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## THE CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHY OF CRAFT BEER PRODUCTION AND ON-SITE CONSUMPTION IN MINSK, BELARUS

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The presented material is devoted to the geographic analysis of the phenomenon of the so-called “craft beer revolution” in Belarus and, in particular, in Minsk (once 74% of the country’s craft breweries were located in the capital in 2024). The brief history of the establishment and development of the craft beer production in Belarus and Minsk is analysed, with an emphasis on the current state of things. The investigation also features of the contemporary spatial structure of craft beer consumption, based on the location attributes, selected visitor’s check-in data, variety of selection and the structure of beers on tap at 28 selected bars, defined as “real” craft beer bars (CBBs). Such topics, as the impact of the “craft beer revolution” on urban development in Minsk, as well as the cases of demonstration of (neo)localisation are also discussed in the article.

**Keywords:** geography of beer; craft beer revolution; beer market; taproom; socio-brewery; Minsk; Belarus.

## СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ГЕОГРАФИЯ ПРОИЗВОДСТВА КРАВТОВОГО ПИВА И ЕГО ПОТРЕБЛЕНИЯ В МИНСКЕ, БЕЛАРУСЬ

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Представленный материал посвящен географическому анализу феномена так называемой «революции крафтового пива» в Беларуси и, в частности, в Минске (в 2024 г. в столице находилось 74 % крафтовых пивоварен страны). Анализируется краткая история становления и развития производства крафтового пива в Беларуси и Минске с акцентом на текущее состояние. В исследовании также рассматривается современная пространственная структура потребления крафтового пива, основанная на атрибутах местоположения, данных о регистрации посетителей, разнообразии выбора и структуре разливного пива в 28 выбранных барах, определенных как «настоящие» бары крафтового пива (БКП). В статье также обсуждаются такие темы, как влияние «революции крафтового пива» на развитие городов в Минске, а также случаи демонстрации (нео)локализации.

**Ключевые слова:** география пива; крафтовая пивная революция; пивной рынок; тапрум; социопивоварня; Минск; Беларусь.

*Introduction.* In the XX<sup>th</sup> century the process of consolidation in the global brewing market led to the dominance of several large brewing companies, and homogenisation of the product, offered to the consumer. Normally, beers of few styles (lager, or pilsner) were popularised and distributed on a massive scale, and market regulations prevented microbreweries with a higher variety of styles, to offer their product [1]. The situation had started to change in the 1960-1970s in the USA, in particular, after 1978, after the President Carter had signed the H.R.No.1337 bill – lifting taxes on small scale beer production. That resulted in the dynamic growth in the amount craft breweries (from 2 in 1979 to 8764 in 2020, in the USA alone), the process, described in the academic literature as the “craft beer revolution” (thereafter the abbreviation CBR is used), the process about the priority of quality over the scale of beer production [1, 2]. New forms of breweries (nanobreweries, microbreweries, brewpubs, contract breweries, etc.) have introduced a new product of higher quality and richer variety of tastes and styles, called craft beer.

The process of the “craft beer revolution” occurs unevenly at temporal and spatial scales, with various factors affecting it. In the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, including Belarus, the trend of growth of craft breweries began to speed up in the XXI<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, chronologically, the start of the CBR process in Belarus can be dated back to 2015 (later than at the neighbouring markets, in Poland, Ukraine, or Russia).

There is no single definition of “craft beer” or “craft brewery”. However, the American Brewers Association (ABA) defines a craft brewery as “*small*,” “*independent*,” and “*traditional*.” *Small* is about the size (annual production less than 6 mln barrels). *Independent* refers to ownership (less than 25% owned or controlled by an alcohol industry member that is not itself a craft brewer). *Traditional* refers to the production, in which 50% or more of the beer brewed takes its flavour from “traditional” or “innovative” brewing ingredients and their fermentation. However, there is an ongoing discourse about that definition, and not all countries or small-scale beer producers adopt this nomenclature [3, 4].

Another interesting question, not often explored in the existing literature, is related to the classification, status, and spatial allocation of the places of craft beer consumption, or the so called “craft beer bars (CBB)”. Briefly the aspects of relationship between their location and urban development is discussed. Additionally, the concepts of “neolocalism” (*when craft brewery of bar reflects locality of production and connections to place (e.g. history, language, geography, features)*) and “third places” (*applicable to bars, taprooms and brewpubs, which may not necessarily display local features, but which simply create sites for gathering and exchange between the first place (home) and the second place (work)*) within the general context of craft beer production and consumption practices are introduced [5].

*Literature review and methodology.* The general geographic analysis of the phenomena (with incorporation of methods of statistics and econometrics)

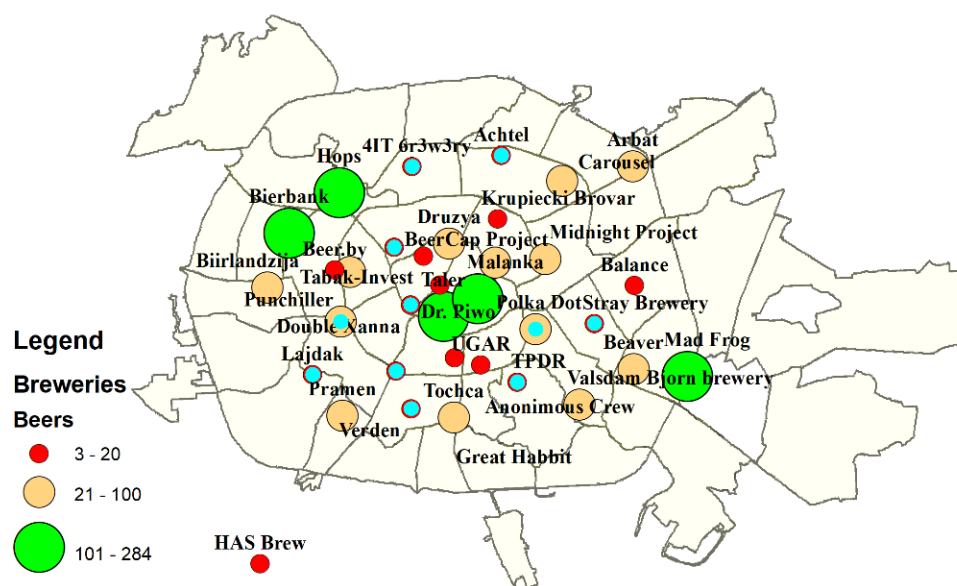
was usually devoted to spatial features of breweries distribution (in the USA, Canada, Poland, Czechia, Bulgaria, etc.). There is a certain amount of research on the topic of craft breweries' interconnections with neolocalism, third places, creative industries, gentrification and urban development [1-5]. Research on the craft beer revolution process and breweries geography in Belarus (the market analysis a prior to 2021) has been briefly carried out by the geographers from the Faculty of Geography and Geoinformatics of the BSU [6]. This material aims to update and fill the existing gap, enhancing the current discourse with a geographic accent and perspective, based on the case study of Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

*The research methodology* incorporated elements of both practical (field exploration, place evaluation, expert talks) and a theoretical analysis of existing historical and geographical information (academic literature, specialised websites and social networks of breweries and bars, other information sources) about the features of the processes of the craft brewing and consumption in the Republic of Belarus, and in Minsk.

The selection criteria for the craft breweries in Minsk were: a) status of the brewery (micro-, nano-, contract, brewpub, or restaurant-brewery); b) market activity as in 2023-2024; c) quantity and range of products (beer styles). The selection criteria for the "real" craft beer bars were: a) number of beers on tap (more than 10); b) share of craft beers on tap (more than 60%). The main up-to-date geospatial information on 32 selected craft breweries (brewery location, its rating, type, number of types of beer produced), and 28 craft beer bars (location, total check-ins, number of total beers on tap, share of craft beers) in Minsk was obtained from the databases of the Ratebeer and Your.beer portals, as well as the Untappd portal. Visualization of spatial data was performed in the GIS software.

Content analysis and systematisation of craft breweries', beers' and bars' names or visual symbology was used to evaluate the cases of neolocalism in Minsk and Belarus. Research limitations are related to the dynamic situation with the systematic data on the craft beer production and consumption, affected by various factors, and that is usually resulted in the lack of the relevant spatial data.

*Results and discussions.* As in February 2024, there were 43 breweries, defined as craft breweries in the Republic of Belarus, 32 of them (74,4%) were located in Minsk. In between 2021-2024 14 breweries terminated or paused the production of beer (predominantly contract by type; mostly located in Minsk). For the same period, 13 new breweries had been established in Minsk, Homiel, Hrodna, Babrujsk, Maryina Horka, and Schomyslitsa. The craft breweries, located in Minsk, are visualised in figure 1.



Note: a) the precise geographic location is applicable only to the breweries with known address; b) blue dots shot the closed breweries

Fig. 1. Craft breweries in Minsk by total amount of beers produced (as in 2024) [7-9]

According to the most recent Ratebeer data, the most popular beer styles in Belarus were IPA (42%) and related by style pale ales. However, according to Your.beer data, among the 50 top-rated beers, strong ales, triple IPAs and sours pre-vailed (as shown in figure 2). According to the selection criteria, explained in the methodology, only 28 bars in Minsk out of 108 (from the Your.beer portal database), did qualify as “real” craft beer. These bars are mostly located in densely populated areas (in some cases at residential blocks with cheap rent), and have good transport accessibility (metro-oriented, see figure 3).

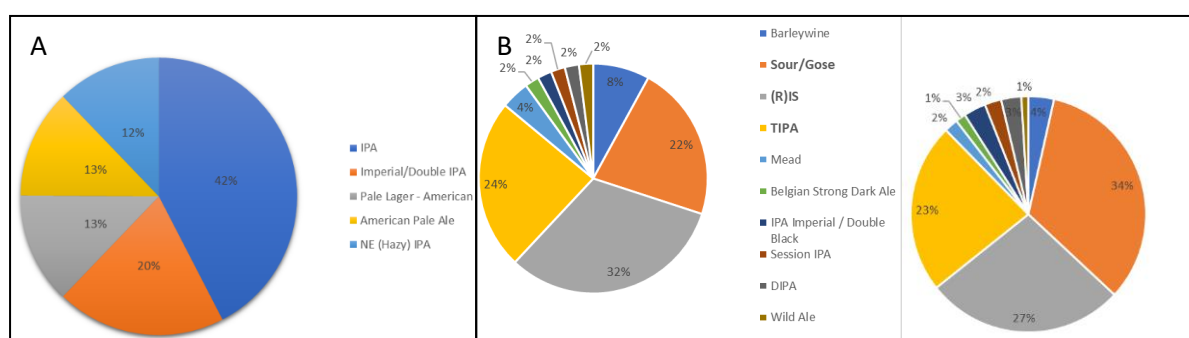


Fig. 2. Structure of the most popular (a) and the top-rated (b) craft beer styles in Belarus (in total, 2024), [7, 8]

The spatial pattern of CBBs location shows, that it is possible to define the so-called “beer axis” between Malinauka (with Pivnoy Klub, Hops, B&F bars) and Uruccha (Papa Kraft, Lauka) metro stations.



<b>Historic</b> (event or personality)	Chapski Bar (relation to person, the former mayor of Minsk), 1067 pub (first time when Minsk city was mentioned in historic chronicles).
<b>Visual</b>	13 Litar (logo of the brewery)

The majority of the studied bars in Minsk (especially, within Shop/Bar category within the “beer axis”) belong to the category of “third places”. Those bars may, or may not necessarily display local features, but, due to their geographic location attributes (mostly, in residential areas, within a walking distance to metro station), create places for gathering and craft beer consumption between home and work).

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