

Project Proposal: BMSS6007

Title: **Environmental Challenges in Surf Culture: From Awareness to Action**

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Fig 1.

Introduction:

My experiences as a surfer, from my home in Gibraltar to my time surfing in Tarifa, Spain, and now living, surfing, and working as a surf coach in West Wales, have sparked my interest in exploring how surf communities engage in activism to address environmental degradation. Additionally, I am keen to understand how surf culture contributes to raising awareness about environmental issues. This literature review will examine how environmental concerns such as coastal erosion, pollution, and climate change influence the sport of surfing within contemporary surf culture. It will particularly focus on the role of surfers and local communities in raising environmental awareness and advocating for positive change.

Like the primitive roots of surfing, modern surfing culture aligns with a philosophy of nature and spirituality, drawing on past indigenous ways of knowing; it is a social movement defined by surfing, ocean connection, and values of freedom, adventure, and environmental consciousness (McGloin, 1991). According to McMahon (2024), surf culture often places a strong emphasis on fellowship, kindness, and cooperation, with surfers supporting one another and working together toward common goals. This sense of community and connection to the ocean influences surfers' awareness of environmental issues and their potential to advocate for change. Surfers are increasingly engaging in environmental activism, particularly as pollution, coastal erosion, and other environmental challenges directly impact surfing.

Wheaton (2020) highlights how surfing fosters intrinsic environmental awareness, which drives advocacy efforts within surf communities. Evers and Phoenix (2022) challenge the idealized view of 'blue spaces' by highlighting the realities of surfing in polluted waters in the UK. They depict seascapes as neglected and damaged, revealing the challenges surfers face and the complexities of joining a new surf community. Similarly, Whyte (2019) outlines how Irish surfers engage with the ocean in ways that reshape their sense of community and environmental responsibility, embodying a form of saltwater citizenship through their politicized connection to the waves. Surfers and coastal communities in West Wales, including Pembrokeshire, face numerous environmental challenges, such as unpredictable weather patterns, coastal erosion, and pollution, all of which directly affect surf conditions and the local economy (Wadey, Roberts, and Harris, 2013).

By broadening the scope beyond Pembrokeshire, this literature review will offer a wider perspective by examining global examples of surf communities engaging in activism and raising awareness about environmental issues. This expanded focus will explore emerging trends, innovative approaches in surf tourism, and environmental activism, making the review relevant to surf cultures worldwide. Pembrokeshire, a key region within West Wales, serves as a case study for understanding these dynamics, and the review will reflect on the region's unique coastal environment within a global context.

While surf culture in each region is shaped by its unique coastal geography, it is evident that surfers worldwide must confront environmental degradation, which in turn affects surfing practices, tourism, and community resilience (Holthuijsen, 2007). This literature review will explore how surfers contribute to raising awareness of environmental concerns such as ocean pollution and climate-related issues. It will examine how the surfing community encourages others who engage with the sea to take action to protect the environment and the ways in which surfing promotes the importance of caring for the ocean to ensure its health and sustainability. Lastly, it will examine how surf communities, particularly in West Wales, respond to these challenges through activism and awareness campaigns, with global examples providing additional context.

Research Question:

How does surfing help raise awareness of environmental issues, inspire action, and encourage people to protect the ocean?

Climate Change and Surfing

Climate change is having a significant impact on surf conditions and broader surf culture. Rising ocean temperatures are leading to changes in wave patterns, with observed shifts in wave height, frequency, and consistency. These changes are particularly noticeable in surf destinations worldwide (Bennett et al., 2016; Espejo, Losada, and Méndez, 2014). As surf conditions become more unpredictable, surf tourism, local economies, and the overall surfing experience are directly affected (Scarfe et al., 2009). Surfers, who have traditionally relied on stable conditions, are now forced to adapt both in their surfing practices and by becoming more involved in environmental activism (Kelly, 2016).

In response, surf communities engage in local and global activism to raise awareness of how climate change affects surf conditions and coastal environments (Lazarow, Miller, and Blackwell, 2008). Organisations like Surfers Against Sewage have been at the forefront, connecting the impact of environmental degradation to the social consciousness of surf culture, advocating for clean water, and supporting coastal conservation efforts (Surfers Against Sewage, 2021). Furthermore, surf culture serves as a platform for climate change advocacy, with surfers supporting campaigns to protect coastlines from rising sea levels, pollution, and coastal erosion (Román et al., 2022). Surf tourism, festivals, and global awareness campaigns have all become significant avenues for environmental advocacy, with surf communities coming together to protect surf environments for future generations (O'Brien and Ponting, 2013).

Research Gaps and Justification:

Research on surf culture and climate change has tended to focus on major surf hotspots such as California, Australia, and Hawaii (Scarfe, Healy, and Rennie, 2009; Kelly, 2016). While these studies address the broader relationship between environmental degradation and surfing, there is a notable lack of research focused on smaller regions, such as Pembrokeshire, Wales. Pembrokeshire has a strong surf culture and a growing surf tourism economy, yet it faces unique environmental challenges, including climate change and coastal erosion, which have not been thoroughly explored (Komali Kantamaneni et al., 2024).

Most existing research has focused on the economic impacts of climate change, such as the loss of revenue from surf tourism (Lazarow, Miller, and Blackwell, 2008). However, fewer studies explore how local surfers and tourism operators adapt to these challenges and engage in environmental stewardship (Román et al., 2022).

Key areas:

- The impacts of climate change, pollution, and coastal erosion on surf tourism in Pembrokeshire (Fanti et al., 2023).
- How local communities and surf culture adapt to these environmental changes (Espejo, Losada, and Méndez, 2014).
- The role of surf culture in fostering environmental activism and sustainability (Surfers Against Sewage, 2021).

Aims:

- To review existing literature on the relationship between environmental challenges and surf culture, specifically in Pembrokeshire.
- To explore key environmental issues (e.g., climate change, water quality, and coastal erosion) that affect surfing practices and tourism in the region (Steers, 1964).
- To investigate how surf culture fosters local environmental stewardship and how surfers engage in activism to address climate change and other environmental challenges (O'Brien and Ponting, 2013).

Objectives:

- Identify the main environmental threats to surf culture in Pembrokeshire (e.g., surf tourism, community resilience, activism) (Bennett et al., 2016).
- Examine existing research on local initiatives to address environmental challenges (e.g., beach clean-ups and conservation efforts) (John, 2019).
- Analyse existing studies on the relationship between environmental changes and surf tourism, particularly in smaller regions like Pembrokeshire, West Wales (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017).
- Assess the role of surfing communities in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable tourism practices (Lock, 2023).

Methodology:

The literature review will analyse peer-reviewed academic sources, books, and reports that explore the intersection of environmental challenges and surf culture. Some of the key topics will include:

- The impact of climate change on surf conditions (Scarfe, Healy, and Rennie, 2009).
- Coastal erosion and pollution and their effects on surfing practices (Fanti et al., 2023).
- The role of surf tourism in local economies and its vulnerability to environmental changes (Román et al., 2022).
- Surf culture as a platform for environmental activism and sustainability (Manero and Mach, 2023).

The review will also include grey literature, such as reports from environmental organisations (e.g., Surfers Against Sewage, 2021) and government publications on coastal conservation and surf tourism (Espejo, Losada, and Méndez, 2014). Focusing on coastal conservation and surf tourism (Espejo, Losada, and Méndez, 2014).

Data Collection:

- Academic Literature: A review of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers on topics like climate change, surf tourism, environmental stewardship, and coastal erosion (Holthuijsen, 2007; Wadey et al., 2013).
- Gray Literature (reports, research papers, theses or dissertations, white papers or policy documents, Technical reports): such as Surfers Against Sewage (2021), local government publications, and other relevant sources addressing surf tourism and coastal environmental issues (Bennett et al., 2016).

Timeline:

- Submit Proposal: 26th March
- Gather and Analyse Literature:: 27th March – 8th April
- Refine Research Question: 8th April– 11th April
- Draft the Literature Review: 10th April– 20th April
- Analyse Key Findings: 21st April- 30th April
- Final Draft Writing: 1st May- 14th May
- Review and Edit: 14th May- 27st May
- Submit Final Literature Review: 28 May – 30th May

Expected Outcomes:

This literature review aims to:

- A clear understanding of how environmental challenges impact surf culture and tourism in Pembrokeshire (Fanti et al., 2023).
- Identification of key environmental issues and the local responses to these challenges (Komali Kantamaneni et al., 2024).
- A focus on the role of surf culture in fostering environmental activism and promoting sustainable tourism (Lazarow et al., 2008).
- Contributions to the growing body of research on sustainable surf tourism and coastal resilience (Román et al., 2022).

Conclusion:

This literature review will illuminate the intersection of environmental change and surf culture, particularly in Pembrokeshire, and explore how local surfers and coastal communities respond to these challenges. By integrating existing research, this review will contribute valuable insights into how small coastal communities can build resilience and sustainability in the face of global environmental threats, with a particular focus on the role of surf culture in promoting environmental stewardship and community adaptation (Surfers Against Sewage, 2021).

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Appendices

Fig 1.

Gill, P. (2021). *Newgale Beach, Pembrokeshire*. [Image] Available at: <https://www.surflife.com/surf-news/whats-like-surfing-wales-anyway/178315> (Accessed 26 Jan. 2025).