

We Ahr Resilient: Abstract

Paulien Guibal, June 2024

The wine region of the Ahr Valley is renowned for its high quality wines made from Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir). It was severely hit by a natural disaster in July 2021. After prolonged, heavy rainfall, the river Ahr flooded and, in the middle of the night, hundreds of peoples' homes were destroyed. As roads became rivers and bridges collapsed, 134 people died. The damage was immense.

Winemakers contribute largely to the economic welfare of the region. They were particularly affected by the flood; many did not only lose their home but also their business (wineries, vineyards, equipment). The ways in which winemakers are coping is a central question, particularly 'in the calm after the storm' as the (journalistic) attention for the situation diminishes.

My research aims to understand the ways in which winemakers in the Ahr Valley perceive their present wellbeing and professional prospects and whether changes have occurred therein (and if so, which); with the view to further explore whether they need additional support in the aftermath of the flood. Ultimately, providing insight into the health of this vital branch of regional business.

The theoretical framework within which this research was conducted, is based on the WHO's definition of wellbeing as: *"A state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."* This includes individual as well as relational dimensions of value that give meaning to lived experiences. Complementary, resilience here is defined as: *"The ability of adults, in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning, as well as the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions"*. Sub-divisions and parameters of both were further explored to make them applicable.

Wellbeing is largely determined by the individual in relation to/with themselves and their direct social surroundings. As such, my research places an emphasis on spiritual resilience (as part of interpersonal resilience), alongside social capital (as part of intrapersonal resilience). Both are positively correlated with life satisfaction (and, by extension, wellbeing) and negatively with depression. Elements that indicate the presence of these concepts were translated to questions

constructed on a 7-point semantic differential scale (and some questions posed as 'yes'/'no' questions), with room to share additional information. This questionnaire was presented to all 37 commercial winemakers in the Ahr Valley.

13 of 37 participants completed the questionnaire (35,14%). The central finding of this study was that the wellbeing of winemakers in the Ahr Valley was perceived as very good. Most participants felt connected, capable, confident, and perseverant. Respondents are further positive about the future and many even show signs of post-traumatic growth. As such, this research gives no reason to organise additional support to winemakers in the Ahr Valley.

A limitation of this study was the participation rate. Additional interviews with winemakers from the Ahr region are recommended, the presence of which will negate this study's shortcomings in regards to sample size. Further research may be helpful in gaining insight into the reasons behind the results, providing valuable information to help people suffering from similar disasters. This type of information could not be gathered due to the method chosen (questionnaire) and due to the complexity and ambiguity of the major themes: wellbeing, resilience and social capital.

Regardless of potential research limitations, a reason for Ahr Valley's winemakers' and broadly positive results on resilience likely lies in the many initiatives that are collectively developed by, and for, the community. These initiatives emphasise community values and togetherness; results stated that winemakers feel connected to the community and almost all actively participate in it. These attitudes appear to have paid off and are therefore recommended to remain a priority.

Only the theme of 'leadership' led to divergent opinions. However, this did not appear to influence winemakers' wellbeing. Still, reconsideration of the organisation of actions and responsibilities would be recommended, especially for situations that require decisive and unambiguous action.