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The logic behind the resurgence of microbreweries in Brussels

Les logiques de résurgence de la microbrasserie à Bruxelles

De logica's achter de terugkeer van de microbrouwerij in Brussel

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Introduction

- ¹ While there was only one brewery in operation in Brussels in the early 2000s, there has been an increase in the number of breweries in the past five years as well as the development of a series of initiatives reflecting a renewed interest in craft beer¹. This resurgence of microbreweries echoes what has been observed in a significant number of large western cities, although it has been a later and slower phenomenon in Brussels. On a national scale, the Brussels region and its economic hinterland² represent an important area in the development of the brewing sector, as almost a quarter of the current Belgian breweries are located there³. This phenomenon seems to be part of a recent, more general movement of a “return to craftsmanship”, also observed in other

fields which have undergone a phase of industrialisation and standardisation. This neocraftsmanship, which corresponds to an ideal and rather vague vision of production and consumption, is described as an alternative to industrial logic, and is intended to correspond to new aspirations for work in skilled manual and intellectual activities [Crawford, 2010; Sennett, 2010], as well as to renewed forms of economic production and market promotion centred on values of quality and authenticity [Boltanski and Esquerre, 2017; Thurnell-Read, 2019]. It often results in the creation of new and relatively distinct niches within a sector of activity.

- 2 The contemporary meanings associated with this phenomenon are shaped by the contexts in which it occurs [Bell *et al.*, 2018]. In large western cities, neocraftsmanship reflects and is part of the recent phenomenon of a return of productive activities [Scott, 2006], which, although still rather limited in scale, could contribute to reversing the trend towards the deindustrialisation of urban environments [Hill and Warden, 2018]. This question has thus become a real issue in the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) over the last ten years, discussed and put forward by many public, associative and academic stakeholders in Brussels⁴. At the same time, urban environments can be attractive locations for such activities, especially the more innovative and creative ones due to the proximity and diversity of other economic and cultural activities, or to the demand of urban consumers [De Boeck and Ryckewaert, 2020; Curran, 2010]. This movement of the return of production to the city, and more specifically of neocraftsmanship activities, is part of broader urban transformation dynamics, including processes of gentrification and clustering of productive and creative activities within former industrial neighbourhoods [Ocejo, 2017; Mathews and Picton, 2014]. For example, Dennet and Page [2017] describe the installation of London breweries under railway arches in post-industrial central neighbourhoods, helping to transform these areas into attractions for tourists and visitors.
- 3 However, urban production – especially in a city like Brussels which has undergone a massive deindustrialisation movement since the 1960s and which is subject to significant land pressure – does not seem to be sustainable without government action, especially due to its position as a weak function and its sometimes complicated coexistence with the residential function [*Observatoire des activités productives*, 2018; Orban and Scohier, 2017]. The Brussels public authorities are inclined to favour the relocation and/or support of productive activities in the city but remain vague with regard to the type of activities targeted and the locations to be favoured. The ideas of industry of the future and circular economy feed this enthusiasm, highlighting certain creative, innovative, and/or sustainable activities [Van Hamme and Lennert, 2018], including the small new brewing activities⁵. At a time when public, academic and institutional stakeholders in Brussels are debating the place to be given to production in the city as well as the types of activities to be supported, it seems essential to examine in greater detail the organisational models of these activities which are drawn to an urban location.
- 4 From the perspective of economic sociology and urban phenomena, our research studies the logic behind the resurgence of microbreweries in Brussels as a new productive world of neocraftsmanship in the urban context. In other words, our objective is to discuss the renewed growth in brewing activities in Brussels, by asking these questions: where, by whom and how is beer produced in Brussels?

- 5 As regards the methodology used, we first compiled a series of quantitative data on breweries which had been or were located in the Brabant area (including BCR and the current provinces of Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant). The data from before 2006 were obtained by analysing and cross-referencing historical sources (*Annuaire de la brasserie belge* published by Mineur [1895-1965] and the weekly trade journal *L'écho de la brasserie* [1970; 1973]) as well as secondary sources. For the contemporary period, we relied mainly on the list of breweries which is compiled and updated several times a year by Zythos [2006-2020], the national confederation of beer tasters' associations.
- 6 We also relied on an in-depth interview survey conducted between 2017 and 2020 with 17 founders and managers of recent microbreweries or brewing companies located in Brussels and its French-speaking area of influence, in Walloon Brabant⁶. The qualitative part of our methodology therefore only includes a part of the territory of the former province of Brabant, whereas the quantitative data concern the entire area. In order to define which breweries belonged to this group, we relied on the criteria generally used in Belgium and elsewhere, namely the date of establishment, the volume of production, and whether or not the brewery belongs to a large brewing group⁷. The profiles of the breweries in our study are quite diverse, particularly in terms of year of creation, annual production volume and production model (see table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the breweries in the study

Brewery	Date and length of the interview	Location	Year of establishment	Production volume at the time of the interview (in hl/year)	Production model	Number of workers at the time of the interview
A	November 2017 - 1h32	Walloon Brabant	2006	1000-2000	Production in the facilities	1-5
B	November 2017 - 2h27	Brussels	2003	10000-12500	Production in the facilities	10-20
C	November 2017 - 1h08	Brussels	2016	200-1000	Production in the facilities	1-5
D	December 2017 - 2h24	Walloon Brabant	2014	1000-2000	Production in the facilities	5-10
E	January 2018 - 1h04	Brussels	2014	1000-2000	Production in the facilities	10-20
F	January 2018 - 2h03	Brussels	2015	100-200	Contract production	1-5
G	January 2018 - 1h30	Brussels	2016	1000-2000	Production in the facilities	1-5
H	February 2018 - 1h41	Walloon Brabant	2009	1000-2000	Production in the facilities	5-10

I	April 2018 - 1h05	Brussels	2013	10000-12500	20 % of the production in the facilities – 80 % under contract	1-5
J	April 2019 - 1h35	Brussels	2018	100-200	Contract production	1-5
K	April 2019 - 1h28	Brussels	2018	200-1000	Production in the facilities	1-5
L	July 2020 - 1h05	Brussels	2015	1000-2000	10 % of the production in the facilities – 90 % under contract	1-5
M	July 2020 - 1h06	Brussels	2020	100-200	Contract production	1-5
N	July 2020 - 1h09	Walloon Brabant	2019	2000-10000	Production in the facilities	1-5
O	July 2020 - 1h33	Brussels	2018	100-200	Contract production	1-5
P	July 2020 - 1h	Brussels	2018	100-200	Contract production	1-5
Q	Augustus 2020 - 1h19	Brussels	2020	100-200	Production in the facilities	1-5

Contract brewing means that production is not carried out by employees in the company's facilities, but is outsourced, often to a brewery specialising in brewing for others. This term covers a variety of situations, as it may concern production as a whole or only a part of it. In some cases, it is a temporary step before a company acquires its own facilities, or when moving to another location, for example.

- 7 This article is divided into several parts. First, we shall briefly review the dynamics of the Belgian brewing market from the turn of the 20th century to the present day, highlighting the history of the spatialisation of this activity in the former province of Brabant. Then, we shall analyse the resurgence of producers in Brussels through the diversity of the modes of spatialisation of the activity. The third part is based on our qualitative survey and examines the diversity of the location and regional implantation modes based on a typological analysis of the production models of microbreweries.

1. A country with a brewing tradition: between industrial concentration, decline and resurgence

- 8 The brewing sector has played an important role in the economic and cultural history of Belgium. With a high per capita consumption as well as a diversity of beer styles, this country is commonly regarded as “the” historical country of beer [Tilly, 2017: 185]. During its golden age of brewing at the turn of the 20th century, Belgium had more than 3 000 breweries, most of them small and medium-sized, producing top-fermented beers⁸. During the inter-war period, the Belgian brewing market entered a first phase of industrial concentration, leading to a constant decrease in the number of breweries during the 20th century, accelerated from the 1970s onwards by a second wave of concentration (see figure 1) centred around a few large breweries producing bottom-fermented beers. By 1980, and for several more decades, there were only about 100 active breweries in Belgium [Vanormelingen *et al.*, 2011]. However, in Belgium, this sector has always been characterised by a diversity of forms of activity, despite the progressive domination of the industrial model for more than a century. Alongside this movement of concentration, small breweries with a strong local presence and/or which offered specialised products continued to exist throughout the 20th century [Bertrams and Poelmans, 2019].
- 9 The Belgian capital experienced the same movement of concentration, with the number of breweries decreasing from about one hundred at the beginning of the 20th century, to about thirty in 1960, and to only two in the 1990s. The decline of the brewing sector in Brussels, concomitant with the general deindustrialisation of the city, corresponds with an evolution in the location of breweries, from the centre to the outskirts [Quintens, 1996]. The province of Brabant was therefore one of the areas where Belgian brewing activity was concentrated in the 20th century. In 1960, a quarter of the producers were located in this province, mainly in the area corresponding to the current province of Flemish Brabant [Tilly, 2017] (see figure 2).
- 10 Since the 2010s, and especially since 2015, the number of Belgian breweries has been increasing steadily (see figure 3). This phenomenon has also been observed in other countries, notably in North America from the late 1990s, and in Europe, in particular in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Italy [Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018]. Compared to other countries, the recent return of producers is still rather limited in Belgium. In Brussels, these new breweries are also located in the city and its urban area, and in the provinces of Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant.

Figure 1. The number of breweries in Belgium from 1890 to 2020

Source: *L'écho de la brasserie* [1970: 448]; Bertrams and Poelmans [2019: 11]; Zythos vzw [2006-2020]

Figure 2. The number of breweries in the province of Brabant⁹ from 1895 to present¹⁰

Source: Mineur [1895-1965]; *L'écho de la brasserie* [1973: 213]; Patroons *et al.* [1979: 103]; Zythos vzw [2006-2020]; our calculations

Figure 3. The number of breweries in Belgium since 2006

Source: Zythos vzw [2006-2020], our calculations

2. A return of brewing activity to Brussels: diversity of location rationales

- 11 The Brabant area had 82 breweries in 2020, three quarters of which were new small businesses [Zythos, 2020]. The location of their activities is diverse (see figure 4). 15 are located in BCR, 19 in Walloon Brabant and 48 in Flemish Brabant. Clusters are emerging in and around the major cities (Brussels and Leuven) and in the Pajottenland¹¹ and Senne Valley area (municipalities on the outskirts to the west and south of Brussels). Outside these areas, particularly in Walloon Brabant, the breweries are generally further apart. It is interesting to note that, unlike the other two areas, Flemish Brabant has a significant proportion of medium-sized and large industrial breweries and small old breweries (see figure 4).
- 12 On the other hand, the 15 producers located in BCR are small breweries, mostly established after 2015. A large proportion of them are concentrated near the Brussels-Charleroi canal, in central neighbourhoods and/or neighbourhoods with an industrial past. They are quite diverse in terms of production volume, although a majority are of relatively similar size, brewing less than 1 000 hectolitres per year (see figure 5). Most employ few, if any, workers. Being relatively small in size and often adhering to a brewpub or taproom model, i.e. a bar located close to the production area, the Brussels breweries – unlike other types of productive activity – seem to be integrated into and coexist with the other more dominant functions of the city. With the exception of a few larger production sites or those integrated into areas supporting productive activities, all Brussels brewing companies are located within residential or mixed areas [PRAS, 2019]. This possibility of coexistence with the other functions of the city, accompanied by a potential appeal linked to their creative nature and openness towards the public, encourages support from the public authorities for these activities, contrary to other

sectors such as the construction sector for example [De Boeck *et al.*] They benefit from various types of aid, linked in particular to support policies for urban production activities, as well as for commercial activities in regeneration areas¹².

- 13 There are therefore a variety of location modes for new brewing activities within the Brussels urban area, contrasting above all a central location and a location on the outskirts, according to a logic in keeping with the old brewing dynamics in Flemish Brabant and the deindustrialisation of the capital.

Figure 4. Breweries in Brabant in 2020, according to type

The annual production volume of the breweries was estimated on the basis of interviews with most of the Brussels stakeholders, as well as on the basis of secondary sources. This number refers only to production at the brewery's own facilities. The categories are based on the progressive categories of Belgian excise duty [Moniteur Belge, 1998, art. 5. § 2].

Source: Zythos vzw [2006-2020]; our calculations.

Figure 5. Breweries located in the Brussels-Capital Region according to year of establishment and estimated annual production volume

The categories used for the estimated annual production volume are based on the usual categories for defining small breweries. Breweries which produce less than 100 hl/year are often integrated into another main activity (brewery workshops, restaurant/bar).

Source: Zythos vzw [2006-2020]; our calculations.

3. Various approaches of microbrewers to the activity

- 14 In addition to the extent and location of the resurgence of brewing activities in the Brussels area, our objective is to understand the entrepreneurial rationale and the modes of production and marketing of microbreweries, as well as the meaning they give to their implantation in Brussels. Based on an analysis of the common foundation of this new social sphere, we shall discuss the characteristics of its internal heterogeneity.

3.1 A common social sphere

- 15 For several years now in Brussels and elsewhere, we have witnessed the development of new brewery projects aimed at being alternatives to the dominant industrial logic. This “promise of difference” [Le Velly, 2017] is essentially based on a desire for uniqueness and forms of authenticity in the modes of production, marketing and consumption [Thurnell-Read, 2019]. This common rationale of opposition begins with the characterisation of the industrial model as homogenising, lacking in meaning and values, and directed solely towards maximising profit. In contrast to this view, the promise of microbreweries, although not formalised and often tailored individually, is nevertheless based on shared arguments which help to build the foundations of a social sphere [Strauss, 1978; Cefai, 2015].

- 16 From the analysis of the individual and collective discourses of the craft brewers expressed during the interviews and/or publicly, four interrelated general principles may be highlighted, which structure the Brussels microbrewery world and its differentiation from the industrial model.
- 17 One of the essential and structuring justifications of craft brewing is that of the diversity and originality of tastes, in opposition to an approach whereby beer becomes a standardised and homogeneous product lacking in taste. The (overly) sweet character is blamed in particular, as it is considered to be a factor for standardisation, and even for the loss of the other flavours. Through this demand for a return to flavour and a desire to educate consumers about “real tastes”, that is to say, more complex tastes which need to be trained, the idea emerges that the objective of craft brewing is to change tastes and ways of tasting, and not to please the greatest number of people.
- 18 Behind this issue lies another important element of the promise of difference, namely the quality of the products. As opposed to a logic of profit maximisation, the quality of products (and therefore of raw materials and production processes) must take precedence over all other considerations. There is no room for compromise. The skills and knowledge of the brewers and their physical involvement in the activity allow this continuous attention to quality.
- 19 Another differentiating feature of craft brewing complements the first feature, in the sense that the taste of the products as well as the other elements of the project are not aimed at pleasing all consumers in order to maximise profits. On the contrary, brewing is described as a personal project allowing self-expression and self-fulfilment for passionate entrepreneurs, and the products are described as an expression of their tastes. This leads some to make connections with art, for example by talking about “designer beers” and highlighting their personalities through their products.
- 20 Finally, a last structuring feature of this social sphere is that of a local presence. As opposed to the globalised and deterritorialised logic of big industries which do not develop any cultural, relational or emotional ties with the region in which they are located, microbreweries aim to be part of their region, in terms of the supply of raw materials, distribution or relations with consumers and other local economic stakeholders. Moreover, in connection with the principle of quality, by being open to the public, producers are able to promote their products and skills by presenting elements of the production process.

3.2 Three differentiated approaches to urban production

- 21 These four principles form the basis of a neocraftsmanship production ideal in brewing, which in part redefines craftsmanship in the more classical sense by emphasising the creative and symbolic character rather than the manual and physical dimensions. Nevertheless, given their low level of institutionalisation and high level of ambiguity, these principles are not understood or expressed in the same way by the craft brewers interviewed, nor are they the object of the same sort of commitment. In reality, this social sphere is not very unified and is characterised by dynamics of internal differentiation and segmentation [Strauss, 1978]. Conventions, i.e. habits, customs and the elements which enable evaluation and coordination [Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991], are not stabilised. The methods of entering the business, as well as the production and marketing methods, are very diverse, and in some cases seem to diverge from the

common neocraftsmanship ideal. Thus, diverse logics of activity appear, sometimes conflicting with one another and forming new oppositions or even new boundaries [Abbott, 1995]. Conflicts between these different views of the activity can lead to controversy – sometimes public. These conflicts mainly revolve around the interpretation of the right balance between the preservation of social and/or moral principles and the pursuit of a profitable economic activity. Belonging to this sphere involves the defence of certain modes of authenticity or reconciliation between the continuation of a project defined by values and the economic success of the product [Demazière *et al.*, 2013].

- 22 Based on a typological approach aimed at comparing the cases encountered during the interviews, we are able to distinguish three approaches to the activity, or ranges of action, which tend to be differentiated within the Brussels microbrewery sector. These three approaches are distinguished by the interpretation and importance given to the four structuring principles of craft brewing (taste, quality, personal expression, local presence), as well as by the preferred modes of authenticity (table 2). These different production approaches form a space with three poles, where the cases are situated and can evolve. They are all drawn to one pole or the other, but none of them correspond perfectly to these standard models.

Table 2. Typology of the three urban production approaches identified

		Niche production	Cultural and/or social project	Enthusiast's undertaking
Structuring principles	Tastes	Traditional and mastered “Local and traditionally made beer” (case D) “A professional beer” (case A)	Innovative and diversified “There are people who come all the way here to taste it – to taste the new one.” (case G) “The brewers have fun with as many recipes as they can think of and brew.” (case I)	Non-standardised “And here we are, proud to be among the pioneers in bringing this bitter taste back to the forefront.” (case B)
	Quality	Attention to the product and know-how “Noble and refined products” (case D) “A structured and scientific approach is needed” (case A)	Visibility and aesthetics of the production activity “Seeing the people who are making the beer you'll be drinking is super cool. When you go to a restaurant, you think it's cool to see the kitchen.” (case Q)	Fun involvement without compromise “You can really have fun and you can really create.” (case C) “Absolutely no compromise.” (case B)

	Personal expression	Competent and unique craftsman <i>"We can tell people how we made them. With every beer I drink, I know exactly why I wanted to add another spice to it."</i> (case E)	Innovative cultural entrepreneur <i>"We wanted to bring a little bit of novelty, creativity and innovation."</i> (case L) <i>"We opened our brewery not just to make beer."</i> (case G)	Passionate self-taught person <i>"It's really a hobby because it's nice and calm. Some people study it, but you learn on the job."</i> (case C) <i>"I also find it exciting that you never stop learning."</i> (case K)
	Local presence	Renewed local traditions <i>"We have a modern touch in what we do but we have a huge amount of respect for tradition, and we draw a lot of inspiration from it."</i> (case B)	Social and cultural revitalisation <i>"We'd like to shake things up a bit in Brussels"</i> (case F) <i>"This place has beer on the one hand but there is also a local organic market and events where all age groups can meet."</i> (case N)	Production of an informed public <i>"One of the goals of my brewery is to get people used to a different taste."</i> (case C)
Modes of authenticity	Justifiable economic objective	Achieving consistent profitability in a quality segment <i>"You can't say: I have a dream that is not profitable. That would be a disaster."</i> (case A)	Involving a maximum number of people in the project <i>"We don't define ourselves as brewers but as creators of communities, creators of tastes."</i> (case I)	Making a living from one's passion <i>"I'm not running a brewery because I want to make millions. I have to have fun, otherwise I'll stop."</i> (case K)
	Reasons for inauthenticity	Lack of respect for natural processes and know-how <i>"There are a lot of people who make beer and who have the impression that it's easy."</i> (case D) <i>"They are brewing giants who have no respect for tradition."</i> (case H)	Lack of an original cultural and/or aesthetic proposal <i>"We still have a fairly classic, traditional philosophy in Belgium."</i> (case L) <i>"You don't get involved in a life project to just copy and paste."</i> (case I)	Lack of involvement and self-expression <i>"A brewery becomes industrial when the brewer is no longer a brewer, but a technical operator who sits in front of a computer and only has to press buttons to monitor a process."</i> (case K)

- 23 The first approach is that of niche production. The emphasis here is on production, which must be mastered and controlled by means of precise know-how, technical skills and scientific knowledge. The objective of craft brewing is mainly the production of

quality products, i.e. products whose quality is not subordinate to profit maximisation objectives. A quality beer is a beer made by a competent craftsman who is respectful of natural processes, the quality of materials and local traditions. Moreover, in this perspective, the commercial objectives are not a priority, but success is still based on the controlled and constant profitability of the company. Scientific and technical training, as well as investment in expensive, professional, automated and high-volume equipment, are considered essential elements of the expertise needed to ensure product quality. Brewing for others is often part of the business model, in order to make the facilities profitable. The brewing profession is described as complex and cannot be carried out without a minimum of scientific training and good equipment, allowing careful control of the process and of hygiene.

- 24 The second approach is that of the cultural and/or social project. In this perspective, the development of a microbrewery activity is mainly motivated by the implementation of an innovative and unifying project. The idea is to breathe new life into the brewing world, to design innovative concepts and new worlds in relation to beer, and to organise events and places conducive to exchange and consumer involvement in the project. It is therefore not only a beer production project, but also a social, artistic and aesthetic project, aiming to contribute to the social and cultural revitalisation of the city. A quality beer is a beer which is part of an innovative project and has unique aesthetics. Accordingly, the packaging of the products and the visual identity of the brewery (logo, website and premises) are particularly important. Consumers are seen as a community which should be involved in the development of the project and listened to, and whose interest should be maintained. Growth is targeted for its capacity to reach and gather a maximum number of people, but always with the aim for a local presence.
- 25 Finally, the last approach, which is very much in the minority, is that of the enthusiast's undertaking. Here, the objective of craft brewing is to oppose and criticise the industrial model by producing an enlightened public. The promise of difference lies in the non-standardisation of production processes and products, as well as in authentic self-expression and personal involvement. In this perspective, brewing is considered not to require scientific expertise or elaborate methods and equipment. The image of the self-taught person is valued for the technical skills he or she has acquired through intensive work in an activity he or she is passionate about. Brewing is seen as an accessible and fun activity, where the brewer's creativity can be expressed. A quality beer is a beer which reflects the personality of the producer who has made it entirely, without any profit objectives or "shortcuts", and which has a non-standardised taste. The economic objective is not the growth of the company, but for the brewer to make a living from his or her passion.

3.3 Heterogeneity of the types of regional implantation of Brussels microbreweries

- 26 Although one of the common principles of craft brewing is that of local presence, the relationships which producers develop with their environment and the meaning they give to their implantation in Brussels are not homogeneous. This leads to a diversity of practices, particularly in terms of location, connections with consumers and peers, and the visibility of the production process (see images in figure 6).

- 27 According to the logic of niche production, local presence is considered in terms of renewed local traditions. The products and production processes are linked to a local history and a certain terroir, specific to (semi-)rural environments [Thurnell-Read, 2019; Boltanski and Esquerre, 2017]. A location on the outskirts is therefore preferred, also due to prospects of expanding production. While relations with local economic stakeholders are an important element of the model, the production and consumption areas do not really overlap, as these breweries mainly turn to Brussels for their distribution via contracts with loyal customers who ask for large and steady volumes.
- 28 According to the logic of the cultural project, in contrast to the first approach, the location in the urban centre is part of the model. The brewery is not just a production space and is above all a cultural place where people can meet and enjoy a beer tasting experience. The place is designed with public access in mind as well as its capacity to facilitate interactions. Proximity – whether physical and/or symbolic – to other places in the local craft scene is seen as an essential means of participating in the general cultural dynamics of the city [Borer, 2019]. A large part of the production is sold on the premises or via the brewery's taprooms, located in the same city and sometimes even abroad. Sales in local bars or at events are also favoured.
- 29 Finally, the logic of regional implantation of the enthusiast's undertaking is characterised by the will to challenge the industrial model at local level through the creation of a certain form of beer tasting and the promotion of citizen involvement in a project [Lallement, 2015]. In this approach, the brewery is not necessarily a place of consumption, but rather a space for experimentation in production and for mutual aid among those who “stand up to” the industrial model, whether they are enlightened enthusiasts or professionals. Alternative locations or locations dedicated to the sustainable economy appear to be particularly conducive to this approach, as they allow breweries to take advantage of support or affordable available premises in order to survive and remain small, and favour proximity with other small stakeholders opposed to the industrial model. A location away from the city centre is preferred, on the outskirts of the city. Distribution is mostly very local: the brewer or an associate often brings the products to local cafés and retailers chosen for their common values.

Figure 6. Images of regional implantation, the types of space used and the presentation of the production process according to the three approaches

Source: Images compiled by the author from brewery websites and Google Street View [2021]

Conclusion

- 30 By whom, how and where is beer produced in Brussels? In answering this threefold question, we have highlighted the heterogeneous dynamics which constitute the resurgence of craft brewing in Brussels and its outskirts. While this return is taking place more gradually than in other metropolises, it echoes a broader phenomenon of the revalorisation of urban production and recent debates on this issue.
- 31 While the advantages of production in the city are being debated – from the point of view of the entrepreneurs, and above all that of the city and its inhabitants – as well as the types of activity to be favoured, the case of microbreweries appears to be interesting as it is marked by a certain heterogeneity of production models and modes of regional implantation and relations. The economic development potential of these activities, their relationship with and contribution to the city and their participation in processes of urban change are contingent upon these models and the ways in which social principles and economic value are interconnected. As regards further studies on the return of production to the city, and in particular artisanal activities, it would therefore be worthwhile to pay attention to the entrepreneurial approaches and models of regional implantation of producers, as well as the collective dynamics involved in the definition of these new production methods and environments.

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NOTES

1. For example, bars and speciality shops, consumer associations, events, brewing workshops, blogs and magazines, etc.
2. The analysis presented in this article is not limited to the borders of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR), but also considers its socio-economic area of influence. Our study area therefore consists of BCR as well as the provinces of Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant.
3. 82 out of approximately 356. Only breweries with their own facilities have been counted [Zyθος vzw, 2006-2020]. Our data are from 2019-2020.
4. Let us mention for example the *Plan Industriel du Gouvernement bruxellois* [Gosuin, 2019] and the publication by the *Observatoire des activités productives depuis 2012* [2018]. See on this subject, in this journal: Orban, Trenado and Vanin [2021] and De Boeck, Degraeve and Van Dyck [2020].
5. Microbrewery projects may benefit from public support, sustainable economy initiatives and urban marketing projects (such as the project to transform the *Palais de la Bourse* into the *Palais de la bière*).
6. It should be noted that the terms “microbrewery” and “craft brewery” are not officially defined and that their definition is often the subject of debate. Even the term “brewery” is a subject of debate, as it can be used to refer to companies which order beer but do not produce it, and which can be called “beer companies” (“bierfirma's” in Dutch). There is in fact a continuum of practices. Without getting into these debates, our survey focuses more on breweries with their own facilities, although we did conduct interviews with entrepreneurs who do not brew entirely or at all in their own facilities.
7. Breweries founded after 2000 and producing less than 12 500 hl per year were considered recent microbreweries. This limit is based on the progressive categories of Belgian excise duty [Moniteur Belge, 1998: art. 5 § 2].
8. There are two main types of fermentation in brewing: bottom and top. The main differences between these two production methods are the type of yeast used and the way it flocculates at the end of fermentation (originally, bottom-fermenting yeast sedimented at the bottom of the vat, while top-fermenting yeast rose to the surface, but the difference is now blurred by the use of cylindro-conical vats in which all types of yeast settle at the bottom) and the temperature of fermentation (between 5 and 15 degrees for bottom fermentation and between 18 and 25 degrees for top fermentation). The production of bottom-fermented beers also involves a cold maturation stage between -1 and 5 degrees for several weeks (called “lagering”). Bottom fermentation arrived in Belgium from Germany and the Czech Republic towards the end of the 19th century when top fermentation was dominant (except in Brussels where spontaneous fermentation prevailed). Bottom-fermented beers were initially seen as luxury beers, as they were more stable, consistent, homogeneous and clear, and required more scientific methods and larger, more expensive facilities for their production [Bertrams and Poelmans, 2019].
9. The current boundaries correspond to BCR and the provinces of Walloon Brabant and Flemish Brabant.
10. Our data are incomplete for this period. The years 1970, 1990 and 2000 are missing and therefore are not shown on the graph.
11. Pajottenland is the traditional production area for lambics and gueuzes, which are spontaneous fermentation beers. An association (HORAL) and a label have been created to defend the interests of these producers.
12. For example, grants, low-interest loans, the provision of space and business project incubators, including the Greenbizz sustainable economy SME park initiated by the Brussels regional organisation City.dev, or the Brusoc micro-credit financing from finance.brussels, which offers loans at low rates for VSEs located in the urban revitalisation area of the Brussels Region.

ABSTRACTS

Microbreweries are an emblematic example of the renewed growth in artisanal activities and are undergoing a significant resurgence in Brussels. Our article discusses the return of these productive activities to the city, answering these questions: by whom, how and where is beer produced in Brussels? First, we identify the dynamics of the location of past and present activities in the urban area and the economic hinterland of the region. Then, based on the analysis of interviews conducted with fifteen or so brewers, we discuss the heterogeneity of the Brussels microbrewery world, through the identification of multiple entrepreneurial approaches which imply a wide range of conceptions of urban production and the relationship to space.

Cas emblématique du redéploiement d'activités artisanales, la microbrasserie fait l'objet d'une résurgence notable à Bruxelles. Notre article vise à rendre compte de ce retour d'activités productives en ville, en répondant aux questions : par qui, comment, et où est produite la bière bruxelloise ? Il s'agit d'abord d'identifier les dynamiques de localisation de l'activité, passée et actuelle, dans l'espace urbain et l'hinterland économique de la région. Puis, à partir de l'analyse d'entretiens menés auprès d'une quinzaine de brasseurs, de rendre compte de l'hétérogénéité constituante du monde bruxellois de la microbrasserie, à travers l'identification de logiques entrepreneuriales plurielles qui impliquent une diversité de conceptions de la production urbaine et de modes de rapport à l'espace.

Als symbolisch geval van de herstructurering van ambachtelijke activiteiten is de microbrouwerij aan een opmerkelijke heropleving bezig in Brussel. Dit artikel brengt verslag uit over deze terugkeer van productieactiviteiten in de stad door een antwoord te geven op de volgende driedelige vraag: door wie, hoe en waar wordt bier gebrouwen in Brussel? Eerst bepalen we de dynamieken die meespelen bij de vestiging van de activiteit in de stedelijke ruimte en het economische hinterland van het Gewest, zowel vroeger als nu. Op basis van de analyse van interviews met een vijftiental brouwers brengen we vervolgens verslag uit over de heterogeniteit van de Brusselse microbrouwerijwereld. In dat kader identificeren we meerdere ondernemingslogica's die gepaard gaan met een verscheidenheid qua opvattingen van de stedelijke productie en qua manieren van samenhang met de ruimte.

INDEX

Keywords: economic development, territorial development, economy, innovation, gentrification

Trefwoorden economische ontwikkeling, territoriale ontwikkeling, economie, innovatie, gentrificatie

Mots-clés: développement économique, développement territorial, économie, innovation, gentrification

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