Empirical Research

David Joins Goliath. The Role of the Institutional Infrastructure in Centre–Periphery Dynamics Between Subfields

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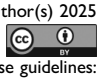

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Abstract

This study explores how Australian winemaking, once considered peripheral, came to influence the entire field and reshape its shared meanings and practices. Although subfields are often assumed to remain at the margins of their fields, our historical analysis shows how Australia drew on elements of its institutional infrastructure – such as professional networks, wine competitions and critics – to reconfigure the centre-periphery order of the field. We identify three mechanisms driving this process: camouflaged deviance, encroachment and integration. These findings highlight the role of subfield dynamics in driving field evolution, the role of the institutional infrastructure in that process and how we understand subfields.

Keywords

subfield, field evolution, institutional infrastructure, wine

Institutional infrastructure is the basic requirement for organisational fields to exist. It represents "the mechanisms of social coordination by which embedded actors interact with one another in predictable ways" (Zietsma et al., 2017, p. 392), which "provides structure and stability to a field" (Mityushina & Hehenberger, 2025, p. 1). It includes cultural, operational and relational elements (Hinings et al., 2017; Logue et al., 2024). Cultural elements concern shared meanings, manifest in practices, labels and categories. Operational elements concern contracts and standard operating procedures, while relational elements include both direct interrelations among subfield members (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and the organisations that facilitate coordination, such as collective interest organisations, regulators, status differentiators and field-configuring events (Anand & Watson, 2004; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). These institutional infrastructure elements are unevenly distributed and unequally available, positioning field members along a centre-periphery dimension.

Institutional infrastructure also shapes field-subfield relationships (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021). Subfields emerge to meet local needs or niche markets, putting them in peripheral positions, either opposing the field or confined by a geographic area (Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Negro et al., 2015; Quirke, 2013; Weber et al., 2008). However, subfields are not necessarily oppositional; higher education, energy and public health serve local communities, operate under regional/national jurisdictions, yet still share core meaning systems and practices.

Subfields may influence the field by introducing alternative practices and meanings, e.g., grass-fed beef, organic horticulture, Italian corporate law, or alternative schools (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Quirke, 2013; Weber et al., 2008). Yet field evolution research has largely focused on isolated subfields, overlooking subfield interactions. Addressing this lacuna is crucial for three reasons: First, many organisational fields contain multiple subfields, increasing the likelihood of interrelations. Second, while some institutional infrastructure elements may keep subfields in peripheral positions, other elements, like global rankings (Voronov et al., 2013), may connect them. The common institutional infrastructure is what defines subfields' centrality (or marginality). Third, we lack understanding of how a peripheral subfield can influence a central subfield by leveraging its institutional infrastructure, thereby transforming the entire field – as shown in the case of Australian winemaking. This gap suggests the need to explore the role of the institutional infrastructure in interactions between subfields. Such dynamics tie subfield repositioning to their engagement with the institutional infrastructure, making this a promising lens for studying field evolution (Micelotta et al., 2017; Zietsma et al., 2017). Thus, we ask: *How do institutional infrastructure dynamics shape the center-periphery position of subfields?*

To explore this question, we studied the peripheral Australian winemaking subfield and its relation to the central French subfield, both members of the global winemaking

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field. Using archival data and interviews from 1950 – when Australian practices began diverging from French traditions – to 2013, when the centre–periphery relation between the two subfields had notably shifted, we identified three subfield-repositioning mechanisms. First, camouflaged deviation: establishing indirect relational channels between subfields while reinforcing cultural subfield boundaries by partially concealing new meanings. Second, encroachment: establishing direct relational channels between peripheral and central subfields, and transcending cultural boundaries through openly communicating new meanings. Third, integration: intensified exchange between subfields, weakening their relational boundaries and rendering cultural boundaries permeable.

These findings advance the understanding of how institutional infrastructure shapes centre–periphery dynamics in fields (Hinings et al., 2017; Logue & Grimes, 2022; Raynard et al., 2021). By focusing on dynamics between subfields rather than their isolation, we contribute to the literature on field evolution (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Micelotta et al., 2017; Zietsma et al., 2017). Our findings also refine the conceptualisation of subfields and shed light on the surprisingly nonconfrontational nature of the shift from the periphery towards the centre.

Organisational Fields, Subfields and Their Institutional Infrastructure

The concept of the organisational field represents a cornerstone of organisational scholarship (Scott, 2014; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). It builds on relational structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Windeler & Sydow, 2001), which comprise communities "of organizations that partake of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field" (Scott, 1994, p. 207). While this definition applies to various types of fields, e.g., professional fields or social movement fields, we focus on industry exchange fields as conceptualised by Zietsma et al. (2017). These fields coordinate exchange among members, who collaborate on shared interests through lobbying or industry promotion, or developing common technologies, standards, or labour relations. "Members often compete […] over market share and legitimacy, and look to one another for best practices, technologies, industry recipes" (2017, p. 410).

To enable coordination and collaboration, a set of institutional infrastructure elements is essential. These include regulatory bodies, collective interest organisations, field-configuring events, status differentiators, critics, organisational templates, categories, labels, shared meanings and practices (Hinings et al., 2017). Together, these elements interlock to stabilise the field, allowing it to operate, evolve and persist (Logue et al., 2024; Raynard et al., 2021). Field members are thus bound by a shared sense of belonging, continuously enacted in practices, rituals and events (Zilber, 2018).

Relational structures are often underpinned by geographical proximity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). Therefore, different regions may produce different institutional arrangements (Lounsbury, 2007; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007). Local fields can be studied as distinct organisational fields, or in relation to other fields of the same type. Fields such as cricket, high tech, or winemaking can all be studied either with a regional focus, e.g., English Cricket, Israeli high tech, or French wine (Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Negro et al., 2015; Wright & Zammuto, 2013; Zilber, 2011), or with a wider scope including other regions, practices and meaning systems (Negro et al., 2011; Voronov et al., 2013). Given the scholarly interest in variance, such local fields are often theorised as subfields which develop in opposition to the field.

Although subfields lack a uniform conceptual definition, they are commonly seen as compartmentalised areas within larger fields, each with its own institutional infrastructure and organisational communities that form around specific issues, resources, or technologies (Hinings et al., 2017; Zietsma et al., 2017). Faulconbridge and Muzio (2021) defined subfields more precisely as distinct institutional realms that emerge from a process of partitioning from a larger field. Subfields thereby borrow elements of the institutional infrastructure from the field during their emergence but eventually develop their own distinct institutional infrastructure (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021), e.g., professional associations, infomediaries, subfield-configuring events, status differentiators, labels, categories, or subfield-internal rankings. They may form either around market niches, such as grass-fed beef or horticulture (Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Weber et al., 2008), or based on geographical remoteness, which enables deviation from dominant field norms. Quirke (2013), for instance, showed how a remote area of the private school field in Toronto developed independent practices and meanings. Similarly, Negro et al. (2015) described how biodynamic winemaking flourished in Alsace, and Massa et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of provenance for winemaking in Ontario. Scottish knitwear (Porac et al., 1989), corporate law in Milan (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2016), mutual funds in Boston and New York (Lounsbury, 2007), community banking (Lounsbury, 2007; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007) and French business schools (Raynard et al., 2021) have provided similar examples. Thus, subfields are often underpinned by their members' geographical proximity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014). Table 1 provides an overview of institutional infrastructure elements and their relevance for this study.

Both geographical seclusion and occupation of market niches shield subfields from conforming to institutional expectations (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2016, 2021; Lepoutre & Valente, 2012). When emerging in opposition to dominant fields (Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Quirke, 2013; Weber et al., 2008), subfields develop sharply defined boundaries. Like fields, they form cultural boundaries that

Table 1. Overview of Institutional Infrastructure Elements.

Type of institutional infrastructure	Definition	Example reference	Empirical relevance in this study
Collective interest organisations	Groups that represent shared interests within the field	Greenwood et al. (2002)	Winemakers and Vine Growers Associations
Regulators	Formal bodies that oversee and guide practices in the field	Raaijmakers et al. (2015)	National wine regulation
Field-configuring events & tournament rituals	Conferences and events that shape and redefine the field's structure and practices	Anand and Watson (2004)	Wine shows
Status differentiators	Actors who establish legitimacy, hierarchy, and prestige, often in the form of rankings or evaluations	Khaire and Wadhwani (2010)	Wine critics
Organisational templates and models	Organisational structures and practices that are widely adopted within the field	Greenwood et al. (1990)	Oenology consultants (flying winemakers)
Categories or labels	Classifications, certifications, and terminologies that define and distinguish organisations and their products	Delmestri and Greenwood (2016)	Wine categories and exemplars
Practices	Routinised sets of activities that are enacted within a field and which shape the core understandings of what is at stake in the field	Smets et al. (2012)	Scientific vs. terroir-based practices
Relational channels	Networks and relationships among actors within a field which enable actors to communicate, coordinate, and exercise influence	Faulconbridge and Muzio (2021)	Relational channels across the field and between subfields
Meanings systems	Form the basis of shared understandings, collective identities, categories, and labels	Zilber (2002)	Democratisation of wine consumption

delineate the realm of shared meanings and practices, and structural-relational boundaries distinguishing members from outsiders. As fields evolve, these boundaries shift (Grodal, 2018). A field's central actors generally strengthen cultural boundaries to maintain their authority and exclude or even delegitimise peripheral actors (Riaz et al., 2016), whereas peripheral actors may form alliances to redraw the field's cultural boundaries (Helfen, 2015).

While some subfields remain secluded and thus unlikely to interact with each other, other subfields compete in the same market. In such cases, relational positioning becomes central to inter-subfield dynamics, as they compete for market shares, resources, moral authority and prestige (Furnari, 2016; Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Weber et al., 2008). These interrelations can be understood along a centre–periphery dimension, similar to actor positions in a field. In the next section, we turn to scholarship on how institutional infrastructure elements influence actor centrality in fields.

The Centre–Periphery Order and the Role of the Institutional Infrastructure

The positioning of field members shapes how they perceive and respond to institutional expectations. For instance, Durand and Kremp (2016) showed that symphony orchestras at the centre and periphery are more likely to make unconventional programme choices than those in the middle. Jonsson and Buhr (2011) found that centrally positioned banks suffer less from negative media coverage. Centrality also affects actors' ability to influence or dominate a (sub)field, its practices and meanings (Riaz et al., 2016; Wild et al., 2020). These positions hold different potentials for effectuating change. While centrality allows actors to dictate practices (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), peripheral positions grant more immunity from institutional pressures and are therefore more likely to induce innovative practices.

Peripheral actors are often outsiders or activists (Van Wijk et al., 2013; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), lacking the same professional background as the central actors (Cattani et al., 2017; Leblebici et al., 1991; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Their outsider status gives them more freedom to introduce novel ideas. Conversely, interactions among actors with similar professional backgrounds typically show central actors leveraging their resources to shape the institutional infrastructure (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Helms et al., 2012). For instance, the "big five" in the field of accounting leveraged their centrality to transform the business model and consequently the entire field via the professional association (Greenwood et al., 2002; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). Similarly, international associations coordinate the diffusion of ISO standards from the centre to the periphery (Helms et al., 2012). These relational channels facilitate the diffusion of meanings and practices across fields or between a field and its subfields (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Smets et al., 2012).

Other elements of institutional infrastructure shaping fields include critics, infomediaries and ranking bodies. These help establish new categories of art or alcoholic beverages (Croidieu et al., 2016; Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016;

Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010). Similarly, ranking bodies can transform entire fields (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). While critics balance continuity and disruption (Bowers & Prato, 2019), they may become deeply invested in new ideas (Massa et al., 2017), therefore driving transformation rather than acting as "neutral" arbiters. While some studies focus on their relevance for market categories, other studies point to their relevance for the formation of subfields (see e.g., Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010; Massa et al., 2017).

The interplay of category and subfield emergence is particularly relevant to market-driven fields like horticulture, cuisine, or the meat industry (Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Rao et al., 2003; Svejenova et al., 2007; Weber et al., 2008). Since categories create order, reduce complexity and give meaning (Hinings et al., 2017), they become associated with standards and norms for the evaluation of actors and practices, which either reinforce or undermine their legitimacy and status (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Zuckerman, 1999). The interplay of critics, categories and field-configuring events creates a lock-in effect. During field-configuring events, such as the Booker Prize or Grammy Awards, critics and rating bodies negotiate the meanings of categories which thereby become embedded in the field's institutional fabric (Anand & Jones, 2008; Anand & Watson, 2004).

By drawing on scholarship on institutional infrastructure and centre–periphery dynamics, we can better understand subfield interactions. We thereby follow scholars who show how subfields borrow, fuse, or transpose institutional infrastructure elements across subfield boundaries (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Hinings et al., 2017). While remoteness may be conducive to creating nonconforming institutional infrastructure, little is known about how the latter affects subfield positioning.

Methods

Research Context

To address the lacune, this study focuses on the initially peripheral Australian winemaking subfield and its interrelation with the central French winemaking subfield, both part of the global winemaking field. The industry exchange field (Zietsma et al., 2017) is characterised by established relationships among producers, suppliers, distributors, regulators, media and critics, who share a common understanding of meanings and production practices of wine made from grapes, which also includes dessert wine, sherry and port. The field also shares a market through which products, services and resources are exchanged (Mountford & Geiger, 2024). Historically, the shared meanings revolved around French practices of *terroir* winemaking, which emphasises the unique environment of each vineyard – altitude, slope, soil, drainage, sun exposure and ambient climate – thought to shape the quality of wine (Zhao, 2008). These practices were globally replicated and adapted to local contexts.

Because winemaking is tied to national jurisdictions and historically has been bound to the local sourcing of grapes, the field comprises various subfields. These subfields maintain independent regulatory systems, resulting in different national or regional subfields and wine categories (Massa et al., 2017; Negro et al., 2015; Voronov et al., 2013; Zhao, 2008). Each subfield has established institutional infrastructure elements, such as trade shows, educational and research facilities, professional bodies and domestic markets. Subfield members include winemakers, vine-growers, merchants, associations, oenologists (wine researchers), critics and wine show organisers. Historically, these subfield members operated within their geographical boundaries, with infrequent inter-subfield exchange and a primary focus on domestic markets. Interviewees emphasised the tension of being distinct while also feeling connected to the global field, resulting in loosely coupled subfields.

The field has long been marked by a hierarchy of influence and prestige favouring French winemaking practices; at the Great Exhibitions in Vienna (1873) and Paris (1878), prizes awarded to Australian wines were withdrawn once their origin was revealed (Evans, 1973, p. 35; Faith, 2003, p. 50), reinforcing the undisputed centre–periphery order. As the subsequent dynamics between the Australian and French subfields were driven by Australian actors, we focus on their efforts to employ institutional infrastructure elements to alter their position. We also analyse responses from French subfield members who attempt to maintain the original order.

The Australian subfield. Australian winemaking dates back to 1788 (Kelly, 1861). With a historically weak domestic market, many Australian winemakers focused on export. Their early replication of traditional French practices did not garner much acclaim in Europe, so they began deviating from traditional practices. Their peripheral position allowed them to develop scientific winemaking under the radar of the wider field. While early scientific insights came from French laboratories (e.g., Pasteur), Australia's Roseworthy College was the first to formalise scientific education in winemaking in 1936 – predating Bordeaux's first oenology programme in 1949 (Paul, 2002). The Roseworthy curriculum separated the science of winemaking from vine growing, challenging the European tradition of uniting both crafts (Bishop, 1980). Thus, Australian winemakers were trained as scientists, instead of inheriting skills passed down from generation to generation.

The Empirical Material

We employed a qualitative, abductive research approach (Sætre & Van De Ven, 2021; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). To understand the local phenomena, we immersed ourselves in the subfield, drawing on archival data, documents, interviews and online posts. Initially focused on how the market category of Australian wine changed over time, we were surprised to discover that Australian winemakers not only

Table 2. Empirical Material.

Source	Number
Historical books	42
Books on the Australian subfield	23
Books on the global winemaking field	19
Online wine blogs	
Reports by wine critic Jancis Robinson	2136
Additional wine blogs followed	6
Additional material: industry reports	89
Winemakers Federation of Australia	20
Wine Grape Growers Association of Australia	37
Australian Bureau of Statistics	18
Economic publications	14
Secondary interviews	26
Winemakers	19
Flying winemakers	3
Wine journalists	2
Wine historian	1
Speech by winemaker Max Schubert	1
Primary interviews [with pseudonyms]	35
Large-scale wineries [LSW1-5]	8
Boutique wineries [BW1-5]	12
Flying winemaker [FM1] – 2 Interviews	1
Grape growers [GG1-2]	2
Critics [CR1-3]	3
University institutes [UR1-4]	4
National research facilities [RF1-2]	2
Professional associations [PA1-3]	3

repositioned the wine category but also contributed to the transformation of winemaking globally. Our focus thus shifted towards the field level, specifically subfields and their institutional infrastructure. To avoid a singular perspective, we triangulated the emerging understandings with data from non-Australian sources, including critics and winemakers.

Empirical material was gathered from three sources (see Table 2 for details). First, we collected archival material to understand the peripheral subfield, its practices and shared meanings. This included historical books on Australian and global winemaking (the latter helping contextualise local interpretations), and articles on Australian winemaking from acclaimed international critic Jancis Robinson's online blog. The first author also followed blogs by Australian critics Richard Farmer, Kim Brebach, Ken Gargett and Max Allen, as well as British critic Mark O'Neill and US wine economist Mike Veseth. References to other sources by members of the subfield led to the inclusion of additional sources such as articles from wine-searcher.com or the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

To contextualise developments, we included industry reports by the Winemakers Federation of Australia, along with reports by the Wine Grape Growers Association, statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1994–2011) and economic publications. We also included secondary interviews printed in books, online archives and a transcription of a speech by Max Schubert, one of the most acclaimed figures in the Australian subfield.

To complement the archival data, the first author conducted 35 interviews with Australian subfield members to better understand the developments and their effects in retrospect. Some were interviewed twice. The interviews lasted between 30 and 180 min. To ensure diversity, participants included small family-run wineries (3 hectares, 600 cases/year) to large publicly listed companies (8,000 hectares, 22 million cases/year). Interviewees represented regions including Adelaide Hills, Barossa Valley, Coonawarra, Eden Valley, Fleurieu, McLaren Vale, the Mornington Peninsula, Hunter Valley and the Yarra Valley. We did not assign specific sources to specific events, as all contributed to understanding subfield institutional infrastructure dynamics. One interview was also conducted with a leading international critic who had witnessed the developments firsthand. Finally, to more deeply explore the emerging themes of flying winemakers, critics and wine shows, we collected additional secondary data from books and interviews with Chris Ringland, Brian Croser and Len Evans. The primary interviews were pseudonymised using abbreviations indicating the interviewees' professional backgrounds (see Table 2).

The Analytical Process

Following an iterative, abductive approach to data analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), we refined our research focus throughout the process. Initially, guided by the market categories literature, we read archival texts, annotated codes and revised them as new data was added. This approach allowed us to immerse in the data and stay attuned to latent themes. We then complemented the analysis by adding the interview data. First, we organised the emerging themes using handwritten notes and thematic maps (see also Reissner & Whittle, 2022) and then transferred the themes and quotes into tables.

Once we started identifying the main actors, we realised focusing solely on market categories was insufficient; the involvement of diverse actors – such as winemakers, education and research facilities, critics, organisers of wine shows and professional associations – in redefining meanings and practices pointed to a broader perspective on organisational fields. Tensions between Australia and France, highlighted in interviews, led us to focus on the subfield literature. We then compared the emerging themes across all data material to identify commonalities and differences. Some themes, like the scientification of winemaking, emerged early, while others surfaced after several iterations of adductive reasoning. Retrospective insights from interviews helped identify high-relevance themes, such as the role of wine shows or flying winemakers. This process resulted in a chronology of critical events in redefining the subfield relation (see Table 3). The chronology distinguishes dynamics identified as affecting the local subfield and the wider field.

We iteratively moved between emerging understandings and focused engagement with the literature (Folger & Stein,

Table 3. Chronology of Critical Events.

Year	Event	Significance for the Australian subfield	Significance for the global field
1936	Scientific education in oenology at Roseworthy College	Formalisation of knowledge; emergence of a new type of winemaker as scientist	
1950	First vintage of Penfolds Grange	Start of scientific winemaking	
1960s	Professionalisation of wine shows	Metrification of evaluation; Est. of systematic wine tasting	Professionalisation of critics, new meanings (evaluation criteria)
1964	Invention of the screwcap	New meaning	Breaching the established category norms
1965	Invention of the wine box	New meaning	
1970s	Establishment of wine consulting	New type of actors	
1980s	Emergence of flying winemakers (consultants)	Exporting scientific winemaking practices	Diffusing new practices in other subfields
1995	Penfolds Grange 100 points – 1976 by Parker; *Wine Spectator* wine of the year	International endorsement of scientific practices by international status differentiators	Challenging the established centre–periphery order
1982	Australian wines listed among the greatest wines of the world in Jancis Robinson's *The Great Wine Book*		
2000	Est. of a new mid-level wine exemplar (Casella's Yellow Tail)	Industrialisation of winemaking	New meaning. Increased competition. Adding a new market category
2000–2017	Parker: 100 points for 17 other Australian wines, and twice again for Penfolds Grange	Confirming initial recognition	Stabilising the new order
2013	First vintage of Penfolds Ampoule	New meaning	Stabilising the new order by establishing a super-premium wine category exemplar

2017). These oscillations led us to engage with the literature on the institutional infrastructure of subfields to better understand their dynamic relationship with the wider field (see also Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021). Following Hinings et al. (2017), we categorised wine shows as tournament rituals and critics as status differentiators and identified oenology consulting as a novel organisational model. Professional networks between critics, wine shows and flying winemakers were categorised as relational channels. We also identified the importance of scientific winemaking practices, new meaning systems and category-related tactics, such as adhering to category norms, category signalling and creating new exemplars. Operational infrastructure elements did not emerge as relevant.

While refining our coding structure, we dropped less relevant aspects like fluctuations of taste, market trends and exchange rates and tariffs. While economic studies show that these factors affect the subfield's cycles of expansion and consolidation (Anderson & Pinilla, 2018; Anderson & Wittwer, 2013), they are not germane to illuminating the specific mechanisms that enabled a change in the relational order among the subfields. To ensure reliability, we collaboratively discussed the themes, codes and data structures. We also engaged in discussions with colleagues to increase the theoretical plausibility of the emerging themes (Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021). To ensure that our conclusions reflected the subfield dynamics, we discussed our interpretations with members of both the Australian and other winemaking subfields.

To condense the sequence of how institutional infrastructure elements have been employed to alter the relationship with the central subfield, we bracketed the themes based on their effects' temporal unfolding (see Table 4). For each bracket we grouped one theme on meanings and another on relational aspects: (1) establishing indirect relational channels while reinforcing cultural boundaries through partial concealment of new meanings; (2) establishing direct relational channels and transcending cultural boundaries by openly communicating new meanings; (3) weakening relational boundaries and increasing the permeability of cultural boundaries. These three pairs form the mechanisms of (1) camouflaged deviation, (2) encroachment and (3) integration (see Figure 1). The findings are structured chronologically according to the sequence of the three brackets. Each bracket is then organised thematically.

Findings

Bracket 1: Camouflaged Deviation

The first mechanism involves the radical redefinition of practices and meanings, a shift from traditional to scientific winemaking. The secluded location of the periphery subfield – both geographically and socio-culturally – provided greater immunity from the central subfield's isomorphic pressures, and laid the groundwork for connecting the subfields and ultimately reordering the field's centre–periphery structure.

Reinforcing the cultural boundary by concealing new meanings. The formalisation of winemaking education as a purely scientific discipline, distinct from vine growing, which was considered non-scientific, transformed the Australian

Table 4. Exemplary Evidence Supporting Centre–Periphery Subfield Dynamics.

Exemplary quotations for each theme	Data sources
1.a Establishing indirect relational channels	
Tournament rituals: There isn't a tradition of wine shows, as important as the ones in Australia. There's one in Paris. There's one in Macon, and they stick medals on the labels. But they're not taken nearly as seriously as the state Australian wine shows […] I think because Australia has this very strong tradition of agricultural shows. (CR3)	Primary interview
Len Evans established and professionalized Australia's wine shows. He introduced systematic blind tasting practices. (Australian critic, Oliver, 1992)	Archival data: book
In the 1960s, Australian wine shows, Adelaide at the forefront, integrated new and systematic evaluation criteria. Since the metrical system allowed for easier comparability, the wine shows grew in importance. The shift towards metric rating systems involved the systematic training of wine judges and led to the rationalization of verdicts, which no longer depended on personal taste to such an extent. Since the metrical system allowed for easier comparability, the wine shows grew in importance. (Australian critic, Hooke, 1994)	Archival data: book
Status differentiators & relational channels: This story dates back to yet another of Evans' initiatives: the inclusion of overseas judges to bring a different angle to the assessment of the wines. It can be a brilliant arrangement, benefiting the offshore judges as they learn our systems and experience our wines and benefiting the judging by adding a critical eye with a different perspective. (Gargett, 2 Feb 2021)	Archival data: online blog
Evans would have some of the top palates in the world, Hugh Johnston, Jancis Robinson, James Halliday […] He would have these big-name people there along with all of the big-name winemakers and judges from around the country. In it there would be '82 Latour's, Lafite's, Mouton's and then interspersed with that he would throw in an old Hunter Valley '58 Hector Tulloch, right, a '65 Lindeman's, a Hunter River burgundy, these types of benchmark Hunter wines […] Those wines would stand proud in those line-ups. They weren't just good by Hunter standards, they weren't just good by Australian Standards: they were good by world standards. (BW8)	Primary interview
From the 1960s onward, the Australian wine scene began to open up to international influences, including the participation of overseas judges and critics in wine shows (Australian wine critic, M. Allen, 2012)	Archival data, book
Interactions with international critics […] reflects Australia's engagement and reputation in the global wine community. […] Interactions with fellow wine writers, judges, and winemakers, highlight established professional networks. […] The knowledge and depth among Australian critics imply professional expertise, shaping industry standards and perceptions. (CR1)	Primary interview
The first [wine show that I visited] was in 1985, which was an exceptional wine show in Melbourne, organised by Len [Evans], where he invited me, Michael Broadbent, Robert Mondavi, Jacques Puisais from the Loire. James Halliday was there, probably Brian [Crozer], Helmut Becker from Germany, and it was an international panel […] I went to Australia, and I – just after coming back – I had to go on a TV program. We were told to bring an interesting bottle. So, I brought a bottle of Grange. (CR3)	Primary interview
1.b Reinforcing cultural boundaries through the partial concealment of new meanings	
Scientific practices: Highly controllable crushers and refrigerated fermentation vessels allow winemakers to make reds which retain all the fresh flavors of the grape without picking up too much of the firm mouth-puckering tannins which inhibit early enjoyment of the wine. (*The Canberra Time*s, 14 Dec 1986)	Archival data: newspaper
The method of production seemed fairly straightforward, but with several unorthodox features, and I felt that it would only be a matter of undertaking a complete survey of vineyards to find the correct varietal grape material. (Australian winemaker, Schubert 1979)	Archival data: speech
At school we were studying science, chemistry, and biology and I wanted to know how it all worked. I continued to make batches of wine at home with the help from my school mates, I was 15 at the time and had started to read some of the bulletins that were published by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research on winemaking. I got talking to some of the scientists there about what I was doing at home. One of them basically suggested to me, you know that, if and when you graduate, you can go and study winemaking. I applied and was accepted into Roseworthy as a full-time student. (Australian winemaker, C. Ringland, 28 June 2018)	Archival data: secondary interview
Australia perfected industrial farming. No other country appears capable of producing an 8-dollar wine as well as Australia. (US critic Parker, Jr. cited in Mattinson, 2007, page 17)	Archival data: book
In 1955 research on wine and winemaking was unhinged from Roseworthy College to cater to the needs of winemakers across the country. Financed by levies, the Australian Wine Research Institute was established to support Australian winemakers and vine growers with the development and adoption of innovative methods through basic research and the diffusion of knowledge. (RF2)	Primary interview
We're more technical in the amount of testing and knowledge about our wines than in Europe. We're doing 1.6 million tests a year in our lab which is double what we were doing five years ago. So, we're getting more	Primary interview

(continued)

Table 4. Continued.

Exemplary quotations for each theme	Data sources
and more knowledge about our wines, and with that knowledge you can make better informed decisions about what you do in the cellar. (LSW5)	
Australia's success in the 1980s and 1990s, driven by science and technology, led other countries, including France, to observe and try to emulate certain aspects of Australian winemaking. (BW1)	Primary interview
Category norms: The first Australian wine that later became the exemplar of scientific winemaking, Penfolds Grange, has like all other Australian fine wines of the time a traditional Bordeaux bottle shape and a traditional French-style bottle label.	Observational archival material
2.a Establishing direct relational channels	
Relational channels & organisational models: Brian Croser and Tony Jordan established Oenotec Consulting. They had an enormous influence on the field. (CR1)	Primary interview
I thought, this is pretty damn exciting […] Now if we go to a region and meet people, and find that the vineyards are all right, you'll know that it's going to be a no-brainer to develop a project. So essentially, we zeroed in on regions […] that tended to be overlooked, and a little bit of second-tier regions that [we] believed had enormous potential but needed a little bit of attention to detail to bring them up to the next level. That's where it all started. I then started to structure my annual work arrangements […] to make sure that I could actually go away for a couple of weeks at certain times of the year and make sure that the work at [home] was uninterrupted. (Australian flying winemaker, C. Ringland, 28 June 2018)	Archival data: secondary interview
The term 'Flying Winemakers' was first used in the late 1980s when referring to winemakers who would fly from one region to another making wines. They were a new phenomenon in a very traditional wine world. Most of them were Australians who had been trained to make wine using the latest techniques that had yet to be introduced into most regions of Europe. (British critic, O'Neill, 22 Oct 2017)	Archival data: online blog
Flying winemakers are specialists who play a key role in enhancing wine quality and innovation by bringing international experience directly to local wineries. They help wineries adopt new technologies, improve vineyard management, and develop new wine styles, especially in regions affected by climate change or seeking to elevate their standards. They engage in knowledge transfer across regions, and continuous improvement in wine production. Additionally, flying winemakers help Australia's strategic positioning in the international wine scene. (UR3)	Primary interview
Most flying winemakers are Australian. Their harvest ends as our summer starts and they find it difficult to resist the seasonal opportunities in the northern hemisphere. Wanderlust seems not to afflict Europeans in the same way; but there are notable exceptions. […] Australia has a clearly defined, professional approach to winemaking […] It's very technical. (British wine journalist, A. Rose, 12 August 1994)	Archival data: online blog
First, low-status central field actors employed those flying winemakers; soon after, also high-status central field actors employed these consultants to help them make scientifically better and more reliable wine. (Clarke, 2015)	Archival data: book
2.b Transcending cultural subfield boundaries through revealing new meanings	
Category signalling cues: Yellow Tail used a non-traditional label design, featuring an orange kangaroo to reduce the snob-appeal of wine. (Kim & Mauborgne, 2004)	Archival data: book
If you can communicate your scientific and quality assurance credentials to that market in a clever way, it will underpin the marketing and brand proposition of the entire category in a phenomenal way. (RF2)	Primary interview
Íve done some research for a big project years ago on the US market, and we tested some different kind of articles people read about wine and then did some simulated purchasing experiments, and the actually choose more Australian wine, when the article was about how high tech the Australian wine industry is, than an article that said Australia has, you know defined wine regions with styles and all that, and I thought the average consumer was more impressed by technology than history. (UR1)	Primary interview
If you go to a barbecue – this is what we do on the weekends in Australia – you engage with someone who doesn't know much about wine, often they will say I like this wine, and someone like me will say I'm interested, why do you like this wine? The answer will be because it's smooth. So, the tannin or astringency or bitterness is not there that we would call mouth feel, texture is very silky. There's probably not a lot of complexity to it but it is just simple fruits, the raspberries and strawberries that are all there and obvious, I like this, smooth. (RF2)	Primary interview
Australia's greatest contribution to wine innovation may be less well-known, but no less important. The wine bag in a box […] was conceived and developed in 1965 by Thomas Angove of Angove's winery in McLaren Vale, South Australia. (Australian critic Farmer, 12 December 2016)	Archival data: online blog
New market category exemplars: In July 2001, Australia's Casella Winery introduced Yellow Tail into the highly competitive US market. By the end of 2005, Yellow Tail's cumulative sales were tracking at 25 million cases. Yellow Tail soon emerged as the overall best-selling 750 ml red wine, outstripping Californian, French and Italian brands. (Kim & Mauborgne, 2004)	Archival data: book

(continued)

Table 4. Continued.

Exemplary quotations for each theme	Data sources
New release price levels: The most expensive wine bottle in the world: Penfolds Ampoule: 200,000 dollars. (Daily Mail, 30 June 2012)	Archival data: newspaper
Penfolds redefined the meaning of iconic wines. [Another expensive wine] is a relative bargain compared to Penfolds' last luxury release: a $168,000 cabinet holding an ampoule filled with 750 ml of Kalimna Block 42. (winesearcher.com, 2 May 2014)	Archival data: online blog
[Another expensive wine] is a relative bargain compared to Penfolds' last luxury release: a $168,000 cabinet holding an ampoule filled with 750 ml of Kalimna Block 42. (wine-searcher.com, Rebecca Gibb, 4 May 2014)	Archival data: online blog
3.a Weakening relational subfield boundaries	
Relational channels: The tradition of visiting other parts of the world to learn winemaking techniques became reciprocal. (Flying winemaker, Salomon)	Primary interview
Virtually all European wine producers under 50 have personal experience of working in at least one and often several wine regions outside Europe and have forged firm relationships with their New World counterparts. (British critic J. Robinson, 6 May 2006)	Archival data: online blog
Flying winemakers may be making wine in three of four continents to great effect, but they don't always do it in a style that reflects country or region. […] They connect different wine regions with international knowledge centres, trade fairs, and competitions, forming a network that facilitates knowledge exchange and standardization. This interconnectedness fosters a globally integrated yet locally contextualized wine industry (Lagendijk, 2004)	Archival data: academic article
Multiplicity of practices & meanings: As a broad generalization, Old World wine producing methods are based on tradition and geography, what is known as *terroir* in French. […] New world regions often placed focus on a science-led approach to winemaking. […] In the same breath, some Old-World wines possess riper and more alcoholic characteristics, resembling the style of the New World. The lines are blurring. (winetitles.com.au, 8 Jan 2014).	Archival data: online blog
These flying winemakers are highly sought after for their specialised skills and their ability to implement consistent production methods across different regions. The transcript notes that these consultants often share similar philosophies or techniques, especially in Australia […] which can contribute to uniformity in wine styles and might influence perceptions of authenticity and regional uniqueness. (UR2)	Primary interview
The consulting model pioneered by Australian flying winemakers has been adopted by French and other Old-World professionals, who are spreading their knowledge to peripheral fields. (Williams, 1995).	Archival data: book
Michel Chapoutier, known for his Hermitage wines, has been working with Australian Shiraz, bringing a different approach to winemaking. (H. Steinman, winespectator.com, 24 Aug 2010)	Archival data: online blog
Big name flying winemakers like [French consultant] Michel Rolland are controversial because they are associated with the homogenization of wine [and] 'international styles' are said to replace distinctive local wine qualities. (US wine economist Veseth, 20 Jul 2008)	Archival data: online blog
3.b Increasing the permeability of cultural subfield boundaries	
Consolidating market category positioning: The 1990 vintage of Penfolds Grange was named "Red Wine of the Year" by Wine Spectator magazine in 1995. (Wine Spectator)	Archival data: webpage
Australia's rapid growth in exports from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s is noted as a significant achievement that positioned it as the fourth-largest exporter in the world, demonstrating its influence on the global market. (CR1)	Primary interview data
Since 1976 – with Penfolds Grange being the first Australian wine to receive 100 points by US critic Robert Parker Jr. – 23 times Australian wines received the highest awards by Parker. E.g., only 8 Italian wines were awarded with 100 points by Robert Parker Jr. during the same (The Wine Advocate)	Archival data: webpage
Penfolds Grange became a great collectable with older vintage selling up to AUD 18000 and the first vintage selling for AUD 60000 at auction (wickman.net.au, 2016)	Archival data: webpage

subfield. By the 1950s, Roseworthy College graduates were involved in over 80% of Australian wine production (Bishop, 1980, p. 242). Penfolds Grange Hermitage exemplifies this shift. Max Schubert, the winemaker responsible for this wine, was a trained chemist. The wine was designed scientifically to deliver the desired quality. Nature was no longer the sole decisive influence determining a wine's characteristics and quality. Winemakers applied innovations to counteract or enhance natural influences. Unlike traditional practices of uncontrolled fermentation, Schubert used controlled, cold fermentation and pH-control to maximise flavour. These steps, viewed today as fundamental principles of modern winemaking, were seen (in retrospect[1]) as breakthroughs. Fine wine production also became detached from the principle of *terroir*; the best quality fruit was sampled from across the country, rather than from a single vineyard. Nevertheless, the underlying meanings were shrouded by French label design, bottle shapes and nomenclature (e.g.,

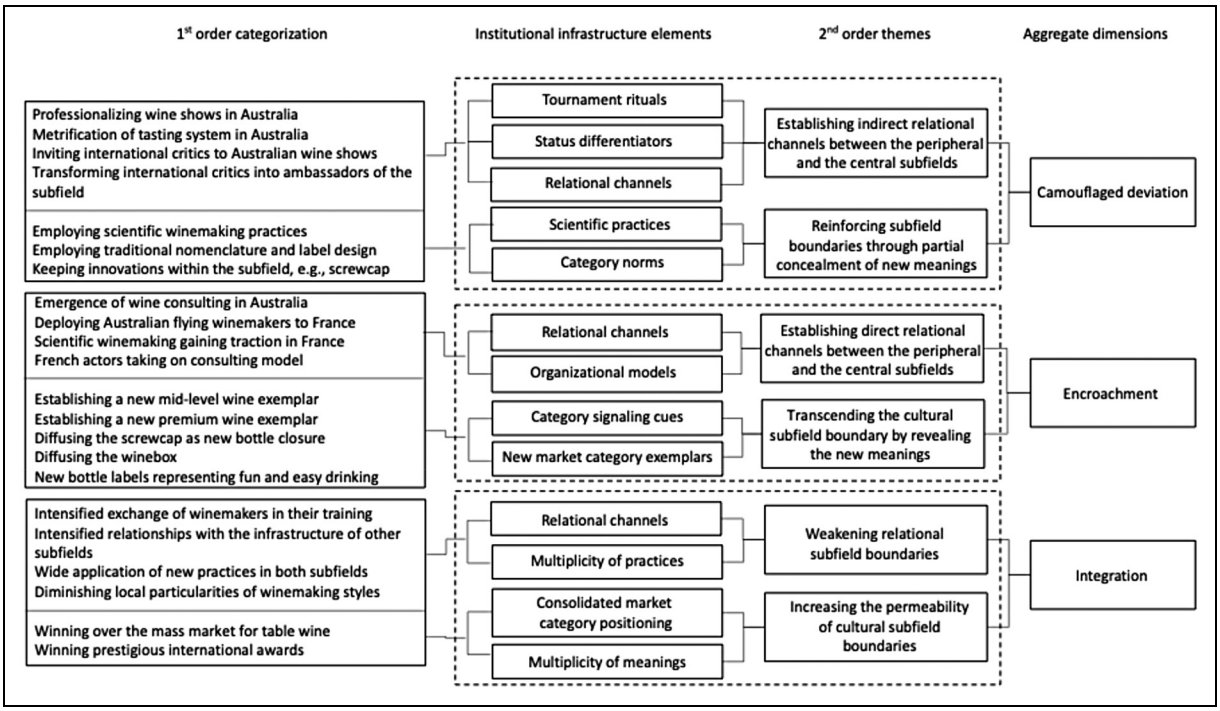

Figure 1. Coding Structure.

Hermitage in Penfolds Grange). Hence, the new meanings were only evident to experts, such as critics, while remaining unknown to the wider public.

Two other manifestations of new meanings concern the invention of the screwcap closure and the wine box. The screwcap diffused within Australia from 1976. It shifted the wine consumption's meanings by emphasising reliability over the appreciation of different vintages' varying quality. This invention initially remained within the subfield until the 2000s, when screwcaps became globally adopted. By 2017, 98% of Australian wine was topped with a screwcap (*Sydney Morning Herald,* 28 June 2017). The wine box, patented by Australian winemaker Thomas Angove in 1965, was designed to hold larger volumes, aesthetically distinguishing bulk wine from fine wine. Other subfields' producers typically sold their wine – regardless of quality – in bottles. Boxed wine also changed the meaning of wine consumption. Catering to leisure activities like picnics and barbecues, it took over the lower-end market in Australia and was subsequently embraced overseas (Clarke, 2015, p. 134). The aesthetic differentiation between bulk wine and fine wine sold in bottles signalled a new focus on quality.

Establishing indirect relational channels between the peripheral and the central subfields. The connection between the Australian subfield and other subfields is rooted in tournament rituals' professionalisation and the rise of professional critics in the 1960s. Len Evans was pivotal in establishing wine shows nationwide, building on the long-standing tradition of agricultural shows. He promoted the principles of systematic blind tasting and metrical evaluations (see also Croidieu et al., 2016), today's global standard. Wines were rated in blind tastings using standardised criteria (colour, odour, mouthfeel) and given metrical scores. These developments put Australia at the forefront; no other subfield had wine shows of similar significance. This foundation led Australian wine show organisers to invite international critics to attend these tournament rituals as judges.

> [Len] Evans would have some of the top palates in the world, Hugh Johnston, Jancis Robinson, James Halliday […] He would have these big-name people there along with all of the big-name winemakers and judges from around the country. (Primary interview BW8)

> The first [Australian wine show I visited] was in 1985, which was an exceptional wine show in Melbourne, organised by Len [Evans]. Then I did a few more, sort of, serious, proper, normal state shows after that. (Primary interview CR3)

Ontological Challenge. As international critics became increasingly aware of the developments in Australia, some began promoting these wines in Europe, almost as ambassadors of the Australian subfield. For example, Jancis Robinson introduced Penfolds Grange on a popular French television programme in 1988, after attending an Australian wine show. Her endorsement sparked backlash, with French wine elites dismissing it as "*un vin de pharmacien*" – "a chemist's wine" (Online blog, J Robinson, 18 Oct 2008). This

critique challenged the product's very nature and the legitimacy of the actors and processes involved in its making. However, the challenge was contained, as the underlying meanings – starkly contrasting with the traditional meanings – were obscured from the public. Moreover, French critics struggled to assert French wine's superiority, since prestigious French wines had only recently lost to Californian wines in a blind tasting (Taber, 2006).

Bracket 2: Encroachment

The second mechanism concerns efforts to bring the subfields closer together and gradually reveal the new meanings. Two key elements of the institutional infrastructure in this process are oenology consulting and the use of category signalling to reveal the new meanings.

Establishing direct relational channels between the peripheral and central subfields. Beyond scientific winemaking, formal winemaking education led to oenology consulting's rise. In 1978, Brian Croser and Tony Jordan founded Oenotec, Australia's first wine consulting company. Initially supporting local winemakers, they were soon sought after internationally. Exploiting seasonal differences between hemispheres, Australian winemakers gained recognition in Europe as "flying winemakers". French cooperatives, often lacking scientific expertise and struggling with wine faults, were early seekers of their help (Primary interview CR1). In the Languedoc region, flying winemakers led large-scale replanting of vineyards with Australian-style varieties (Clarke, 2015, p. 176). Martin Shaw and Brian Croser also consulted in the prestigious Bordeaux region, teaching about cleanliness, cultured yeast, acid adjustment, enzyme setting and the use of new oak (Williams, 1995).

Transcending the cultural boundary by openly communicating the new meanings. Australian subfield members began actively communicating the new meanings to a broader audience. While these innovations did not initially shake the category foundations, they unobtrusively added new meanings. Established standards of bottling, labelling and closures were breached by introducing new elements. These changes reflected the scientific practices that made Australian wine drinkable easily and early, reducing the necessity of maturing bottles in cellars. In contrast, traditional European fine wine is typically unenjoyable when uncorked too young:

> At different tastings, I have seen that they want the wine to be drinkable and easy and good, right when it's bottled, or maybe half a year later, even if it's a very rich and heavy wine, which would take years to be drinkable if it's a European bottle. (Primary interview UR4)

Wine writers often describe the diffusion of the screwcap and wine box as the 'democratisation' of wine consumption. Quality wine was no longer exclusively within the purview of the upper class and had become common in average households (Williams, 1995).

Epistemic challenge. In the 1980s, aiming to protect the meanings tied to the nomenclature, France lobbied against the use of French terms by non-French producers. This epistemic challenge aimed to impede the dilution of French meanings. Anticipating legal restrictions, Australian producers revised their wine nomenclature, dropping references to European terms. For example, Penfolds stopped using the term "Hermitage"; the wine has since been labelled simply "Penfolds Grange":

> Spite and panic led French winegrowers to force a change to the name of Australia's most respected red wine, according to a leading British wine expert. Journalist and author Auburn Waugh said the overall quality of Australian wine was the reason for the French campaign. (*The Canberra Times*, 3 Jun 1988)

From the 1980s onward, Australian winemakers redesigned labels using simplified language to describe a wine's style, origin and characteristics. These labels provided more transparency than their European counterparts, which typically referenced regions rather than grape varieties (Clarke, 2015, p. 167). Many wine labels changed to a modern style, breaking from traditional aesthetics.

Another step in breaching the established meanings was creating new category exemplars, first for mid-level and subsequently for premium wines. The first development concerns Yellow Tail wines, established by Casella in 2000. These wines broke norms in taste, price, label design and closure, redefining wine consumption for new-to-wine audiences by transforming quality table wine into a mass-market product (for more details, see Kim & Mauborgne, 2004). Pointing to the earlier ontological challenge, the new category exemplar's sheer existence underscored that "Yellow Tail wine isn't wine as we know it" (Veseth, 2011, p. 140).

At the premium level, Penfolds Grange became highly collectible, with vintages selling for up to AUD 60,000 at auctions (Wickman.net.au). Other iconic Australian wines include Henschke's Hill of Grace, Torbreck, Leeuwin Estate and Giaconda. Capitalising on this success, Penfolds redefined the meaning of premium wine by creating Ampoule, a small-scale production bottled in a distinctive carafe, for a regular release price of AUD 186,000 per bottle, all of which sold out in China and Russia – both important markets for French premium wine – immediately after release.

Bracket 3: Integration

The third mechanism diminished the local particularities of subfields due to intensifying exchanges among winemakers during their training and deepening relationships across subfields. In addition, the meanings became increasingly detached from their place of origin, rendering the cultural boundaries more permeable.

Weakening the relational subfield boundaries. As flying winemakers began to improve the reliability of wines in the French subfield, young European winemakers began visiting Australia to learn the scientific practices. The tradition of visiting other parts of the world to learn winemaking techniques became reciprocal (Primary interview FW). Many winemakers started collaborating with or acquired wineries in the other subfield. For example, Champagne producer Moët & Chandon established a major facility in the Australian Yarra Valley. Likewise, Australians invested in French wineries: Richard Serisier bought Château de Cadillac (Online blog, T. Mullen, Forbes, 30 June 2017), and an unnamed Australian investor acquired Château Vieux Paquillon (Online blog, G. Collins, Financial Review, 23 April 2018). Consequently, the new practices' diffusion continued.

Increasing the permeability of the cultural subfield boundaries. Australian subfield actors did not attempt to replace traditional French winemaking practices. Instead, both traditional and scientific practices coexisted across subfields. Local particularities declined, as scientific practices became detached from local specificities and traditions, and terroir.

> Old and New World: Blurring the lines. […] They [the Old World] are the historic birthplaces of wine […] all about tradition, restraint, and elegance. The New World is often described as […] producing wines defined by technology, experimentation, and ripe, powerful fruit. […] International influences and travelling winemakers have led to some Old-World producers eschewing the regulations. (Online blog J. Barrow, bibendum-wine.co.uk, 6 March 2020)

As both traditional and scientific practices were embraced across subfields, the distinction between Old (exemplified by the French subfield) and New World (exemplified by the Australian subfield) labels ceased making sense and began to fade. French winemakers also began adopting the oenology consulting model, most famously exemplified by French oenology consultant Michel Rolland, who continued the flying winemakers' tradition of spreading the scientific practices globally (Williams, 1995).

For scientific practices to co-exist with traditional ones, they had gained equal legitimacy. At the highbrow level, influential international critics awarded top ratings. Jancis Robinson (1982) listed three Australian wines in her book *Greatest Wines of the World*, and Penfolds Grange earned 100 points from Robert Parker Jr. three times. By 2016, twenty other Australian wines had received perfect scores, a distinction historically achieved by very few. At the lowbrow level, most prominently, the Yellow Tail wines broke every sales record, selling 112,000 cases in its first year in the U.S. and reaching eight million cases by 2005, surpassing the combined sales of all French wines (Veseth, 2011). Despite typically reviewing only fine wine, critics occasionally reviewed Yellow Tail wines highly, with several gold medals at Mundus Vini, a large European wine competition, and 90 + scores from *Wine Spectator* magazine.

In short, the Australian subfield successfully repositioned itself relative to the central French subfield by leveraging elements of its institutional infrastructure. These collective efforts connected the subfields through relational channels and established new meanings and practices alongside traditional ones. Based on these findings, we developed a process model of field evolution driven by subfield infrastructure dynamics (see Figure 2).

Discussion

This study explores how institutional infrastructure dynamics shape the centre–periphery positioning of subfields. While studies have shown the relevance of the institutional infrastructure for the emergence and consolidation of *individual* subfields (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021), our study extends these insights by exploring the role of infrastructure in defining relationships *between* subfields. Our findings offer a new perspective on the origins of field evolution and practice variation (Lounsbury, 2007; Micelotta et al., 2017; Voronov et al., 2013; Zietsma et al., 2017). We thereby contribute to the institutional infrastructure literature (Hinings et al., 2017), deepen our understanding of centre–periphery dynamics (Cattani et al., 2017; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Leblebici et al., 1991) and supplement the conceptualisation of subfields (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2016, 2021; Quirke, 2013).

Contributions to Institutional Infrastructure Scholarship

By focusing on a broad set of institutional infrastructure elements, our study reveals the complex interplay between structural-relational and cultural elements (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Logue et al., 2024; Raynard et al., 2021). Unlike the findings of Raynard et al. (2021) on institutional infrastructure's status-quo cementing effects, our findings highlight its transformative potential. By focusing on inter-subfield dynamics, this finding extends the prevailing understanding of institutional infrastructure as a means to differentiate subfield from field (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Quirke, 2013; Weber et al., 2008). Below, we disentangle both the structural and the cultural dimensions of this process.

Institutional infrastructure's relational elements can bridge disparate actors (Logue et al., 2024; Logue & Grimes, 2022; O'Mahony & Bechky, 2008). Thus, negotiating new meanings requires not only cultural and political work (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008), but also infrastructural scaffolding – establishing relational channels as conduits through which alternative meanings diffuse. Changing a subfield's position can be difficult, as shown at the Great Exhibitions, where Australian wines were withdrawn from competition because it was unthinkable that colonial produce could rival Old

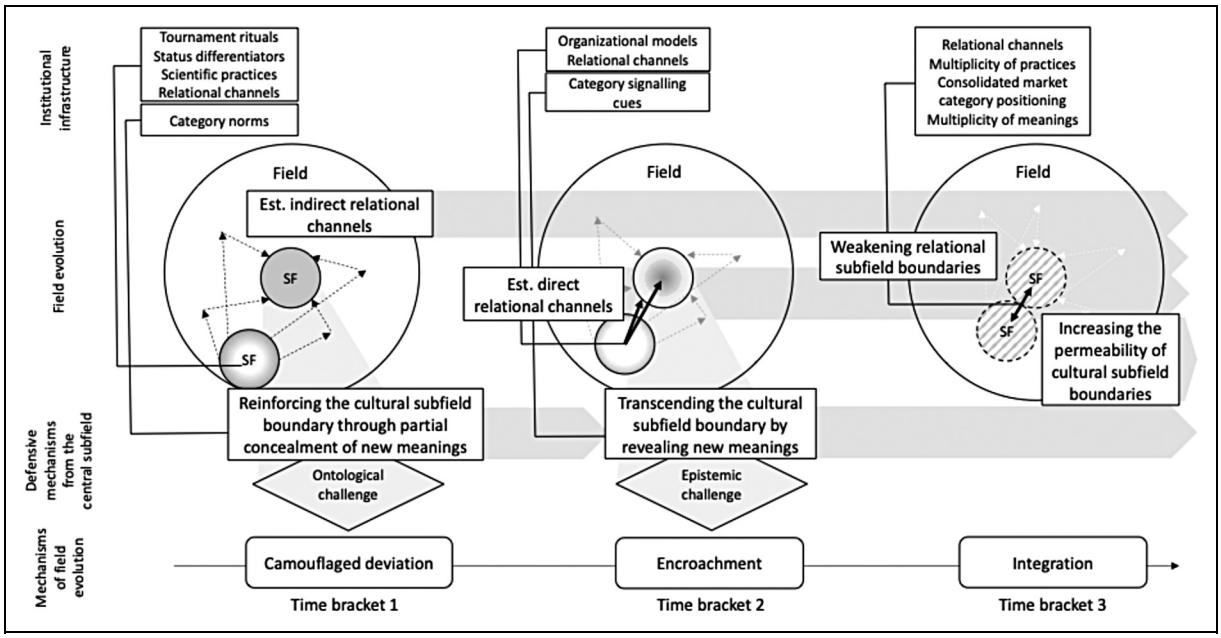

Figure 2. A Process Model of Field Evolution: Institutional Infrastructure and Subfield Dynamics.

World excellence. Our findings thus suggest a cascading sequence of first indirect, then direct interaction, in which relational elements preceded and enabled cultural change. Employing structural elements may be easier, given their apparent neutrality as "structures", compared to meanings, which are inherently value-laden. This finding also extends the notion of proactive engagement with critics (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010; Massa et al., 2017). While reminiscent of evangelisation's emotional aspects (Massa et al., 2017), the professionalisation of tournament rituals underscores the structural dimension of enlisting critics. In this sense, structural elements can act as a Trojan horse for new meanings to diffuse.

The role of critics points to the importance of markets as a relational type of institutional infrastructure. Serving both economic exchange and legitimisation of shared meanings and practices, this view reaches far beyond the economic realm of the market (Mountford & Geiger, 2024). Actors are therefore not constrained to taking advantage of opportunities as they arise; they can also proactively employ institutional infrastructure to create opportunities (cf. Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). Another example of this concerns the structural element of consultants ("flying winemakers"). Although their primary aim was to professionalise practices in the central subfield, they inadvertently became relational channels which rendered cultural boundaries more permeable, enabling encroachment into the central subfield.

Unpacking the cultural dimension of camouflaged deviance, our findings reveal the ambivalent role of market categories as means to both disguise and signal meaning. Camouflage reduces contestation risk by aesthetically emulating established norms, akin to robust design (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001). The vulnerability of novelty, which is particularly high when it comes from the periphery, can thus be mitigated. However, while robust design is meant to remain unchanged, camouflaged deviance was merely one step in a process of changing the shared meanings. While the deviance was hidden from public scrutiny, it was partially communicated to international critics, perhaps because critics are generally more open to innovative ideas (Bowers & Prato, 2019). Thus, what seems a nascent category externally may rather represent a fully developed category concealed from the wider public. This finding extends the understanding of categories as attention-channelling devices (Arjaliès & Durand, 2019; Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010) by adding nuance to how and when category signalling occurs. Since first impressions generally stick (Aversa et al., 2021), the timing of when new meanings underpinning a category are revealed matters for its legitimacy.

Contributions to Field Centre and Periphery Dynamics

The positional dynamics between subfields highlight a field's uneven topography (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Lounsbury, 2007; Quirke, 2013). Prior research shows that the centre–periphery order of actors can change (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Wright & Zammuto, 2013; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Our findings extend this view by showing that these dynamics apply not only to individual actors but also to entire subfields.

While our findings are consistent with research showing that peripheral positions are conducive to deviations from field norms (Cattani et al., 2017; Cattani & Ferriani, 2008; Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Leblebici et al., 1991), we add nuances to this understanding by disentangling actors' professional

background homogeneity. Prior studies show that when changes originate within the same profession, they tend to come from the field centre (see e.g., Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Helms et al., 2012). Our findings reveal that novel practices can also emerge from peripheral actors within the same profession. This is surprising, as innovations originating from the periphery usually come from actors with different professional backgrounds than those at the centre (Leblebici et al., 1991; Wright & Zammuto, 2013).

This finding highlights a non-confrontational approach to incorporating practices across subfields within the same professional community (Smets et al., 2012). Rather than seeking to displace existing practices and meaning systems (see e.g., Micelotta et al., 2017), actors from the peripheral subfield avoided confrontation. This suggests a new category within the field-governing infrastructure typology (Mityushina & Hehenberger, 2025); unlike opposition, expert lobbying, or collaborative governance, our findings reveal latent *embedded competition* operating within established professional communities.

Contributions to Subfield Conceptualisation

Traditionally, subfields are seen as communities united by shared values opposing the field's dominant logic, such as grass-fed beef, alternative schooling, or biodynamic winemaking (Negro et al., 2015; Quirke, 2013; Weber et al., 2008). While this oppositional view suits subfields catering to market niches, our findings show that subfields can also emerge from subtle meaning differences fostering actors' local identification and often based on local cultural roots and a common history and fate (Coraiola et al., 2018), similar to national myths or localised traditions (Negro et al., 2015; Voronov et al., 2013; Zilber, 2006).

This suggests that sharing a common regulatory system with the broader field (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021; Quirke, 2013) is not essential for a subfield's existence. Thus, a subfield's definition rests on two dimensions: an *internal* one, based on self-conception and social cohesion, and an *external* one, based on recognition within the field's wider socio-economic reality. This conceptualisation extends the view of subfields as remote and secluded (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2016; Quirke, 2013), showing that nested subfields interact with not only the parent field (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021) but also each other, with differences in prestige and influence shaping these relationships. This finding also extends the view of subfields as simply partitioning from the field (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2021). Instead, subfields may coexist within the field by balancing interdependence and differentiation.

Limitations and Future Research

Our analysis is based on the efforts of one peripheral subfield to change its relational positioning vis-a-vis the central subfield. As such, it does not aim to systematically compare processes among several subfields. Future research should explore similar processes in varied contexts. Relevant cases might include subfield dynamics in public health, emerging technologies, transportation, or energy. While these areas are typically shaped by national regulation, they are highly relevant for tackling global challenges. Studying these cases might thus reveal alternative practices and potential solutions to prevailing issues. Future studies should also consider the geopolitical dimension of subfield relations and further unpack the multi-dimensional nature of centrality, disentangling influence, prestige, power, status and domination. This research agenda might also unearth differences in resource dependencies between subfields (Furnari, 2016).

Conclusion

By analysing institutional infrastructure dynamics between the initially peripheral Australian and the central French winemaking subfields, our study offers a new perspective on field evolution. We show how the peripheral subfield established relational channels with the central subfield, thereby diffusing novel practices and infusing the central subfield with alternative meanings. These dynamics allowed traditional and novel practices to coexist, which ultimately redefined the centre–periphery relationship by moving the peripheral subfield closer to the centre. These findings extend the understanding of field evolution by emphasising the role of institutional infrastructure and offering a more dynamic view of subfields. We thus advocate for a more topographical approach to field analysis that foregrounds how field evolution can originate within and between subfields.

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Note

1. Initially the wine was rejected by the company and local critics. However, production secretly continued and ten years after the first vintage, the new wine style was accepted.

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