

164 Cold water wave surfing and tourism destination developments in Norway

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With a length of 103,000 km, The Norwegian coastline is the second longest worldwide and offers many places with good wave surfing conditions. At the outset, wave surfing was a warm water leisure activity, but modern wetsuits provide thermal protection for surfers that make cold water surfing possible. Since its onset in 1963, surfing in Norway has grown as leisure, sport, and tourism activities. To date, only two papers have focused surfing in Norway. Langseth focused on the construction of surfer identities in Norway, while Elmahdy, Orams, & Mykletun (2021) studied Norwegian surfers experiences and travel behaviour. No official registration of surfing sites exists, and studies have addressed the localisation and development of surfing destinations and possible consequential environmental issues on the Norwegian coastline, which is the focus of this paper. How and where has surfing developed in Norway, and does it threaten conservation and protection goals?

Data for this paper were collected through webpages, media articles, tracing knowledgeable individual surfers, pioneers, and entrepreneurs for interviews by “snowballing”, and observing three surfing destinations. As surfers are unwilling to reveal the best sites, a tedious multiple method approach is feasible when tracing these under-researched leisure activities.

Wave surfing began in Polynesia thousands of years ago and is one of the oldest practiced leisure activities (Stranger, 2011). It spread to the rest of the world, initially as a life-style sport, and developed into tourism products and a competitive sport to be represented in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Warm seas, white sandy beaches, bright sun, blues skies, and tanned and fit bodies are images connected to surfing. Worldwide, 35 million people surf. Surfing as leisure becomes surf tourism when the surfer leaves his/her local waves to surf in other waters, and for more than 100 years, surfers have travelled to surf and searched for ‘the perfect wave’ (O’Brien & Eddie, 2013).

Exploring the Norwegian coastline to find remote surf-able waves is a recent adventure

tourism (Elmahdy et al, 2021). Surfing may be characterised as an extreme sport involving an intimate dance with the energy of nature (Booth, 2013) but with risk elements when practiced in cold, rough waters. Thus, surfing in Norway developed as a crossroad of adventure tourism, extreme sport, and recreational leisure, and surfers regard the coastlines as their playgrounds. Three main surf destinations have developed, Unstad on the North Atlantic coast of Lofoten, Hoddevik and Ervik at Stadt on the border between the North Sea and the North Atlantic, and Jæren facing the North Sea. Norway Surf Association dates from 1985. As an out-door activity without close interpersonal contacts, surfing has not been restricted by COVID-19 restrictions.

The first surfers in Lofoten (and Norway?) were Thor Frantzen and Hans Egil Krane who had observed surfing at Bondi Beach in Sidney. Back home, in 1963 they surfed on ‘home-made’ surfboards on the beach of the old small fishing community Ustad. Surfing picked up in Ustad in the 1990’s. In 1999, Lamiroy and Hargraves made the epic surf movie E2K at Unstad beach. In 2003, a local, Thor Frantzen, established Unstad Camping which is developed into Unstad Arctic Surf. They provide accommodation, cafe, bar, surf gear rental, surf coaching, stand up paddle tours, conference facilities, private and public events, and other activities, employing 25 persons in the high season. A public support agency, Innovation Norway, supported the development. In 2008, Kristian Breivik developed Lofoten Surfing offering locally made surfboards and equipment for sale and rent. The annual competition Lofoten Masters attract more than 100 domestic and international participants. Unstad is popular with professional and amateurs and has competitive business models.

The second main surf area is the sparsely populated Hoddevik and Ervik on the Stadt peninsula, the westernmost part of mainland Norway. Surfers from Eastern Norway and Sweden dominate in numbers. Non-locals have developed three companies providing accommodation in old houses. Several surf schools offer courses, there is a

surf shop, equipment rental service, yoga training, and surf courses for women only. A Christian Surf Community is established, who was in charge of the 2016 Norwegian Surf Championship that attracted 50 active participants. The Nordic Ocean Watch, an organisation that cleans beaches, is a unique feature of this destination. Idealism and relaxed life style characterises this destination.

The third destination, Jæren, the long coastline south of Stavanger, offers surfing spots ranging from gentle beaches for beginners to demanding boulder rock points for more advanced surfers. In October 2017 Stavanger Surf Club hosted Eurosurf – the European championship of surfing, having HM, Crown Prince Håkon as a committee member and guest. Jæren was the 'epicentre' for surfing in Norway since most leading surfers started their careers there. It is close to densely populated

areas with many local surfers living in its proximity and practicing 'localism'. In 2019, some local surfers raised a small hotel on Bore beach, else surf tourists must camp or stay in hotels in nearby towns. There are several surf schools and shops. These organisations are 'loosely coupled' with low focus on products and service for outsiders.

Conservation and protection have different faces across these cases. Unstad, Hoddevik, and Ervik, are experiencing "over-tourism". Sufficient accommodation, camping areas, and restrooms are lacking. In Unstad, property prices have become extremely high. In Jæren, protection of a rich birdlife and conservation of sand dunes constitute the major concerns.

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