

Neolocal but global? A cross-cultural insight into the neolocal discourse of craft beer industry

Simona ŞOICA¹

Neolocalism, a movement that shifted the focus from the global to the local sense of place is highly illustrated by local food industry, particularly craft beer industry. Researchers have identified neolocal discourse indicators in terms of branding, environmental sustainability and community engagement. In this paper I look at the neolocal discourse of three craft breweries from Romania, France and United States of America as mirrored in the most active and interactive communication environment, the social media. My aim is to investigate the extent to which national cultures impact the neolocal discourse. I place the research within a cross-cultural framework in light of the cultural dimensions framed by Hofstede, and I carry out semiotic analysis of images and texts posted on the Facebook pages of three craft breweries, Mustăţă de bere, Romania, Deck & Donohue, France, and Bell's Brewery, United States of America.

Keywords: *neolocalism, discourse, semiotics, cultural dimensions, craft breweries*

1. Introduction and background: Neolocalism, (re)sense of place

In the introductory part of the paper I gain insight into neolocalism and neolocal particularities that have authorized the development of the neolocal discourse. The meaning of neolocalism, first investigated by Shortridge (1996) and Flack (1997) may be tracked back in the field of cultural geography, more precisely in what was originally conceptualized as sense of place.

In his seminal work, Lowenthal (1978) investigates the bond between people and landscape under what he names landscape attachment. One interesting assertion that Lowenthal makes is that people are not so much attached to a place as they are to the type of place and to the experience the particular place produces. This remark may inform various types of discourses, for example environmental or tourism discourses that endeavour to recreate meaning for

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania, s.bucsa@unitbv.ro

particular places given the emotions and experiences associated with those places (Cheng and Kuo 2015; Lin and Lockwood 2014). Lowenthal (1978) captures the sense of or attachment to places as intuitive, innate, linked to literary sources or on grounds of landscape evaluation.

Tuan (1974) introduces the concepts of topophilia as the sense of place. The scholar believes that the sense, the love of places is linked to aesthetic appreciation, bodily contact, relations of health, familiarity or awareness of the past. Later on, Altman and Law (1992, 6) explore the meaning of the word 'attachment' on both emotional and cultural grounds. The emotional bonding delineates places "as satisfying because they permit control, creativity, and mastery and they provide opportunities for privacy, personal displays, security, and serenity" and the cultural connection figures places as "incorporating friends, people-family community". Community is given particular attention in the specialist literature. Hummon (1992) writes an influential work on place attachment as community attachment and local sentiment. A vast amount of studies has been conducted within the boundaries of place attachment (see Lewicka 2011 for a complete review or Manzo and Wright 2021 for recent investigations).

While the sense of place as emotional attachment that people have to places is well acknowledged (Cresswell 2004), a similar pattern is identified in the loss of sense of place. The emotional and cultural disruption of place is most often attributed to the effects of globalization that "eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces (Cresswell 2004, 8). Globalization has also affected the sense of belonging (Carolissen 2012).

Neolocalism appeared as a reaction to the loss of geographical identities (Shortridge 1996), "a deliberate seeking out of regional lore and local attachment by residents (new and old) as a delayed reaction to the destruction in modern America of traditional bonds to community and family" (Shortridge 1996, 10), a "reassertion of the distinctively local" (Flack 1997, 38). Neolocalism is seen as a form of resistance to globalization and homogenization of the economy (Holtkamp *et al.*, 2016) that may challenge the creation of new local identities, a (re)sense of place.

Originating in concepts of sense of place and place attachment, neolocalism, a movement for local business support and local identity, is essentially a community, place-based phenomenon (Talmage *et al.* 2020), with food and beverages businesses as core catalysts for a neolocal imprint due to the fact that "their stories and messaging can be steeped in local culture and geographical attributes (Talmage *et al.* 2020, 4). Mihaylov *et al.* (2021, 162) maintain that community place attachment is a distinct form of place attachment in four ways, namely location, community members' bonds to place, holistic focus of place attachment, and behavioural response to disruptions or threats. The neolocal

movement plays an important role in this form of place attachment. Neolocal strategies develop towards stimulating local community economic development, forging community cultural bonds as well as taking action against environmental hazards (see also Gatrell *et al.* 2018). Tourism is added to local development strategy (Eberts 2014; Talmage *et al.* 2020) under its new forms also born under the ethical turn and solidarity economy, responsible tourism or community tourism (Goodwin 2016; Mann 2013). Thus, the term community does not restrict to local community, but it also refers to the community of tourists who also get the sense of place by means of memory, in search of a lost place in their homelands, or through engagement with the local community. Feelings of pride for consuming local products and for participating in the local community are directly linked to the willingness to return to a destination, as Kim and Huang (2021) argue. The concept they develop, locavorism, which describe three dimensions, namely lionization - superiority of local food, opposition - opposing distant foods, and communalization - consuming local food (Kim and Huang 2021: 3) may be read within the neolocal movement.

One particular business, craft beer, identifies with the neolocal movement (Flack 1997; Schnell 2013; Holtkamp *et al.* 2016; Gatrell *et al.* 2018; Graefe *et al.* 2018; Eades *et al.* 2017; Talmage *et al.* 2020 to name just a few). In terms of place attachment, Eades *et al.* (2017, 60) emphasize the role craft breweries have assumed as “promoters of place attachment in local communities” for both locals and tourists. Eades *et al.* (2017) infer that by promoting a community-oriented discourse, visitors may also be attracted to that particular community. As the authors also emphasize, postmodern tourists, or millennials as elsewhere described (Gatrell *et al.* 2018) share the neolocal discourse that portrays engagement with local communities and encourage environmental and sustainability initiatives (Graefe *et al.* 2018). Graeffe *et al.* (2018, 32) refer to this category as LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) consumers characterized by a hybrid lifestyle framed by a postmodern ethics paradigm which dictates an environmentally conscious, socially responsible and healthy consumption behaviour.

The way the neolocal movement is mirrored in discourse is discussed in the following part.

2. Instances of neolocal discourses in craft beer industry

A significant body of research has approached expressions of neolocal discourse by means of textual representations in names of local products, products labels, manufacturers websites or social media environments, as well as in the linguistic/semiotic landscape of places. Craft beer industry has become an epitome

of the neolocal discourse on account of its emplacement at what Gatrell *et al.* (2018, 362) calls “nexus between nature, place, and identity”.

The recurring themes in most studies emphasizing neolocalism are localism and community (Larsen and Hutton 2012; Holtkamp *et al.* 2016; Graefe *et al.* 2018; Baker 2019; Talmage *et al.* 2020; Kim and Huang 2021) and environmental beliefs and behaviour (Holtkamp *et al.* 2016; Graefe *et al.* 2018; Schnell and Reese 2014; Wright and Eaton 2018). A few strategies come to the fore in expressing localism, sense of community or environmental beliefs.

Imagery associated with unspoiled landscape (Schnell and Reese 2014) or agrarian past (Wright and Eaton 2018) is used to promote environmental consciousness and place attachment. Illustrations of rural or industrial tools, for instance shovel, pick axe, darkened mine shaft, reinforce the local character of particular regions (Eades *et al.* 2017). Storytelling and testimonies may enhance localness and sense of place (Talmage *et al.* 2020; Ikaheimo 2021). Schnell and Reese (2014, 176, also referring to Tuan 1980) posit that “place attachment can be strengthened through storytelling and a heightened consciousness of local history”. Another strategy, which may be investigated through the lens of linguistic landscapes, is the presence of local-oriented images and text in public areas. For example, Talmage *et al.* (2020) point to the use chalkboards, stickers of local groups around buildings, local art hanging up on the walls, whereas Eades *et al.* (2017) pay attention to the ‘drink-local’ T-shirts that aim to increase the sense of localness.

These strategies are closely related to the tourist discourse, also part of the neolocal movement. Murray and Kline (2015, also in Eades 2017) posit that creating strong ties within one community and increasing the awareness of attachment to community among locals have the potential to attract more visitors to that particular community. These remarks may also be linked with the feelings of pride and willingness to return to a place, as described above in referring to Kim and Huang (2021).

3. Data and research method

The fact that the neolocal discourse is actually a global discourse is not a paradox. Place-based discourse has been recently investigated within the framework of global production networks (see Coe 2019) as a form of value-addition and spatial embedding of local regions within “the organizational ecology of the GPN” (Baker 2019, 9). In his analysis, Baker (2019) shows that beer labels are sites where place-based discourse follow the main stream of a global-oriented discourse.

A similar observation is revealed in this study. First, I have taken as reference point for the neolocal discourse analysis the neolocal indicators named by Holtkamp *et al.* (2016), i.e. (1) use of local names and images in labeling and marketing, (2) environmental sustainability, and (3) social and community engagement. In looking at how these indicators are expressed by the discourse of craft beer manufacturers from three countries, the first remark is that these indicators are globally recognized within the larger framework of ethical discourse.

What I add to the current literature is a cross-cultural perspective grounded in the cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede *et al.* (2010). My hypothesis is that although craft breweries across the world share similar neolocalism indicators, the national culture also influences their neolocal discourse. The research question, therefore, is: What neolocal indicators prevail in the discourse displayed by craft breweries depending on the national culture they belong to? The next chapters detail the analysis.

3.1. Data

For the present study I have chosen craft breweries from the United States of America, France and Romania.

Bell's Brewery, situated in Kalamazoo, Michigan, United States of America reveals its orientation towards responsibility, sustainability and concern about environmental impacts, along with its liaison with the local community and the National Trails System (Bell's brewery website, 2022).

Deck and Donohue, situated in Bonneuil-sur-Marne, Val-de-Marne, France, undertakes a social and environmental role with regards to sustainable and responsible means of production and consumption. Supporting local businesses, local ingredients, along with a supporting working environment and healthy consumption are a few of the directions in their mission presented on their website (Deck & Donohue website, 2022).

Mustață de bere, situated in Brașov, Romania, emphasizes the pride of setting up a business with a sense of community, that is the brewery, the local and the consumers community (Mustață de bere website, 2022).

The websites descriptions may already give a hint of the predominant neolocal discourse indicator, but it is interesting to investigate how these indicators relate to the cultural dimensions of the three national cultures. The empirical focus of the analysis are Facebook pages of the three companies on account of the dynamics of social media as source for analysis. The entries on the Facebook pages, texts or images, have been analyzed spanning a three-month period, June-August

2022. The aim is to gain insight into the way neolocal discourse is constantly nourished depending on the national culture the breweries belong to.

3.2. Cultural dimensions

The three countries submitted to analysis have a different cultural portrait according to the cultural dimensions traced by Hofstede (2010; 2011; 2022). In Table 1, I present the scores provided by Hofstede (2022) for the six cultural dimensions he has traced at global level, but for this study I consider mainly three cultural dimensions, namely power distance, individualism and masculinity.

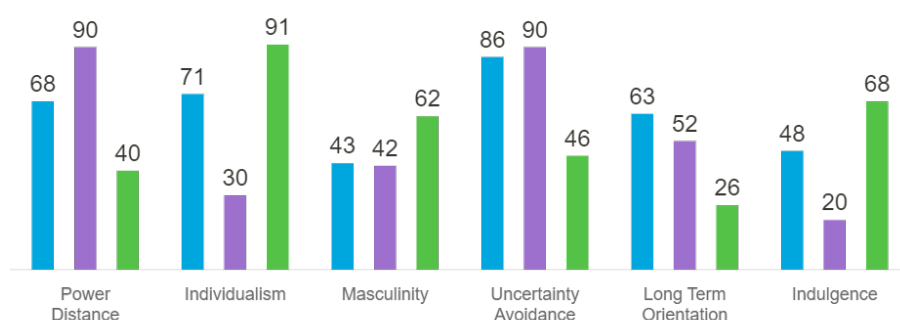


Figure 1. Cultural dimensions scores. Blue - France; Purple - Romania; Green - USA (Hofstede Insights, 2022)

According to Hofstede (2010, 2022), the power distance scores inform us about the attitude of a culture towards power inequalities and about dependence relationship in a country. Romania and France are inegalitarian cultures, whereas the USA is an egalitarian culture. The Masculine score indicates either a culture “driven by competition, achievement and success” (a high score, Masculine) or a culture where “the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life” (a low score, Feminine) (Hofstede 2022). Both France and Romania are feminine societies, whereas the USA is a masculine country. Another cultural dimension, Individualism versus Collectivism, indicates the degree of independence among the members of a culture. “In Individualist societies people are only supposed to look after themselves and their direct family. In Collectivist societies people belong to “in groups” that take care of them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede 2022). France and the USA are individualistic cultures, whereas the scores indicate Romania is a collectivist society.

3.3. Research design

The design for the research, chosen within this cross cultural framework, is the semiotic model drawn up by Peirce (1994). Peircian semiotics enables interpretations of signs outside text and language, and allows a closer insight into “the relation between the world and our understanding of it” (Metro-Roland 2009, 4). In this study, the main concern is to see how meaning emerges from the interaction with a particular object, craft beer. Investigating the sense owners of craft breweries make of craft beer helps us understand what authorizes a neolocal discourse across three different cultures. Peirce (1994) defines signs as follows:

A Sign is a Cognizable that, on the one hand, is so determined (i.e., specialized, bestimmt,) by something other than itself, called its Object, while, on the other hand, it so determines some actual or potential Mind, the determination whereof I term the Interpretant created by the Sign, that that Interpreting Mind is therein determined mediately by the Object. (CP 8.177)

In Figure 2, I explain the relationships within the sign: the object is craft beer, the interpretant is the experience craft brewers have of craft beer, and the sign is represented by the final meanings attached to craft beer in a neolocal discourse, namely local names or images, environmental sustainability, and social and community engagement.

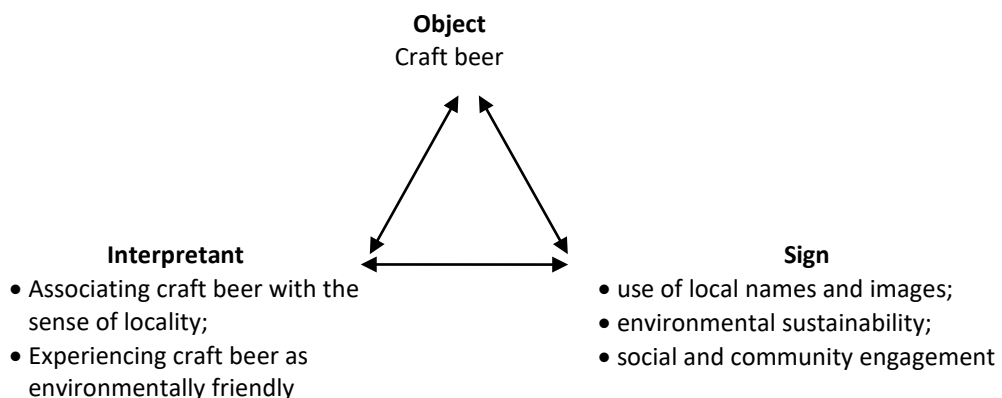


Figure 2. Semiotic research design (according to Peirce 1994)

3.4. Semiotic analysis

The relationships within the signs encoded on the Facebook pages of the three breweries have been investigated through a content analysis that envisaged collocative relationship occurring within texts and images. Halliday and Hasan (1976, 287) originally used the concept of “collocational cohesion” in terms of “the co-occurrence of lexical items that are in some way or other typically associated with one another, because they tend to occur in similar environments”. An example of what the two linguists call “chains of collocation” is “*mountaineering... Yosemite ... summit peaks ... climb ... ridge*”. By means of similarity, I looked at pairs of lexical units and images in light of craft breweries neolocal practices that attach new meanings to craft beer.

For the Use of local names and images sign, I have looked at pairs of lexical units and images drawing on the association of craft beer with the sense of locality. Under the Environmental sustainability sign, the collocative relationships considered means of experiencing craft beer as environmentally friendly. As for the Social and community engagement sign, I have analysed the pairs of lexical units that relate to associations of the craft beer with the local factor and community.

The use of local names and images sign is marked on Facebook pages through collocations with lexical units or pictures/videos depicting traditions (‘homage aux druides’), local ingredients (‘France a enfin son houblon’), local names (West Coast Hazy, Lager of the Lakes – reference to Great Lakes of Michigan)



Figure 3. Bell's brewery Facebook page

The environmental sustainability sign is denoted by collocations with lexical units and pictures illustrating nature and environment conservation: *bio certified; life outdoors, adventure, habitat conservation, Water stewards, trail with Bells, mountain.*



Figure 4. Pictures on Facebook pages of Bell's Brewery (a, d), Deck & Donohue (b), Mustață de bere (c)

Associating craft beer with the sense of locality and community engagement defines the Social and community engagement sign. Deck and Donohue associates the beer with local plantations (*plantation de Claire*), or season workers (*Saison de Cueillette*), and all the three breweries present members of the team as a community. Bell's Brewery also presents friends, including pets (*buddies of Bells*). Local associations (*Breasla Cârciumarilor – Mustață de bere*) local pubs selling beer or local events (*Semimarathon – Mustață de bere*) also connote with craft beer.



Figure 5. Pictures on Facebook pages of Bell's Brewery (a), Deck & Donohue (b), Mustață de bere (c)

4. Discussions and concluding remarks

In the above chapters I discussed aspects of neolocalism and gained insight into the way the websites and the social media environment of the three craft breweries nourish the neolocal discourse. The content analysis of the Facebook entries revealed the meanings attached by brewers to craft beer, i.e. sense of community, use of local names, or environmental sustainability.

4.1. Discussion

In Table 1, I transpose the semiotic analysis in figures that illustrate the neolocal factors that dominate the social media discourses of the three craft breweries.

In the next lines I look at the connection between national cultures and neolocal discourse in order to investigate how cultural dimensions impact the neolocal discourse.

Table 1. Neolocal signs - meanings attached to craft beer by Bell's Brewery, Deck & Donohue and Mustață de bere on Facebook pages

Craft brewery	Sign (meaning)		
	Use of local names and images	Environmental sustainability	Social and community engagement
Bell's Brewery	50%	39%	24%
Deck & Donohue	50%	27%	34%
Mustață de bere	0%	34%	42%

Researchers (Husted 2005; Park, Russell and Lee 2007; Hanson, Rasmussen and Lauer 2018 to name a few) have approached the responsibility for the environment across cultures and have used the cultural dimensions traced by Hofstede *et al.* (2010) in order to explain various worldwide attitudes towards the environment given certain collective beliefs and values. Husted (2005) associates low power distance, individualistic and feminine values with sustainable values. On the other hand, high power distance, collectivist and masculine values are linked to less concern for environmental sustainability.

Bell's Brewery is located in the USA and its social media neolocal discourse is largely oriented towards environmental protection and time spent in nature.

(extract 1) "we take our role as water stewards seriously" (Bell's Brewery).

(extract 2) "we're asking our fans to pledge time to the trails" (Bell's Brewery).

(extract 3) "we get ready to harvest these healthy and flavorful hops for Sideyard Ale" (Bell's Brewery).

The high scores for low power distance and individualistic values may influence the top position of the American neolocal discourse as far as the environmental sustainability is concerned despite the high masculinity score that would place the USA as a country concerned more with economic growth than with environmental conservation (Hofstede *et al.* 2010). However, beyond Hofstede's analysis, the masculine value, identified with power, recognition, success, may be regarded as an environmental factor provided it is regarded through the lens of the first transformations of wild nature into the first American national parks. In picture 2.d above, Bell's beer is associated with wilderness, which, in its turn, identifies with the first national parks that became iconic images of the United States of America. MacCannell's (1992, 116) assertion that national parks were created out of humans' desire to "compete with nature and eventually to win" is also emphasized by Holden (2008) as an affirmation of humans's power over nature. This power may have entitled authorities to remove Native Americans from their land, what Germic (2001, 9) calls the "manufacturing of the geography of exclusion".

The sign 'Use of local names and images' shows that the craft breweries from France and the USA are more likely to appeal to everything is local than the Romanian craft brewery. Husted's (2005: 365) observations may help with the interpretation of data. The scholar shows that in high power distance and collectivist cultures "leaders tend to take cues more from external sources, rather than from interest groups". Whereas Bell's Brewery and Deck & Donohue procure their ingredients from local sources, Mustață de bere import the hop to make sure the beer is best quality. The high score for uncertainty avoidance that Hofstede applies to Romania may explain the Romanians' lack of trust in their systems of production.

(extract 4) "Thank you for your dedicated efforts harvesting these iconic hops!"
(Bell's Brewery).

(extract 5) "our small but mighty hop field next to our Comstock brewery: (Bell's Brewery).

(extract 6) "organic mint and rosemary as local as possible for the first recipes of our drinks" (Deck&Donohue).

(extract 7) We are very happy to be able to combine our love for old styles with our quest for the most local and natural ingredients possible (Deck&Donohue).

(extract 8) France finally has its hops to create IPAs!" (and in addition, it's organic)
(Deck&Donohue).

The sense of place and the discourse oriented towards community, revealed under The Social and community engagement sign, is dominant on the Facebook pages of *Mustață de bere*. Stress on belonging, harmony and relationship (Hofstede 2011), which characterizes collectivist cultures (collectivist values for the three countries: Romania 30 as compared to France, 71 and USA, 91), along with orientation towards quality of life, good working relationships and living in a desirable area (Husted 2005), which outlines feminine societies (feminine values for the three countries: Romania 42, France 43 and USA 62) may explain the data obtained.

Deck & Donohue from France comes second, with community-oriented significances emerging within the object-sign-interpretant relationships.

(extract 9) “You’ve made the right decision choosing the beer we have made for the Pub owners guild of *Brașov*” (*Mustață de bere*).

(extract 10) “We delivered fresh beer to Ograda (local pub) and they posted photos with our moustache-vehicle and other local foods” (*Mustață de bere*).

Mustață de bere from *Brașov* highlights the ties of friendship with local businesses, which affirms a strong sense of community. All the three craft breweries do not restrict to local communities or local businesses, but also promote the sense of working community, a feminine value that comes out on the three Facebook pages submitted to analysis.

(extract 11) “an inside look at the employees who each have a hand in crafting your favourite Bell’s beer” (Bell’s Brewery).

(extract 12) “After two years on a work-study program, Hugues joins our team permanently as a brewer!” (Deck&Donohue).

(extract 13) “Today, on the national day of Spain, we wish our colleague Maria happy birthday” (*Mustață de bere*).

Craft breweries make up a micro-culture (see Gibson 2010 for a detailed description of types of culture – macro-, meta-, micro- cultures) that goes beyond the boundaries of national cultures, with craft brewers embodying similar values “such as creativity, tradition, and locale that serve to create niche, often community-based, markets” (Gatrell *et al.* 2018, 31). Geographies of beer cover wider spaces and link similar values no matter the place. Within this context, an issue for further study may be that of discourse and space in light of Massey’s (2005, 189) views of space as “connections”, “multiplicity of stories-so-far”, “coeval becomings”. Cultural dimensions may be moved to new spatial dimensions in this way.

5. Conclusion

Peirce's tripartite sign, which favours an illuminating insight into the relationship of the sign to its object, is not only a semiotic theory, but an actual instrument that helps researchers capture a more complete picture of people's understanding of the world around them (see Metro-Roland 2009). In former research (Soica 2016) I applied Peircian semiotics in order to explain practices of making meaning in tourism. In this paper I added the cross-cultural dimension in an attempt to understand the meanings different cultures attach to objects, craft beer in this case. The neolocal discourse is also the global discourse of environmental sustainability, along with an ethical and responsible behaviour towards nature and human communities. The national cultures impact the neolocal discourse in terms of the most appropriate choices craft brewers make to relate to their communities. The results of this study may help craft brewers relate to communities of tourists given that the neolocal discourse also identifies with the tourism discourse. A further research may examine the link between the neolocal and the tourism discourse.

The neolocal discourse, global though it is, may meet the interests of both researchers - new paths of research, and professionals – new communication strategies for promoting their products for both local and tourist communities.

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