

Community Perceptions of Surfing Tourism Impacts in Lanuza, Surigao del Sur, Philippines: A Triple Bottom Line Study

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ABSTRACT: Guided by the Triple Bottom Line framework, this mixed-methods study examined how residents evaluate the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental effects of surfing tourism in Lanuza, Surigao del Sur, Philippines. Data from 196 survey respondents, 15 key informant interviews, and three focus group discussions showed that surfing tourism has strengthened community pride, cultural identity, livelihood opportunities, and local entrepreneurship. At the same time, residents raised concerns about unequal benefits, changes in youth lifestyles, waste generation, and pressure on coastal resources. The study highlights the need for inclusive governance, fairer benefit sharing, and stronger environmental management.

KEYWORDS: surfing tourism; socio-environmental impacts; community evaluation; sustainable tourism; Philippines

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I. INTRODUCTION

Surfing tourism has grown from a niche recreational activity into an important contributor to many coastal economies worldwide (Buckley, 2002; Ponting, 2022). More than a sport, it has become a lifestyle-based form of tourism that combines recreation, travel, and cultural interaction. In the Asia-Pacific region, countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines have become well-known surfing destinations, attracting both domestic and international visitors. While places such as Bali and Siargao remain prominent in global surf circuits, smaller destinations, including Lanuza in Surigao del Sur, are also beginning to gain attention as emerging surf communities (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2021; Towner & Davies, 2021).

Despite this growth, much of the existing scholarship continues to focus on established surf destinations such as Hawaii, Bali, and Costa Rica, where tourism systems and governance structures are more developed (Ponting, 2022; Usher & Kerstetter, 2022). Less is known about smaller surf towns in developing countries, where limited institutional capacity, fragile coastal ecosystems, and local livelihood conditions may shape tourism impacts in different ways. This gap is especially relevant in Southeast Asia, where new surf sites are becoming more visible but remain underrepresented in community-based tourism research.

Surf tourism can open opportunities for livelihood diversification, entrepreneurship, and cultural exchange (Gössling et al., 2021; Lazarow, 2007). Effective tourism development also depends on strengthening the capacity of local tourism stakeholders through proactive service practices that enhance visitor satisfaction and destination sustainability (Verano et al., 2026). Recent qualitative research has further shown that eco-tourism education can empower coastal communities by strengthening socio-economic resilience, promoting participatory governance, and encouraging the shared stewardship of marine resources, thereby supporting more inclusive and

sustainable tourism development (Carpio et al., 2026). At the same time, it may raise concerns about unequal access to benefits, cultural change, and environmental pressures (Hall, 2020; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2020). These tensions are more noticeable in small coastal destinations where tourism governance is still developing. Recent research further emphasizes that the success of community-based tourism depends not only on community participation but also on coherent and inclusive governance systems that address socio-cultural, economic, and environmental challenges in marginalized coastal destinations (Indama, 2026). Lanuza, Surigao del Sur, recognized locally as the "Surfing Capital of Surigao del Sur," offers a valuable case for this study. Its annual surfing festival attracts local and foreign visitors, while the town's relatively small scale provides a useful setting for examining tourism dynamics in an emerging destination.

This study used the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, 1997; Weaver, 2006) to assess the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental effects of surfing tourism in Lanuza. It gives attention to local community perspectives by examining how residents perceive the benefits, concerns, and sustainability issues connected with surf tourism. Specifically, the study examines residents' views on socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts; the challenges and inequalities associated with tourism growth; and possible ways to strengthen sustainability through community-centered governance and destination management.

The study contributes to the literature by applying the TBL framework to a small Southeast Asian surf destination. It also offers practical insights for local decision-makers who need to balance tourism growth with long-term community welfare, cultural preservation, and environmental care (Almeida & Garrod, 2021; Ponting & O'Brien, 2021).

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Surfing tourism and its emerging relevance

Surfing tourism has evolved from a specialized leisure pursuit into a substantial driver of coastal economies, influencing destination identity and cultural landscapes. Initial research on renowned surf locales such as Hawaii, Bali, and Australia laid the groundwork for understanding the nexus of surf culture, regional economies, and coastal resource use. Recent research has highlighted the increasing significance of surfing in broadening tourism options and drawing new visitor demographics (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2021). Surfing is now recognized as both a sport and a lifestyle-oriented tourism activity that impacts mobility patterns, cultural exchange, and environmental consciousness (Usher & Kerstetter, 2022).

Research on surf tourism is growing in Asia, but most of it remains focused on well-known destinations such as Indonesia and the Maldives. Most research in the Philippines has been conducted on Siargao Island, known as the country's surfing capital. There are few studies of smaller communities like Lanuza, even though they are becoming better known as alternative surf spots that blend local customs with tourists from other countries. This gap suggests looking into how new surf tourism destinations address the social and environmental changes that accompany it.

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and sustainable tourism

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, which considers sustainability from economic, social, and environmental perspectives (Elkington, 1997), is still widely used in tourism research. Researchers contend that sustainable tourism cannot be understood solely through economic metrics; it requires incorporating community well-being and ecological integrity (Hall, 2020). In surf tourism, TBL serves as an analytical framework to elucidate the advantages—such as employment, livelihood diversification, and cultural pride—and the disadvantages, including coastal degradation, overcrowding, and cultural commodification (Ponting & O'Brien, 2021).

Recent research has underscored that implementing the TBL framework in tourism yields a comprehensive perspective on both opportunities and challenges. Li et al. (2022) found that host communities frequently emphasize socio-cultural benefits, including cross-cultural exchange and enhanced community infrastructure, while simultaneously expressing concerns about waste management, environmental challenges, and the erosion of local identity. Torres and Tan (2023) contended that the TBL is most efficacious in small island and coastal settings when integrated with participatory governance models that enhance local agency in decision-making.

Community evaluation of tourism impacts

Community perceptions significantly influence the sustainability of tourism development. Residents' attitudes toward tourism are shaped by their perceptions of its benefits and costs, as well as their level of involvement in tourism planning (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2020). Research consistently indicates that communities are more inclined to endorse tourism development when they recognize concrete socio-economic advantages and when their cultural and environmental values are honored (Almeida & Garrod, 2021).

Community evaluation is especially important in surf tourism because the activity relies heavily on local natural resources, such as surf breaks and coastal ecosystems, which can be harmed by excessive use or poor management. Research conducted in Indonesia, Fiji, and Costa Rica indicates that excluding local communities from tourism planning engenders conflicts over resource access, benefit distribution, and cultural appropriation (Ponting, 2022). On the other hand, when communities are involved in decision-making, surf tourism can help people feel more connected to their culture, encourage them to take care of the environment, and lead to development that benefits everyone (Usher & Kerstetter, 2022).

Research Gap

A significant amount of literature has focused on surf tourism in well-established destinations; however, research on emerging surf towns, especially in Southeast Asia, remains limited. There is a lack of research on how communities in these areas weigh the pros and cons of tourism in a socio-environmental context. Lanuza, Surigao del Sur, serves as a pivotal case for comprehending the equilibrium between tourism expansion, community aspirations, and environmental conservation in small coastal towns. This study addresses the gap by utilizing the TBL framework to analyze community perceptions of surfing tourism in Lanuza.

III. METHODOLOGY / APPROACH

Research design

This study utilized a mixed-methods descriptive research design to describe the complex socio-environmental impacts of surfing tourism in Lanuza. The quantitative aspect comprised a structured survey designed to assess residents' perceptions regarding the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). The qualitative aspect comprised semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), facilitating the exploration of deep insights and intricate community perspectives. Combining both

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methods ensured the results were valid and enhanced their credibility.

Research locale

The study took place in Lanuza, Surigao del Sur, a coastal town in the Caraga region of the Philippines. The town calls itself the "Surfing Capital of Surigao del Sur" and hosts the Lanuza Surfing Festival every year, which draws surfers from all over the world. Its surf culture connects local jobs, small businesses, and city-run tourism programs. The municipality is a great example of a new surf destination growing in popularity with tourists while still maintaining a strong sense of community and relying on coastal resources.

Participants and sampling

The respondents were residents, business owners, and community leaders who were directly or indirectly affected by surfing tourism. The researcher sent out 220 survey questionnaires and received 196 valid responses, for a 89% response rate. We used stratified random sampling to make sure that people from different barangays and socio-economic groups were represented. The researcher conducted 15 key informant interviews (KIIs) with local officials, surf school owners, and NGO representatives during the qualitative phase. We also held three focus groups with residents, youth groups, and fisherfolk associations, totaling 28 participants.

Data collection

The researchers organized the structured questionnaire into three parts: (1) socio-cultural effects, (2) economic effects, and (3) environmental effects of surfing tourism. The items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. Twenty people took the survey before it was sent out to make sure it was clear and reliable. The Cronbach's alpha score of 0.87 indicated that the survey was highly internally consistent. A thematic protocol guided the interviews and focus group discussions, focusing on perceived advantages, obstacles, and community aspirations for sustainable tourism development. All sessions were recorded with permission, transcribed for analysis, and held in English and the local language.

Data analysis

The analysis utilized descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distributions) to process the quantitative data and employed SPSS for calculations. To clarify, the analysis presented the results in TBL dimensions. Thematic analysis in NVivo coded the qualitative data, inductively generated codes, and grouped them into themes that aligned with the TBL framework. This enabled comparison of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Ethical considerations

The university's research ethics committee approved the study. The researchers informed all participants about the study's objectives, methodologies, and the voluntary aspect of their involvement. They obtained informed consent before collecting data and promised to protect

respondents' privacy and anonymity. To avoid community tension, the team discussed sensitive issues, such as disagreements over resource use, with care and cultural sensitivity.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Socio-cultural effects of surfing tourism

The survey results show that most respondents believe that surfing tourism has a positive effect on local culture and identity. About 82% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that surfing tourism makes people proud of their community, and 76% said it encourages cultural exchange between locals and tourists. Qualitative interviews corroborated these findings, with numerous residents highlighting that the annual Lanuza Surfing Festival has evolved into a venue for showcasing local traditions, music, and cuisine. However, 41% of respondents said they were worried about how younger residents' lifestyles were changing, especially due to shifting social values and greater exposure to Westernized surf culture. Focus group participants emphasized the potential for youth empowerment (e.g., via surf schools) and the dangers of cultural dilution.

Table 1. Socio-cultural perceptions of surfing tourism

Indicator	Mean Score (1-5)	Interpretation
Surfing tourism fosters community pride	4.21	Agree
Promotes cultural exchange	4.08	Agree
Enhances sense of place identity	3.97	Agree
Encourages lifestyle changes among youth	3.64	Moderately Agree

Economic effects of surfing tourism

Respondents perceived that surfing tourism was a major source of job opportunities. About 79% said that tourism helps families make money, either directly by providing jobs in surf-related businesses or indirectly by increasing demand for local goods and services. They said that small businesses like restaurants, homestays, and souvenir shops would benefit the most. Key informants said that, even though there are more job opportunities, they are not evenly distributed. Business owners and families who work in surf-related businesses benefit the most, while traditional jobs like fishing do not.

Table 2. Economic perceptions of surfing tourism

Indicator	Mean Score (1-5)	Interpretation
Creates employment opportunities	4.12	Agree
Increases household income	4.07	Agree
Stimulates local entrepreneurship	3.98	Agree

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Unequal distribution of benefits	3.55	Moderately Agree
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Environmental effects of surfing tourism

The residents' top concern was the environment. According to 65% of respondents, surfing tourism increases waste production, especially during festival seasons and the busiest surf season. According to interviews, the community is concerned about the stress on coastal ecosystems and the inadequacy of waste management systems. 71% of respondents agreed that surfing tourism raises community sensitivity to conservation, indicating that it promotes growing ecological awareness. They cited programs like youth organizations and surf schools organizing beach clean-ups as examples of progress.

Table 3. Environmental perceptions of surfing tourism

Indicator	Mean Score (1-5)	Interpretation
Surfing tourism increases waste generation	4.12	Agree
Raises ecological awareness among locals	4.07	Agree
Pressures natural resources (water, coastal areas)	3.98	Agree
Encourages environmental initiatives (clean-ups, conservation)	3.55	Moderately Agree

Lanuza's findings affirm that surfing tourism has multifaceted impacts on host communities, aligning with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach. Residents indicated favorable socio-cultural and economic effects, while articulating measured apprehension regarding environmental concerns. These findings both reflect and expand on current research on surf tourism in established and growing areas.

Socio-Cultural Aspects

The study indicates that surfing tourism has enhanced community pride and identity, with locals perceiving the Lanuza Surfing Festival as a cultural emblem that elevates local heritage. A local remarked, "Surfing has established Lanuza's prominence." "We take pride in our identity when individuals attend the festival" (FGD 1). The discovery corroborates Usher and Kerstetter's (2022) assertion that surf tourism frequently fosters a feeling of place identification and intercultural engagement. Nonetheless, apprehensions about lifestyle alterations and youth exposure to external factors indicate the onset of cultural negotiation. A neighborhood elder stated, "The youth today resemble surfers—they exhibit confidence, yet occasionally neglect our traditional customs" (Interview 3). This dynamic illustrates events in Bali and Costa Rica, where surfing tourists transformed traditional values (Ponting, 2022). Lanuza's instance underscores the significance of preserving cultural authenticity while capitalizing on tourism-induced opportunities for cultural exchange.

Economic Aspects

The economic advantages were broadly recognized, especially in terms of livelihood diversification and assistance for micro-entrepreneurship. A homestay proprietor stated, "My revenue doubles during surf season as tourists require accommodations" (Interview 7). The findings align with those of Li et al. (2022), who demonstrated that surf tourism can invigorate local economies when communities leverage tourism-related ventures.

The disproportionate allocation of benefits remains a challenge. A leader of the fisherfolk remarked, "Surfing benefits those residing near the beach, yet farmers and fishers do not experience equivalent advantages" (FGD 2). This pattern is observed in tiny island environments (Torres & Tan, 2023). Unless mitigated by inclusive measures, such discrepancies may exacerbate social inequality and restrict widespread community support for tourism development.

Environmental Aspects

Respondents expressed delight in the ecological consciousness fostered by surfing tourism, but also concerns about waste production and the strain on coastal resources. A young participant remarked, "During competitions, there is consistently an increase in litter on the beach" (FGD 3). Simultaneously, proactive measures were emphasized: "Surf schools now conduct clean-up activities, and visitors are educated on ocean conservation" (Interview 10).

This dual perspective reflects Hall's (2020) claim that tourism can concurrently promote conservation awareness and harm delicate ecosystems if inadequately managed. The Lanuza instance demonstrates that small-scale initiatives, albeit beneficial, are inadequate without established waste management systems and more robust legal frameworks. Consequently, whereas surfing tourism can promote environmental stewardship, it also poses a threat to ecological resilience if its expansion exceeds governance capabilities.

Situating Lanuza within Surf Tourism Scholarship

Lanuza exhibits numerous similarities with other burgeoning surf locales in the Asia-Pacific, like Sumbawa in Indonesia and specific villages in Fiji. Like these locations, Lanuza exemplifies how surfing can serve as a cultural and economic asset while exacerbating environmental issues. In contrast to well-known surf destinations like Siargao or Bali, Lanuza maintains a more pronounced community-based governance model, allowing local voices to influence tourism policies significantly. A barangay official stated: "Tourism decisions are still deliberated with the community, not solely with external parties" (Interview 12). The findings establish Lanuza as a viable paradigm for sustainable surf tourism growth in smaller coastal towns, highlighting inclusion and equilibrium across TBL aspects.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study theoretically advances surf tourism research by applying the TBL paradigm to a nascent Philippine surf

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town, thereby deepening the discourse on community interpretations of sustainability in specific contexts. The findings emphasize the need for governance systems tailored to individual destinations that foster equitable benefit-sharing, cultural preservation, and proactive environmental management.

For Lanuza, this entails enhancing community involvement in tourism planning, investing in waste management infrastructure, and advocating for sustainable tourism practices that protect surf breaks and coastal ecosystems. According to an NGO representative: "By safeguarding the surf locations and maintaining the town's cleanliness, we can ensure a steady influx of visitors, resulting in mutual benefits for all" (Interview 14).

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