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# The genesis of a new body of sport tourism literature: a systematic review of surf tourism research (1997–2011)

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*Surf tourism is a rapidly expanding market segment of the wider sport tourism industry and the purpose of this study is to provide an analytical interpretation of surf tourism research. Published and unpublished literature from 1997 through to 2011 was collected through searching a variety of academic databases and communicating directly with the authors themselves. A systematic review was employed to identify and analyze the types of research emerging from international journals, universities, governments, and the not-for-profit sector. The study indicates a genesis in sport tourism literature, representing a new and available body of surf tourism research. We find that this new area of research has arisen mainly from the grey literature through the works of graduate students and consultants. Surfing events, artificial surfing reefs, and the sustainability of surf sites and host communities are among the most prolific areas under discussion and key arguments include socioeconomics, coastal management, and sustainable tourism. Approximately 10% of countries in the world with coastal surfing resources have been studied, and this and other findings indicate the potential for new areas of research in domestic and international tourism. A bibliography provides 156 documentary materials compiled for the systematic review.*

**Keywords:** surfing; surf tourism; literature review; sustainability; coastal management

## Introduction and Rationale

Surfing is generally defined as the act of riding an ocean wave while standing on a surfboard and broadly includes other aspects of wave riding, such as riding prone on a ‘bodyboard’ or simply ‘bodysurfing’ (using only one’s body surface to plane across

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the wave). Consequently, surf tourism research is an outgrowth of the research literature related to the activity of surfing framed in the discipline of tourism. For the purposes of this study, the broad definition of 'surf tourism' has been adopted from Tourism New South Wales (2009):

An activity which takes place 40 km or more from the person's place of residence, where surfing or attending a surfing event are the primary purpose for travel. Surf tourists stay at their destinations for at least one night or can undertake their visit as a day trip. (p. 3)

The growth of surfing in sport and tourism has gained marked attention in academia during the past decade, and this paper establishes a corpus of surf tourism research for academic review. Built upon the foundational studies by Assenov and Martin (2010) and Martin and Assenov (2011), a comprehensive inventory of 156 pieces of research spanning 15 years (1997–2011) was compiled for review, including the gray literature. The study outlines the development of surf tourism literature in terms of the types and quantities of research emerging from international journals, universities, governments, and the not-for-profit sector; it offers an evidence-based informetric approach to the development, content, and current status of surf tourism research in the academe. This type of investigation serves to identify intellectual linkages which can be systematically counted, such as the growth and productivity of studies (Eom, 2008). The reference list provides a seminal body of documentary research materials on surf tourism.

### **Systematic Approach to the Study**

A systematic literature review is a straightforward methodology often applied in the social sciences and this study investigates and presents surf tourism research normatively and quantitatively. While this type of documentary analysis may satisfy the natural curiosity of those in the discipline, it is particularly useful to future research, graduate students, and faculty whereby the knowledge of research productivity facilitates an understanding of scholarly output (Jogarathnam et al., 2005). Weed (2006a) suggests that although a key feature of the systematic review is the aim for comprehensive coverage of a field of study, it is a primary research activity in its own right. Fundamentally, a systematic review covers a wide-ranging search for relevant studies on a specific topic, and those identified are then evaluated according to a 'pre-determined explicit method' (Klassen et al., 1998, p. 701). In contrast to single studies taken in isolation, the systematic and statistical summary of a determined body of research results in a 'research synthesis', a methodology which is highly progressive (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). In the context of sport tourism, Weed (2006b) identifies how the boundaries of such studies are determined:

The key to systematic review is that the criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of studies in the review is explicit from the outset, and while others may not agree with the inclusions, the criteria for such inclusions, and thus the scope of the review, are clearly delimited. (p. 6)

The collection of the surf tourism literature began in 2007 and encompassed three broad approaches: (1) extensive and ongoing internet search using a variety of

advanced search techniques on a wide range of academic databases; (2) tracking references in relevant books, journal articles, conference proceedings, and Master's and PhD theses; and (3) personal communication and collaboration with authors and scholars. Given the nascent character of the field, the latter approach was baseline in locating and authenticating literature. Over 5000 relevant papers were collected and methodically searched for 'surf' and 'tour' along with other base terms and reviewed through reading and interpreting content in order to discern epistemological contribution to the field.

### *Inclusion and Exclusion of Studies*

With the development of the electronic media and the internet, the authentication of literary materials faces new challenges, such as works generally lacking a printable version or other types of gray and transient literature. However, gray literature and to some degree deliberately gray literature (i.e. for intended readership only) are potentially significant in terms of flexibility in approach and content, the speed of dissemination to the private or public domain, the opportunity to go into detail (e.g. not restricted in size or word count), and as a window into a developing field of research where traditional academic materials may be limited or unavailable. For the purpose of this paper, we delineate the gray literature to include theses (Bachelor, Honors, Master's, and Doctoral), paper presentations (without inclusion in conference proceedings), and government and not-for-profit organization reports; we outline published materials to include conference proceedings (with or without editors), journal articles, and book sections or chapters.

As many references found on the internet or quoted in others' written works do not meet accessibility criteria and are therefore of limited value to future research, we have taken account of the need to avoid ephemera (e.g. internet blogs, unpublished posters, PowerPoint files, etc.) and eligibility criteria are as follows: (1) name(s) of author(s), venue, dates, and an accountable record of presentation or proceedings for conference papers (including page numbers); (2) name of author, year of completion, university and its location for Bachelor, Honors, Master's, and PhD theses; (3) name(s) of author(s) or lead organization(s) (accountable for or commissioned by), year, and type of publication for government or not-for-profit publications or reports; (4) name(s) of author(s), year, and volume and page numbers of peer-reviewed journal articles; and (5) name(s) of author(s), year, publisher, chapter and/or title, and pages for books. Upon consideration, some exceptions were permitted (such as being unable to obtain full papers or page numbers for conference papers). Conversely, in cases where we were unable to authenticate research it was regretfully excluded. Taking into account the nature and limitations of locating the gray literature from around the world and despite the best efforts of the authors, it is inevitable that the inventory of literature is less than exhaustive.

The literature has developed over the previous decade and there are cases where a string of research exists by the same author. To ensure inclusiveness, such layers of research have been measured as individual studies, including papers which are in fact

duplicates (with or without title changes). While in the scientific literature, republished materials are called 'double publication', surf tourism literature is a developing area and graduate students may have presented similar work at symposiums or conferences, and these works may have entered into proceedings (with or without editors) and/or received publication in an academic journal at later dates. In some cases, this has led to a somewhat ambiguous record of publication and posed some dispute in the accurate account of references in this paper. We may have erred on the side of inclusion when evaluating whether contributions passed the quality threshold.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned definition of surf tourism by Tourism New South Wales (2009), the focal point of research included for review is not necessarily the traditional definition of 'tourism' *per se*, and given the infancy of the field, a range of papers with discussion on the visitation of surf sites for leisure, recreation, and tourism, be it domestic or international, have been considered. Topic areas include surfing events, surfing space and imagery (as marketing devices or psychodynamic constructs), coastal and environmental management, valuation and socioeconomic studies, sustainability issues at surf sites and for local communities, and the designation of surf tourism locations as surfing reserves.

Excluded from this study were the following: (1) numerous books and travel guides on surfing and the history of surfing; (2) research literature in French, Spanish, and Portuguese (approximately 10 studies identified thus far); (3) surf tourism articles in magazines (e.g. *Surfer's Journal*, *Surfer Magazine*, *Surfer's Path*), web media (e.g. *Surfline.com* and *Surfers Village.com*), and those articles appearing in newspapers; (4) the wide body of social science works related to surfing (the 'surfing literature'); (5) technically based artificial surfing reef literature (the 'ASR literature'); and (6) scientific works related to surfing (the 'surf science literature').

Of special consideration for inclusion were the following examples: (1) the ASR literature where it includes direct discussion on surf tourism; (2) surf event economic impact studies prepared for or commissioned by corporations, contest sponsors, or surfing organizations (however, as these studies are often considered 'commercial in confidence', only those files which could be located for review were included and therefore a considerable number of reports were excluded, such as a long-running series of annual reports prepared for *Surfing Victoria Inc.*); (3) one Spanish language Master's thesis on sustainable surf break management in Mexico by Pijoan (2008) due to co-authorship in an English language conference paper in affiliation with the US-based *Surfrider Foundation* (on the grounds that an English account conveying essentially the same material was available).

At the discretion of the researchers, a distinction has been made regarding whether studies are 'dedicated' or 'non-dedicated' to the field of surf tourism. One-hundred and two dedicated works are acknowledged in the statistics and tables appearing throughout this paper. While dedicated studies which focus directly on surf tourism are generally distinguishable, non-dedicated works involved careful consideration for inclusion based on their contribution to the field. As it is not practical to provide justification for each of the 54 non-dedicated studies in our paper, the following five pieces of research serve as examples and reasoning for inclusion:



(1) Preston-Whyte's (2002) study which targets the concept of surfing space as a social construct and tourist activity intrinsic to the challenges surfers face in mastering the forces of nature; (2) the topic of surf break management described through oceanographic study, particularly those works by Scarfe (2008) and Scarfe et al. (2009a, 2009b) given their unique contribution in terms of literature review and attention to the environmental management of surf sites for recreation (note that the latter reference was redeveloped from a previous work to include surf tourism and subsequently published in *Reef Journal*); (3) Chapman and Hanemann (2000) who argued the environmental costs to commerce, including surfing and tourism, from the *American Trader* oil spill in Huntington Beach, California; (4) the social science PhD thesis of McGloin (2005) which focused on the social dimension of surfing as a distinctly Australian national identity which includes and attracts tourism; and (5) the anthropologic PhD research by Leonard (2006) who looked at the origin of Bali's surf hero culture amidst the rise of Indonesia's surf travel industry.

## **The Genesis of a New Body of Research**

### *Forerunners of the Field*

Despite the fact that the imagery of surf travel has appeared in specialized surf magazines and films since the 1960s, Kelly (1973) conducted one of the earliest known investigations in the research area (an estimate of surfers' expenditures on surfing equipment in Hawaii). Although surfers were traveling from far and wide to surf the big waves of Hawaii and to buy Hawaiian-made surfboards, 'surf tourism' was yet to appear in the literature. In the 1980s, research into the economic significance of the sport of surfing as a superficially appearing low-capital leisure activity at US beaches brought to light the importance of the natural ocean resources (Johnson & Orbach, 1988), and the economic effects of surfing activities in Hawaii showed that the sport was an integral part of the state's economy and tourism industry (Markrich, 1988). In January 1991, the *Hawaii Ocean and Marine Council* published a management plan which acknowledged that 23,000 surfers were using the coastal zone, that surfing events were a major source of ocean recreation revenues, and that the sport was highly significant to tourism (Hawaii Ocean and Marine Council, 1991). As the early surfing industry had important spinoffs to the clothing industry in beachwear and beach-holiday fashions, corporate manufacturers were prolific in promoting international surf competitions at iconic surf destinations. As a result, commissioned studies into the touristic impacts and econometric evaluations of surfing events (contests, competitions, and festivals) led a new area of 'surf event research' in sport tourism in Australia (Breedveld, 1995; Downey, 1991; Ernst & Young, 1995).

### *Surf Tourism in Academia*

Our systematic review begins with Halsall (1997) whose graduate report employed the established *Hallmark Tourist Events* methodology to investigate the impacts of

Australia’s annual *Margaret River Masters Professional Surfing Event* on the host community. In the following year, the term ‘surfing resort’ appears in an international journal (Augustin, 1998), followed by ‘surf travel’ (Reed, 1999), and ‘marine tourist’ (Orams, 1999) being similarly employed to indicate a new research area and market segment. Poizat-Newcomb (1999a, 1999b) was among the first to coin ‘surfing tourism’ in an in-depth study of the sport as an international touristic activity and the second to publish in an international journal (*Journal of Sport Tourism*). However, the term ‘surf tourism’ first appears in academia in a Master’s thesis from San Diego State University (Reed, 1999), a symposium abstract (Buckley, 1999), and subsequently in an unpublished graduate research report (Ponting, 2000) and conference abstract (Buckley, 2000).

**Systematic Review of Surf Tourism Research (1997–2011)**

*Timeline and Development of Research*

As a field of academic inquiry, surf tourism research emerged just prior to the dawn of the twenty-first century. Table 1 identifies the development of the research over time, differentiating the types of literature, including 102 papers which we have assigned as dedicated to surf tourism research. Sixty percent of the total works were produced in the recent 5 years, signaling a significant acceleration in publication frequency, and this is an indication of a new and developing field of study. Approximately two-thirds of the 156 studies produced to date are gray literature.

**Table 1.** Surf tourism research by type of publication, 1997–2011

Year	Journals	Book sections	Conference papers	Graduate studies <sup>a</sup>	Non-refereed studies <sup>b</sup>	Total
1997	0	0	0	1	0	1
1998	1	0	0	0	0	1
1999	3	2	1	2	0	8
2000	0	0	1	1	0	2
2001	2	1	0	2	1	6
2002	4	0	3	1	2	10
2003	3	0	6	0	1	10
2004	2	1	2	2	1	8
2005	4	0	2	2	0	8
2006	0	2	3	2	1	8
2007	7	2	3	3	10	25
2008	3	1	3	4	7	18
2009	10	2	6	3	4	25
2010	1	1	5	2	4	13
2011	2	2	4	3	2	13
Total	42 (23) <sup>c</sup>	14 (6)	39 (35)	28 (19)	33 (19)	156 (102)

<sup>a</sup>Includes Master’s and PhD theses and graduate and undergraduate academic projects.

<sup>b</sup>Papers prepared for or by local authorities, corporations, and not-for-profit organizations.

<sup>c</sup>Numbers in parentheses show the number of papers by publication dedicated to surf tourism.

**Table 2.** Research articles by journal

Journal	Articles <sup>a</sup>
<i>Journal of Coastal Research</i>	5(2)
<i>Journal of Sport &amp; Tourism</i> <sup>b</sup>	3(3)
<i>Reef Journal</i>	3(0)
<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism; Shore &amp; Beach</i>	2(2)
<i>Tourism Management</i>	2(0)
<i>Africa Insight; European Sport Management Quarterly; Geografiska Annaler; Geographical Review; International Journal of the History of Sport; Journal of Ecotourism; Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality &amp; Tourism; Land Use Policy; Society &amp; Leisure; South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation; Tourism Analysis; Tourism Planning and Development; Tourism in Marine Environments; Tourism Review International</i>	1(1)
<i>Annals of Tourism Research; Cultural Values; Event Management; Film &amp; History; Geography Compass; Journal of Travel Research; Managing Service Quality; Qualitative Market Research – An International Journal; Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural; Sport in History; Tourism Geographies</i>	1(0)
Total journal articles	42(23)

<sup>a</sup>Articles which are dedicated to surf tourism are in parenthesis.

<sup>b</sup>Previously (until 2006) known as *Journal of Sport Tourism*.

### *The Advance of Journal Articles*

Academic journals began to publish surf tourism research as early as 1998, and we were able to identify 42 articles (of which 23 are dedicated to surf tourism) appearing in 31 journals (14 of which are devoted to the discipline of tourism). As international journals serve as indicators of disciplines of study, we find surf tourism primary to tourism management, sport tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, marine tourism, tourism geography, and event management (Table 2). Thirteen journal articles were produced as a result of graduate work, indicating the contribution of graduate research to international journals.<sup>1</sup> Journals have been grouped and sub-grouped according to the number of published and dedicated surf tourism articles.

### *Institutional Contributors to Journal Articles*

When segmented by country, institutional contributions to international journal articles indicate that Australian universities have produced just over one-third of all articles (15 articles), followed by the USA and the UK (five articles each) and South Africa (four articles). Griffith University, Australia, is the foremost institution in surf tourism research (seven articles). Although Hawaii is the undisputed origin of surf tourism in the twentieth century, there have been no journal articles attributed to universities in Hawaii (albeit there have been other research works); and while Indonesia is one of the most prolifically researched surfing destinations in the world, to our knowledge at the time of writing an English language surf tourism research project has yet to be attributed to an Indonesian university. Table 3 outlines institutional



**Table 3.** Institutional contributors to journal articles

Country	Institutional contributors	Pieces of research	Year of first publication
<i>Universities</i>			
Australia	Griffith University	7	2002
	Australian National University	3	2007
	University of Wollongong	2	2003
	Edith Cowan University	1	1999
	University of Technology, Sydney	1	2005
USA	University of Queensland	1	2006
	Pennsylvania State University	1	2009
	San Diego State University	1	2009
	Stetson University	1	2009
	University of California, Berkeley	1	2009
UK	University of California, Los Angeles	1	2007
	Manchester Metropolitan University	2	2005
	Bournemouth University	1	2011
	Swansea Metropolitan University	1	2009
	University of Exeter	1	2005
South Africa	University of Natal	2	2001
	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	1	2008
	University of KwaZulu-Natal	1	2008
New Zealand	University of Waikato	3	2004
Canada	University of Calgary	2	2001
France	Université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux III	1	1998
Ireland	Dublin Institute of Technology	1	2011
The Netherlands	University of Leiden	1	2003
Portugal	Instituto Superior Tecnico	1	2009
Spain	Universidad de La Laguna	1	2010
<i>Other organizations</i>			
Australia	National Surfing Reserves	1	2007
New Zealand	ASR Marine Consulting and Research	1	2009

Note: For papers with authors from different institutions, only the first author affiliation has been accounted for. Academic affiliations were not applicable for two authors.

contributors by country and universities and other institutions within each country by contribution. Data were compiled based on primary authorship.

### *Key Scholars in the Field*

Table 4 identifies five Australian authors, Buckley, Dolnicar, Lazarow, O'Brien, and Ponting, as instrumental in defining the research area, accounting for 46 of the total examined studies (including 12 journal articles) and constituting nearly one-third of the extant surf tourism literature to date. As four of these authors are surfers, this indicates that surfers are highly significant in driving the field of study. As of

**Table 4.** Shortlist of prolific authorship in surf tourism

Authors <sup>a</sup>	Journal papers (primary authorship)		Other research <sup>c</sup>	Total pieces of research
	Citations (Google Scholar) <sup>b</sup>	Total dedicated articles		
Buckley	89	3	5	8
Lazarow	33	4	7	11
Ponting	27	2	14	16
Dolnicar	26	2	2	4
O'Brien	21	1	6	7
Nelsen	15	1	3	4

<sup>a</sup>Arranged by number of *Google Scholar* citations.

<sup>b</sup>As of 5 September 2012.

<sup>c</sup>Includes non-dedicated surf tourism articles in journals, secondary authorship, graduate work, book sections, conference papers, and non-refereed papers.

September, 2012, Buckley is the most cited scholar in the field based on data retrieved from *Google Scholar*. While Table 4 is short of an exhaustive account, it identifies researchers who have primary authorship of at least one journal article dedicated to surf tourism and served as a common link across multiple studies. The table excludes some authors, such as Fluker (five pieces of research) and Martin (seven pieces of research), who, despite appearing in conference proceedings and publishing research, do not have primary authorship of journal articles.

#### *Degree Conferral in the Research Area*

Degree conferral in the research area includes 28 theses at the bachelor, honors, and graduate levels, 19 of which are dedicated to surf tourism (Table 5). Graduate studies dedicated to surf tourism research accentuate the interdisciplinary development of the field of study with degrees conferred in anthropology, ecology and sustainable development, hospitality and tourism management, Latin American studies, leisure and tourism, oceanography and coastal zone management, spatial planning, tourism management, travel industry management, and urban and regional planning. Management, sustainability, and marketing are the key research areas. Australian Jess Ponting was the first to produce a sequence of graduate studies on surf tourism leading to degree conferrals: a graduate report (Ponting, 2000), a Master's thesis (Ponting, 2001), and a PhD thesis (Ponting, 2008). Twenty-eight conference papers were produced as a result of graduate work.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Commissioned Research*

Research produced as a result of commissioned studies forms a developing component to the field, wherein 26 out of 32 total pieces of research were produced in the recent 5 years.<sup>3</sup> These works are mainly reports, assessments, and impact studies generated by or

**Table 5.** Degree conferral in the research area (Bachelor, Honors, Master's, and PhD theses)

Year	Author	Degree conferred	University	Country
1997	Halsall	Graduate Diploma in Urban and Regional Planning (planning report) <sup>a</sup>	Curtin University of Technology	AU
1999	Reed	Master of Arts in Geography (thesis)	San Diego State University	USA
1999	Gough	Honors Degree in Social Sciences (Directed Research Project)	University of Waikato	NZ
2000	Ponting	Master of Mgt (Tourism Mgt) (graduate report) <sup>a</sup>	University of Technology, Sydney	AU
2001	Ponting	Master of Mgt (Tourism Mgt) (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	University of Technology, Sydney	AU
2001	Tilley	Bachelor of Science (Capstone Project) <sup>a</sup>	California State University, Monterey	USA
2002	Williams	Bachelor of Arts in Geography <sup>a</sup>	University of Exeter	UK
2004	Tantamjarik	Master of Science in Travel Industry Mgt (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	University of Hawaii	USA
2004	Hageman	Bachelor of Arts in Tourism Mgt and Consultancy (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences	NL
2005	McGloin	Doctor of Philosophy (thesis)	University of Wollongong	AU
2005	Sanders	Doctor of Philosophy (thesis)	Murdoch University, Perth	AU
2006	Hageman	Master of Science in Leisure, Tourism and Environment (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	Wageningen University	NL
2006	Leonard	PhD in Anthropology (thesis)	Australian National University	AU
2006	Cochetel	Master of Technology in Marketing	Durban University of Technology	SA
2007	Krause	Master of Arts in Anthropology (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	San Diego State University	USA
2007	Frood	Master of Arts in Ecology and Sustainable Development (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	Murdoch University, Perth	AU
2008	Kelly	Master of Science in Oceanography/Coastal Zone Mgt (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	Florida Institute of Technology	USA
2008	Ponting	PhD in Leisure and Tourism (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	University of Technology, Sydney	AU
2008	Scarfe	PhD in Earth and Ocean Sciences (thesis)	University of Waikato	NZ
2008	Pijoan	Master of Science in Arid Zone Ecosystem Mgt	Autonomous University Ensenada	MX
2009	Hugues-Dit-Ciles	Doctor of Philosophy (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	University of Plymouth	UK
2009	Ingersoll	PhD in Political Sciences (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	University of Hawaii	USA

*(Continued)*

**Table 5** Continued

Year	Author	Degree conferred	University	Country
2009	Mach	Master of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development (substantial research paper) <sup>a</sup>	American University, Washington, DC	USA
2010	Martin	MBA in Hospitality and Tourism Mgt (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	Prince of Songkla University	TH
2010	Lazarow	PhD in Public Policy and Coastal Mgt (thesis)	Australian National University	AU
2011	MacWilliam	Master of Science in Spatial Planning (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	Oxford Brookes University	UK
2011	Iatarola	Master of Arts in Latin American Studies (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	University of California, San Diego	USA
2011	Eberline	Master of Resource Mgt in Coastal and Marine Mgt (thesis) <sup>a</sup>	University of Akureyri	IS

<sup>a</sup>Research dedicated to surf tourism.

for government agencies, councils, tourism planning organizations, and the not-for-profit sector (Table 6). Commissioned research is most evident in Australia (13 studies), the USA (9 studies), and the UK (6 studies). Eastern Australia (New South Wales and Queensland) is the most researched coastline in this category (with 10 studies). Taken as a whole, commissioned research targets tourism management issues, particularly in areas of the economy, environment, coastal resources, and destinations. *Save The Waves* (STW) and *Surfers Against Sewage* (SAS) are the most active not-for-profit organizations with two and three reports, respectively. While most not-for-profit studies target environmental sustainability issues as well as the economic implications of surfing and surf tourism, all 14 government-commissioned studies (i.e. excluding the works for corporate and private organizations) focus on tourism development through impact studies and management reports. As aforementioned, a considerable number of 'commercial in confidence' studies commissioned by *Surfing Victoria, Inc.* (and other organizations) were not available for this study, save for Pulford (2007). Seventeen of the commissioned studies are dedicated to surf tourism.

### Research Locations

The most popular surf tourism research sites are in Australia, the USA, and Indonesia. Australia and the USA benefit from the presence of universities near the coast and from students and scholars who surf and have taken up research accordingly. Although surf tourism is clearly a global phenomenon, research has been carried out in relatively few countries to date and this may indicate a knowledge gap. We find that although surfing occurs in as many as 162 countries (Wannasurf, 2013) and is officially and organizationally represented in 72 countries on five continents (International Surfing Association, 2013), peer-reviewed research on surf tourism has been conducted in only 18 countries.

**Table 6.** Commissioned research

Year	Commissioning organization	Type of research <sup>a</sup>	Field location
<i>Not-for-profit organizations</i>			
2002	Environmental defense; Surfer's Environmental Alliance; The Surfrider Foundation	Valuation study	Rincon, Puerto Rico, USA
2008	STW Coalition	Economic impact study <sup>b</sup>	Mundaka, Spain
2009	STW Coalition	Economic analysis <sup>b</sup>	Mavericks, California, USA
2009	SAS	Environmental impact assessment	UK beaches
2010	SAS	Resource report	Global, UK beaches
2011	SAS	Sustainability report	Global, UK beaches
2011	Surf First; Surfrider Foundation	Socioeconomic report <sup>b</sup>	USA
<i>Government, corporate or private organizations</i>			
2001	Cornwall Enterprise	Socioeconomic assessment	Cornwall, UK
2002	Opunake Artificial Surf Reef Committee and South Taranaki District Council	Economic and social impact report <sup>b</sup>	Opunake, South Taranaki, NZ
2003	Cornwall County Council	Historical report	Newquay, Cornwall, UK
2004	Back Beach Improvement Group	Socioeconomic impact study <sup>b</sup>	Back Beach, Western AU
2004	Tourism Ragland <sup>c</sup>	Case study <sup>b</sup>	Ragland, NZ
2007	Fiji Ministry of Transport and Tourism	Tourism development plan <sup>b</sup>	Fiji
2007	Gold Coast City Council	Coastal management report	Kirra, Gold Coast, AU
2007	Maui Land and Pineapple Company, Inc.	Recreational carrying capacity	Honolua Bay, Hawaii, USA
2007	Ontario Ministry of Tourism and others	Profile report <sup>b</sup>	USA and Canada
2007	Surfing Victoria, Inc.	Economic impact report <sup>b</sup>	Bells Beach, Victoria, AU
2007	Tourism New South Wales	Scoping study <sup>b</sup>	New South Wales, AU
2007	Tourism New South Wales	Inventory report <sup>b</sup>	New South Wales, AU
2007	Tourism New South Wales	Focus report <sup>b</sup>	New South Wales, AU
2007	Vans, Inc.	Economic impact study <sup>b</sup>	Oahu, Hawaii, USA
2008	Brevard County, Florida (Economic Segment)	Feasibility study <sup>b</sup>	Brevard County, Florida, USA
2008	Corepoint and local authorities	Physical, ecological, and socioeconomic impact study	Cornwall, UK
2008	Gold Coast City Council	Best practice research report	Gold Coast, AU
2008	Griffith Center for Coastal Mgt	Socioeconomic study	Gold Coast, Queensland, AU

(Continued)

**Table 6** Continued

Year	Commissioning organization	Type of research <sup>a</sup>	Field location
2008	Oregon State University	Recreation carrying capacity and management	Kailua Beach Park, Hawaii, USA
2008	Waikiki Improvement Assoc.	Economic impact analysis	Waikiki Beach, Hawaii, USA
2009	Gold Coast City Council	Economic contribution assessment <sup>b</sup>	Gold Coast, AU
2009	Tourism New South Wales	Action plan <sup>b</sup>	New South Wales, AU
2010	Central Coast Tourism	Destination management plan	Central Coast, AU
2010	Surf Coast Shire	Coastal management plan <sup>b</sup>	Bells Beach, AU
2010	Sydney Coastal Council Group	Scoping study	Sydney, New South Wales, AU

<sup>a</sup>Terminology follows that employed in individual studies.

<sup>b</sup>Research dedicated to surf tourism.

<sup>c</sup>Journal article.

Table 7 provides a detailed account of field research sites whereby the category ‘global’ identifies research findings with discussion in a global context. In the case of countries with research carried out in various regions (such as the coastlines of eastern, southern, or western Australia, various islands in Indonesia, and states or territories of the USA), the data have been segmented for purposes of clarification. The ‘general’ category (for Australia, the USA, Indonesia, and Oceania) indicates discussion targeting the entire country or region as a whole. In some cases, a single research project may offer discussion on more than one country or location and these works may be attributed to more than one category accordingly.

## Trends and Implications

With the exception of Augustin (1998), the early journal articles brought the ‘international tourism’ discussion and then shifted toward the ‘domestic tourism’ argument, notably through surf site valuation studies in Australia and the USA. Two key trends are evident in the development of the research literature. First, the call for recognizing the implications of surfing breaks for rural host communities in the developing world in terms of social justice and equality; and secondly, recognizing the economic benefits of surfing breaks for urban communities in the developed world in terms of the need for considering the protection of surfing areas in the coastal management decision process. In both contexts, sustainability is the foundational issue. Thus, with the emergence of a new surf tourism research community, there is an evident call to sustain and manage surfing resources around the world.

Bridging all types of literature in our review are the studies on ASRs and surfing events (contests, competitions, and festivals). With the development of ASR



**Table 7.** Surf tourism field research locations

Country/region	Location	Sub-total	Total
Global			30
Australia	General	15	50
	East and South	27	
	West	8	
New Zealand			6
USA	General	4	30
	California	10	
	Hawaii	10	
	Florida	4	
	Puerto Rico	2	
Indonesia	General	5	26
	Mentawai	17	
	Bali	2	
	Lombok	2	
Europe	UK	14	22
	Spain	3	
	France	1	
	Ireland	2	
	Portugal	2	
Oceania	General	4	12
	Fiji	4	
	Samoa	1	
	Papua New Guinea	3	
Africa	South Africa	5	6
	Morocco	1	
Latin America	Costa Rica	3	7
	Mexico	2	
	Chile	1	
	El Salvador	1	
Others	Thailand	5	6
	Maldives	1	

technology, research assessing the potential touristic contribution of surfers drawn to use an ASR has been evident since at least 1999 (Gough, 1999) and future arguments for ASR development have inevitably incorporated tourism as a component to some degree. While the majority of ASR studies lie on the outer periphery of surf tourism research and have not been listed in our review, 43 pieces of research acknowledge the relevance of ASRs to sport and tourism, 11 of which are committed in this regard: Bicudo and Horta (2009), Fletcher et al. (2011), Gough (1999), MacWilliam (2011), Mead (2009), Mead and Black (2002), Rafanelli (2004), Slotkin et al. (2008, 2009), Tourism Resource Consultants (2002), and Weight (2003).

The acknowledgement or discussion of surfing events appears in 99 papers (nearly two-thirds of the total research reviewed). Many of these papers can be more broadly

defined as papers on the socioeconomic impact of surfing, which underscores the economic importance of events in the touristic context. Sixteen pieces of research are devoted to surf events: Ahmed et al. (2008), Carlsen (2003), Cochetel (2007), Getz and Fairley (2003), Getz et al. (2001), Halsall (1997), Markrich Research (2007), Ntloko and Swart (2008), O'Brien (2006, 2007a, 2007b), O'Brien and Chalip (2008), O'Brien and Harrison-Hill (2005), O'Neill et al. (1999), Pulford (2007), and Tindall (2011).

As the genesis of surf tourism research is evident in terms of the quantity of studies produced over time, the types of studies produced, and the progression of themes and topics in the field, we have placed the research into three conceptual stages for discussion: an *Early Period* (1997–2000); a *Formative Period* (2001–2006); and a *Progressive Period* (2007–2011).

#### *The Early Period (1997–2000)*

The *Early Period* indicates surf tourism research as a novel and dynamic new field of study and features the very first works which are largely descriptive and social science based: Halsall (1997) recognized the positive and negative aspects of an international surfing competition on a rural community in Western Australia; Augustin (1998) discussed the trendy development of coastal resorts near surfing areas in France; Reed (1999) argued the commodification of surf travel; and Poizat-Newcomb (1999a, 1999b) distinguished the early-stage surf tourism development in Puerto Rico with a sense of the peculiarities of a new sport activity. Although Augustin (1998) had previously published in works in French, his 1998 paper is arguably the first-ever international journal article dedicated explicitly to surf tourism. Capacity management issues at surf sites were first identified by Buckley (1999, 2000), and this will become a significant and reoccurring theme in future studies by him and other authors. The research carried out before the turn of the twenty-first century indicated that the far-flung global reach of surf tourism was eminent well before the development of academic inquiry into the field. With the early period came the first statistical marketing data targeting surf tourist behaviors and preferences (Ponting, 2000), and these primary data would be foundational to future studies in the *Formative Period* by Ponting and other authors.

#### *The Formative Period (2001–2006)*

While Fluker (2003) forged the first-ever definition for surf tourism and identified areas for further research, Buckley (2006, p. 194) denoted that defining surf tourism in economic terms encompasses four distinct segments: (1) specialist surf tour companies that run scheduled tours to prime surfing locations worldwide (often using charter live-aboard boats and/or specialist surf resorts); (2) experienced surfers who travel to surf using mainstream transport and accommodation (not easily identified as surf tourism); (3) low-budget surf safaris that take organized groups of surfers to a series of sites; and (4) surf schools offering surfing lessons as part of a tourist's

travel experience (e.g. the 'backpacker' market). We find that social science research during this period originally captures the representation of the 'surf tourist' by characterizing surf tourism in two broad aspects. First, studies aim at surfers' demographic and economic statistics, travel patterns, and behavior (Buckley, 2002a, 2002b; Dolnicar, 2005; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Fluker, 2003; Ford & Brown, 2006; Hugues-Dit-Ciles et al., 2003; O'Brien, 2006; Ponting, 2000; Ponting & McDonnell, 2002; Rafanelli, 2004; Ryan & Cooper, 2004; Tourism Resource Consultants, 2002; Williams, 2002). The second aspect is the discussion on the use and success of surf imagery as a psychodynamic construct, including the chimera of paradise as a marketing device and the commodification of 'surfing space' alongside the impacts that surfers' have on host communities, particularly in foreign countries (Buckley, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2006; Canniford, 2005; Fluker & Hageman, 2006; Ford & Brown, 2006; Hageman, 2004, 2006; Ormrod, 2005; Persoon, 2003; Ponting, 2001, 2002, 2006; Ponting & Wearing, 2003; Ponting et al., 2005; Tantamjarik, 2004).

Over the 6 years of this period, field research was carried out in Africa, Australia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Indo-Pacific, and North and Central America. Primary data collected from the Surf Travel Company in the *Early Period* by Ponting (2000) subsequently provided Dolnicar (2005), Dolnicar and Fluker (2003a, 2003b, 2004), and Ponting and McDonnell (2002) with data for their quantitative studies. Buckley (2002a, 2002b) produced the most cited papers in the field to date, and this research is foundational in emphasizing the limited practical or theoretical investigation into surf tourism and brings to light 'capacity management' as a significant factor in the sustainability of destinations with high wave quality. While Ponting (2001) produced the first-ever Master's thesis on sustainable surf tourism management, other graduate students followed in developing the sustainability theme in their studies during this period (Hageman, 2004, 2006; Hugues-Dit-Ciles et al., 2004, 2005; Tantamjarik, 2004) and sustainability issues continued to evolve as a chief area of concern for graduate-level research during the *Progressive Period* which followed.

### *The Progressive Period (2007–2011)*

Nearly two-thirds of the total literature was produced from 2007 to 2011 (94 studies), marking a genesis in both the types and sources of research. Graduate students contributed greatly to the development and awareness of the field through conference papers, theses, and published articles, and several of these researchers remain key innovators and authors in the field today. The period saw the completion of nine Master's theses targeting the resource base through three central themes, namely the assessment, management, and sustainability of surf tourism and associated sites (Eberline, 2011; Froom, 2007; Iatarola, 2011; Kelly, 2008; Krause, 2007; Mach, 2009; MacWilliam, 2011; Martin, 2010a; Pijoan, 2008). Highly significant to the field are four doctoral theses (Hugues Dit Ciles, 2009; Ingersoll, 2009; Lazarow, 2010; Ponting, 2008). Ponting (2008) produced the first-ever PhD thesis dedicated to surf tourism, a theoretically grounded research which transcends the social, psychological, spatial, and managerial concerns and impacts at remote Indonesian islands; Hugues Dit Ciles

(2009) examined impacts and sustainability at remote destinations in Western Australia, Fiji, and Nias, Indonesia; while Ingersoll (2009) offered ontological and cultural perspectives on Polynesian seascape epistemology as an integral base upon which contemporary tourism is placed. While not dedicated to surf tourism, Lazarow (2010) steers the surf research community toward *Integrated Coastal Management* (ICM) through five theoretical and practical perspectives:

- (1) The relationship of surfers and surfing to coastal environs; (2) the socio-economic impact and value of recreational surfing to particular locales; (3) the importance of local knowledge in coastal communities, including the role of individual and especially organized surfers in shaping environmental perceptions, policy and management; (4) the challenges for incorporating local or lay knowledge into public policy; and (5) our capacity for social and institutional learning through improved monitoring and evaluation of ICM. (p. iii)

Although on the periphery of the tourism argument, yet similarly concerned with ICM, Scarfe (2008) completed a PhD thesis in Earth and Ocean Sciences which built a case for surf break management and protection in the context of resource scarcity and significance. Collectively, the 14 graduate theses discussed here call attention to the interdisciplinary nature and diversity of research problems particularly in the social sciences.

Marking the development of an entirely new context and body of research, studies commissioned by governments, tourism associations, not-for-profit organizations, and private interest groups account for 27 pieces of research during this period (as was presented in Table 6). A landmark in this category of literature came with a series of made-to-order scoping studies and reports (Calais Consultants & Dhatom Tourism Consultants, 2007; Dhatom Tourism Consultants, 2007; Tourism New South Wales, 2007) produced in lead of Tourism New South Wales (2009) constructing the first-ever government action plan to consolidate the state's comparative 'surf resource' advantages and to conceptualize the region as a premier domestic and international surf tourism destination. The report identifies the significance for consumer engagement (enhancing destination appeal), product and distribution development (quality and supply of surf tourism experiences), and business support (assisting surf schools and tour operators with training to implement good business practices) (Tourism New South Wales, 2009). The recent acceleration of commissioned research is an indication of the concern and response by government and the private sector to the social, economic, environmental, and institutional implications and relationships among surf tourists and coastal communities. Equally, extensive reports identifying surfing waves as dynamic and valuable natural resources emerge from the not-for-profit sector, including SAS (Butt, 2010, 2011; Surfers Against Sewage, 2009) and *STW Coalition* (Coffman & Burnett, 2009; Murphy & Bernal, 2008), signaling that surfers and the wider surf community are key stakeholders in surf site advocacy, custodianship, and protection.

Conservation features prominently in the research literature of this period with Farmer and Short (2007, 2009) who proposed the promulgation of surfing areas in Australia through the formation of national 'surfing reserves' as designated and

protected surfing areas in the government legislature; and with FFLA (2010) who revealed the official *Bells Beach Surfing Reserve Coastal Management Plan*. These types of studies indicate that surfing reserves increase habitat protection, enhance natural resource values, and retain existing social, cultural, economic, and environmental values while providing a strategic and institutional framework to address current and future user and management needs and issues (FFLA, 2010).

As the current trend in research development is underpinned by commissioned works and graduate studies alike, the research led by PhD candidates N. Lazarow and C. Nelsen serve to synthesize the source, content, and direction of the field.<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly affiliated with universities and public and private sector organizations, these PhD candidates offer the research community a series of socioeconomic studies which illuminate the significance of surfing to society and particularly to coastal communities (Lazarow, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; Lazarow & Castelle, 2007; Lazarow & Tomlinson, 2009; Lazarow et al., 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Nelsen et al., 2007, 2008; Wagner et al., 2011). These works bring home the argument for the value of local surf sites in urban areas and broaden our understanding of the implications of domestic surf tourism.

## **Future Research and Conclusion**

### *Research Horizons*

The 2010 formation of the not-for-profit *SDSU Center for Surf Research* at San Diego State University is an indication of the significance and future direction of surf tourism research, offering an avenue for graduate research, inviting insight and sponsorship from the private and corporate community, and through organizing symposia (J. Ponting, personal communication, 20 August 2012). The mission of the SDSU research and teaching center includes providing leadership in the struggle for sustainability:

Creating and disseminating specialist knowledge to governments, the surf industry, tourism developers, destination communities, non-profits, and tourists; Inspiring and driving active stakeholder engagement with the social and economic development of destination communities, sustainable use of their resources, and conservation of their critical environments. (SDSU Center for Surf Research, 2013)

In 2011, the world's inaugural *International Symposium on the Protection of Waves* (Global Wave Conference, 2013) introduced international initiatives for the preservation of surf sites wherein previous research (including those found herein) and personal experiences of surf researchers were presented and made available to the general public online.

At the time of writing we are aware of a considerable number of research projects, research grants, and graduate studies that are either underway, in press, or recently published. The following journal articles and affiliated universities serve as examples: Bond University, Australia and San Diego State University, USA (O'Brien & Ponting, 2013); North Carolina State University, USA, and St. Ignacio de Loyola University,

Peru (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013); University of Melbourne, Australia, and University of Southern Denmark, Denmark (Canniford & Karababa, 2012); Southern Cross University, Australia (Fendt & Wilson, 2012a, 2012b); University of North Carolina Wilmington, USA (Reynolds & Hritz, 2012).

Of particular interest among the works in progress is the concern for the vulnerability and adaptation of surfing areas in the wake of climate change, as addressed by the Griffith Centre for Coastal Management and Bond University's *Beach and Surf Tourism and Recreation in Australia: Vulnerability and Adaptation (BASTRA) Project* (Beaches, Surfing and Climate Change in Australia, 2013; Griffith Centre for Coastal Management, 2013). Other ongoing sustainability-related works include Short and Farmer's research on the documentation and development of surfing reserves at regional, national, and global levels (2012), and Martin and Assenov (2012)'s *Surf Resource Sustainability Index (SRSI)* projects.

Based on our review and the survey of the works under development, we identify two dynamic trends in the production of research: one is the prolific growth in research dedicated to surf tourism among commissioned studies and studies produced at the graduate level, wherein graduate studies can be expected to contribute significantly at the conference and journal levels; the second is the integration of surf tourism with a great number of other fields of research and areas of discussion due mainly to its acceptance as a component of the wider sport and tourism market and the growing vogue of the activity on the global stage.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

Surfing-related touristic activities have now expanded well beyond the scope of research and academic knowledge in the subject area, and this is evident in the limited number of field sites to date (18 countries) relative to the global presence of surfing (at least 161 countries). In terms of human geography, two practical and theoretical areas of consideration are most evident: one is the positive and negative effects that surf tourism activities have on the developing world; the other is the concern for age-old surfing locations in developed countries in mainly urban settings which experience high-use, high-impact exposure to predominantly domestic surfers (particularly in the USA and Australia). Research in the former is directed toward 'surfing space' (and the exploitation of surfing space) in terms of capacity management in relation to social, economic, and cultural interaction and impacts on rural host communities; research in the latter area is focused toward the threats and impacts of urbanization in terms of coastal development with negative implications for the resource, as well as acute and visible environmental impacts, such as pollution and degradation.

As this study serves as the first-ever formative body of surf tourism research literature compiled specifically for analysis and future inquiry, we find that this new and global subfield of tourism research has arisen not only by several well-known theoreticians writing about it, but by graduate students, consultants, and diverse authors – and this is evident in the quantity of gray literature and degree conferrals in the field.



Issues of double publication are an indication of the immaturity of the field and this is likely to become rarer as the field matures. From academic and developmental perspectives, surf tourism research represents new and rapidly expanding areas in the touristic academe, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of tourism not only as a professional field, but within the fields of ecology, environmental and coastal management, and engineering, and the concern for the custodianship and conservation of surfing areas wherein the preservation of habitat is an increasingly important point. Surf tourism research appears across a wide spectrum of touristic fields, including sport tourism, event tourism, adventure tourism, marine tourism, water-based tourism, nature-based tourism, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, coastal tourism, tourism marketing, tourism management, recreational management, sport management, travel industry management, coastal zone management, and tourism planning; and social science disciplines include human geography, anthropology, economics, sociology, psychology, and political science.

The broad expansion of surf tourism research areas may suggest a need to redefine the meaning, boundaries, and activities of surf tourism in order to better capture the emergent dynamics of the field. Further research may consider the growth of surfing activities in new regional and demographic markets, cultural shifts in the surfing sub-cultures, and the impacts of technology and engineering innovations which allow wave pools and ASRs to produce waves of sufficient quality to potentially act as tourism drivers.

Surf tourism research denotes a genesis in sport tourism literature in little over a decade set in the contexts of globalization, exploration, and diversity amidst natural and political borders and backgrounds of disciplines and authorship. While in recent years significant progress has been made in developing new approaches and topics in surf tourism research, the field has yet to develop to a level which benefits the myriad stakeholders of the coastal zone – and we are currently left with a somewhat subjective and inconclusive approach to recognizing, evaluating, and conserving coastal surfing resources in the prevalence of the expanding tourism industry.

### *Recommendations*

Further content analysis is required in order to better identify contributions to the field of study alongside emergent theories and methodologies. Foreign language works are in need of review, particularly those in French, Spanish, and Portuguese. Given that the majority of the existing English language research is on prolific surf tourism areas in Australia, Indonesia, and the USA, there exists an opportunity to conduct research in new or less-publicized surf tourism destinations, such as much of coastal and insular Africa, South America, India, and East and South-east Asia. Along this line of thinking, research can broaden to include countries where although surf quality may be somewhat marginal, other tourism experiences (such as cultural or adventure tourism) are already shared with surfing, such as in Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, or Bangladesh. With the growth of the international and interdisciplinary field of tourism, and given the increased petition for empirical research by

graduate students and faculty, surf tourism research offers a new and dynamic area and element of inquiry for students and theoreticians alike. As this new body of research continues to expand, future systematic reviews can narrow the scope and criteria for inclusion of studies which more clearly define the field.

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## Notes

- [1] Includes two journal articles (Dolnicar, 2005; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a) not authored by graduate students and based on primary data from a graduate report by Ponting (2000).
- [2] Includes two conference papers (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003b, 2004) not authored by graduate students and based on primary data from a graduate report by Ponting (2000).
- [3] Note that the discrepancy between 33 non-refereed studies (from Table 1) and the 32 commissioned studies indicated here is due to subtracting two non-commissioned studies (non-refereed ENCORE reports) by O'Brien (2006, 2007a) and adding the commissioned study by Ryan and Cooper (2004) which appeared in an international journal.
- [4] Neil Lazarow completed his PhD in 2010 and Chad Nelsen in 2012.

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