



TOPIC: BEER CATEGORY

PART 1: BEER AND HUMAN SOCIETIES: AN INEXTRICABLE MARRIAGE

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In the grand tapestry of human history, few foods and beverages have woven themselves as intricately into the fabric of society as beer. In the first of a three-part series on the multifaceted world of beer's influence on humanity, we explore beer's broader societal relevance, a prelude to further deep dives into beer's role as a potent catalyst for cultural, artistic, and technological advancements.

Beer is accounted as the most widely consumed alcoholic beverage worldwide, and third beverage in overall popularity, behind water and tea. A recent report from leading global economic forecasting and econometric analysis firm Oxford Economics, revealed that in 2019 the beer industry contributed a staggering \$555 billion to global GDP, averaging about 0.8% of GDP per country. The report also underscores that brewing supports over 23 million jobs globally and generates around \$262 billion in tax revenues for governments. Considering its influence on global GDP, job creation, and government revenue — and comparing beer's economic contribution to the world's most consumed beverage, tea, whose production is valued at approximately \$17 billion (about 3% of that of beer) — it becomes evident just how substantial beer's impact on the global economy is.

One crucial reason for beer's widespread significance in societies around the world, from the streets of Berlin to the heights of the Himalayas, lies in its deep historical roots. Fermented cereal-based beverages have been an integral part of human life for millennia, with some sources tracing the origins of brewing back at least 10,000 years.

Beer is, essentially, intricately intertwined with human civilizations. And as such, its positive effect on society extends well beyond mere economic contribution.

Community impact

Beer and brewing can have a significant impact on local communities. Breweries like Diageo-owned Seychelles Breweries, for instance — the sole beer producer in the Indian Ocean archipelago of the Seychelles — plays a crucial role in the local economy and society. In a country with only two noteworthy industries, fisheries and tourism, which rely on fluctuating influx of tourists or the vulnerability of feeble export markets, brewing offers a substantial and safe alternative source of employment. The brewery employs around 160 people, the majority of whom are locals, thus not only contributing to the livelihoods of individuals, but bolstering the broader community too.

Beer and brewing can also play a vital role in rural or remote areas worldwide. In 2018, a research paper conducted a study involving 16 small breweries in rural Australia, revealing the positive impact they have on local and regional development. The paper shows how these types of breweries often exhibit a strong connection to their local surroundings. They emphasize their deep attachment to the region, a commitment to fostering regional growth, and, in some cases, a dedication to using local ingredients in their beer production. The evidence gathered from the case studies presented in the paper indicates that these breweries contribute positively by building social, symbolic, and financial capital within their hometowns and regions.

Public houses, public homes

Whether in rural areas or in more urbanized centers, the places where beer is traditionally consumed have historically played a profoundly positive role in communities too. In anglophone societies, pubs have historically represented vital institutions that go beyond merely retailing beer. They serve as essential venues for social interaction, providing physical spaces where people can gather and engage with one another. They contribute to a sense of social belonging for the various stakeholder groups they serve within the community.

A recent report issued by British think-tank Localis, which focuses on issues related to politics, public service reform and localism, provides evidence to the key value of pubs for societies. According to polling conducted by YouGov for the report, a substantial 75% of respondents expressed a positive view of the impact of pubs on community life. When asked about the role of pubs in bringing people together, a remarkable 81% of British adults agreed on their significance, and 68% believed that pubs play a role in alleviating loneliness.

Moreover, the survey revealed that nearly half of the respondents (44%) were aware of pub events that promoted community togetherness, and another 25% were acquainted with local pubs that actively supported charitable causes. Additionally, 17% of those surveyed were informed about local pubs that provided assistance to vulnerable individuals in their area, such as The Lamb Inn in Swadlincote, a former mining town in England's South Derbyshire. Owner Becky Barnett points out how her venue supports the local community in a number of ways, including offering free food and drinks to people on Wednesday mornings. "People can come into the pub, have a free hot meal, and in winter, sit by our log fire in comfy chairs, no questions asked," she says. "When times are tough, we want to be a place where people can come for help and local people have been incredibly grateful of us opening our doors at no cost."

In a paper published in the journal *Beer, Brewing, and Business History*, Ignazio Cabras and David M. Higgins argue that the gradual decline pubs have been experiencing in Britain since the 1980s has been having a considerable effect on the levels of community cohesion and social wellbeing in rural communities. "Their decline also had an impact on alcohol consumption trends: pubs provide a safe and controlled environment which fosters 'social drinking', but their decline is frequently associated with increased levels of alcohol consumption within private premises. This signifies higher risks in terms of health and depression, which in the absence of pubs (or similar places for communal aggregation) often remain unreported even in the smallest communities."

Such is beer's relevance in our societies that, while traditional pubs have been facing a decline, new and alternative beer-centric venues have been emerging. Ian Clayton, writer and author of *It's the beer talking: Adventures in public houses*, claims that some pubs have maintained their social significance by catering to "communities of interest", rather than communities based solely on geographical proximity. "While on a visiting fellowship in creative writing at a Chinese university, I often visited a craft beer bar," he explains. "It was no different than a craft beer house in, say, Bristol or Leeds. It was a very 'local' pub in terms of it having a community built around it. But only people who identified with the hipster culture were in there. It was a destination, people traveled miles to get there, it was all about people sharing a common interest."

The craft effect

The craft beer phenomenon, exemplified by its role in inspiring a global proliferation of beer-centric venues, reflects broad societal shifts. This concept is extensively explored in the recently published volume *Producing and Consuming the Craft Beer Movement*. The book provides insight into how the craft beer movement offers a valuable perspective for understanding contemporary consumer culture. It emphasizes that the consumerism associated with craft beer often embraces values and priorities that differ from the prevailing culture perpetuated by large-scale industries, which tend to prioritize profit and efficiency above all else.

Yet, not only did the craft beer phenomenon respond to societal shifts, it actively catalyzed further changes in society, too. It paved the way for — and influenced — the emergence of other movements, including the contemporary spirits industry's remarkable flavor revolution. Today, a diverse spectrum of spirits producers, ranging from small independent distilleries to multinational corporations, are reevaluating the importance of flavor throughout the entire production process by experimenting, innovating, and paying greater attention to raw ingredients and yeast selection.

Mild inebriation

Alongside its supporting role in community building and socialization, beer's (mild) inebriation effect has also historically played a vitally positive function in our societies. Beer might have had a significant impact on not only the survival but on the development and civilization process of the human species, too.

Archaeological evidence indicates that moderate intoxication from early brews was seen as an aid in facilitating deliberation and was even a central element within state-making projects. In fact, studies claim that inebriation from beer might have aided the development of civilization itself. Human beings are social creatures subject to social constraints. Such constraints have been central to the survival of humans as a species by fostering cooperation, hierarchy, responsibility, conflict avoidance, and resource allocation within our ancestral groups. Yet, these same instincts often limited early human's capacity for exploration, creativity, romance, innovation, and experimentation. By temporarily overriding the rigid social codes that kept ancient tribes secure, beer permitted individual freedom and expression, offering a paramount mechanism to unlocking human civilization. Scholars have gone as far as suggesting that "the mind-altering effects stemming from alcohol consumption likely served as a catalyst that sparked the Neolithic revolution in Mesopotamia".

The Neolithic Revolution was a pivotal moment in human history. Societies transitioned from hunter-gatherer lifestyles to agriculture and settled farming, significantly altering human culture, economy, and social structures by enabling the development of permanent settlements, and surplus food production.

Beyond its significant contribution to today's global GDP, we might owe beer the very beginning of civilization itself, too.

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