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Pleasure Policies: Debating Development Plans in Southern California's Wine Country

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Pleasure policies: debating development plans in southern California’s Wine Country

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On 11 March 2014, the Board of Supervisors of Riverside County in southern California, USA, voted to approve the Wine Country Community Plan, culminating a nearly six-year policy and planning process that would pave the way for the expansion of the Temecula Valley’s wineries and wine tourism complex. The exercise in state-led development was a triumph for the plan’s major proponents, but this does not mean that the Plan was accepted by all elements of the community nor does it mean that the approval process was a smooth and orderly one. This article takes as its frame of reference an anthropology of policy approach to analyze the elements of the Plan that would dramatically increase the Temecula Valley’s wineries from around 40 to around 100, and greatly impact wine tourism activity there, to show how various stakeholder groups defined their position vis-à-vis the Plan and put into practice strategies designed to influence the process, to demonstrate the workings of the state-led planning process, and to show how policy outcomes are informed by the political negotiations between the state, wine capitalists, community residents, and various other interested groups. This article calls for the development of theoretical models based in political economy whose applicability reaches beyond particular case studies.

Keywords: wine tourism; public policy; development; anthropology; wine capitalism; the state; Temecula Valley; southern California

Resumen

El día 11 de marzo de 2014, la Junta de Supervisores del condado de Riverside en el sur de California, Estados Unidos, votó para aprobar el Plan Comunal País del Vino, culminando un proceso político y de planificación de casi 6 años que encauzaría la expansión de las bodegas del valle de Temecula y el complejo del turismo del vino. El ejercicio de desarrollo liderado por el Estado fue un triunfo para los principales proponentes del plan, pero esto no significa que el Plan fuese aceptado por todos los miembros de la comunidad ni que el proceso de aprobación fuese tranquilo ni ordenado. Este artículo toma con marco de referencia una política de aproximación antropológica para analizar los elementos del plan que incrementarían espectacularmente las bodegas del valle de Temecula de unas 40 a alrededor de 100, con un importante impacto en la actividad turística enológica de la zona, para mostrar como diversos grupos de interés definieron su posición con relación al Plan y pusieron en práctica estrategias diseñadas para influir en el proceso, para demostrar el funcionamiento

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del proceso de planificación impulsado por el Estado y mostrar cómo los resultados de la política son informados por las negociaciones entre el estado, los capitalistas del sector vinícola, los residentes de la comunidad y otros diversos grupos de interés. Este artículo pide el desarrollo de modelos teóricos basados en la economía política cuya aplicabilidad vaya más allá de estudios de casos particulares.

Palabras claves: Turismo enológico; política pública; desarrollo; antropología; capitalistas del sector vinícola; el Estado; valle de Temecula; sur de California

Résumé

Le 11 mars 2014, le Conseil de Coordination du Comté de Riverside en Californie du Sud, Etats-Unis, a approuvé par vote le Plan Communautaire Vinicole du Pays, résultant d’un processus de politique et de planification qui a duré presque six ans dont le but était de préparer le terrain pour l’expansion du complexe touristique et des zones vinicoles de la Vallée de Temecula. Pour la majeure partie des partisans de ce plan de développement, cette initiative encadrée par l’État a été couronnée de succès, mais ceci ne signifie pas que le plan a été accepté par tous les membres de la communauté et ne veut pas dire que le processus d’approbation a abouti sans heurts. Cet article prend comme cadre de référence l’anthropologie de l’approche des politiques pour analyser les éléments du Plan qui augmenteraient l’activité du tourisme vinicole. L’article veut montrer comment divers groupes d’acteurs ont défini leur position vis-à-vis du Plan et ont mis en pratique des stratégies conçues pour influencer le processus, démontrer le fonctionnement du processus de planification engagé par l’État, et montrer comment des résultats des politiques sont générés par les négociations politiques entre l’État, les capitalistes vinicoles, les membres de la communauté, et divers autres groupes d’intérêt. Cet article propose le développement des modèles théoriques basés sur l’économie politique dont la portée d’applicabilité s’étend au-delà des études de cas particulières.

Mots-clés: Tourisme vinicole; politique publique; développement; anthropologie; capitalisme vinicole; l’État; la Vallée de Temecula; la Californie du Sud

摘 要

2014年3月11号，美国南加利福尼亚河畔县的监事会投票通过了《酒乡社区计划》，这宣告了一个将近六年的政策制订和规划过程完美收官，其将为特美古拉谷(Temecula Valley)的葡萄酒酿酒厂和葡萄酒旅游的共同发展铺平道路。对于该计划的主要倡导者来说，由州领导开展各项举措是一个胜利，但是这并不意味着社区的所有成员都接受该计划，也不意味着计划的过程是一帆风顺、秩序井然的。这篇文章，参考人类学政策方法的框架，分析该计划的组成部分，将其对特美古拉谷的酿酒厂从40家显著增加到100家并极大影响那里的葡萄酒旅游，从而说明各种利益群体是如何定义他们在该计划中的位置，是如何在实践中采取各种策略影响整个政策制订和规划过程，从而证明州领导的规划过程工作的状况，并说明政策结果如何通过州、葡萄酒资本家、社区居民和各种其他利益群体之间的政治协商而获得。这篇文章呼吁基于政治经济学建立适用性能超过特定的案例研究的理论模式。

关键词：葡萄酒旅游、公共政策、发展、人类学、葡萄酒资本主义、州政府、特美古拉谷、南加利福尼亚

1. Introduction

On 11 March 2014, the Board of Supervisors of Riverside County in southern California voted to approve the ambitious Wine Country Community Plan, culminating a
nearly six-year policy and planning process that would pave the way for the expansion of the Temecula Valley’s wineries and wine tourism complex – located adjacent to the city of Temecula, itself about 100 kilometers north of San Diego and 150 kilometers southeast of Los Angeles – while attempting to regulate development by segmenting the area into winery, equestrian, and residential districts. For this relatively new wine-growing region with ambitions to become ‘the next Napa Valley’, the phrase constantly on the promoters’ lips it seemed, the Plan promised to promote the growth of an already-burgeoning wine tourism complex. Yet throughout its history and implementation, the Plan generated controversy because it laid bare competing economic and political interests and differing social and ethical positions.

In this article,1 while taking a ‘political economy of tourism’ approach (Mosedale, 2011), we build upon recent insights into ‘wine in society and culture’ that emphasize the social relations of wine production and consumption (Black & Ulin, 2013) at a global level (Campbell & Guibert, 2007), the political economy of state regulations (Melonia & Swinnen, 2013) and the politics of value (Colman, 2008), and, on wine tourism more specifically, the global movement of people, capital, and images (Carlsen & Charters, 2006) and the critical role of public policy (e.g. Boatto, Galletto, Barisann, & Bianchin, 2013) – and the latter includes our own work (Dillon-Sumner, 2014; Simms, 2013; Yelvington, Simms, & Murray, 2012). Here, we are in dialog with work in the ‘anthropology of policy’ to consider and evaluate the Plan (e.g. Abram, 2003; Cochrane, 1980; Davis-Floyd, 2011; Geilhufe, 1979; Hinshaw, 1980; Okongwu & Mencher, 2000; Schwegler, 2008; Shore & Wright, 1996, 1997; Shore, Wright, & Però, 2011; Wedel, Shore, Feldman, & Lathrop, 2005; Wright & Shore, 1995). We trace competing economic and political interests and differing social and ethical positions entailed in the Plan by placing policy – its evolution and function – as our unit of analysis. Our anthropological approach to policy entails understanding symbolic and cultural politics as much as power politics, policy as a social process characterized by negotiations between elites and non-elites, as much as policy as promulgated decrees from above. At the same time, we utilize policy as a means to analyze the neoliberal state and its relationship to neoliberal capitalism – in this case a particular variety, ‘wine capitalism’. We show how through the policy-making process the state gives form to the way in which individuals, groups, and classes are incorporated into the body politic, and in so doing we ‘anthropologize’ the state (e.g. Das & Poole, 2004; Ferme, 2013; Heyman, 1999; Sharma & Gupta, 2006; cf. Bouchard, 2011) by using ethnographic methods to understand the particularities of specific contexts and exercises of state power – and simultaneously state-making – through the workings of state practices. We consider the legal and jurisdictional practices with which the state, through assertions of endorsed technical knowledge, realizes a particularly effective confluence of sovereign and disciplinary efficacy in a ‘power/knowledge’ mode. We also interrogate the state’s imaginary practices of territorializing, localizing, legitimizing, and symbolizing. In so doing, we enter into the seemingly perennial debate in both radical and bourgeois social science circles as to the relationship between the state and civil society and the mechanisms of symbiosis affecting if not ensuring state formation and capital accumulation.2

2. The advent of wine capitalism in the Temecula Valley

California wine and wine tourism are associated with northern California’s famed Napa and Sonoma valleys, located not far from San Francisco. The Temecula Valley is a
relative newcomer, with the advent of commercial wineries occurring in the process of regional growth. With the construction of the I-15 freeway in the early 1980s, the area boomed as housing developments sprung up for densely populated southern California’s commuters, for retirees, and for those wishing to escape the region’s urban and suburbanizing environments. The City of Temecula was officially incorporated in 1989. While in 1980, there were fewer than 1800 residents in Temecula, by 2000, there were 57,716. By 2010, the population was 100,097. Vincenzo and Audrey Cilurzo were pioneers in the area’s nascent wine industry, planting the first family-owned commercial vineyard in 1968 east of town (Yelvington interview with Vincenzo Cilurzo and Audrey Cilurzo, July 8, 2012, Murrieta, CA). Ontario’s Brookside Winery planted grapes in the area at around the same time. In 1969, entrepreneur Ely Callaway began farming grapes and opened the first winery in 1974, shortly followed by others including the Cilurzos (Barnett, Farnbach, & The Vail Ranch Restoration Association, 2006; Brigandi, 1998; Danson-Lucy, 2003; Farnbach, Cilurzo, & Cilurzo, 2009; Knight, 1999). The Temecula American Viticultural Area (AVA) was established in 1984. The AVA name was changed in 2004 to ‘Temecula Valley’. It comprises 33,000 acres (13,355 hectares), about 5000 acres (2023 hectares) of which encompass the current Wine Country. By the 1990s, though, a pest called the Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter brought Pierce’s Disease to the Temecula Valley’s vineyards, destroying a great number of the vines and putting the Wine Country’s future in doubt. It destroyed over half the acreage in vines. Acreage under cultivation went from 3500 to about 1200 (from 1416.4 to 485.6 hectares) before it could be brought under control. The area under wine grape cultivation is now at around 1600 acres (647.5 hectares; Figure 1).³

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Figure 1. Map of California showing the location of the Temecula Valley. Source: Map by Jason L. Simms.
There are now just over 40 wineries in Wine Country, which is situated in unincorporated Riverside County. Leaving the City of Temecula on Rancho California Road, one drives past upscale housing developments, Chardonnay Hills on the left and Vintage Hills on the right, and where suburbia ends, Wine Country begins. The wineries range in size from large industrial operations with vast vineyards that produce tens of thousands of cases of wine annually to smaller, boutique wineries with a handful of acres planted with vines that produce around 1000 cases. In addition, about 20 or so growers produce and sell grapes to wineries. The wineries’ business model is to charge for tasting room samples, sell bottles of wine on their premises, sign up wine club members who pre-pay to receive regular wine shipments, and, increasingly, hold special events such as corporate meetings, concerts, and weekend weddings. Many wineries have full-scale restaurants and hotels. The sprawling South Coast Winery Resort and Spa has everything in one: It produces 65,000 cases of wine a year and on its 39 acres (15.8 hectares) sit, in addition to the vineyards, a tasting room and elaborate gift shops, 76 villas, a 50-unit all-suite hotel, a spa, a pool, a restaurant, a banquet hall, meeting rooms, and outdoor event facilities. Reaching out to a mainly ‘middle-brow’ crowd, wineries hold concerts and movie nights (Figure 2).

Other attractions complement the wineries. Old Town Temecula, refurbished with 1890s-look storefronts, is a tourist draw (Barnett, Farnbach, & Harmon, for the Vail Ranch Restoration Association, 2012), as is the Pechanga Casino, one of California’s many Native American casinos. The Temecula Valley Visitors and Convention Bureau markets the area heavily with an advertising budget of about $1.4 million. The Pechanga casino, built in 2001, spends about $20 million a year in promoting itself and the region. As of 2012, Temecula Valley attracts 2.3 million visitors annually, a good many of them heading to Wine Country. Visitors spend about $625 million annually in the Temecula Valley, sustaining more than 6500 travel-related jobs.

Figure 2. An early wine bottle label, from Cilurzo Winery.
(Dean Runyan and Associates, 2013). Wine Country employs around 1000 workers and entertains an estimated 550,000 tourists visit every year. These tourists head to the wine tasting rooms which are open daily and to annual events such as the Temecula Valley Balloon and Wine Festival, established in 1983, the fall Harvest Celebration Barrel Tasting, and the spring World of Wine events (Figure 3).

The Temecula Valley Wine Country finds itself at an important crossroads as it struggles to balance the features that have contributed to its popularity – namely, wine, and the offer of an ‘authentic rural experience’ – while the desire to capitalize on these elements and expand is ubiquitous. While expansion may be inevitable, at least to some degree, there is less certainty on the direction of this change. Journalistic accounts recently have highlighted this tension (e.g. Comiskey, 2011; Downey, 2014a, 2014c; Klampe, 2011), asking whether Temecula must choose between being known as a serious wine destination on par with the world-famous wine regions of the Napa and Sonoma valleys, or whether it will be known as a party destination where dining, music, and entertainment are the primary draws. The Temecula Valley’s vintners have received praise for their wines, none more so than South Coast Winery which won the Golden Bear Award in 2008, 2009, and 2013. This is the award given by the California State Fair since the 1850s to the state’s best winery. Still, a 2011 article in the Los Angeles Times asked ‘Is Temecula Valley big enough for serious vintners and serious partyers?’ (Comiskey, 2011).

Trying to strike a balance is difficult. Winemakers want to craft a quality product, and the fruits of their labors are being realized, with many wineries besides South Coast producing wines that win multiple awards at local and state levels. On the other hand, tour buses and limousines transporting bachelorette party (‘hen party’) groups and other party goers to and fro whose main goal seemingly is to become inebriated in inexpensive tasting rooms rather than to make any serious purchases based on wine knowledge.
are so common that many wineries restrict the number that can visit, while some even ban them outright (Figure 4).

3. The Wine Country Community Plan
With Pierce’s Disease held in check if not eliminated, Temecula Valley winegrowers felt new threats in the mid-2000s. There was the threat of further housing incursions into Wine Country (e.g. Nealon, 2007). As one winery owner recalled, ‘There was a time when the number one crop was rooftops’ (Dillon-Sumner interview with Bill Wilson, July 2, 2013, Temecula, CA). And there was the threat of the Wine Country’s cultivated sense of local rurality succumbing to innovative commercial measures. A winemaker from outside the area wanted to be able to sell wine made in Paso Robles, 480 kilometers to the north. The Temecula Valley winemakers turned to the county government for help, and a new requirement meant that landowners had to plant 75% of their land in vines. Another 75% rule was instituted: Wineries were required to make at least 75% of their wine from grapes grown in Riverside County. The federal AVA rules call for 85% of the grapes used in the making of a wine to be grown within the boundaries of the AVA for the wine to be permitted to carry the AVA name as the appellation of origin.

A further threat came with the general downturn in the US economy. Riverside County has had unemployment in the double digits since early 2009. When the worst effects of the global economic recession were coming to bear locally – at least 20 winery projects had to be shelved during this time due to the crisis – Supervisor Jeff Stone stepped in. A pharmacist and owner of pharmacies in the area, he is a former Temecula city council member and mayor of Temecula. He became a Riverside County supervisor in 2004 for the county’s Third District, which includes the Temecula

Figure 4. Wine tourists in a Temecula Valley winery’s tasting room with built-in gift shop. Source: Photo by Kevin A. Yelvington.
Valley’s Wine Country. He ran as a conservative Republican Party candidate for state senate and seriously considered a run for the US Congress. While California maintains a reputation for progressive politics, much of southern California, with perhaps the exception of Los Angeles, is politically conservative and home to the state’s ‘Bible Belt’. Pro-business and philosophically opposed to ‘big government’, Stone was not reticent to marshal the state’s resources on behalf of wine capitalists in the Temecula Valley (Figure 5).

In 2008 Stone unveiled the framework for a comprehensive business-oriented development plan for the area that would open Wine Country up to further development and investment. The Wine Country Community Plan was born. In 2009, winegrowers pledged $100,000 to fund a feasibility study and the county said it would contribute $50,000 (Rowe, 2009). By the next year, it was reported that developer fees and contributions from the private sector netted $450,000 (Horsemans & Gang, 2010). County budget shortfalls threatened funding for the Plan (Downey, 2010a). But in 2010, the county diverted money from other sources to help pay for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and a traffic study (Downey, 2010b). Stone was eventually able to secure $500,000 from the budget to keep the Plan going (Horseman, 2010), thus representing a subsidy to existing businesses desiring to expand and to future investors. The concept was taking shape: An ambitious plan to take the over 5000 acre (2023.4 hectares) Citrus/Vineyard district created in 1994 and encompass the large homes within Wine Country, many of them on substantial parcels of land, and bring in the equestrian businesses and residences in the Valle de los Caballos south of Wine Country, to create nearly 20,000 acres (8094 hectares) of a Wine Country Policy Area broken down into winery, equestrian, and residential districts with specific land-use rules for each. To conform to the state’s strict California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, an EIR would be needed that would identify environmental impacts of the project and provide ways to eliminate or mitigate those impacts. In 2011, the Board of Supervisors

Figure 5. Riverside county supervisor Jeff Stone.
Source: Photo by Press-Enterprise. Used with permission.
awarded a $229,346 contract to RBF Consulting, a Temecula-based firm, to produce the report (Downey, 2011).

The Plan’s (see County of Riverside, n.d.) goals were to be met by regulating and encouraging development in order to preserve the agricultural land necessary for a vibrant wine tourism industry that would in turn serve as an engine of growth. That is, this was a state-led marketing effort to construct an appropriate authentic rural experience where wine tourism and wine capitalism could flourish. At the same time, the Plan would regulate existing equestrian commercial enterprises and integrate them into development plans, while holding housing tract development at bay. The Plan’s main feature was to accomplish these goals through legal amendments to a set of zoning and other ordinances (Figure 6).

In the winery district, the Plan set minimum acreage for wine production facilities, for wineries that would sell wine to the public in a tasting room, and wineries that would also have restaurants, hotels, and special event venues, as well as other enterprises such as resorts, spas, meeting facilities, golf courses, and other entertainment centers. Wineries were required to plant 75% of their land in vines. In wine production and sales, 75% of the grapes had to be grown in Riverside County. There were rules that required wineries to sell wines that had been produced on their premises. Residential development there was subject to minimum lot requirements and housing developments also had to plant vines. Further, the Plan regularized commercial activity in the equestrian district, and set limits on housing developments there. In the residential district, there were requirements for low density and for land to be devoted for planting vines or for equestrian areas. In its design guidelines component for the Wine Country, the Plan called for standard signs throughout with a common logo, and the standardization of walking trails, streetscapes, fences, and minimum distances between the road and buildings. Stone believed that the area could support 125 wineries: ‘We have the potential to be one third of the size of Napa and Sonoma. They are [ … ] 375 wineries. And we have in our plan as we draft boundaries, can expand it to 125’ (Yelvington interview with Hon. Jeff Stone, May 9, 2011, Temecula, CA) (Figure 7).

The long and detailed EIR was submitted in December 2011 (RBF Consulting, 2011), giving broad support to the Plan. The planning process went to the public, as is called for by pertinent laws. A website was set up (http://www.socalwinecountryplan.org). Supervisor Stone and the county planners held a number of informational meetings in the community. And eventually there were official meetings where public comment was sought. The public addressed meetings of the Board of Supervisors as well as the county Planning Commission. Revisions were made to the Plan, some slight and some significant. The process took nearly six years and generated over 7500 pages of documents. For nearly six years the Plan generated debate and competing visions of what the future of the Temecula Valley Wine Country should be and what development and progress really look like.

4. Pleasure and politics

By deploying the idea of various ‘stakeholders’ to the project, the state made a contribution to creating subjectivities – ‘winery’, ‘equestrian’, and ‘residents’. This accomplished several things. It arranged all those affected into these districts and created for them an identity to which those affected would have to now relate. While separate from and prior to the Plan, individuals were likely to see themselves as a ‘winemaker’ or an ‘equestrian’ or a ‘long-time resident’; the Plan ensured that individuals and groups
would address the Board of Supervisors and other officials and, importantly, be recognized by these officials, in these terms and only in these terms. It in effect excluded those who did not fall under this rubric – for example, independent environmental
planning and conservation experts who weighed in on the plan – by creating an absence, preventing them from being recognized as a ‘stakeholder’. This kind of position taking was seen in the many reactions to the Plan.

Because the thrust of the Plan was to benefit Wine Country, this had the potential to create oppositions. As part of the Plan, Supervisor Stone approached four of the largest winery owners and developers in Wine Country to form an Ad Hoc advisory committee in order to help draft specific recommendations. However, once residents found out
about the Plan, they insisted on their inclusion and were added to the committee which eventually consisted of 19 people from winery, equestrian, and residential affiliations, with Wilson Creek Winery owner Bill Wilson as chair. ‘So we basically had to petition to get residents on this committee. Stone’s assistants interviewed people and it was put up to a vote by the existing committee,’ explained Sandy Mullens, a resident who was eventually selected to the committee (Dillon-Sumner interview, July 1, 2013, Temecula, CA).

Winery owners and those connected to the wine business were not a homogeneous group. In the Temecula Valley there is a great diversity with regards to the size of wineries in terms of acreage planted in grapes, the amount of wine produced annually, and the number of tourists who visit every year. Some wineries are indeed family owned and operated. Others may be owned by several unrelated entrepreneurs or investment groups. Thus, while overall vintners were generally supportive of the Wine Country Community Plan, some wine capitalists more than others were going to be able to take more advantage of what the Plan had to offer. Indeed, small wineries, and those who wanted to open new ones, complained that their needs were not being met with the Plan (Horseman, 2011) (Figure 8).

Two days prior to what was supposed to be the final Board of Supervisors meeting before the Plan’s approval, in December 2013, winemaker Jim Hart, whose father Joe was one of the early pioneer winemakers, was quoted in the newspaper as worrying that the Plan would turn the region into a ‘wine-themed Disneyland’, claiming that the region is losing sight of making great wines. Stone disagreed, saying that ‘Wine making is the highlight. But, it’s also the anchor’, saying that the Wine Country would be a place to be entertained, fed, and a place to vacation and a place to get married: ‘The common denominator for all of these events is that you have to have quality wine. I don’t think we’re going to become a Disneyland. I think we’re going to become a Napa competitor’ (quoted in Downey, 2013 g, p. A5).

When Bill Wilson – the owner of the very large Wilson Creek Winery with its tasting room, events pavilion, and restaurant – rose to speak in favor of the Plan he

![Figure 8. Some large wineries are investing in hotels on their properties.](source: Photo by Kevin A. Yelvington.)
had helped craft in the Board of Supervisors December 2013 meeting, he said that he wore ‘many hats’, including those of a resident, a winery owner, and a member of the tourist board, and actually pulled various hats out of a bag he brought with him and put them on as he spoke. Then he pulled out Mickey Mouse ears and put them on, saying ‘We’ve been criticized, Mr. Stone, of being the Disneyland of Wine Country’, with a smile, but more seriously saying ‘We should embrace the “Disneyland of Wine Country”. We should take all the good that Disneyland has,’ going on to extol Disneyland’s organization, cleanliness, and management practices.

There was more than a touch of irony here. The most (in)famous of the ‘play wines’ disparagingly referred to in the Los Angeles Times article mentioned above is Wilson Creek’s almond champagne. ‘The most popular beverage in the Temecula Valley’, the article starts, ‘is something called “almond champagne”’, described as ‘a more or less naturally sparkling wine (the bubbles induced in pressurized tanks) with almond flavoring added’, said to smell ‘sweetly of cream soda and marzipan, the wine’s thick, cloying flavor wouldn’t seem out of place in an ice cream parlor if not for a modest alcohol kick and its bitter finish’. The almond champagne is not made at Wilson Creek, but in Lodi, 750 kilometers north. But ‘to most of the 500,000 or so annual winery visitors, none of this matters’ (Comiskey, 2011, p. 1E).

Indeed, while his winery has a large portfolio of wines produced on-site, Bill Wilson credited coming up with the plan to purchase and re-sell the almond champagne with a Wilson Creek label on it with saving the family business from the brink of bankruptcy (Williamson, 2013). It is not clear whether this was a jab at critics like the Harts who own a small, rustic winery, or others as represented by the Times article, or simply an assertion that the large landowners and the owners of large operations stood to gain

Figure 9. Wilson Creek Winery owner Bill Wilson dons Mickey Mouse ears at the Board of Supervisors meeting.
Source: Photo by Kurt Miller, Press-Enterprise. Used with permission.
the most by the specifics of the Plan that would allow large hotels and resorts. Perhaps it was both (Figure 9).

Wilson’s Ad Hoc committee colleague Jim Carter, the owner of South Coast, was approved to move forward with his decade-long plans to build Carter Estates catercorner from the sprawling South Coast Winery Resort and Spa (Downey, 2012c). The plans for Carter Estates were for 23 buildings on 111 acres (45 hectares), featuring a working winery, tasting room, 42 villas called casitas, a 180-suite hotel, a restaurant and bistro, and a 5000-seat amphitheater. When the county Planning Commission had denied his request to build his Carter Estates hotel over two stories tall (Downey, 2013f), Carter quietly complained at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors in December 2013. Supervisor Stone found a way. He recommended that Carter be allowed to build a three-storey hotel, as long as it was terraced and only two stories could be seen from the street. He warned: ‘I don’t want us to be the Holiday Inn Express Wine Country, where you go out to our Wine Country and all you see is grandiose, large buildings instead of the beautiful vines and the beautiful ambiance that we’re trying to create in our Wine Country.’

Both large and small operators were united in backing the Plan’s intent to preserve the rural character of Wine Country and reinforce the centrality of viticulture to the region’s identity and source of a culturally constructed authenticity. Wilson claimed that the Plan was necessary to protect current winery owners from ‘bottle shops’, those operations that would sell wine in Wine Country that was produced elsewhere. Others were not so sure that the Plan fostered vineyard development but, instead, claimed that the Plan did not accurately account for the amount of suitable land needed to grow the grapes to support the approximately 100 wineries the Plan proposed. Unless all of the additional wineries are very small (producing approximately 1000 cases annually) some farmers said there simply was not enough of the right kind of land within the Wine Country region. Ben Drake, a sixth-generation farmer from the Riverside-Corona area (Clarke, 2013; Yelvington interview with Ben Drake, July 25, 2013, Temecula, CA), began planting vines in 1972, owns a farm management firm that now farms many of the Temecula Valley vineyards, sits on the Rancho California Water District board, is a member of California’s State Board of Food and Agriculture, and led the fight in the Temecula Valley against Pierce’s Disease. He provided a critique of the Plan in a 2012 statement:

The 2020 Plan makes it seem as if it’ll triple or quadruple vineyard land and wineries – but that’s a total pipe dream because most of the 18,000 acres they’re talking about are either already developed to housing, equestrian and wineries, or just plain aren’t suitable for wine grape growing.

He continued:

I know this valley better than just about anyone and I can tell you that realistically there are only about 1500 acres left of plantable land in Temecula Valley. And that’s just not enough to sustain our existing wineries, much less to support the 105 wineries the County says are possible. (quoted in PRWEB, 2012)

Equestrians and equestrian sport have a very rich history in the Temecula Valley. Before the wine tourism complex was firmly established, equestrians bred, trained, and raced horses, competing in equestrian sports on an international level. A common quip by equestrian enthusiasts is that Temecula’s equestrian community has
more international recognition than any of its wineries. This activity mainly occurs in
the Valle de los Caballos, a 2800-acre (1133 hectare) valley to the east of the city of
Temecula that was incorporated into the Plan. There, farms and businesses are centered
around the Southern California Equestrian Center, widely known by its former name
Galway Downs, a 240-acre (97-hectare) facility with stables, tracks, and other ame-
nities built in 1968. Owners of the equestrian operations and homes in this area have
no doubt that they contribute to the rustic esthetic and the much-talked-about ‘rural life-
style’ enjoyed by residents and tourists alike.

Once those identifying as ‘the equestrian community’ learned about Supervisor
Stone’s Ad Hoc committee and the plan to re-zone their land for tourism and hospital-
ity-related uses, there was an immediate reaction. They rapidly organized and formed a
committee to provide recommendations to the county, but that committee was quickly
co-opted and incorporated into the existing Ad Hoc committee which at that point was
made up exclusively of vintners and developers. The equestrian community was able to
come together over their common interests, mainly the preservation of a unique Horse
Country within Wine Country. As Raymond Kincaid recalled, ‘The goal with the
equestrians was to support the equestrian businesses, and to articulate how those
businesses can support the equestrian lifestyle, the equestrian business and the
outdoor feeling and the tourist, the benefits that the tourists would bring to the area’
(Dillon-Sumner interview, June 29, 2013, Temecula, CA).

Since their land was implicated in the Wine Country Community Plan, the eques-
trians became deeply involved in debate. There were fears that the Plan could encour-
gerage wineries to expand into what is currently equestrian land, but more than that
there were fears about residential developments. Many equestrians voiced a strong
sentiment that without the rural character the Temecula Valley is known for their
‘equestrian way of life’ would be in jeopardy. They feared that without a comprehen-
sive land-use plan like the Wine Country Community Plan, development pressures
would push them out, leaving them unable to maintain an authentic equestrian
lifestyle.

While residents of the Wine Country were made to form an interest group by virtue
of their shared position, in practice they did not unite or unify around their common
interests. Residents form what is perhaps the most diverse group – except for their rela-
tive affluence as most live in large homes with dramatic views, many on parcels around
the same size as the smallest winery. Some residents are long-time Wine Country
dwellers, having moved there when it was still quite rural and sparsely populated.
Others are more recent migrants who do not remember a time before wineries and vine-
yards dominated the landscape. Similarly, there is a great diversity with regards to resi-
dents’ entanglement with winery operations. Some residents are purely homeowners
with no financial or social ties to the wine business; others are winery owners, loyal
patrons, wine club members, business partners, and close friends of winery owners.
As a resident representative on the Ad Hoc committee remarked, ‘That was part of
the problem with representing the residents. We had a large faction of the population
out here that are very pro-winery and that was typically related to them having some
type of financial tie to the wineries,’ saying that ‘Those of us who don’t have any finan-
cial ties and simply want to live here in a rural lifestyle, we were the ones who tended to
not be pro the Plan’ (Dillon-Sumner interview with Sandy Mullens, July 1, 2013,
Temecula, CA).

Despite the contributions that the Wine Country makes to the local economy, not
everyone is entirely supportive of its current state. In recent years, discontent among
residents in particular has led to some resistance efforts in various stages of organization that primarily seek to preserve the rural character of Wine Country. Chief complaints have included increased traffic, noise pollution from special events held at the wineries (especially those held at night), and a general degradation of the agricultural feel of the area. Many residents had a negative view of what the Plan would do. A 20-year resident of Wine Country said:

Homeowners next to very large, commercial venues is a disaster waiting to happen. It’s going to be very, very hard to keep the rural atmosphere when you’ve got so much commercialism. My fear is it’s going to get too big, too fast, and there’s going to be non-stop feuding [between winery owners and residents]. (quoted in Klampe, 2011, p. C5)

Many residents expressed sadness at their treatment throughout the policy-making process. While residents eventually became active members of the Ad Hoc committee, and while many attended the public meetings and spoke out against the Plan, they did so on an individual basis.

Residents had already argued that their quality of life was already being impacted by the number of wineries and tourists and did not see how the Plan would mitigate the negative impacts of development for their ‘rural way of life’, as they refer to it. One long-time resident noted that ‘Part of the charm of Wine Country is that it is more rural. If they get too much in here, I think it might kill it. Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe people would like a Wine Country in the style of Las Vegas, but I doubt it’ (quoted in Downey, 2010c). They worried that rowdy tourists and special events, which could be heard miles away from the noise source given the Valley’s acoustics, were infringing upon their right to the peaceful enjoyment of their land. When there would be a dispute between wineries wanting amplified music at special events in the evenings and residents wanting peace and quiet, they felt that the county officials would always come down in favor of the wineries at the expense of the residents. Noise was one of their chief concerns. One resident lamented:

My husband and I went and sat at the table on our patio one night and we could hear three different concerts. There was a wedding concert, there was a country concert, and there was a hard rock concert. And so we sat down to this very nice meal, the sun was setting and we just looked at each other. It was like, you know, my rights are being affected here. ‘Where is my right to the peaceful enjoyment of my property?’ And I said it and said it in those meetings and they don’t care. (Dillon-Sumner interview with Sandy Mullens, July 1, 2013, Temecula, CA)

Yet, after some wrangling and a lot of determined participation by residents in the Plan’s public meetings, residents were given a concession. The final amendments to the Plan banned outdoor amplified music unless a specific permit was granted by county officials. Residents interpreted these developments as symptoms of and precursors to the urbanization of their rural way of life. Most residents supported the idea of a land-use plan that would foster development and preserve their rural paradise. However, they often did not see the Wine Country Community Plan as adequately addressing their concerns and fears with regards to overdevelopment. Several residents told us that their way of life was being so degraded by commercial developments, noise from neighboring wineries, and increased traffic that they planned to sell their homes and move away from Wine Country. Many residents expressed sadness at their treatment throughout the policy-making process. One resident said ‘We didn’t move out here to stare at hotel roofs.’
Some more activist residents formed a group to express their concerns. Save Wine Country was an informal group made up of residents and homeowners living in Wine Country. While membership shifted, there were about a dozen members at any given time. Loosely organized, this group created a website and circulated petitions in opposition to what they described as ‘harmful development’ fostered by the Wine Country Community Plan. Their goals were to get the Riverside County Board of Supervisors to disallow major development projects in Wine Country. Save Wine Country was primarily concerned with noise and traffic and the negative impacts of urbanization on their lifestyle. This group saw the Wine Country Community Plan as a major threat to the peaceful enjoyment of their private property.

And winery interests were not always completely supportive of the residents’ concerns. One long-time winemaker and winery executive said that while he sympathized with the residents’ complaints, he said that it came down to the fact that ‘We were here first’. He continued: ‘So that’s kind of where I’m coming from. But we still should be, and I certainly want to be, a good neighbor and do everything I can not to disturb my neighbors. But part of that is appreciating the fact that this is a business and our neighbors are taking advantage of our beautiful view, of our vineyard, and all of that. It’s one of the reasons they moved out here’ (Simms interview with Allan Edwards, July 20, 2012, Temecula, CA; cf. Downey, 2013b).

In the middle of the planning process, further controversy ensued. Calvary Chapel Bible Fellowship had been granted a permit by the county to build a church right in the middle of Wine Country in 1999 and immediately thereafter the county denied the possibility for further houses of worship to be established in the area. The 3000-member church decided to expand, construct a private school and ancillary facilities on land it had recently acquired and converted from vineyards. Members of the church, with the aid of Temecula city mayor Mike Naggar, spoke fervently at county meetings and implored the commissioners to lift the ban on houses of worship and give the church clearance to expand and build a church. Church members sent petitions to the Board of Supervisors and showed up by the dozens at meetings.

The church’s expansion plans led to the formation of an opposing group in 2011 called Protect Wine Country. This group was highly organized and consisted of residents, business owners, winery owners, and wine makers with the stated goals to protect the Temecula Valley’s Wine Country from what they described as ‘incompatible uses’ and to ‘preserve the wine making and rural atmosphere of this important region’ (http://www.protectwinecountry.com). Their main concern was with not allowing overdevelopment, and the attempts of the only church in Wine Country, Calvary Chapel, to expand and build a school. Protect Wine Country filed a suit against the county and in 2012 the group won. A judge said that the county was too lenient in allowing exceptions to zoning laws that would allow the church to expand (Horsemann, 2012; cf. Downey, 2013e). Members of Protect Wine Country said that they were not opposed to religion or churches as such, but they were opposed to using agricultural land for what they saw as incompatible uses in Wine Country just as they were opposed to residential developments there. The Calvary Chapel church and its members made claims about their religious freedom being violated, but since they were already established that argument was not very convincing to the public. Many winery owners and farmers spoke at public hearings about their fear of schools being established directly adjacent to working vineyards. This was due to the fact that schools are sensitive sites and the use of pesticides and herbicides within the vicinity is strictly monitored by national and state laws. There were also legal and ethical
issues of having a school and a winery and alcohol-serving establishment so close to each other. This prompted the formation of Wine Country Freedom, the activist arm of Calvary Chapel Bible Fellowship. At first, the church sought to construct a private school, expand its facilities by building a 900-seat auditorium, and dissolve an ordinance that disallows churches in Wine Country. However, the church backed out of its plans to build a school (Downey, 2013c), but wanted to continue its plans to build a 936-seat auditorium and expand its facilities, buying 20 acres adjacent to the chapel (Downey, 2012b). Further legal challenges questioned whether zoning favorable to the church was lawful (e.g. see Downey, 2013d, 2013e). Wine Country Freedom continued to express its activities in terms of freedom of religion and cast its enemies as opponents of that freedom. After a contentious 2012 meeting in Temecula where supporters of the church packed the chambers, the lead county planner for the Wine Country Community Plan, Mitra Mehta-Cooper, abruptly resigned (Downey, 2012a). Yet Stone, perhaps anticipating political pressure as well as enacting a sincere belief in freedom of religion, sided with the church’s plans to expand and their right to do so was written into the Plan even as opponents threatened more lawsuits. At the Board of Supervisors meeting in December 2013, Stone justified his decision, saying that the church bought land on the open market that could have been bought by a winery, and that they would be required to plant 75% of it in vines as it was still within the winery district. He said in a serious tone:

A lot of people will say that this is for political purposes. I would say that it’s not for political purposes. I feel that it’s divine intervention that the church be allowed to expand in conformance with existing laws in the county.

With some final modifications made to the Plan, the Board of Supervisors met once again for the final vote of approval. At the final meeting, on 11 March 2014, at the end of a long process, and after urging his fellow supervisors that it was time for them to vote, Stone, full of confidence, said:

This is a very historical vote and I want to thank my colleagues for your support. This is going to help [us] ascend out of this economic crisis that we have found ourselves in. It’s going to create jobs and for the residents of southwest Riverside County, it’s going to preserve approximately 25,000 acres for agriculture, which I might remind the board is what our county was founded on in 1893. We were an agriculture county. And surrounding this 25,000 acres is habitat land. So for as far as the eye can see in the Temecula Wine Country, you’re going to see nothing but beautiful rolling hills of vines and open space and this historical vote is going to forever change the fabric of southwest Riverside County and the entire county as we look to be a destination not only nationally, but internationally, whether you’re going into Old Town Temecula or Old Town Murrieta, whether you’re going to the Diamond Valley Lake, whether you’re going to the beautiful golf courses and facilities in eastern Cochella Valley, the Mission Inn in Riverside. Riverside County in going to be a tremendous destination and the wine country is going to be a further compliment to that. So please vote.

The vote passed 5–0. The Plan was implemented amid great hope among many winery owners and developers (Downey, 2014d, 2014e). Will the Temecula Valley be the next Napa Valley? When the Plan passed, the state was in the middle of a severe drought. And the very day the Plan was passed, the Riverside County Agriculture Commissioner’s office asked for emergency Pierce’s Disease measures declared in 1999 to be renewed because of the continued presence of the threat. Had Wine Country
reached its ecological limits? Could economic growth continue? The Plan was enacted to direct development, but is Wine Country on the verge of outstripping its capacity?

5. Conclusion: the political economy of pleasure policies

As the state rushed to facilitate capital accumulation by means of the exploitation of labor in the production of commodities by wine capitalists in the Temecula Valley – it cannot be gainsaid that the Plan aimed at promoting interests of the wine capitalists by using its resources on their behalf when other interests could be promoted – by charting an ambitious course for the development of Wine Country, a few key assumptions remained largely unaddressed for those affected by the plan (for a longer discussion of these, see Dillon-Summer, 2014; Simms, 2013; Yelvington et al., 2012). From the perspective of a contribution to anthropological theory, in taking up a position within the political economy tradition in anthropology (e.g. Lem & Leach, 2002; Roseberry, 1988), we are implicitly critical of anthropological approaches to state policy that do not interrogate the nature and form of the state and its relation to capitalism as the source and raison d’être of said policy. This is certainly not to equate policies with the state. The point Gavin Smith makes about a comparative analysis of welfare regimes is apposite for our position regarding the anthropological study of policy. ‘Policies’, we might infer from Smith’s argument,

should not be taken as coeval [and, we might add, isomorphic] with the state itself. Nor should the state be understood simply in terms of its institutions and policies. The state can’t simply be reduced to a package of institutions, or of elite actors plus those institutions. There is a cultural component too. The state itself has to be understood in cultural terms. (Smith, 1999, p. 224)

One implication of this argument is that the policy/state relationship must not be approached in a reductionist way, where the behavior of ‘the state’ or of any particular state is seen as disclosed through the policies it produces. Rather, the approach we take here is to theorize what sort of entity ‘the state’, or any particular state, must be to produce the kinds of policies it produces. Another implication, regarding the ‘cultural’ study of the state, is to conceive of the constant interactions between the state and civil society – such as the ones we document here – as constitutive of both. Thus, the state is, whatever else it is, both a historical process and a social relationship.

Nearly 40 years ago the Marxist geographer David Harvey, in a now-classic article on the state in relation to capitalist development, posed ‘three unresolved questions’ about this relationship, ‘questions which’, he said, ‘will likely be resolved as much through concrete material investigations of history as through further theoretical analysis’. These were

‘To what degree do the various aspects and instrumentalities of State power yield to the State a relatively autonomous function in relationship to the path of capitalist development and to what degree can state functionaries act as purely neutral or even self-serving arbiters in class and intra-class conflict?’; ‘To what degree can the capitalist State vary its forms and structures to give the appearance of quite substantial differentiation amongst the capitalist nations while fulfilling the basic function of sustaining a capitalist society and ensuring the reproduction of that society?’; and ‘Which structures and functions within the State are “organic” to the capitalist mode of production and therefore basic to the survival of capitalist social formations and which are, in Gramsci’s phrase, purely conjunctural?’ (Harvey, 1976, pp. 88–89)
The present ethnographic investigation of policies suggests, at least, how these questions might be answered – and how they might come to be answered in other (kinds of) ethnographic-based investigations.

The structure of the Wine Country Community Plan entailed an activist role for an interventionist neoliberal state that appeared to consider and balance the interests of previously constituted ‘communities’ as well as to uphold the principles of laissez faire capitalism along with the hegemonic common sense notion that what is good for business is good for the rest of the society, in various ways: for example, in the pronouncements of politicians such as Supervisor Stone, the deployment of ostensibly politically disinterested technocratic knowledge through apparently transparent processes codified in and upheld by the law, in adherence to the legal frameworks of state structures at a higher level of remove, and through an appeal to the legitimacy of the office and personage of a democratically elected official, among other methods of securing relative autonomy for the state. However, this was challenged in the public meetings and in general discourse and communications about the Plan from all sides. Nevertheless, the material support for the gist of the Plan on the part of the major wine capitalists ensured that the shape of the Plan favored their interests.

If the Wine Country Community Plan as state policy does indeed help to ensure the reproduction of the (wine) capitalist class and (wine) capitalist class relations, it is certainly not the only or maybe even the best or most efficient way for this turn of events to occur. Indeed, the Plan as policy must be seen as an artifact of a relatively autonomous state, or, perhaps more properly, a branch of the state characterized by the configuration of a governmental apparatus that employs a number of strategies that tend to reproduce the state relation and the prevailing system of capitalist class relations and reproduce the social formation more generally. Because of the relatively autonomous nature of the state, and because of its amorphousness, oftentimes we find various branches working at cross purposes or even in contradiction with one another. Yet, it must be said that the Plan had a class (and ethnic and gendered) character that affirms a picture of the state as the condition of existence of capitalism if not the automatic guarantor of profits for the capitalist classes. But recognizing this should not lead to a functionalist definition of the state. An anti-/non-functionalist (and anti-/non-teleological) explanation is one that does not equate the phenomenon’s definition with its outcomes. The capitalist state may indeed function in this way, but its functioning is not the cause or the reason for its existence. That it does function in this way, when it does, is amenable to concrete analysis.

Relatedly, whereas the Plan is suited to wine capitalism and favors wine capitalism over other classes and class fractions, there was nothing inevitable about the Riverside County Board of Supervisors formulating and approving and implementing it. Thus, capitalism’s ‘needs’ – especially in such a rarified context of the ongoing development of wine capitalism and the wine tourism complex in the Temecula Valley and the competing interests therein – cannot necessarily be ‘read’ from the history of the Plan. Perhaps a more effective strategy for the promotion of wine capitalism and wine tourism would have been to prohibit further growth in Wine Country whereunder the forces of supply and demand would push land values up and allow wine capitalists to concentrate on wine quality rather than the quick fixes of special events, movie nights, concerts, and so forth. That this is all amenable to and calling for ethnographic investigation shows once again the value of demonstrating how larger, even universal, processes work themselves out within the particular.
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Notes

1. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Temecula Valley conducted by Yelvington during intermittent periods from August 2010 through March 2014 by Dillon-Sumner during January and from May to August 2013, and by Simms during intermittent periods from February 2012 to July 2013.

2. In one sense, this is a study of neoliberalism at work – our assumptions being that neoliberalism is a phase of capitalism (Duménil & Lévy, 2004, 2011) the prominent feature of which is the re-organization of class relationships through class (re-)formation. David Harvey’s oft-cited definition of neoliberalism as ‘a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’, where ‘The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices’ (Harvey, 2005, p. 2), may serve as a familiar reference point. If this defines a ‘theoretical’ neoliberalism, there is a ‘practical’ neoliberalism as well (which Harvey, 2005, describes thoroughly). Thus, ‘Unless we assume that practical neoliberalism corresponds with theory in every detail, it is extremely difficult to make generalisations about the consequences of neoliberal policies carried out at a global scale, but in extremely varied contexts’ (Hilgers, 2012, p. 87).

3. Recent monitoring activities, however, suggest that the glassy-winged sharpshooter may still be a threat to viticulture in the Temecula Valley (Downey, 2013a, 2014b).

4. The assumptions of the Plan regarding water availability, the availability of farm labor, most of which comes in the form of undocumented migrant workers from Mexico, and the sustainability of a development model with the potential to threaten the very environment that makes it attractive in the first place, are all contentious and central to our evaluation. These themes are taken up elsewhere (see Simms, 2013; Yelvington, et al., 2012).

5. ’Sandy Mullens’ is a pseudonym.

6. ‘Raymond Kincaid’ is a pseudonym.

7. ‘Allan Edwards’ is a pseudonym.

References


