

LIVING, NOT LEAVING THE VILLAGE: PLACE ATTACHMENT AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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***Abstract.** The Republic of Moldova has been drastically affected by depopulation, especially in rural areas. Nevertheless, in regions with a winegrowing tradition and emerging rural tourism, a large part of the active labour force is motivated to stay and not migrate. In order to gain insights into how some rural areas can withstand potentially detrimental population dynamics, this paper explores the interaction of rural residents with the local environment, and their acquirement of a sense of place and rootedness in a Moldovan winegrowing region. Drawing on ethnographic methods, this paper analyses data collected through participant observation and narrative interviews during one year of fieldwork carried out predominantly in one village in southeastern Moldova. The ethnographic perspective provides a holistic understanding of the existing narratives and individual circumstances that support staying in this rural area through the lens of place attachment. In particular, we analyze the interplay between local identities, place-making, and population dynamics. Results show that the presence of a long tradition in both industrial and artisanal wine production plays an important role in the interlocutors' attachment to this place. Nevertheless, other aspects such as owning or building a house, family cohesion, owning land, or appreciating the landscape and rural lifestyle are at least as important in their decision to stay. The presence of a recognized 'taste of place' expressed in wine and other local foods is an embodied, sensory experience of place that accompanies the cluster of socio-economic and ecological dimensions of place attachment.*

Keywords: Moldova, staying, place attachment, well-being, winemaking region

JEL: I31, Q18, Z13

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Introduction. Depopulation happens all over Europe but is most pronounced in southwest Europe, the Baltic Region, and Southeast Europe. Moldova has become one of Europe's countries with the highest outmigration rates with rural areas especially being affected. Around 2.6 million Moldovans live in the country² and it

² National Bureau of Statistics https://statistica.gov.md/en/demographic-situation-in-2021-9578_59440.html, Accessed 27.04.2023.

is estimated that over 1.2 million Moldovans live abroad.³ According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), economic factors primarily drive temporary labour migration, which is the predominant form of emigration from the country of Moldova. The main push factor is economic due to poverty, limited employment opportunities, and low wages, while the presence of better living standards abroad acts as a pull factor.⁴ In the context of hypermobility in the countryside (Bolokan, 2021), Moldovan villages suffer changes from transformations in landscape and land use patterns to profound changes in social and family relations. Nevertheless, in regions in Moldova where factories or tourism are present and where villagers own land, a larger part of the labour force is motivated to stay and not migrate. For example, villages with a wine-growing tradition and emerging rural tourism tend to be more attractive to the population choosing “immobility” over migration.

However, the reasons underlying the phenomenon of staying in rural areas are under-researched due to the apparent “normality” of staying. Against this background, we take an ethnographic perspective on the everyday lives and values of rural Moldovans by exploring a less-researched side of rural socio-economic relations: non-migrating or “place-attached” rural Moldovans. In particular, we ask the following questions: What are the interlinkages between place and well-being? Who are the “stayers” in the researched region and what are the perceptions and attitudes towards staying? How do they acquire a sense of place and rootedness in a Moldovan winegrowing region, in a hypermobile countryside? We focus on a winemaking village in a district in the southeast of Moldova strongly affected by out-migration,⁵ where we interviewed and observed villagers who decided to stay in the village and not migrate to the city or abroad. With this study, we are contributing to a deeper understanding of place attachment by underlining how well-being shapes the relationship to place in rural areas. The share of the rural population in the Republic of Moldova has been fluctuating, with 52.6% of the total population living in villages in 1990, 59.0% in 2005, and 57.8% in 2014 (Certan and Certan 2015). Rurality is thus prominent in the Moldovan society.

In our research, we draw upon the anthropology of well-being and link it to the interdisciplinary literature on place attachment. Specifically, we build on the work of Fischer (2014) and Kay, Shubin and Thelen (2012), whose insights provide a foundation for understanding the various factors that contribute to subjective and collective well-being. We also draw on (Rühmling, 2023), who discusses the phenomenon of staying in rural areas and highlights the significance of everyday life, as well as biography and life course as overarching concepts. People's daily routines provide information about their attitudes toward life, differing ideas about the good life, and class-specific resources. We also elaborate on the concept of place attachment by exploring the cultural and symbolic significance of local food and

³ International Organization for Migration, 2021, [IOM GMDAC Migration Data Survey Report for MOLDOVA](#), Accessed 3.05.2023.

⁴For more information, visit <https://moldova.iom.int/migration-profile-republic-moldova>.

⁵ The district is called Ștefan Vodă; 16% of its population emigrated between 2013 and 2021 (BNS, 2022).

wine (both household and commercial production), their economic value, and their relation to a specific place.

The following section provides an overview of the research site and the methods employed. Next, we detail our theoretical approach relying on anthropological and sociological research on place attachment and (im)mobility. We then bring the voices of interlocutors from Văleni, in which we explore their motivations to stay in the village, their visions of a good life and the relationship they have in and with the place they reside in. We will analyse these biographies relying on the above approaches to well-being and place attachment, and we develop four typologies of stayers in this region. These typologies will help us understand staying decisions in a post-Soviet rural region, shedding light on local meanings and concepts of attachment.

Literature Review: Well-being and Place Attachment. The concept of well-being enjoys a renewed interest in academic and policy fields, albeit it has remained insufficiently defined and difficult to measure (Ferraro & Barletti 2016). From an anthropological perspective, a critical view of how we understand well-being is necessary. The well-being index tools have been criticized for an approach universalizing Eurocentric practices and values and giving insufficient attention to “the constitutive interactions between wellbeing, place and culture” (Ferraro and Barletti 2016: 1). Ferraro and Barletti (2016: 1-2) argue that the field of well-being research commonly exhibits three notable trends: a strong dominance of psychology and economics approaches, an excessive focus on quantifying well-being, and a tendency to downplay the significance of location in well-being due to a preference for perspectives from Anglophone and high-income countries.

In this paper, we address this critique through a qualitative perspective on well-being from the post-Soviet space. We focus on different layers of meaning in the everyday life of rural Moldovans, capturing practices and values in a rural locality, and unearthing their link to place. Drawing on Fischer (2014) and Kay et al. (2012), we focus on, besides practices and materiality, “the interplay of multiple structures and intangible forces (including expectations, desires, emotions and structures of feeling) producing rural places” (Kay et al. 2012: 59), aiming to uncover the invisible spaces in people’s notions of attachment and well-being.

Fischer (2014) approaches well-being by focusing on the subjective dimensions of peoples’ desires and imaginations. An understanding of well-being includes several **core dimensions**: adequate material resources, which can vary based on individual circumstances, physical health, safety, and supportive family and social relations are all essential for well-being (Fischer, 2014). However, these core dimensions alone are not enough. Three additional factors play crucial roles in well-being. First are **aspiration and opportunity**, allowing individuals to have dreams, goals, and the means to pursue them. Secondly, notions of **dignity and fairness** ensure that individuals are treated with respect and equality. Finally, a **commitment to a larger purpose**, going beyond narrow self-interest, is necessary for a fulfilling and meaningful life (Fischer, 2014). By considering all these dimensions and linking them to a rural place in the Republic of Moldova, we provide insights into the

conceptualization of well-being and how the dimensions of well-being attach people to a place.

Place attachment is a cognitive-emotional bond between humans and places that has been studied across various disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, geography, and economics (Low & Altman, 1992). Place attachment as a theoretical construct touches on a wide range of dimensions, each referring to a sense of experiencing a place, named either “place identity” (Demossier, 2018), “sense of place” or “rootedness” (Williams & Miller, 2021: 13), and research on this topic has been highly interdisciplinary. Place attachment occurs at the individual level as well as at the collective level, and entails a positive relation to a place and its environment, through interactions “between emotions, knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and actions in relation to a place” (Bora & Voiculescu, 2021: 579)

We will pay special attention to the exploration of the cultural and symbolic significance of local food and wine (Csurgó & Megyesi, 2015), along with their economic significance (Cash, 2015; Ana, 2022) and their relation to a specific place. Hedegaard (2018: 68) argues that the relation between place and food (as cultural production) takes place through taste, narratives of tradition and sentiment of attachment, and that place can be understood in this context as “the point of departure for experience”.

Research Methodology. One of the authors spent nine months at the Văleni winery in the village of the same name and the rest of the time in the capital city of Chişinău, carrying out ethnographic fieldwork. Văleni is situated in a district affected by depopulation. Between 2013 and 2021, 16% of Ştefan Vodă's population emigrated, and in 2021 alone, it lost 1.7% of its residents, ranking second only to the Teleneşti district, which had a 2% population decline (BNS, 2022). Nevertheless, Văleni offers certain advantages to its inhabitants, as well as some strong identity markers, as the village is renowned for winemaking. The Văleni wine produced in the commercial winery is a market success, having been sold in the last two centuries across the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet Union. Since the privatization of the winery in 2003, the number of countries in Europe and beyond buying Văleni wine has been on a constant rise and some of the wines have often received silver and gold medals at international wine competitions. This translated into the fame of the region, as well as some secure number of workplaces in the vineyards and the winery. At the same time, virtually every household in the village owns a vineyard for subsistence wine production, and for the villagers, the wine they produce at home is of great cultural and symbolic importance. Food (and wine) self-provisioning involves producing one's own food by people who are not professional farmers, at a small-scale gardening level (Vavra et al., 2018: 433). Unlike the commercial Văleni wine produced in the winery which is meant mainly for export, the wine produced in the household is for local consumption and it is embedded in a web of meanings for the villagers that encompass craftsmanship, balance, industriousness and tradition (see Ana, 2022: 58-83).

The Văleni winery has 260 hectares of vineyards in use, produces an average of two million bottles of wine per year, and employs approximately 200 permanent

employees and another 100-150 seasonal workers during the harvest during the research period. The age of the employees ranged from 17 to 66 years and thus included adolescents and retired people. Women were in the majority in most departments of the winery.

The main research methods were participant observation in the factory and the vineyard and participation in the main operations during the year. In the village of Văleni, visits to female and male employees at home (20 households in total) were carried out, including participation in religious festivals. Participation in working the gardens and private vineyards was also included, in order to better understand household provisioning strategies and family labour distribution. This is thus partly an ethnographic study in a commercial winery and partly one in rural households. In addition to participant observation, 51 formal interviews were conducted (narrative-biographical and semi-structured); the interviewees were factory workers, specialized staff, elderly residents of Văleni village, and researchers in Chişinău. The history of the village and the winery, and the development of the Moldovan wine industry in the last century were researched in the state archives and the archives of the National Library in Chişinău. These different types of data have been triangulated and we applied a qualitative analysis for the development of the current paper.

Main Results: Staying in a hypermobile countryside. In Văleni and the surrounding area, leaving for work abroad long- or short-term is rather common. Often mobile workers have a family at home and they talk about the pain that comes with leaving the children in the care of others and seeing empty villages left behind. Nevertheless, jobs abroad bring substantially more income than it would be possible in Moldova. However, part of the villagers prefers to stay at home. Yet, emotional costs to “workers’ subalternity” (Kideckel, 2002) in the postsocialist decades are significant regardless of the option chosen – doing factory or agricultural work at home or going abroad. While factory or agricultural work at home provides, on average, a 200 to 250 Euro salary per month, going abroad involves typically higher incomes but leads at the same time to prolonged absence and transforms household reproduction work and relations in the family or one’s social group, under which often family cohesion suffers. We will examine the life stories of various central figures within the Văleni village, utilizing the previously mentioned frameworks for understanding well-being and the emotional connection to a place.

Conscious, “active” staying versus place dependence Anton⁶ (39 yrs.) was a security guard at the Văleni winery and in his spare time he was also producing wine and vegetables for household consumption. He was married and had three children. One day in the autumn of 2016, I visited Anton at his workplace for an interview; he was sitting in his narrow booth at the entrance of the Văleni chateau. Winery workers stopped at the gate and checked in with Anton and had to show their bags to be checked for stolen or dangerous items before and after a shift. We spent a few hours talking about life in the village. During these conversations, the topic of migration or of life in a foreign country where people speak a different language came up

⁶ The identity of all the interlocutors is protected, all names in the paper being pseudonyms. The name of the village and the winery have been anonymized as well.

repeatedly. In Anton's network, almost every household had someone working abroad. He took the time to imagine how his life would look like if he joined the mobility trend around him:

“Going somewhere far away, maybe I could...but for me, family comes first. And only afterwards come money, the car, and all the wealth. As I said, all this travelling doesn't end well or right. I wouldn't want to go, and the wife still works in a medical position, as an anaesthesiology assistant. She has a good job. She's not allowed to go anywhere else [for seasonal work abroad]. And why are we, husband and wife? To live together, that's a life too. You don't bring back those years and that wasted time [...] Money is money, but life, health, love - I don't trade them for money. We're not so... [poor]...but here you can't achieve much.[...] But one can't have everything - money, family, a woman, and everything. You lose something. But what I have, I don't want to lose. I'm happy with what I have. (Interview, Văleni, 9 November 2016)

Anton continued by saying that he had the possibility to find work in Russia or in countries in Western Europe and earn more, like some of his acquaintances, who could earn around 20,000 MDL per month (roughly 1,000 Euro). His wife and he earned together something between 5,000 and 6,000 MDL per month (250-300 Euro), and this amount of money covered the basic minimum for a family of five. Some needs were covered through subsistence agriculture, producing food and animal feed on the land plots around the household (ca. 1.5 hectares). However small this income might be, Anton found the active participation in his family life and the consistency in the things consumed in his household more valuable. Looking at the neighbours who “brought 20,000 MDL home”, he noticed a vicious cycle of consumption that led to even more time spent “on the road and abroad” and even more money spent on consuming and repairing new things, such as an expensive car and garage, and “then something around the house needs reparation”. His view of living in the village and working sustainably with the available resources was more important.

His dim view of seasonal migration is in line with Bolokan's findings (2022: 14), which show that agricultural care chains within a labour mobility regime (where rural Moldovans seasonally migrate to perform low-paid jobs in Western European countries) have a negative impact on the well-being of some individuals and households left behind. Although the decision to stay was a struggle with poverty for many of our interviewees, Anton was at peace with his decision to stay. He was nonetheless concerned that he would no longer be able to support his artistically gifted sons and would have to rely on small government grants and money earned from dance competitions to continue their dance education.

Alla (28 yrs.), a manual worker in the Văleni vineyards, was married, had two children and found it central to be present at home with her small children as much as possible, so as “not to spoil their psychic state”. Her husband, who went several times abroad for seasonal work in Germany and the Netherlands, found it difficult to be away from the children for longer than his usual three-month seasonal work stays. In 2017 he came back from working in a Dutch greenhouse after only a few weeks,

even though he had planned to stay there longer. He found the work too hard and he was also homesick. His young daughter told him she missed him and repeatedly begged him not to leave again. Alla and he even considered relocating all four of them to another country as the only acceptable option, if they couldn't manage to earn enough money to afford anything other than the bare necessities for living.⁷ Their two children, who were four and six years old respectively, showed visible talent in music and sports, but there were no possibilities in the village to support their talents, as the kindergarten and the school did not provide any specialized training for children; “unfortunately for them, there’s nothing here”, said a downcast Alla at the end of an interview.

The committed stayers show a strong connection with their locale and environment, often feeling a strong sense of belonging, like Anton. In contrast, individuals like Alla, exhibit a deep attachment to their place but concurrently grapple with a lower level of well-being. The family depends on the financial support of Alla's husband to maintain the household. She also needs to stay in the village to take care of the children, but at the same time sees limited prospects for her children's future in the village.

Critical well-being and reluctance. There were a few of us in Teodor’s garden on a warm summer evening in 2017. The interview took off properly after we had some of Teodor's homemade wine from the vineyard where we were standing. Teodor was a retired agricultural machinery park supervisor but he was still active as a local entrepreneur. He owned agricultural machinery and leased it. He also owned three small grocery stores in the villages nearby, and part of his income came from selling homemade wine. He belonged to the class of entrepreneurs who could benefit from the advantages that market liberalization provided to a part of the population. This made it even more comprehensible to understand his decision not to emigrate, although he, as he put it, could go and live with his children in Germany. In any case, the decision to stay was mixed with frustration:

“Moldova does not give even the minimum. Taxes increase every year quarter. And the migration of people: for 6-7 years, there are waiting lines at all embassies. 70% of people with passports find permanent jobs elsewhere. For Moldova, it's not good. I have an age and I can't get used to being in Europe. I have conditions there [near Berlin], I wouldn't go to work physically: thanks to my children I can be a kind of boyar there because of their situation [because I wouldn't need to work]. But for others, it's not like that. And they have to end their lives living on this land. But the state doesn't forgive you. The state wants from you [...] at every step 3 roubles, 4, 5. You have [the roubles], you have benefits; you don't have them, leave. In all of Europe, the state is [present] in the social sphere, in this country, it is zero. If you're sick, you need to beg.”

Despite the general dissatisfaction with the Moldovan state, Teodor was very well integrated in the village, being one of the winemakers to which many other interlocutors from the village referred to with admiration. Indeed, Teodor shared

⁷ Alla was an agricultural worker in the winery’s vineyards, earning 150-180 Euros per month and her husband had a job in the district administration, where he earned around 150 Euros per month.

with me that the strove to make the best wine possible also “to make clean wine so that people know that this is a wine from that *gospodar* (householder).” He learned how to care for the grapevines from his parents. He named his product “bio wine”, requiring bi-weekly spraying with copper sulfate, limestone water and sulphur, against diseases such as oidium and mildew; these were the only inputs he was applying on the grapevines. He expressed that people hailing from rural backgrounds, akin to him, have the opportunity to incorporate a significant proportion of locally sourced clean production into their consumption habits. He enumerated the possibility to raise animals, make bread from homemade ingredients and grow vegetables on the household plots as important elements in the village life contributing to the overall well-being. Wine came to the fore:

“A large percentage respects the vine and keeps it alive out of love, from their sources [...] a large percentage of people prefer wine culture, they like it, they value it, they fight for different grapes, they buy different varieties. Practically not only in this village, it's like a virus in the whole district. But in our village, on the slopes, there are more [winemakers], where the vines grow on the banks of the Dniester. Not everyone [in Moldova] can have it like that. In the Moldovan steppe, they would like it too, but they don't have it. But on the slope here it gets the highest percentage of sun, of strength, so the wine is the tastiest.” (Interview, 13 June 2017)

The possibility of growing food perceived as healthier in a place where certain products, such as red wine, have favourable conditions, contributed to the positive aspects of daily life. But apart from this, the presence and access to markets to sell the surplus of household products used to be an important provisioning strategy in the village. For decades, Odesa was the main market for the goods produced in the household for the villagers of Văleni; small-scale trade in fruits, vegetables, dairy products, alcohol, or meat flourished in the last Soviet decades and steadily declined in the post-Soviet years until it came to a complete halt in February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Teodor was an affluent village but expressing disappointment in the socio-political context of the country, while others in the region lacked both the trust in the state and good enough income to be determined stayers. The case of Marian was illuminating in this direction, being reluctant stayer in the village. He was a former immigrant labourer in Russia, where he spent four years working in Moscow. In the last years, he took on various jobs in Stefan Vodă, the regional centre, in his home village of Olănești (next to Văleni). He had been working at the Văleni winery for two months at that time. He was initially hired as a seasonal worker, but on the second day the managers recognized his speed and tirelessly willingness to work and offered him a permanent position in the processing department.

During our conversations he mentioned that he used to vote for pro-Russian candidates in the past, but in the autumn of 2016, he hoped for Maia Sandu's victory.⁸ During his time in Moscow, he realized that Russia was not as ideal as he once thought, despite some nostalgia for the nights he spent in Moscow's largest casino. He was deeply disheartened by the widespread corruption in Moldova and remained

⁸ Our first meeting occurred in the week before the 2016 final presidential election round.

determined to fulfil his dream of experiencing life in Europe. He desired to explore Europe and was willing to give the pro-European candidates a chance. While he wasn't openly expressing dissatisfaction with his job, he harboured the aspiration to acquire Romanian citizenship in the near future. This would enable him to pursue employment in the UK, where some of his friends were already working. However, until this plan came to fruition, he remained committed to his job at the winery, driven by the responsibility of providing for his family—a wife and a one-and-a-half-year-old son. He always tried to maintain a positive and cheerful demeanour, but at the same time showed frequent exhaustion as a result of his workload. One day, as we were engaged in the process of transferring aged wine from the barrels to the blending cisterns, we found ourselves in a position to engage in deeper conversations. He started reflecting on how society was organized: ‘It’s some sort of a maze: I give the money, I need food, I work here to give the money for someone else’s work [who works in my garden so I can have enough food]. The idea would be just to work your land and be happy with what you get, because “through the sweat of your face you shall earn your daily bread”, as the holy writings say.’ Paying someone else for one’s food – be it helping hands or supermarkets – would perhaps not come across as so absurd if the wage sufficed, but for many manual workers it is impossible to save something from their salary. Previous research shows that household subsistence work in this winemaking community is partly a choice, and partly a necessity to make ends meet (Ana,2022).

Based on our analysis we developed a typology of stayers. Figure 1 captures the positions of the different types in relation to the researched theoretical constructs – well-being and place attachment. The active stayer has a positive relationship to the place, to the environment and also a form of identification with the place – it can also be a form of nationalism. The dependent stayer ideal type has a high degree of attachment to place, like Alla, but at the same time, she experiences a low level of well-being, relying on remittances from her husband to maintain the household and struggles to see bright possibilities for the future of her children in the village. The critical stayer type is characterized by a high level of well-being, usually more affluent villagers, who also appreciate the affordances of the place and are well embedded in their local community, but who are strongly disappointed with the social and political developments of the place they are in. The reluctant stayer, like Marian, experiences low levels of both well-being and attachment to the place where they live. They tend to stay longer in their place of residence, ruminating for years in a row to emigrate, but not doing it.

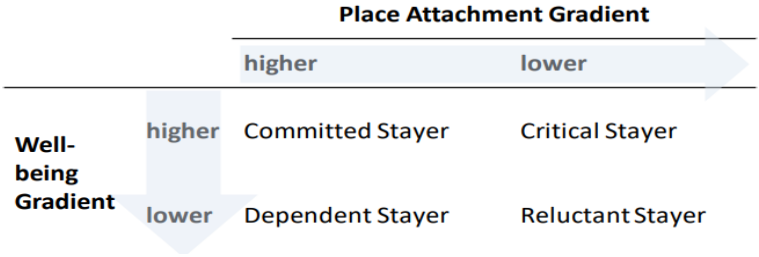


Fig. 1. Preliminary Typologies of Stayers on a Place Attachment - Well-being Gradient (Source: adapted from Arapi-Gjini and Jantsch 2023)

Through focused coding of our interview and observation data, and relying on Fischer’s (2014) dimensions of well-being, we elaborated Table 1, where we assembled the main aspects of well-being expressed by our interlocutors in Văleni.

Place attachment is a complex interplay of factors that can significantly shape the well-being of the Văleni community. On the positive side, having employment in the region not only bolsters financial security but also cultivates a sense of belonging and purpose. Additionally, the ownership or construction of homes and land ownership can imbue residents with a profound sense of rootedness and pride in their locale. The cohesive fabric of families, marked by stable marriages and the nurturing of children, contributes to emotional well-being, fostering a harmonious environment within the community. Furthermore, strong social networks in the village create a supportive framework, underpinning social well-being. These positive aspects intertwine to create a sense of place attachment that can elevate the quality of life for individuals and their neighbours.

Conversely, attachment can be marred by challenges that diminish overall well-being. Economic woes like the lack of job opportunities, factory closures, and inconsistent market access for production stifle economic prosperity and can create a climate of uncertainty. The strain of family care dependency can erode family cohesion, or create a sense of dependence. The absence of leisure activities and the scourge of alcoholism can tarnish the sense of community, causing isolation. When these negative facets of place attachment take hold, they can undermine the sense of identity and well-being that individuals and communities derive from their place of residence.

Table 1. Well-being through place (adapted from Fischer 2014)

		Increasing well-being through place	Decreasing well-being through place
Core needs	Economic needs	Employment: being employed Assets (property): Owning/building a house, land ownership	Income: Low wages Debt: Household indebtedness
	Social needs	Family cohesion: keeping the family together; being around when children grow up; stable marriage Community: Social network in the village	Responsibilities: family member care dependency Social activities: scarcity of leisure facilities
	Health related needs	Nutrition: consumption of organic or unprocessed food	Addiction: alcoholism
Aspirations & Opportunities	Political environment		Corruption: distrust in government
	Economic environment	Job market: Access to the local job market	Job scarcity: companies/factories closing Market access: inconsistent for the produce
	Natural environment	Landscape preference: being in a rural setting	
	Functional environment		Infrastructure: missing village infrastructure, lack of hospitals
	Social environment	Craftmanship as part of the society: socially embedded and acknowledged	Population development: emptying country side Trust: social distrust
	Cultural environment	'Taste of Place': food and wine production Tradition and heritage: dances, food and wine production	
Dignity & Fairness	Identity	Work as identity: Control over the food production process, producing "clean" (organic) food	Lack of social justice: perceived income inequality, lack of state support/welfare ('the state is not present in the social sphere')
Commitment to a greater purpose		Village rituals: ex. honouring the dead at their graves in the local cemetery Common history: war or social struggle	War in Ukraine

Discussion and Conclusion. This research draws from the anthropology of well-being and the interdisciplinary literature on place attachment, emphasizing the role of daily routines, differing notions of the good life, and class-specific resources in shaping individuals' attitudes. It also explored the cultural and economic significance of local food and wine in relation to a specific place. Ultimately, this study contributed to a deeper understanding of place attachment and its link to well-being in rural Moldova, where rurality plays a prominent role in society. Based on interview and observation data analysis, we developed four typologies of stayers, in relation to well-being and attachment to place: active, dependent, critical and reluctant. The role of place figures quite prominently in the first three types of stayers, with aspects related to landscape, food and wine production, and physical location of the household occurring often in our interviews.

The limitation of our study in the present is due to the little amount of data collected after the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Firstly, renewed attachments to place occurred during pandemic-related lockdowns. Secondly, the rural landscape and staying decisions have changed since the Republic of Moldova has been one of the main transit and reception countries for Ukrainian refugees; over 700.000 transited the country between February 2022 and April 2023, and a bit over 100.000 Ukrainian refugees were living in Moldova in April 2023.⁹ We will carry out further fieldwork in the second half of October 2023, seeking to understand if and how the relationship of the villages to place have changed over the last five years.

This study further serves as the basis for a quantitative household survey in four countries in Southeast Europe. With this survey, we want to capture the role of place attachment in the (im)mobility decisions of the rural population and how well-being is related to it.

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⁹ UNHR <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10784> Accessed 3.05.2023.

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