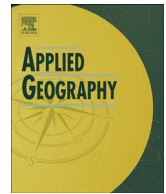


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## Branding spaces: Place, region, sustainability and the American craft beer industry

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## ABSTRACT

The craft beer industry is of increased interest to academics and geographers are beginning to not only chart a “geography of beer”; but also the local economic development implications of the industry. Indeed, we posit that the growth of the craft beer industry resides at the nexus between nature, place, and identity—or what we consider an applied geography of growth that is necessarily informed by sustainability and the closely allied geographic concepts of human–environment interactions and place. Further, we examine the branding of nature and place as co-determined spatial mechanisms for market differentiation and economic growth including neo-localism. Specifically, we examine real world examples of authentic branding initiatives that extend from dynamic place-based human–environment interactions that promote the overall sustainability of communities and the craft beer industry. In doing so, we propose an economic development framework based in an applied geography organized around the concepts of place, region, and sustainability. The framework can be used in a variety of economic development contexts and across multiple industries.

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Applied geography can be conceptualized as the deployment of geographic concepts or spatial themes to address real world problems. In this paper, we explore the example of market differentiation in the rapidly growing craft beer industry insofar as geography (or spatial concepts) has been coopted to create or produce authentic brand identities. Specifically, we assert that spatial constructs are used to validate brands and position products within a highly competitive market. More importantly though, the paper will examine how “spatial-branding” and a sophisticated accounting of situational geographies can be leveraged to promote firm-level and community-based economic development. In doing so, the paper will present three examples from the craft beer industry and demonstrate the conceptual and practical linkages that exist between well-established geographic frameworks, brands, and observed consumer behavior.<sup>2</sup> Our paper focuses on the

American craft beer industry. While craft beer is becoming increasingly popular in many countries data indicate that the United States leads the way in the growth of this segment of the beer industry. Even using the more restrictive European definition of a microbrewery (a brewery producing no more than 1000 hL of beer per year) the United States had 2399 such establishments in 2015 ([Brewers Association, 2016a](#)). This is considerably more than the leading European country, the United Kingdom, which had 1404 microbreweries in 2014 ([Brewers of Europe, 2015](#)). Furthermore, American craft beer is becoming increasingly popular in Europe where consumers appear to be excited by the innovative beers that U.S. brewers are producing ([Margolis, 2012](#)). For example, American craft beer exports to the United Kingdom doubled between 2011 and 2015 ([Chaudhuri, 2016](#)).

### 1. Craft beer and economic development: expansion, creativity, and branding

Since the mid-1980s the number of craft breweries in the United States has increased dramatically. From 37 in 1985 the number stood at 4225 in 2015 ([Fig. 1](#)). There are now more breweries in the United States than at any time in the county's history. The previous

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<sup>1</sup> The order of the authors, which is alphabetical, should not imply relative contribution as the effort has been collaborative, shared, and balanced.

<sup>2</sup> Based on sales data, we contend that it's the brand (and branding) that is driving the decisions of craft beer drinkers.

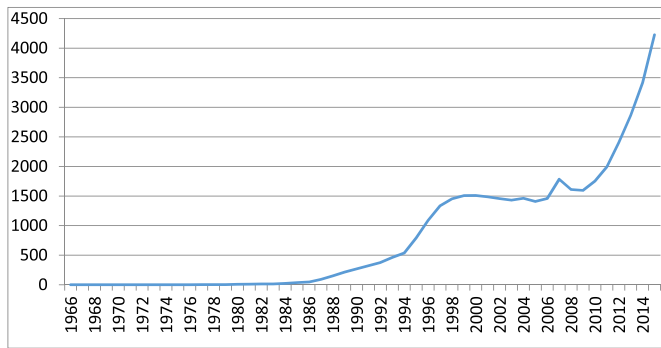


Fig. 1. Craft breweries in the United States, 1966–2015. Source: Brewers Association.

high watermark was in 1873 when there were 4131 breweries operating (Brewers Association, 2015). The growth has been particularly rapid in recent years, with a net gain of 2471 craft breweries since 2010. Craft breweries are attaining a growing share of the American beer market (Brewers Association, 2016b). In 2015 craft beer accounted for 12.2% of beer sales by volume and 21% by sales.<sup>3</sup> This impressive growth is occurring at a time when Americans are drinking less beer (NACS, 2014).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore there are no indications that this growth is going to cease in the near future. In recent years, at any given point in time, there have been somewhere in the neighborhood of 1500 breweries in the planning stages (Watson, 2015). At least one prominent industry insider believes that both the number and market share of craft breweries will double (CBS News, 2016).

The growth in craft breweries has emerged as a localized response to the stale brands and tastes of macro-brewers such as Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors who specialize in the standard American-style of the pale lager (Tremblay & Tremblay, 2011). Concomitantly, the nascent sector also benefited from the experimentation, innovation, and creativity of the homebrew movement that exploded following the Carter administration's legalization of the hobby in 1978. This was followed, on a state by state basis, by the legalization of brewpubs (Elzinga, Horton, & Tremblay, 2015; Fallows, 2010). By 1990, hobbyists turned entrepreneurs were driving an industry where the total number of firms had more than doubled in a single decade—and the scale and scope of craft beer had transformed the monochromatic landscape of U.S. beer from a marketing-based framework reliant on slogans such as “Tastes Great Less Filling” (Siegel, 2013) that sought to differentiate ubiquitous pale lagers to a world defined by more diverse local and regional product lines which now included ales, stouts, sours, IPAs, and bitters.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the scale of production is much smaller and the language of “micro-breweries” and “brew pubs” has become familiar to consumers around the nation. Today, the industry has matured and the term “craft brewery” has emerged as a short hand for smaller and independent firms that deploy traditional production processes (as opposed to the industrial practices of macros); emphasize quality, flavor, and diversity; and produce limited quantities (Gomez-Corona, Escalona-Buendía, García, Chollet, & Valentin, 2016; Hieronymous, 2015).

Much of the growing demand for craft beer is driven by the

<sup>3</sup> The sales share is higher than volume share because craft beer commands a higher price point than macro-beer.

<sup>4</sup> Beer's share of U.S. alcohol sales declined from 56.0% in 1999 to 47.8% in 2014, while one survey showed that per capita consumption of beer in 2012 was down by 20% when compared to 1992 (Bailey, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> The Brewers Association recognizes over 140 distinct styles of beer most of which are currently being brewed by American craft brewers.

millennial cohort (Fromm, 2014; Granese, 2012). Millennials have been described as “confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change” (Pew Research Center, 2010, 1). They account for approximately 75 million Americans which makes them the largest cohort in American history (Fry, 2016). Accounting for over a trillion dollars in consumer spending millennials prefer to purchase products and services from companies that support solutions to specific social issues while being of the opinion that there it too much power and influence vested in the hands of a few large companies (Carter, 2016). Small-scale and independently-owned craft breweries, with their demonstrated commitment to social causes and environmental sustainability, appear to resonate with millennials (Sprengeler, 2016; McWilliams, 2014). Furthermore millennials are willing to pay more for products embedded with social responsibility; this includes craft beer that retails at a significantly higher price point than traditional mass-produced beer (Rayapura, 2014). As consumers millennials are attracted to products that reflect their values, lifestyle, and personality. They tend to be adventurous consumers that appreciate diversity authenticity, creativity, and individualism. In choosing which products to purchase millennials are more influenced by the recommendations of friends (or online reviews) than they are by traditional advertising methods. This is consistent with research that has suggested that the decision to consume a particular beer is influenced by peers (McCluskey & Shrey, 2011). Engaging with products and brands digitally is also important to them (Barton, Koslow, & Beauchamp, 2014). These values and preferences are clearly present in millennial craft beer drinkers. A survey of millennial craft beer drinkers showed that 94% of them had tried a new beer within the last month, 70% followed their favorite craft beer brands on social media, and they were five times more likely to be influenced by word-of-mouth than traditional advertising (Granese, 2012).

In light of the industry's rapid growth and emphasis on smaller scale production and distribution, craft beer is inherently “more local” and “less global” than the macro-brewers, like ABInBev and SABMiller that now control literally dozens of brands across the globe (Chew, 2016). In many respects, craft brewers embody values, such as creativity, tradition, and locale that serve to create niche, often community-based, markets. These values also combine in various ways to lead consumers, especially millennial consumers, to conclude the brewer is “authentic.” As will be seen below, authenticity is important in this analysis. Additionally, craft beer and breweries have increasingly become markers for urban renewal and neighborhood revitalization—and stand in as a sort of short hand for a city's competitive “place-brand” (Weilar, 2000); so much so that local governments are crafting intentional growth initiatives to enhance the craft beer industries in their cities (see City of Louisville, 2014). It has also been argued that the relative maturity of local craft brew industries serve as a proxy for a community's economic sophistication (Fallows, 2016). For these reasons, the overall sustainability of the craft beer industry and the degree to which the craft beer industry thrives and grows is of keen interest to policymakers, economic development practitioners, and academics alike. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to understand how spatial or geographic concepts shape, inform, and enhance firm competitiveness, derived brands, and associated regional economies. In doing so, the paper is an example of a broader applied geography that leverages the discipline's foundational concepts to inform observed realities on the ground.

## 2. Authenticity: an applied geography of branding

One theme that dominates the craft beer industry, based on blog posts and even a cursory survey of craft beer shelves in your local

supermarket, is branding. The importance of branding in this rapidly growing and highly segmented market cannot be understated. Indeed, we will argue that branding is especially critical for smaller more local firms that occupy niche local markets. To that end, the craft beer brands need to be embedded within, we would argue, a shared socio-spatial landscape that is simultaneously a link to place, region, and the dynamics that promote sustainability. Authenticity and authentic geographies (think physiography)—particularly when linked to economic development policy—are critical to the success of long term strategies, policies, or branding initiatives. In fact, there are many examples of spatial policy initiatives, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, that deploy spatial branding strategies to legitimize and strengthen regional economies (Gatrell & Fintor, 1998).

Place, region, and sustainability are central components of the geographic or spatial perspective. To that end, geographers have codified their importance using three key conceptual frameworks. The approaches include Pattison's (1964) Four Traditions; the National Geographic Society's Five Themes of Geography (Bednarz et al., 1994); and the current 2012 national standards (Table 1). Beyond these approaches, Jordan-Bychkov, Domosh, Neumann, and Price (2013) have used the five themes of cultural geography—which are aligned with the prominent Berkeley School which focuses on the dynamics of the cultural landscape—to understand the many ways in which people transform the landscape and create symbolic meaning from human-environment interactions. In concert, these four approaches to understanding spatial constructs coalesce around place, region, and sustainability.

While place and region are well established concepts in geography—as well as popular discourse, sustainability as a concept and practice is more complex. Indeed, sustainability has no commonly agreed upon operational definition and while we have endeavored to approach the issue vis-à-vis a narrow economic frame—observed development patterns are necessarily connected to human-environmental practices. Generally all definitions are derived from the UN Brundtland Commission report, the use of the term in this paper focuses on principally two of the three pillars of sustainability as often used (Elkington, 2012): environment, economy, and equity or people, planet, profit. The use of the term in this paper refers specifically to profit focusing on markets, economic development and the competitiveness of firms in industries in the host communities and on people; specifically on people as a resource, both in past understandings of the local geography as well as local culture including past history of industries or current culture such as references to local people, places and things. Conventionally the people pillar of sustainability is focused on the company, industry, or greater society giving something back to people in terms of a fair and healthy, safe society but in this case, “people” is used similarly to a natural resource, it's part of the production and sale of craft beer.

We contend that “authenticity” is a key resource; similar in importance to conventional production inputs. Like Carroll and Wheaton (2009, 256), we argue that ultimately authenticity is a socially constructed phenomenon:

... what becomes perceived and labeled as “authentic” imbues an object or service with deeper meaning to its transaction partners, at least its consumers. In other words, authenticity carries with it an almost sacred, cultural type of interpretation that conveys value ...

Authenticity is a nebulous concept and requires consumers and locals to label something authentic. Nonetheless, a brewery is not without agency in this process. With regards to craft breweries, both types of authenticity are evident, nominal and socially constructed. “Nominal authenticity” refers to an “historical link to a person, event, time, or place of some significance” (Frazier, Gelman, Wilson, & Hood, 2009, 1). In essence “nominal authenticity” is factual. A brewery is either located on the Great Lakes or it is not. If it is, it can nominally be called a “Great Lakes brewer.” Nominal authenticity though is probably not enough. It's not enough to merely be located on the Great Lakes, it's necessary to embody the “spirit” of the Great Lakes, whatever that spirit might be. In the end, whether a brewer is regarded as “authentic” or not has to do with the identity of the brewer and not so much the specific beers produced (Kovacs, Carroll, & Lehman, 2014) or only its nominal authenticity. “Socially constructed” authenticity is ultimately not about facts but consumers interpretations of them (Kovacs et al., 2014). For example, a lawsuit filed on behalf of all consumers in San Diego Superior Court on April 24, 2015, claimed that SABMiller Coors marketing of Blue Moon as a craft beer was fraudulent. In the suit, plaintiff pointed to the fact that consumers of craft brew “are willing to pay, and do pay a premium for quality, small batch, craft beers.” (Parent v MillerCoorsLLC, 2015). Plaintiff used The Brewers Association definition of craft brewery in its suit, and pointed out that Blue Moon Brewing Company is a small, limited capacity craft brewery located inside Coors Field. However, the Blue Moon beer that is sold in stores is not brewed by that brewery; it is brewed by SABMiller in Golden, Colorado and Eden, NC at the same brewery as other beers. While the lawsuit was not successful, it demonstrates that space, place, and region are inherently linked to the authenticity of brands and that what is consumed as “craft beer” come from an authentic craft brewer (inclusive of associated spatial practices).

Research and theory suggests “authenticity” works best (i.e., accrues greater benefits) in modern society when it is organizationally constructed—that is, when the social construction is visibly or centrally supported by, and embodied in the structure and operations of a formal organization” (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009, 256). This is the “identity” of the brewer. In the age of social media, reviewers' assessment of authenticity is crucial. Thus, the authentic brand is as much a cultivated/natural resource as are the ingredients of the beer.

In addition to these frameworks, a related and derivative concept has emerged known as “neolocalism” (Flack, 1997; Shortridge, 1996). At the most basic level, neolocalism is best understood as “... deliberate seeking out of regional lore and local attachment by residents (old and new) as a delayed reaction to the destruction in modern America of traditional bonds to community and family” (Shortridge, 1996, 10). In doing so, neolocalism appeals to place, regional identities, and broader narratives on the

**Table 1**  
Concepts from geography.

Framework	Place	Region	Sustainability
Pattison's (1964) Five Themes of Geography	Man-Land & Areal	Areal	Man-Land
NGS's (1994) Five Themes of Geography	Place	Region	Human-Land Interactions
National Geography Standard (Gallagher and Downs, 2012)	Place & Regions		Environment & Society
Jordan-Bychkov et al. (2013) Five Themes Cultural Geography	Cultural Landscape	Cultural Region	Cultural Interaction & Cultural Ecology

sustainability of local economies—as well as environmental sustainability. In practice, neolocalism—as a strategy—is closely associated with emerging consumer priorities including farmers markets (Cone, 2012); community supported agriculture (Galt, O'Sullivan, Beckett, & Hiner, 2012), buy local programs, and place-branding initiatives such as “Keep Louisville Weird” (Reid & Gattrell, 2015). The strategy is multi-scalar (firm, neighborhood, city, and region) in scope and serves to define consumer markets. In a recent survey of a demographically-representative cross-section of the U.S. population respondents stated the belief that the primary issue that companies should be addressing is economic development at the local level (Cone Communications, 2013). With respect to craft beer, locally-produced beer builds on and resonates with increasing numbers of consumers interested in the local movement and reflects the gestalt of a place or region (Schnell & Reese, 2003; Tremblay & Tremblay, 2011). Indeed there is evidence that “successful microbreweries are geographically focused, often producing specialty products with a strong local flare” (Wesson & Nieva de Figueiredo, 2001, 400). Yet, the success of neolocalism is inevitably defined by the authenticity of a place-brand, regional identity, and shared definition of sustainability. If a firm (or craft beer) lacks authenticity and is unable to combine these three themes, success is an unlikely outcome. To that end, research indicates that environmentally sustainable practices, themes, and related place-based narratives on the environment figure prominently in the craft beer industry (Patterson, Hoalst-Pullen, & Pierson, 2016). As such, geography and geographic themes can arguably be leveraged to build a brand and define a market—which as Khermouch (1997) suggests is “beer marketing for dummies” (see also Tierney, 2014). However, brands—not marketing alone—promote firm sustainability and growth.

To that end, why is geography a useful lens through which to understand the growth and success of the craft beer industry? Simply put, the themes of geography—place and region—are embedded with shared sets of human-environment interactions (cultural-ecology). These interactions include, but are not limited to, resources (Gattrell, Nemeth, & Yeager, 2014; Yool & Comrie, 2014), historical settlement patterns (Batzli, 2014), and a connection to a shared landscape (Schnell & Reese, 2003, 2014). And, as we assert, successful growth initiatives associated with the craft beer industry—as well as the success of firms—are closely linked to brand authenticity and associated narratives that reflect a community's historical identity, connection to natural resources, and local agricultural systems. Or as we assert, place, region, and sustainability (which includes human-environmental interactions and practices that define a place, region, and firm).

### 3. Spatial branding: examples from craft beer

The simple geography of beer is a complex one—as is any applied geography focused on economic development and regional change. From the perspective of industrial geography, the resulting spatial dynamics are deceptively simple—beer is a classic weight gaining product; thus production locations have tended to skew towards local markets (Batzli, 2014; Shears, 2014). Overtime, consolidation across the industry, particularly following World War II, steadily reduced the number of firms as consumer palates changed and economies of scale in production, transportation and marketing were realized through the 1980s (Choi & Stack, 2005). While global consolidation continues and has accelerated, the explosion of the craft beer industry suggests other dynamics are at work in an industry that is interestingly bimodal with respect to scale and branding: local (craft beer—micro-breweries, regional breweries, and brewpubs) and global (macro-breweries). Consequently, we believe any applied geography of the

industry—particularly with respect to economic development—and the success and long term sustainability of craft brewers is necessarily linked to what we will call the triple helix of spatial branding: Place, Region, and Sustainability.<sup>6</sup>

Place, or the derived concept of a sense of place, is critical to understanding the growth of the craft beer sector. Indeed, place attachment was recognized as a critical driver of the first round of microbrewery growth starting in the late-1980s (Flack, 1997). In practical terms, the most obvious examples of place attachment and neo-localism were the names of breweries and their beers (Schnell & Reese, 2003, 2014). Yet, place is also linked to local human-environment interactions, natural resources, and broader regional contexts (Mittag, 2014; Yool & Comrie, 2014). For that reason, the deployment of a shared sense of place or identity may not be sufficient to sustain growth—and ensure firm survival in an overheated economic sector that may be experiencing a bubble (Morris, 2015). To that end, firms, brands, and product lines that explicitly combine place (a version of neo-localism—and in some respects a socially constructed or naturalized resource) with themes of sustainability and region may be more likely to survive the perceived bubble—assuming a quality product.

So why are craft beers that leverage recognizable sustainable human-environment interactions, region, and place successful? We believe the larger spatial scale associated with a region broadens the marketplace; human-environment interactions inform product names and styles, and place binds the two together to create a recognizable, authentic, and knowable brand. Indeed, the craft beer market is extraordinarily dense and competition for space on retail shelves and taps is intense. Given the intense competition, even high quality and reasonably priced products may not be able to be successful without a brand strategy that resonates with the target market—local, regional, or national (see Mann, 2016). According to one commentator “breweries have to tell their story, remind people why they are worth visiting and lure new customers. They have to sell and sell” (Robertson, 2016).

In an effort to explore the applied geography framework in a real world context, we examine several examples. Two of the examples are established craft brewers and early entrants into the craft beer market and another is a recent start-up associated with a re-branding of a sub-contract production facility. In all three cases though, place, region, and sustainable practices (economic and human-environment) have combined to drive firm, neighborhood, and community growth. At the most basic level, the selection of the breweries is a result of relative location—and convenience. That is, the selected breweries are geographically close to where two of the authors reside and their locations provided easy access as it relates to field observations, as well as access to archival materials and local histories. More importantly, the authors—as residents—were able to identify these breweries—and the degree to which spatial branding—reflect and/or resonate with the local milieu from a qualitative perspective.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The use of the “triple helix” analogy seeks to combine the qualitative components of place, the region concept, and observed elements of sustainability (i.e., practices of firms) to provide a framework within spatial brands are afforded authenticity with locals—and extra-local beer drinkers alike. In the wine industry, brand authenticity is also a concern and inauthenticity (particularly as it relates to micromarketing) is detrimental (Kadriov, Varey, & Wooliscroft, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> In the interest of full disclosure, the mixed methods approach included participant-observation (yes, the authors drank beer, toured facilities, met head brewers, discussed Millennial preferences, obtained insights into firm histories, and visited with patrons), archival materials, and local histories. As a result of relationships developed with employees, the authors were able to follow up electronically as needed to obtain more recent data.

### 3.1. Great Lakes Brewing Company, Cleveland, Ohio

Cleveland, Ohio's Great Lakes Brewing Company (GLBC) serves as an excellent example of a successful "brewpub" that grew from a local brand to a regional powerhouse with distribution across the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic states. Additionally, the brewery is an award winning firm with products that are regularly recognized as high quality at beer festivals around the nation (Gribbins, 2013). Opening in 1988, GLBC was Ohio's first brewpub and has developed its corporate brand around the local history and folklore of north-east Ohio, as well as the broader Great Lakes region. Indeed, the product line balances history, place, and human-environment interactions and the company has produced individual beers that resonate with each. Today GLBC is the 21st largest craft brewery in the United States with a 2014 production volume of nearly 150,000 barrels. Like many of the country's larger craft breweries GLBC has experienced significant growth in recent years. For example, its production volume as recently as 2008 was just under 69,000 barrels (Brewers Association, 2016a, 2016c). Great Lakes' beers are distributed to fourteen states, primarily in the Midwestern and northeastern United States (Great Lakes Brewing Company, 2016c).

For example, GLBC produces Burning River Pale Ale (Fig. 2). The Pale Ale is a reference to the environmental challenges of the Cuyahoga River which actually caught fire in 1969 and spurred environmental debates across the country and signposted the unsustainable manufacturing practices of the Midwest cities that would soon become known as the Rust Belt (Latson, 2015; Stradling and Stradling, 2008). The fire, ignited when sparks from a passing train made contact with oil-soaked debris in the river, was one of a number of events that led to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Latson, 2015; Maag, 2009).

In addition to Burning River, Great Lakes have also developed brands that reflect other historical events tied to Cleveland's unique history as a port including Commodore Perry IPA and Edmund Fitzgerald Porter. The IPA is named after Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, who commanded U.S. forces on Lake Erie during the War of 1812 where he famously defeated British forces on September 10, 1813 (Hickey, 2012). The Edmund Fitzgerald, likewise, links the community with its maritime heritage and serves as a memorial to

the Edmund Fitzgerald, a freighter that was lost in Lake Superior on its way to Cleveland to deliver iron ore for the blast furnaces of the steel industry (Hultquist, Dutter, & Schwab, 2006). In each of these cases, the brand links the product to place, region, and the many ways in which human-environment interactions shape industries, communities and history. These products collectively create a brand that is modern and proud of its local history and regional identity—thus defining its central market. In short, these establish GLBC's nominal authenticity.

While GLBC has expanded, the core distribution network remains the shores of the Great Lakes. As terrible an event as a burning river would be or the loss of the Edmund Fitzgerald, GLBC utilized these local social resources for its beer and through them, specifically the label, re-tell the story and help to preserve and perhaps improve on it as part of the local lore in the minds of those who live or visit the region. Thus GLBC through its beer labels utilize the local history and lore as well as contribute to its presence and place in the culture even as GLBC utilizes it as a social resource. In short, the use of the lore not only sustains it, but builds and develops it through the beer names and labels.

It is not unusual for craft brewers to pay attention to sustainability issues (economic, environmental, and equity) pertinent in the industry and perhaps ones meaningful in their locale. Patterson et al. (2016) surveyed craft breweries across the nation and found that microbreweries and regional craft breweries compared to brewpubs generally paid more attention to sustainability issues (O'Brien, 2006). GLBC is a good example of a regional brewery with an active commitment to environmental sustainability regarding water issues. "Positioned on the Great Lakes and paying homage to water in the very name of our company, our business has a unique role to play in advocacy for water. Thus one of their goals was a 15% reduction in water usage (on a per unit basis) by 2017 over 2013 baseline" (Great Lakes Brewing Company, 2014, 2). Every August the brewery hosts the Burning River Fest, a food, beer, and music festival that raises money for the brewery's own Burning River Foundation (Great Lakes Brewing Company, 2016a, 2016b). Since 2007 the Foundation has given over \$400,000 to local non-profits working towards more sustainable waterways. In short a sustainable use of this social resource. GLBC has an interest in the sustainability of the natural resource that contributes to its "place," The Great Lakes, but also to the quality of its main ingredient: water. In addition, energy conservation, commitment to local food, and, as already mentioned water stewardship and advocacy form the cornerstones of GLBC's environmental sustainability efforts. In 2010 GLBC led a collaborative effort to repurpose nearly six acres of unused land near its brewery. The end result was Ohio City Farm, the largest urban farm in Ohio. The farm provides fresh produce for the brewery and, more importantly, in partnership with several non-profit organizations provides employment and job training opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities and resettled refugees from around the world (Ohio City Neighborhood, 2016e). These commitments reflect and establish the organizational identity of GLBC and further the socially constructed authenticity of the brewery which is an important and crucial aspect of GLBC's branding as a craft beer.

Firms like GLBC that have been the engines of revitalization in cities like Cleveland and GLBC is credited as being the driving force behind the revitalization of Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood. Located just west of downtown Cleveland, Ohio City was a vibrant industrial neighborhood during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Docks, mills, foundries, distilleries and bottling works were bustling with industrial activity (Ohio City Neighborhood, 2016a). By the middle of the 20th century, however, the neighborhood was in a downward economic spiral. While the efforts of the Ohio City Redevelopment Association, established in 1968, went some way to

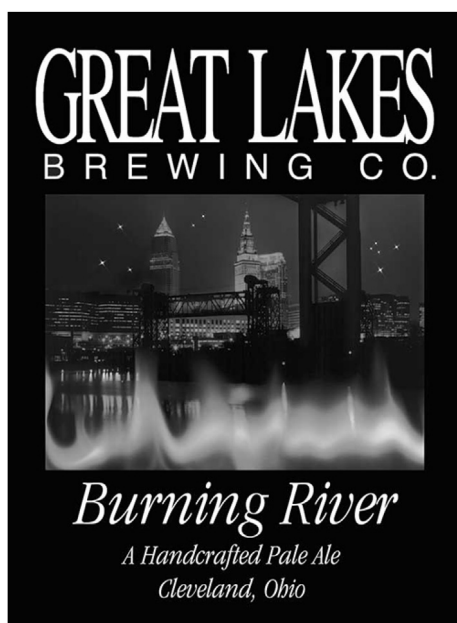


Fig. 2. Great Lakes Brewing Company label for Burning River.

slow the decline it was not until the founding of the Great Lakes Brewery in 1986 that the neighborhood started to experience a reversal in fortunes. Indeed Great Lakes' founders Pat and Dan Conway have been described as the “beer men who became the unlikely leaders of the neighborhood's revival” (Alexander, 2013). Today, Ohio City is a vibrant, ethnically diverse neighborhood (34% of its 9000 residents are African American and 23% are Hispanic) where locally-owned breweries, restaurants, bicycle shops, book stores, a glass blowing studio etc. co-exist side-by-side in a spirit of friendly competition (Ohio City Neighborhood, 2016c, 2016b). Since 2005 crime rates in Ohio City have fallen ~25% while real estate values have doubled. Today it is ranked as the second most walkable neighborhood in Cleveland (Ohio City Neighborhood, 2016d).

The example of GLBC is a critical one as the firm—a single firm—served as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization and the neighborhood emerged as an important signpost on the road to post-industrial growth. While this trend has been most pronounced in Rust Belt cities like Cleveland, the positive impact of craft beer driven revitalization has been felt in other cities like Oakland, CA. For example, Margot Lederer Prado, a senior economic development specialist, asserts that craft breweries represent “a movement that carries the promise of revitalizing neighborhoods that have been lost to violence and disinvestment. Breweries are a magnet for new businesses, encourage people to bike and walk in the area and create a social ambience that helps to stamp out crime” (Somerville, 2013). Similarly, planners and policy makers in Denver, CO credit the growth and revitalization of a decaying commercial district known as LoDo to the craft beer industry (Weilar, 2000). And more recently, the existence of a vibrant craft beer community has been identified as a pre-requisite for higher order growth (Fallows, 2016).

In light of the many examples of neighborhood revitalization, the craft beer industry has increasingly become a prominent component of urban economic development policy and the importance of the industry can be readily discerned from the media (Becker, 2015; Fallows, 2016; Funari, 2013). Indeed, the importance of the craft beer sector is even more pronounced when sales figures for the entire industry (which have declined slightly) are considered; in an environment where Americans are drinking less beer the craft sector has grown by double-digits in recent years. For this reason, cities like Louisville, KY increasingly see the industry as a core pillar in the “sustainable future” of local economies—particularly when linked to local food movements (City of Louisville, 2014, 4). More importantly, officials recognize that the craft beer industry is inherently linked to local history and the success of that city's craft beer sector requires reconnecting with the historical practices (including barrels), as well as associated contemporary trends (bourbon barrel aged products), and the legacy of the city's brewing including celebrating local brands—Fehr, Oertel, and Falls City—that dominated the local and regional markets prior to the period of industry consolidation (1960–1970) and the rise of the macro-brewers (City of Louisville, 2014, 10–11). And it is the creation of an authentic place-based beer culture that creates community and sustainable economic development.

### 3.2. Falls City Brewing Company, Louisville, Kentucky

Falls City (FC) has a long history in Louisville and across the lower Ohio River Valley (Fig. 3.). That history establishes the nominal authenticity of the brand, linking it to place and the history of the FC brewery. The original incarnation of FC was unique as it began as a collaborative community wide network of brewers and grocers—essentially a co-op. Indeed, on FC's website, they claim that they brewed “craft beer before craft beer was cool” a clear claim to social constructed authenticity. With roots that date back



Fig. 3. Falls City facility.

to 1905, the once popular regional brand disappeared as a result of the industry-wide consolidation in the late-1970s. The brand remained dormant through the late-1990s—which coincided with a revival of community heritage brands across the nation and was initially produced by Pittsburgh Brewing Company until 2007. Indeed, the revitalization of the regional brands signaled the coming growth of craft beer—as well as the challenges of the national economic context within which craft beer has grown. In 2010, the brand was revitalized and returned home when purchased by a Louisville entrepreneur. While the majority of distribution-focused production is produced under contract, Falls City has developed a rich collection of beers that are served in their Taproom (known as “Over the 9”) located in Louisville's revitalizing Portland neighborhood west of 9th street. Falls City is unique in that its parent company also produces wines under the brand Old 502 Winery.<sup>8</sup> In 2015 Falls City produced 3222 barrels of beer making it the 570<sup>th</sup> largest craft brewer in the United States (Brewers Association, 2016a).

With respect to spatial branding and nominal authenticity, the Falls City example unites core themes of place, region, and human-environment interactions—most notably Louisville's location as a portage site for the Falls of the Ohio (Kleber, 2001; Yater, 1979). However, it wasn't until the real estate speculation of the early-1800s and the steamboat that the city would emerge as a major break-in-bulk site and rapidly grow (Kleber, 2001). With respect to current sustainable practices, Falls City and the associated Old 502 Winery, utilize local inputs, repurposes old casks for select products, and builds on the history of a local place to create an authentic and competitive craft beer. Indeed, FC's history as a co-op of local Louisvillian tavern and grocery owners suggests that the original incarnation of the company was highly localized, collaborative, and organized around small scale community based production systems. Finally, the firm, as noted in multiple local news stories, serves as an anchor for economic development and revitalization in one of Louisville's historically working class neighborhoods known as Portland. The neighborhood's name is an explicit reference to the historical portage site (just west of the present-day CBD) that prompted the settlement of Louisville and is now home to the Army Corps of Engineers' McAlpine lock system, located on original Portland canal which dates to the early-1800s.

<sup>8</sup> Old 502 use local grapes grown in Kentucky and 100% of wine production occurs at the Over the 9 location.

The brand name is a reference to a geological feature that is almost visible from their current production location—the Falls of Ohio, another basis for establishing nominal authenticity. Indeed, the Louisville settlement was a natural site for portage on the Ohio River. In the end though, Falls City is an interesting case of a revitalized community brand that has re-visioned itself. Indeed the firm's signature pre-prohibition beer was not a lager like the mass produced neighborhood beer folks remember from the 1970s; but pale ale. The decision to pursue pale ale was rooted in the brand's history as the new owners learned that pale ale was the company's staple brew prior to Prohibition. In addition to FC Pale Ale, the firm has had success at the tap and in bottles with Hipster Repellant IPA which is a nod to Louisville's Millennial hipster culture and the broader craft beer scene found in trendy and emerging neighborhoods across the city including Germantown, Clifton, NULU, Portland, and Bardstown Road. "Hipster" is a socially constructed label, its definition is somewhat fluid, but to the extent those neighborhoods are strongly associated with "hipster" the brand establishes its authenticity. Finally, FC recently launched a new bottled beer—Kentucky Common (Loosemore, 2016). The new common is the first of a kind offering in bottles and was last seen in the market decades ago when another, long defunct, local brewery produced it (The Lane Report, 2016). Aside from its obvious geographic reference, the Kentucky Common beer is one of two indigenous U.S. styles—the other being California Steam. The Kentucky Common is unique as it was crafted in a region (roughly Louisville to Lexington, west to east, and the Ohio River to Bardstown, north to south) that has unique groundwater characteristics—which other craft brands have sought to leverage to promote sales (see Fig. 4). Additionally, the common uses a corn mash—akin to locally distilled bourbon. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Kentucky Common was brewed and consumed almost exclusively in and around Louisville. It was inexpensive to brew and was ready to drink in 6–8 days. It was a highly popular beer among the laboring classes between 1900 and the start of Prohibition in 1920 when it accounted for an estimated 75%–80% of the beer sold in and around the city (American Homebrewers Association, 2016; Gibson, 2015; Wahl & Henius, 1901). With regard to Kentucky Common Pat Hagen founder and owner of Bluegrass Brewing Company notes that "it's uniquely Louisville in that it's such an important part of our city's distinguished brewing heritage." (Gibson, 2015).

FC demonstrates how geography and a shared history in place coincide to lend authenticity to a local or regional brand. While the FC is dedicated to producing novel high quality beers that resonate with Louisville and across Kentuckiana, the brand is closely linked to location, familiarity with the region, and historical sustainable human-environment interactions. In contrast to GLBC's emphasis on historic names and events, FC fuses historical images and geography with contemporary place identifiers and seeks to connect its product line (particularly its draught pours) with the craft beer

movement and culture of creativity.

Uniqueness is an important factor in authenticity. Kovacs et al. (2014) examined words used in reviews of restaurants that are related to authenticity and "unique" was in the top 20 (of 80) words. To that end, firms need to develop new beers (or products), such as FC's recently launched new product line, known as the 7 Barrel series, which further builds on the city's bourbon history, as well as its sister firm Old 502 Winery. The series will be a tap-only limited run with new beers released each month. The beers will be experimental and explore the full range of prominent, as well as obscure styles (The Lane Report, 2016).

The more subjective, socially constructed authenticity, especially rooted in organizational identity is shown by how FC personalizes its firm through featuring its master brewer, Dylan Greenwood, with a tag line of: "from an unbalanced man comes a balanced beer." Sustainable practices are not uncommon in the craft brewing industry (see Patterson et al., 2016) and are arguably an important source of organizational identity and ultimately "authenticity" as that judgement extends to the business practices (organizational identity) (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). FC engages in several sustainable practices but rather than a commitment to the environment, it's related more pointedly to the bottom line.

FC's operations are located in repurposed urban locations. FC obtains repurposed barrels for their winery from the bourbon industry to age their wine and in turn use those barrels to age their beer. After aging the beer they cannot be reused for that purpose but they are repurposed as tables, sold as smoking chips for BBQ, and sometimes individuals buy them for their own repurposing. Thus, depending on the specific use, all barrels go through at least three (sometimes four) cycles of use.

Breweries produce a lot of waste. Managing that waste can be either an expense or a source of savings. FC reuses water for cooling and has developed local strategies to conserve and maximize hot water efficiency. Spent grains are given to farmers for their use as likely animal feed, a fairly common practice with brewers. Utilizing natural light through skylights is also a common way to reduce energy and decrease heat in hot areas. FC utilizes local inputs where possible. For craft beer consumers, based only on the experiences of the authors and colleagues, these would be practices that one would normally associate with craft brewers are contributing to the organizational identity of FC and in turn are creating a basis for socially constructed authenticity.

FC, by its very existence, contributes to Louisville's history and identity as a (craft) beer city. While GLBC's use of local history and local historical figures in its individual beer labels, FC takes from the lore of FC's (and Louisville's) past and builds upon it, especially with its "craft beer before craft beer was cool" tagline. It, purposefully or not, cultivates and features local Louisville and regional lore, thus keeping it alive as a resource; the very model of sustainability as we are using the term.

### 3.3. Goodwood Brewing Company, Louisville, Kentucky

Opened in 2015, Goodwood (GW) is a recent entry into the craft brew scene; but the firm's owners, brewers, and production facilities are not (Fig. 4). Indeed, the present day firm, which will produce 7000 barrels in 2016, was the long term contract brewer for a first generation regional chain of brewpubs known as BBC (Bluegrass Brewing Company) (Halbleib, 2016; Wurth, 2015). The rebranding initiative coincided with not only a new name; but a wholesale rebranding that embraced the region's physical and cultural geography—as well as a twist on Louisville's linkage to the bourbon industry. Important to the rebranding is authenticity as a craft brewer. In less than two years, the brand has established markets in adjacent states (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee)—



Fig. 4. Logo and Tagline.

and beyond (Alabama, North Carolina, and Virginia).

Barrel-aged beer is an increasingly common process used by craft brewers. In the Midwest, the most popular and most visible example would be Kentucky Bourbon Barrel Ale produced by Alltech Brewing and Distilling in nearby Lexington. Like Lexington, Louisville is one of three centers of the Bourbon Trail that extends east to Lexington and south to Marian County. The trail and the region it encompasses is the historical home of the bourbon industry and the region's physical geography is unique—in particular the water. Indeed, the four season region that gave the world bourbon aged in wooden casks and its water (and corn production) also crafted the Kentucky Common. To that end, Goodwood's branding intentionally highlights "... another ingredient that makes Kentucky beers unique: limestone water. This water is something the bourbon industry hypes up for its flavor profile. Goodwood CEO, Ted Mitzlaff says, "If it's good for bourbon, it's great for beer" (Wurth, 2015).

So the foundation for the desired label of "authentic" is closely linked to local resources and history. The brewers' identity, closely associated with wood, reflected in the breweries' name, Goodwood, must carry through on the brand by showing integrity to it. Hence, the firm's product line includes brews aged in bourbon, brandy, and rum barrels as well as wine casks. In addition to leveraging the flavors associated with prior uses, the company also uses new wood barrels—as well as chips. The use of wood chips is similar to staves used in the spirits industry. Finally, Goodwood makes a linkage to the famous Louisville Slugger baseball bat with its Louisville Lager that is aged using white ash, the same wood used to manufacture the bat.

Goodwood relies on using the lore of the region's historic connection to whiskey and especially bourbon. While the beer labels are not as informative as GLBC's, Goodwood's minimalist labels note what casks or wood is involved with each brew. Without sounding too obvious, if a firm names and brands itself as "good" wood, then wood has to be significantly part of their core beer offerings. So, the labeling reminds consumers of that as well as recycles and improves upon the lore of the area as a whiskey producing area (Fig. 5).

As noted previously, sustainable business practices are common in the craft brewing industry. Even if it is pursued only as a bottom



Fig. 5. Goodwood bottle label.

line strategy and only indirectly contributes to environmental or social sustainability, Goodwood, in the words of its brew master (private correspondence, 2016) "We try as many breweries do to keep our footprint on the environment as small as possible." Goodwood engages in recycling by using spent bourbon and wine barrels from local distilleries and vineyards. For the new barrels they buy, the cooperages they buy from practice sustainable forestry for they wood they harvest. When finished, Goodwood either sells them to the public or sends them back to the cooperage that in turns sends them to Scotland where they are used to age Scotch.

Goodwood recycles its water, a resource that is perhaps even more important to its brand than other craft brewers, and according to the brew master, their water usage is "well below" the industry average of 2.5 barrels of water per barrel of beer. Goodwood provides its spent malted barley to a farmer who uses it for feed. Goodwood is working on recycling waste heat in the brewery. Additionally, all plastic, metal and cardboard waste is sold to a recycler. The brewery hopes to rely on all solar energy for its single phase power at their new brewery.

Beyond recycling barrels and casks, Goodwood uses local grains—and as such is similar to GLBC and FC—with respect to building a brand that combines contemporary narratives of environmental sustainability with historical human-environment interactions that have shaped the industry and cultural landscapes. GW adds a different twist to the idea of recycling or repurposing in how it presents its "team." Each team member is presented as having had a "previous" job/use only to find their way to GW. For instance, each Team member has a line called "Beer DNA;" for the company president it reads: "One time expat discovers beer vending machines in Germany = Repatriates as successful vendor of fine craft beer. " The brief, tongue-in-cheek biographies and Beer DNA descriptions also help to personalize the firm which is crucial for establishing authenticity. At the same time, it speaks to the people part of the three pillars of sustainability, but in a different way, the repurposing of people from past roles.

Like FC, GW served as an initial gateway to a once declining neighborhood that has been revitalized as NuLu ([www.nulu.org](http://www.nulu.org)). While GW re-branded recently, the production facility and taproom was the first in NuLu which now houses three craft brewers—Against the Grain and Akasha being the other two. Today, NuLu is a thriving commercial district—with retail, restaurants, and pubs—that hosts an annual craft beer festival and goat race in late-March. As such, NuLu serves as a thriving example of how craft beer has—and can be—leveraged to promote economic growth. More importantly, the same recipe is being used in the nascent revitalization efforts of a working class neighborhood known as Germantown—or Schnitzelburg to longtime residents—where Monnik Beer Co. (which opened in 2015) proudly and ironically proclaims to be the oldest brewery in Schnitzelburg.

#### 4. Spatial branding—beyond beer

Local economic development and the competition for capital investment have long interested social scientists. The challenge facing practitioners though has long been the degree to which economic development creates a place or economic development extends from a place or region's identity and shared practices. For this reason, geographers have explored aspects of local boosterism and the policies and authentic place narratives that enable local actors to assert agency in a global environment (Cox & Mair, 1988; Gattrell & Reid, 2002, 2006; McCann, 2002; Reid & Gattrell, 2003). Alternately, sociologists have proposed that place-making and urban imaginations (driven by investors) can be used to reconfigure the local-space economy and redefine a place (see Zukin et al.,



1998). While it is exciting to believe policy makers and capitalists can imagine alternate realities (think Disneyworld and Las Vegas), the case of the craft beer industry—and the revitalizations of once blighted cities like Cleveland—suggest places benefit from authentic historically based narratives (Molotch, Freudenburg, & Paulsen, 2000)—and as a result inauthenticity may be especially problematic in the marketplace (Granese, 2012; Mainwaring, 2013). Consequently, we have asserted that through spatial branding firms and communities can leverage authenticity vis-à-vis shared histories (or a sense of place), space (region and place), and practice (sustainability and human-environmental interactions).

In terms of spatial branding, the linkage between place and product has gained attention by geographers; but continues to be under researched (Pike, 2011). While understanding place-based marketing strategies is a useful starting position, spatial branding is a broader holistic concept that combines history, place, location, region, and practice to build not only a firm's brand; but enhance a community's competitiveness in the global economy. To that end, "geographies of branded commodities" and their socio-spatial biographies have been considered (Pike, 2011, 206) places' primacy of sense of place—a theme that has also been plumbed by academics interested in craft beer and wine (Bruwer & Johnson, 2010; Schnell & Reese, 2003, 2014; Shears, 2014). In contrast, spatial brands uniquely commingle the geographic, historical, and contemporary with observed practices that reinforce the brand and explicitly link to human-environment interactions—and increasingly sustainability. As noted by Kuznesof, Tregear, and Moxey (1997, 201) "the importance of foods associated with a particular locale was attributed to the climate and geomorphology of that region and the resultant local resources such as water and indigenous crops able to flourish in the governing environmental conditions." Interestingly, our research suggests the ability to engage in spatial branding may be limited to the food, beverage, and hospitality (inclusive of tourism) industries.<sup>9</sup> And these sectors are critical to the competitiveness of post-industrial regional economies insofar as these sectors shape the quality of life, zeitgeist of communities, and as a result their overall competitive advantage relative to the attention and investment of the burgeoning creative class (see Fallows, 2016; Florida, 2012, 2014). Indeed, work specifically on the broader food industry suggest that the potential exists for the "cultural relocation of food production to acquire the benefits of the authenticity of a geographical origin" (Tellstrom, Gustafsson, & Mossberg, 2006, p. 131). Similarly, others have reiterated the importance of authenticity and note that consuming local foods in their place of production is a key contributor to authenticity (Kuznesof et al., 1997). In the case of craft beer the option of drinking the beer while in sight of the fermentation tanks is as close to consuming at the point of production as it is possible to get.

Finally, spatial brands are especially useful frameworks for promoting the competitiveness of firms and communities in the global economy. Beyond "nominal authenticity", spatial branding facilitates and permits socially constructed authenticity to be translocated so that a market for a craft beer brewed locally in Cleveland or Louisville is competitive elsewhere. In short, spatial branding enables authentic local products to be sold to people with a minimal connection to the local space—just the idea of place

<sup>9</sup> In our research, we have focused primarily on U.S. brands. While we were able to find some "geo-centric" brands outside of the food, beverage, and hospitality sectors they were not spatial brands per se. For example, San Francisco based Timbuk2 manufactures urban adventure gear. Similarly, Patagonia (Ventura, CA), Columbia (Beaverton, OR) and North Face (Alameda, CA) would be examples of geo-centric brands. However, geo-centric brands or names do not necessarily constitute spatial brands. We do note that artisanal or craft industries might also be able to develop spatial brands; but the scale of these firms varies.

without much, if any, local experience or material connection? For this reason, authentic spatial brands that resonate with consumers have a competitive edge. That is, authentic spatial brands ensure product differentiation in a competitive and crowded market (which is the case in craft beer, see Mann, 2016, as well as many other consumer goods). Additionally, the spatial brands permit companies to provide consumers in "faraway places" access to more local options—thus re-scaling and globalizing neolocalism. In doing so, spatial branding permits local firms to compete in more global markets, enhance local economies, and bolster the capacity of communities to compete for local investment.

## 5. Conclusion

Geography—and shared geographies—can be applied to economic development at a variety of scales and in many respects the case of the craft beer industry's ability to develop authentic spatial brands demonstrates how applied geography, broadly conceptualized, can be leveraged to promote change, growth, and sustainable urban change. Yet, as we have demonstrated, deploying geographic concepts or place names themselves may not be enough. Rather, effective spatial brands leverage place, practice, and region (a spatial triple helix) to validate and authenticate a spatial brand. For this reason, spatial monikers such as the "silicon forest", "silicon alley", and other derivatives which seek to reproduce model economic development trajectories of specific communities fall short. Similarly, highly localized names, such as the Terre Haute Brewing Company or the Tecumseh Brewing Company, may fall short as the firm, its products, and brands fail to capture the rich place-based histories of regions and/or capture the consumer's imagination in the way achieved by the more sophisticated spatial brands like those presented here. In the end, firm success and economic development is complex. As such, we believe an intentional deployment of geographic concepts can enhance firm and place viability.

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