

A case-study of the benefits acquired by surfers in Jæren, Norway

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Introduction and purpose of the study

- Surfing is a sport deeply connected with images of sandy beaches, blue sea, bright sun and tanned bodies (Booth, 2004; Langseth, 2012). However, surfing in Norway, a 'cold water' surf destination does not induce any of the prominent regular surf images (Langseth 2012). Surfers in Norway surf year round, they expose themselves to extreme weather conditions; freezing cold water, strong currents and heavy storms.
- Traditional theoretical viewpoints on extreme sports and extreme sports participants have speculated that participation is about risk-taking (Brymer, 2010; Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012) and adrenaline seeking (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013), a channel for irresponsible individuals with unhealthy connection to fear (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012). However, these theoretical methodologies may display judgments that do not necessarily pertain to participants' lived experience (Brymer, 2005; Brymer & Oades, 2008; Brymer, 2010).
- The main aim of this research is to identify the benefits acquired by Norwegian surfers surfing in cold water along the Jæren coast, south the city of Stavanger in Norway.

This research addresses three research questions:

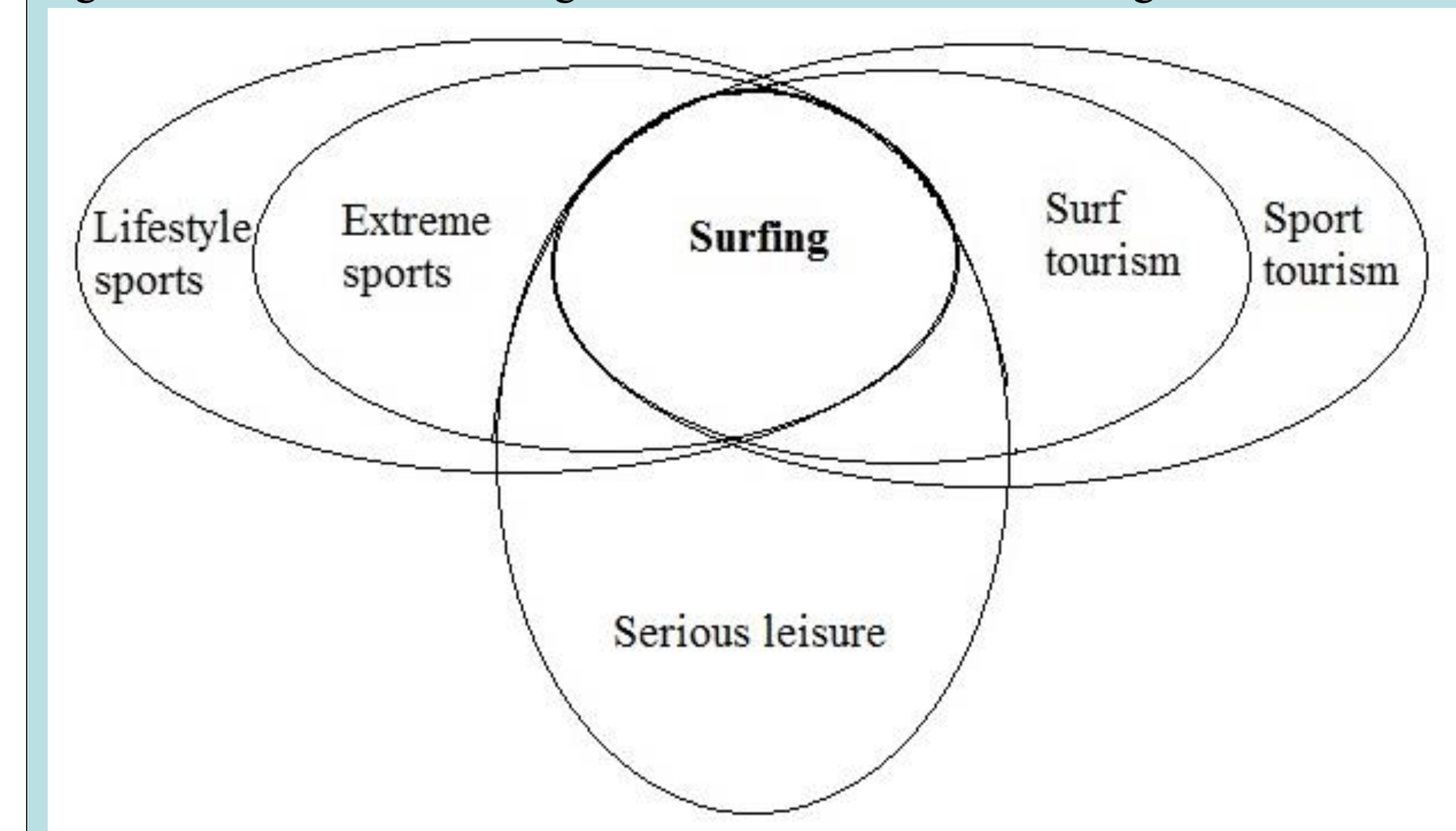
- When and how did surfing commence in Norway?
- What is the inclusion process in the Jæren surfing subculture?
- What are the benefits acquired by cold water surfers in Norway?

Theory

Despite the popularity of surfing, very scarce empirical social research has been conducted on the sport.

- Surfing as a sport activity is interrelated with a number of fields, including lifestyle sports, extreme sports, serious leisure, sport tourism and surf tourism which are all thoroughly discussed in this study. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. A model illustrating the connection between surfing and other fields



- The various benefits derived from participating in sport activities as recreational leisure activities are extensively discussed in the study as well. See Table 1.

Table 1. Types of benefits from sport

I Personal Enjoyment	II Personal Growth	III Social Harmony	IV Social Change
Enjoyment/Fun Flow	Physical health -cardio respiratory -Muscular strength -muscular endurance - flexibility - bone structure -weight management	-Socialization -Intergroup relations -Community Integration	-Educational attainment - Social status -Social mobility
	Psychological well-being -anxiety reduction -depression reduction		

Source: Driver et. al, 1991 P.123

Additional themes on benefits:

- The state of 'Play'
- Environmental benefits
- Travel benefits



Figure 2. A surfer in Jæren , Norway

Methods

A phenomenological method adopting qualitative research techniques including in-depth interviews and observations was chosen for the study.

- In-depth semi-structured interviews, lasting 40 to 120 minutes, were conducted with 13 veteran surfers in Norway. The discussions were led by the researcher, recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

The chosen research design was found to be the most suitable approach to provide in-depth understanding of the interviewees' subjective experiences, allowing the researcher to understand and interpret each individual participant's lived experience (Kvale, 1983).

Results

Table 2. Benefits acquired by surfers in Norway

I Personal Enjoyment	II Personal Growth	III Social Harmony	IV Social Change	V Environmental Benefits
-Enjoyment/Fun -The 'Flow' State -The State of 'Play'	Physical health -cardio respiratory -Muscular strength -muscular endurance - flexibility - bone structure -weight management	-Intergroup relations -Social bonding - Pride in community and nation	-Social status	-Understanding of human dependency on the natural world -Unity with nature -Realization of courage and humility
	Psychological well-being -anxiety reduction -depression reduction -Self-esteem and self-perception			-Environmental awareness -Environmental protection via ecological sustainable practices



Figure 3. Photo taken by Richard Gale

Results: Selected Quotations

Environmental benefits

"The whole kind of like personal situation where you actually are in the water and you feel, first thing you feel very humble because you're in Mother Nature and everything is out of your control. Yeah, I bet like all the surfers have been saying that. The humble feeling of being in something you don't have any control over" (P-6, Male, 27).

Health benefits

"You do start caring about yourself a little bit more like me getting older, health wise. That's also a benefit of being passionate about something which involves physical fitness coz you do wanna keep doing what you do. Otherwise, I definitely wouldn't care that much about myself" (P-7, Male, 45 years).

Personal Well-being

"(...) For me, I felt that I was not succeeding so much maybe as a single parent alone and I'm feeling lonesome. I was succeeding in the sea (laughter) and I experienced that "Oh, yeah, I did it. I rode this wave" (...) I used the sea as kind of a therapy and I always felt more rested to get home with the kids after a session. So after a while I didn't use it as a therapy because it was just for fun and for pleasure and something you cannot do without. Just have to surf (...)" (P13, Female, 37 years).

Social bonding

"I think we're lucky in Norway with the scene being so small and we know each other really well. And we've got a good community and there are a lot of good people in it, but it is an individual sport" says one of the informants" (P-11, Female, 32 years).

Self-esteem and feeling proud

"When the Crown Prince is here, he also kite-surf, windsurf, surf and stand up pedal. And I have equipment. So I take him out, normally he's here to open the concert house or museum so he send me a message "Well I have three hours, what can we do?" so we go out. So that's kind of special too, that the shop and my position has given me the opportunity to go to spend maybe three hours with the future king of Norway, not everyone can do that (...) I'm a royal surf guide of Jæren" (P-2, Male, 50 years).

Conclusions

- The interpretation and analysis of qualitative materials showed that participants gain a wide range of benefits by surfing actively year round. Surfers reported experiencing feelings of freedom, playfulness, strong social cohesion with other members in the surfing subculture, a deep connection to nature, physical and mental health benefits and an overall enhanced quality of life.
- The study contributes to understanding this serious leisure activity as a positive and beneficial human experience rather than an unhealthy and deviant practice.
- Furthermore, the benefits of surfing identified in the study can be utilized by surf destinations attempting to attract more surfers by incorporating these benefits into their travel and tourism promotional campaigns (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). For instance, a city such as Stavanger in Norway can include the findings of the study to its marketing strategies to market the city as a new, exotic 'cold water' surf destination.

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