draw on the skills of ethnologists and ethnographers.

Another limit is the Corsican territory which was the context of our study. It would have been interesting to compare the interaction modes of local actors in other Corsican territories and also to compare interaction modes between local actors and public entities identified in our study.

## CONCLUSION

Stakeholder theory and network theory are useful to put forward the various stakeholders and their degree of involvement in the promotion of ecotourism activities in a rural and mountainous area.

The main components in the value chain of innovation production around ecotourism activities are embedded in the perception of a built territory. This territory is self-formed by local actors' daily uses and behaviors. Such uses and behaviors take place within a social organization which is governed by the Kula and the savage mind.

Strong ties and the foundations of the socio-economic organization of the built territory take part in the production of innovation, which impacts the production of elements of the territory's brand identity.

We may hope that public EU funding through the LEADER program will support local actors' production of innovation. Table 4 above illustrates the areas of convergence of the LEADER program with local actors' actions in terms of strategy, partnership and the notion of territory.

LAG actors can contribute to the management of ecotourism innovation in rural and mountainous areas. This means taking into account the notion of built territory as well as the sharing of information and recurring dialog with local actors about sustainable development of ecotourism activities in rural and mountainous areas.

It might be interesting to further our study by considering that nature and intangible cultural heritage are two essential stakeholders. Translation theory might shed some light on the subject.

In future we are going to take on board these dimensions by observing the impact of ecotourism activities in light of Leroux's indicators (2010) and consider the ways in which such impacts contribute, or fail to contribute, to the creation of added value from an economic, social, cultural and environmental point of view. We will supplement our analysis of impact assessment with the contributions of the authors of translation theory.

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**APPENDIX 1 - TABLE 6**  
**The six points of ecotourism (Dehoorne and Transler, 2007)**

<b>The six points of ecotourism</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>1) Nature and culture</b>	Preservation of the natural and cultural environment, consideration for the host community's culture.
<b>2) Well-being of host societies</b>	Improvement of local populations' living conditions and diversification of their economic activities.
<b>3) Responsible tourists</b>	Well-informed customers who respect the places they visit, are interested in cultures and willing to learn.
<b>4) Participation of host societies</b>	Taking ownership of the activity, limitation of middlemen (development of local supply chains for the distribution of regional products, for example) and establishment of real partnerships with village inhabitants as well as actors of national and transnational tourism.
<b>5) Sustainability</b>	Ecotourism must be thought of as a "dynamic tension that evolves over time, not as a physical condition for development" (Lequin, 2001 p.24-25).
<b>6) The art of meeting people</b>	Meeting people is conducive to fairer relations.

The satisfaction survey of tourists who sojourned four days in the village reveals dimensions linked to ecotourism activities.

**APPENDIX 2 - TABLE 7**  
**The link between the tourist satisfaction survey**  
**and the dimensions of ecotourism**

<b>Dimensions of ecotourism</b>	<b>Tourists' verbatim responses (translated from French)</b>
<b>1) Nature and culture</b>	<p><i>"Here when we arrive, we are quickly in the outdoors. During the visit of the chestnut forest, we can feel how much the long term, in the past, is indispensable to understand the present, and look to the future."</i></p> <p><i>"What is being done to protect the chestnut forest is extraordinary because it is meaningful; Fanfan's explanations show us how important it is to take into account the history of the chestnut forest, from a social, human and economic point of view, to consider differently how we relate to life, to the earth, and to other people."</i></p>
<b>2) Host population</b>	<p><i>"We were greeted by an elderly person, and also by a young person, and we could see that they understood each other well. We were guests and dined at the hostel, and also Fanfan's friend; the meals are prepared from local produce, we saw the preparation of migliacci, and enjoyed local produce. Everything is local and sourced locally, bravo."</i></p>
<b>3) Responsible tourists</b>	<p>Access to healthcare for the village's inhabitants and improvement of roads: <i>"We are at the village to relax, but for the people living here, it would be good if they could have better access to healthcare services and a better road to go from the village to Corte"</i>.</p>
<b>4) Expression of tourists' expectations</b>	<p>1) The visibility of a refreshments stall: <i>"When we arrive in the village, it would be nice to know there is a refreshments stall, there aren't any signs, it's too bad, people go past it and don't stop; and so they miss an opportunity to chat with the stallholder and the villagers"</i>.</p> <p>2) Hosting tourists throughout the year: <i>"With the hostel and accommodation in people's homes, guesthouses, it's possible to envisage a year-round activity. Hosting small groups of tourists, twelve as a maximum, accommodating them in people's houses or at the hostel, that would be good; the catering at the hostel is a plus: the traditional dishes are excellent. They might also develop some themes depending on the season, and also align with other events in the area"</i>.</p> <p>3) Sports activities: <i>"With the river and its configuration, it's possible to do some canyoneering, and with all the beautiful summits, there's a wide choice, it's nice to go to the Caldane and chat with the shepherd"</i>.</p> <p>4) Relaxing and discovering the fauna and flora: <i>"The picnic by the banks of the Saint Vincent River was really fabulous. And as you walk, you discover the animals, the plants"</i>.</p> <p>5) Bathing: <i>"To go to the beach, the road offers some spectacular landscapes, wonderful colors, and as we go back up, we can stop over at friendly little restaurants: Diana, Urbino, Moita, Zuani. In the villages you're made to feel very welcome"</i>.</p> <p>6) Authentic activities and well-being: <i>"The village and its environs are places of history and good for recharging batteries, in the evenings after the hikes in the outdoors, the discoveries, a nice meal, a quick blaze, conversations, playing the guitar, singing, it's great"</i>.</p> <p>7) Local produce: <i>"The gastronomy is good quality, and the wine too"</i>.</p> <p>8) The feeling of security and well-being: <i>"In the village, no need to double-lock the bedroom doors, and the people are nice, no stress, and it's great to see them smile, to hear them laugh; it's becoming rare!"</i>.</p>

Local people are involved on a daily basis in entertainment, welcoming, accommodation and catering activities oriented towards ecotourism. In addition, they develop a reflection about the impact of those activities. The link between their verbatim responses and Leroux's indicators (2010) shown in Table 5 is useful to shed light on this reflection.

**APPENDIX 3 - TABLE 8**  
**The link between practitioners' verbatim responses**  
**and Leroux's indicators (2010)**

Indicators	Practitioners' verbatim responses (translated from French)
<b>Environmental indicators: Environmental load capacity</b>	
<b>Biodiversity, respect of flora</b>	<i>Natural resources are abundant, they are preserved because few people venture here; but we must catalog them to develop some alert flags to manage the effects of those activities.</i>
<b>Waste management; water treatment plant, waste collection</b>	<i>This is a real question, we are confronted to it every year with the celebrations the village has low waste management capacity.</i>
<b>Water management: adapt the number of tourists to the territory's water capacity</b>	<i>We must keep an eye on the water quality of rivers. There is a possibility of bathing and fishing activities.</i>
<b>Biodiversity, respect of fauna and flora</b>	<i>We must catalog [the fauna and flora] and identify points that require more attention; we must connect activities such as hiking, bathing, picnics, camping and fishing, and their effects. Support material to develop awareness must be created.</i>
<b>Human (sociocultural) indicators</b>	
<b>Ratio touristes/résidents</b>	<i>Visitor capacity is limited by accommodation, waste management, parking areas for cars; a strategy must be defined to have a limited number of visitors throughout the year; each season comes with a number of activities and cultural and religious events.</i>
<b>Population's degree of satisfaction</b>	<i>Our intangible heritage is part of our territory, i.e. the village, our customs, the Corsican language, the chestnut forest, Anne Frank's tree, the washhouse, the chestnut dryer, the cheese and cold cuts production, local supply chain etc.; it must not be altered.</i>
<b>Degré de satisfaction des touristes</b>	<i>A warm welcome is essential; the tourist deserves attention and respect.</i>
<b>Manpower skills, training</b>	<i>We have someone who is good at welcoming people, who proposes quality traditional dishes made with local produce, he must be kept and supported when there are more visitors.</i>
<b>Tourists' prior education</b>	<i>We must target the population that we want to visit us: respectful people, who like nature, contacts with local people. Until now, things have gone well with the people who have come, they like the village.</i>
<b>Authenticity of hosting place</b>	<i>The quality of the welcome, accommodation at people's houses and the hostel, the tasty dishes that Mathieu prepares with local produce and his grandmother's recipes, chatting with tourists, the beauty of the area, of our village, all of that is real.</i>

<b>Discussion with local population</b>	<i>With tourists in the morning at breakfast and in the evening at dinner, we have friendly chats; they ask questions about how to cook a dish, ask about local activities, local history, the chestnut forest, the roads or paths to take; but we must also ask them if they have enjoyed their stay with us.</i>
<b>Economic indicators</b>	
<b>Job creation</b>	<i>So far two jobs have been created: the chestnut forest farmer and the hostel manager. Development of the activity should lead to the creation of a third job in the short term.</i>
<b>Daily spend</b>	<i>80€ per person for groups who stay several days in the village (accommodation and catering, visit of Corte, walks around the village, discovery of the Marestagnu beach, the Aleria fort and the museum, special dinner, car rental) and 30€ for hikers who stay overnight at the hostel.</i>
<b>Return intentions</b>	<i>Delighted tourists who come to Corsica on a regular basis for its seaside activities, and who want to discover the interior of the island. People like the village and come back regularly (Dutch people), or even move here on a permanent basis (an entrepreneur couple from the continent).</i>
<b>Household income</b>	<i>The locals live on their retirement pension (among them business executives and retired entrepreneurs). Among the young people (average age 45) there are local cold cuts producers who live on the income from their activity, and the chestnut forest farmer who has various activities; other people are still working: the head of a company, a teacher, a business executive. The social category of tourists who stay several days in the village and that of hikers is either business executive or young student (some of the hikers). The hikers we interviewed are experienced (they have climbed several summits over 4000 meters high<sup>17</sup> in several countries); they consider hiking as a spiritual path and a way to get back to essential things.</i>
<b>Indicateurs patrimoniaux et culturels</b>	
<b>Préservation, protection et valorisation du patrimoine, des paysages, de l'habitat traditionnel</b>	<i>Maintenance of traditional habitat: renovation of the Caserna led by the municipal team, renovation of a bread oven by its owner. Preservation and valuation of fauna, of the biodiversity of the river: regular maintenance work. Taking care of Anne Frank's tree. Inventory of places and history of each of them with the study of place names and their origin.</i>
<b>Entretien des éléments de la culture (art culinaire, langues de la région etc.)</b>	<i>Valuation of intangible heritage: paghjela<sup>18</sup>, chiami e rispondi<sup>19</sup>, tales, the brotherhood, the study of place names in the chestnut forest, the village and its environs, as well as the moving of sheep to and from summer pastures, are all part of the intangible cultural heritage, transmitted through the practice of the Corsican language. Culinary traditions are served to tourists on a daily basis.</i>

<sup>17</sup> Over 13,000 feet.

<sup>18</sup> Polyphonic songs.

<sup>19</sup> *chiami e rispondi*: tale that is sung and improvised when two poets face each other.