Reshaping Belonging in the "Tuscany of Germany" – Climate Change, Viticulture and Affects in the Palatinate's Bad Dürkheim District

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Photo Credit: Maren Schulz

Introduction

Vineyards are often seen as symbols of continuity, landscapes shaped by traditions and seasonal rhythms. In the Palatinate's Bad Dürkheim district, often framed as the "Tuscany of Germany", viticulture has been deeply intertwined with everyday life for generations. The label "Tuscany of Germany" does not simply describe climatic or visual similarities; rather, it stems from representations that highlight the area's mild climate, rolling vineyard hills, Mediterranean vegetation, and culinary culture. The comparison invokes imaginaries of warmth, leisure, and cultivated landscape, thereby shaping both external perceptions and local self-understandings.

Yet, climate change is slowly transforming the seasonal rhythms, local grape varieties and the sensory experience of the landscape. These shifts raise questions that go beyond the

economic aspect of viticulture and ask how it affects the ways local winegrowers feel, narrate and belong to their region.

This paper therefore asks: How is climate change reshaping viticulture and the affective meanings of place in the Palatinate's Bad Dürkheim district and what are the consequences for the local belonging?

Conceptual framework

This research builds on the "emotional turn" in geography as articulated by Bondi, Davidson and Smith (2012). Their work challenges the traditional view of geography as a detached and rational discipline by foregrounding emotions as central to how people experience, interpret and inhabit places. Rather than treating emotions as private, internal mental states, they conceptualize them as socio-spatial and relational processes that are produced through interactions between bodies, environments and social relations. Bondi et al. (2012) argue that emotions are not objects that can be measured or contained within individuals. Instead, they are relational flows that circulate between people and places, shaping boundaries, attachments and meanings. Emotions are both embodied and located: they are felt through lived, material engagements with landscapes, and environments. In this sense, place is not simply a physical setting but is co-constituted through affective experience. Furthermore, the emotional turn emphasizes that emotions are political and transformative. They underpin experiences of belonging, exclusion, attachment and loss by influencing how social and spatial change is negotiated. The emotional dimensions of lived experience represent a critical lens for understanding how broader changes, like climate change, become meaningful at the level of everyday life. In the context of this research, this framework allows climate change to be understood not only as an environmental change but also as an affective process. Changes in landscape and practice are simultaneously changes in emotional attachments, embodied routines and place-based meanings. Following Bondi et al. (2012), the reshaping of viticulture can be analyzed as a reshaping of emotional geographies.

The second key concept for this paper is "belonging". Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011) conceptualizes it as an emotionally charged social location that integrates feelings, social practices and attachments. Rather than a fixed identity, belonging is lived and negotiated through everyday relations and shared experiences. It emerges from the intersection of three interrelated dimensions: commonality, mutuality and attachments (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011). Commonality refers to perceptions and performances of shared values, memories and practices that distinguish insiders from outsiders. Mutuality encompasses the norms of reciprocity, obligation and

recognition that stabilize collective life. Attachments link people to material and immaterial worlds, like places, objects or symbols, while producing affective ties that make belonging felt. In the context of this research, belonging can be understood as the emotionally charged relationship between winegrowers, viticultural practices and the landscape often framed as the "Tuscany of Germany".

The Bad Dürkheim District

The Bad Dürkheim district is a particularly suitable case for this research because viticulture is not only an economic activity, but a deeply sedimented cultural and historical practice. Winegrowing in the region dates back to Roman times (Pfalz 2026), embedding vineyards, grape varieties and cultivation techniques within intergenerational traditions. This historical depth intensifies affective attachments to landscape and practice, making changes emotionally significant. Moreover, the region's popular framing as the "Tuscany of Germany" (Magerl 2026; Morrhof 2026) reinforces a strong narrative of place and links to specific environmental qualities, like sunlight and rolling vineyards, that are now directly influenced by climate change.

To answer the research question, a qualitative, ethnographic interview (Int. I) was conducted with a local winegrower along the central and most popular "Weinstraße" of the Bad Dürkheim district in December 2025. The interview followed a semi-structural format (Brinkmann 2013), allowing for open-ended storytelling while guiding the conversation towards the research question of how climate change is reshaping viticulture and the affective meanings of place in the Palatinate's Bad Dürkheim district and what the consequences for the local belonging are.

The transcript of the interview (Int. I) then was coded manually. Key themes that emerged from the interview are history, renegotiation of belonging, affective meanings of place and future scenarios (Codes Int. I). These key themes originated from different more specific categories, like perceived changes, family traditions, regional change and alcohol production crisis (Codes Int. I). I thus structure the following analysis along these key themes.

Analysis

History

The first key theme emerging from the interview is history, derived from codes like personal background, family tradition and regional identity. History appears not merely as a contextual information, but as an active framework through which the winegrower interprets belonging. The frame of the "Tuscany of Germany" is tied to specific typical grape varieties and climatic conditions. Moreover, the interviewee situates his work within a long genealogical and regional trajectory. Working in viticulture has always been obvious for him: "*Ja, ganz klassicher Familienbetrieb. Für mich war nie die Frage, was werde ich […]. Für mich war das immer klar*" / "*Yes, a classic family business. For me, it was never a question of what I would become […]. It was always clear to me*" (Int. I). This reflects what Bondi et al. (2012) describe as the socio-spatial mediation of emotion: attachment to place is produced through lived, embodied practices embedded in temporal depth. At the same time, climate change introduces shifts in grape varieties, such as the increasing viability of Mediterranean types and shifts the characteristics of the traditional Palatinate Riesling (Int. I). The historical identity of the Palatinate as a Riesling landscape is subtly destabilized.

Renegotiation of belonging

Through perception of climate change, regional change and adaptation in practice, the renegotiation of belonging was further central to the winegrower's perception. Central to this negotiation is closely linked to articulation of a continuity that is increasingly unsettled. Climate change impacts, in particular, are becoming tangible in particular through experiences of longer growing seasons, earlier harvests, water issues and different varietal possibilities. The traditional vineyard, once governed by inherited cultivation norms, becomes less stable. This destabilization is captured in the statement: "*Also diese penible Ordnung wirft man gerade so ein bisschen über den Haufen*." / *"So, we're throwing that meticulous order out the window—just a little bit."* (Int.I). This order refers both to the practical organization, like harvest timing, and the visible order of the vineyard landscapes, challenging the deeper sense of belonging to a recognizable wine landscape. The renegotiation unfolds on different levels: On an individual level, the winegrower must adjust his embodied practices and expertise. On a collective level, the frame of the "Tuscany of Germany" tied to specific typical grape varieties and climatic conditions is questioned. Belonging, in this context, becomes less anchored in fixed conditions and more dependent on adaptive capacity. Importantly, the tone of the interview suggests ambivalence rather than pure loss. Alongside concern and uncertainty, there is also pragmatic

openness, technical advance and even curiosity about new ways. This reflects the dynamic character of belonging described in the theoretical framework: It is continuously negotiated through practice and affect.

Affective meanings of place

A key theme that emerged from the interview is the affective meaning of place, rooted in codes like Heimat, personal background and embodied practice. This theme captures the emotional depth with which the vineyard is experienced in everyday life. The winegrower describes the vineyard in explicitly intimate and spatial terms: "*mein Wohnzimmer, der Weinberg"/ "My living room, the vineyard"* (Int. I). By equating the vineyard with a living room, he collapses the boundary between workspace and domestic space. The vineyard serves as an extension of home, an interiorized environment that offers familiarity, comfort and belonging. This metaphor indicates a profound emotional attachment grounded in repeated, embodied engagement with the land. This affective attachment becomes even more visible in the statement: "*Wenn ich draußen bin im Wingert, ist für mich Heimat. Ich glaube das sind nicht unbedingt jetzt nur der Ort, sondern auch Momente. Wie man sich fühlt vielleicht auch." / ""When I'm out in the vineyard, that's home to me. I don't think it's necessarily just the place itself, but also the moments. Maybe it's how you feel, too."* (Int. I). Here, Heimat is not reduced to geographical location. Place is therefore constituted through affective encounters: being outside, working the soil, sensing weather and season. This articulation strongly resonates with the emotional turn in geography, which understands emotions as socio-spatial processes rather than internal states. At the same time, this wording suggests that climate change has implications beyond economic production: if the affective meanings of place are tied to moments in the vineyard, moments shaped by temperature, vegetation cycles and landscape aesthetics, then climatic shifts subtly transform these affective conditions. Belonging is not fixed to a static place but relational and moment based. Therefore, belonging can adapt as long as affective moments of connection remain possible.

Future Scenarios

Perception of the future figure prominently in the articulation of emotions around place and belonging in vineyards. This theme was derived from codes such as alcohol production crisis, structural change, and regional transformation and shifts attention toward anticipated developments and imagined trajectories. The winegrower expresses concern about structural changes that extend beyond climatic adjustments in the vineyard. He states: *"Und das wird glaube ich auch draußen Vieles verändern, also in den Ortsbildern werden einige Weingüter*

verschwinden." / "And I think that will also bring about a lot of changes out there—in other words, some wineries will disappear from the townscapes." (Int. I). This statement points to visible and symbolic transformations in the built and social landscape. The anticipation of disappearing wineries suggests a fear of thinning out the cultural fabric of the region. These places are not only production units, but instead they shape local traditions, festivals, social networks and everyday rhythms of village life in the Bad Dürkheim district. The emotional tone here shifts from pragmatic adaptation to concern about erosion. Importantly, this future scenario reflects an awareness that climate change intersects with broader crises in alcohol production, market pressures and generational shifts. Climate change rather acts as an accelerator within already existing structural vulnerabilities. The future is thus perceived as uncertain and potentially disruptive, intensifying the need to rethink continuity and belonging.

Main findings

Regarding the research question, the main findings show that the intersection of climate change, the alcohol production crisis and generational shifts reshape viticulture in the Bad Dürkheim district both materially and affectively. Practically, longer growing seasons, earlier harvests and new grape varieties require adjustments in cultivation techniques, destabilizing inherited routines and rhythms of vineyard work. At the same time, these dynamics influence the affective meanings of place. The vineyard is experienced through embodied, emotional moments tied to seasonal rhythms and landscape aesthetics. As these climatic conditions shift, so do the sensory and emotional foundations of belonging in the "Tuscany of Germany". Consequently, local belonging becomes more dynamic and negotiable. While there is concern about broader structural change and disappearing wineries, there is also pragmatic openness. Belonging is not anchored in stable traditions but increasingly sustained through adaptation and the capacity to reinterpret attachment under changing conditions.

Conclusion

This research shows that climate change is reshaping the affective meanings of place and local belonging in the Bad Dürkheim district beyond transforming viticultural practices. The intersection of climate change, a broader alcohol production crisis and generational shifts unsettle inherited routines, regional varieties and attachments to the local vineyard landscape. At the same time, belonging is renegotiated through adaptive practices and new interpretations. By bringing together the emotional turn (Bondi et al. 2012) and the concept of belonging (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011), this research contributes to broader debates on climate change by

demonstrating how environmental changes are lived at the local level. Rooted in a socio-spatial and emotional perspective, it highlights that adaptation is also an affective process.

These findings resonate with other research on belonging and environmental disruption, though the specific mechanisms diverge: in their study, Köhne and Rasch (2018) show that in the Noordoostpolder belonging is mobilized selectively as a political and discursive resource to resist shale gas extraction, the Bad Dürkheim study demonstrates that belonging is instead affectively and gradually renegotiated as viticultural communities adapt to the slower-moving disruptions of climate change.

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