

**Surf Tourism for
Destination Competitiveness and Sustainable Tourism Development**
A Case Study of Ribeira Grande, Azores

Deborah da Silva Carvalho

**Surf Tourism for
Destination Competitiveness and Sustainable Tourism Development**
A Case Study of Ribeira Grande, Azores

Deborah da Silva Carvalho

A dissertation submitted to the School of Tourism and Maritime Technology of the
Polytechnic Institute of Leiria in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Sustainable Tourism Management

Dissertation conducted under the supervision of
Professor João Paulo Jorge and Michael Schon

2023

**Surf Tourism for
Destination Competitiveness and Sustainable Tourism Development**
A Case Study of Ribeira Grande, Azores

Copyright

Deborah da Silva Carvalho, student of the School of Tourism and Maritime Technology of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria

A Escola Superior de Turismo e Tecnologia do Mar e o Instituto Politécnico têm o direito, perpétuo e sem limites geográficos, de arquivar e publicar esta dissertação/trabalho de projecto/relatório de estágio através de exemplars impressos reproduzidos em papel ou forma digital, ou por qualquer outro meio conhecido ou que venha a ser inventado, e de a divulgar através de repositórios científicos e de admitir a sua cópia e distribuição com objectivos educacionais ou de investigação, não comerciais, desde que seja dado crédito ao autor e editor.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank all the participants who, willingly or unwillingly, took their time to participate in this research study and provide valuable information about surf tourism development in Ribeira Grande. I am deeply grateful to all of you. I learned so much about where I live and I now have a much greater appreciation for the sport of surfing.

I would like to extend my thanks to my thesis supervisors, Professor João Paulo Jorge and Professor Michael Schon for their support, words of motivation, and for accompanying me throughout this research process.

I have to thank my partner, Paulo Casanova, for his patience in listening to me talk about Ribeira Grande and surf tourism for months. This dissertation is also the culmination of two years in the Master's of Sustainable Tourism Management, where I had the fortune of making wonderful friends who I will take for life: Naho, Ana Luisa and Sally.

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Severina Teixeira, who is originally from Ribeira Grande, and to my aunt and godmother, Ivone Silva, for her constant support and words of encouragement.

Abstract

Surf tourism has been growing in recent years, becoming a highly profitable activity and industry. Many coastal regions have developed due to surf tourism, including Portugal. Surf tourism has been seen as a new tourism product with the potential to develop regions and contribute to their competitiveness and sustainable growth. This dissertation aims to analyze the potential of surf tourism for the competitiveness and sustainable development of the destination Ribeira Grande, Azores. This destination has invested in surfing as a differentiating element, branding itself as the "Capital of Surf." It is a surf destination in the early stages of development, making it relevant to study in order to chart a sustainable and competitive path. Through a qualitative study, data was collected from various stakeholders affected or involved in surf tourism, including local surfers, surf tourists, residents, members of the business community, and members of the surf business community, as well as municipal government officials. The perceptions and involvement of stakeholders in tourism development are crucial elements considered pivotal for this study. Conclusions were reached regarding the development of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande, its potential and importance, its attributes as a surf destination, recommendations for improvements, and well as the relevance of the destination brand, and the contribution of this niche tourism to sustainable development. The results show that there is general support for the development of surf tourism from all stakeholders, who see it as a differentiating element with the capacity to develop the destination. However, since this is still in the early stages of development, there are weaknesses regarding some typical attributes of a surf destination, a lack of a surf culture and vibe, a dissonance between image and reality, and weak involvement of the local population in surfing, despite their support. The results also show some environmental weaknesses and that the destination brand is premature. With the support of all stakeholders and the belief in the potential of this tourism product, these weaknesses can be addressed, establishing the destination as a true and competitive surf destination.

Keywords: surf tourism; sustainable tourism development; destination brand; competitiveness; Ribeira Grande.

Resumo

O turismo de surf tem vindo a crescer nos últimos anos, sendo uma actividade e sector bastante lucrativo. Muitas regiões costeiras têm se desenvolvido devido ao turismo de surf, incluindo em Portugal. O turismo de surf tem sido visto como um produto turístico com o potencial de desenvolver regiões, contribuindo para a sua competitividade e desenvolvimento sustentável. A presente dissertação tem como objectivo analisar o potencial do turismo de surf para a competitividade e desenvolvimento sustentável do destino Ribeira Grande, Açores, o qual tem apostado no surf como elemento diferenciador, tendo registado a sua marca de destino- Capital do Surf. É um destino que se encontra nas primeiras fases de desenvolvimento e como tal é relevante estudá-lo a fim de traçar um caminho sustentável e competitivo. Através de um estudo qualitativo, foi realizada uma recolha de informação junto de vários *stakeholders* afectados ou envolvidos no turismo de surf, nomeadamente os surfistas locais, turistas de surf, residentes, membros da comunidade empresarial e membros da comunidade empresarial de surf, assim como membros do governo municipal. As percepções e envolvimento dos *stakeholders* no desenvolvimento do turismo é um elemento primordial e considerado fulcral para este estudo. Foi possível assim chegar a conclusões em relação ao desenvolvimento do turismo de surf na Ribeira Grande, ao seu potencial e importância, atributos e recomendações para melhorias, assim como à relevância da marca de destino e ao contributo deste turismo de nicho para o desenvolvimento sustentável. Os resultados mostram que há um apoio geral em relação ao desenvolvimento do turismo de surf por parte de todos os *stakeholders*, que o vêem como elemento diferenciador e com capacidade para desenvolver o destino. No entanto, estando este ainda nas primeiras fases de desenvolvimento, assiste-se a uma debilidade no que respeita a alguns dos atributos típicos de um destino de surf, à falta de um ambiente e cultura de surf, a uma dissonância entre imagem e realidade, e a um fraco envolvimento da população local no surf, apesar do seu apoio. Os resultados mostram também que existem debilidades a nível ambiental e que a marca de destino é prematura. Com o apoio de todos os *stakeholders* e com a crença no potencial deste produto turístico, estas debilidades podem ser revertidas, afirmando-se o destino como um verdadeiro e competitivo destino de surf.

Palavras-chave: turismo de surf; desenvolvimento do turismo sustentável; marca de destino; competitividade; Ribeira Grande; percepções dos *stakeholders*.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	IV
Abstract	V
Resumo.....	VI
Table of Contents	VII
List of Tables.....	X
List of Figures	XI
List of Abbreviations	XII
Chapter 1-Introduction	1
1.1 Study Framework, Relevance and Justification for Research	1
1.2 Research Objectives and Question	2
1.3 Methodology	3
1.4 Thesis Outline	4
Chapter 2-Sustainable Tourism and Destination Management.....	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Sustainable Tourism Development	5
2.2.1 <i>UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals</i>	8
2.2.2 <i>Butler's Sustainable Tourism: The state of the art review</i>	9
2.3 Destination Management and Competitiveness	11
2.4 Summary	16
Chapter 3-Destination Branding.....	17
3.1 Introduction	17
3.2 Destination Branding	17
3.3 The elements of a destination brand	19
3.3.1 <i>Brand Name and Logo</i>	20
3.3.2 <i>Brand Image</i>	20
3.3.3 <i>Brand Identity and Personality</i>	21
3.3.4 <i>Brand Equity</i>	22
3.4 Objectives, Development and Competitiveness of Destination Branding	24
3.5 Development and Complexities of Destination Branding	27
3.6 Destination Branding and Sustainable Tourism Development	29
3.7 Summary	30
Chapter 4-Surf Tourism.....	31

4.1 Introduction	31
4.2 Concept and Global Context.....	31
4.3 Surf Tourists: Profile and Motivations	34
4.4 Surf Destination Competitiveness.....	37
4.5 Benefits and Impacts of Surf Tourism.....	41
4.5.1 <i>Economic Benefits and Impacts</i>	41
4.5.2 <i>Environmental Benefits and Impacts</i>	42
4.5.3 <i>Socio-cultural Benefits and Impacts</i>	44
4.6 Surf Tourism for Sustainable Development	45
4.7 Surf Tourism in Portugal	48
4.7.1 <i>Surf Tourism in the Azores</i>	49
4.7.2 <i>Surf Tourism Destination Ribeira Grande</i>	51
4.7.2.1 <i>Geographical and Socio-Economic Framework</i>	51
4.7.2.2 <i>Tourism in Ribeira Grande</i>	53
4.7.2.3 <i>Surf Tourism in Ribeira Grande</i>	54
4.8 Summary	57
Chapter 6-Methodology	58
6.1 Introduction	58
6.2 Research Method: A Qualitative Approach.....	58
6.3 Research Question	59
6.4 Methods of Inquiry	59
6.5 Data Collection and Analysis	59
6.6 Interviewees Characterization	60
6.7 Summary	61
Chapter 7-Research Findings: Stakeholder Perceptions and Interview Result	62
7.1 Introduction	62
7.2 Surf Tourism Development.....	62
7.3 Destination Competitiveness: Attributes and Weaknesses	69
7.4 Sustainability in Surf Destination Competitiveness.....	79
7.5 Surf Tourism for Sustainable Development	87
7.6 Destination Brand-Ribeira Grande Capital do Surf.....	95
7.7 Destination Brand Capital do Surf: Importance and Competitiveness	105
7.8 Stakeholders' Recommendations and Future Directions	113
Chapter 8-Conclusions	118
8.1 Main Conclusions and Recommendations	118
8.2 Research Limitations and Contributions of the Study.....	122

8.3 Future Research	122
References	123
Appendices	131

List of Tables

Table 1 Stakeholder Groups and Number of Respondents.....	61
Table 2 Tourism Indicators for Ribeira Grande.....	133
Table 3 Ribeira Grande Surf Destination Attributes	134
Table 4 Stakeholder Analysis	136
Table 5 SWOT Analysis of Surf Tourism in Ribeira Grande.....	138

List Of Figures

Figure 1 Location of the Azores	131
Figure 2 The Archipelago of the Azores	131
Figure 3 Location of Ribeira Grande on São Miguel Island	134
Figure 4 Santa Bárbara Beach in the 1980s	136
Figure 5 Santa Bárbara Beach in 2023	138
Figure 6 Capital do Surf-Logo.....	133

List of Abbreviations

ASBA- Associação de Surfistas e Bodyboarders dos Açores

BTL-Bolsa de Turismo de Lisboa

CBBE- Customer-based Brand Equity

DMO-Destination Management Organisation

GSTC- Global Sustainable Tourism Council

ISA- International Surfing Association

SDGs- Sustainable Development Goals

SIMA- Surf Industry Manufacturer's Association

SREA-Serviço Regional de Estatística dos Açores

SST- Sustainable Surf Tourism

UN-United Nations

UNWTO- United Nations World Tourism Organisation

WSL- World Surf League

WSR-World Surf Reserve

Chapter 1-Introduction

1.1 Study Framework, Relevance and Justification for Research

In the last few years, particularly since 2015 with the liberalization of the Azorean airspace¹, tourism in the Azores has grown significantly. Tourism currently occupies an important position in the development of the region as, besides generating income and employment, it has stimulated investment in new services and infrastructures, and has contributed to the enhancement and protection of the Azorean socio-cultural heritage and natural landscape. Sustainable tourism development has been one of the main commitments and pillars of the strategic tourism plan of the Azores, and the archipelago has been officially recognised as the world first archipelago certified under the EarthCheck Sustainable Destination Programme.² In order to ensure sustainable tourism development, destinations must have a clear and strategic management plan and tourism vision that involves the participation of all stakeholders, and must constantly monitor and evaluate its development. In the current highly competitive tourism market, destinations must also enhance and guarantee their competitiveness by innovating, developing new tourism products and services, better utilizing their resources, and finding means to differentiate themselves from the competition. Destination branding and niche tourism are popular strategic tourism tools.

Surf tourism is a type of niche tourism that has seen a significant global growth, contributing to the development of many coastal regions and destinations, including in several coastal towns of Portugal, such as Ericeira, Nazaré and Peniche. Portugal is now considered a premium surf destination with the Portuguese Tourism Board promoting the sector and activity through tourism campaigns, both domestically and abroad (Martins, 2019). Being the Azores, an archipelago located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the opportunities for surfing are many, and so are the opportunities to develop this tourism product. Studies show that surf tourism generates large amounts of socioeconomic value, bolsters environmental protection, and contributes to the economic growth and development of many small coastal towns. Ribeira Grande, in the Azores, is one of the best and most popular surfing spots in the archipelago, hosting yearly national and international surf competitions, and has been recently branded itself as the “Capital do Surf”. There is a vast amount of

¹ Until 2015, there was a strong monopoly of the domestic routes in the aviation sector of the Azores, controlled by SATA, the Azorean Airline. From 2015, other airlines, namely Easyjet and Ryanair, were allowed between the island and mainland Portugal, making travel to/from the Azores much more affordable.

² www.earthcheck.org

literature on surf tourism, but very few studies on surf tourism in the Azores, particularly with a focus on destination competitiveness, branding and sustainable tourism development. This research project aims to understand and examine the potential of surf tourism for the competitiveness and sustainable development of an emerging tourism destination- Ribeira Grande, Azores.

I have been a resident of Ribeira Grande for almost 10 years, and I have not only fallen in love with it but I have seen first-hand its progressive social and economic development. Having lived around the world, I have always felt the need to find the right place to call 'home'- Ribeira Grande has become that place. Caring genuinely about it, believing in its potential, and considering myself a stakeholder in the development of this destination, this research project has a special meaning to me. I am not a surfer, but I take great pleasure from the ocean, and I share that same love surfers have for it. As with the other residents of Ribeira Grande, including the many expats who have chosen to call it home, I too share a love for this place, wishing to see it bloom further and develop sustainably, establishing itself as an outstanding tourism destination, where locals enjoy an excellent quality of life and tourists leave yearning to return. As said by one of the interviewees *"Ribeira Grande is a diamond in the rough. It just needs to be polished"*. I could not agree more. Given surf tourism's popularity in Portugal and around the world and its contribution to socio-economic development, the case study at hand and the research topics associated merit attention.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

Noting the role that surf tourism has had in the development of many regions, the strategic goal of destination branding and the focus on sustainable tourism development by the archipelago of the Azores, this dissertation seeks to answer the following question: What is the role and potential of surf tourism for the development and enhancement of Ribeira Grande's competitiveness and sustainable tourism development? To answer this question, further sub-questions must be addressed, namely:

- 1) How has surf tourism been developed and managed in the destination?
- 2) How is surf tourism important/adequate for the sustainable tourism development of the destination?
- 3) What role does destination branding play in the promotion and competitiveness of Ribeira Grande as a surf tourism destination?

- 4) What challenges and opportunities does Ribeira Grande face in the development and competitiveness of its destination as a surf destination?

The scope of this Master's thesis is to achieve then the following objectives:

- 1) To understand how surf tourism can benefit the sustainable development and competitiveness of the destination;
- 2) To understand the challenges of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande;
- 3) To analyze the destination brand elements and relevance of Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf for the competitiveness of the destination;
- 4) To grasp the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding surf tourism and destination branding;
- 5) To formulate recommendations that can contribute to the sustainable development and destination competitiveness of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination.

Using Ribeira Grande, a small and emerging tourism destination located in a remote archipelago, as a case study, may lead to a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges of surf tourism for small and developing tourism destinations, and to their competitiveness. This study contributes to the literature on surf tourism in Portugal, particularly regarding the perceptions of stakeholders on the relevance of this tourism product for sustainable development and competitiveness.

1.3 Methodology

To meet the stated objectives and to answer the research questions, this study used a qualitative research method. First, a literature review was conducted on the main topics that would be used for this study, namely sustainable tourism development, destination management and branding, and surf tourism. Research was then conducted through the use of semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders: local surfers, surf tourists, local business owners, local surf-business owners, local government, and residents. Sustainable tourism development stresses the importance of the involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process of tourism development. Thus, it was crucial for this study to understand the perceptions and opinions of the different stakeholders regarding surf tourism and destination branding and its impact and/or potential in the sustainable development of Ribeira Grande, in order to reach conclusions and provide recommendations based on their views.

In total, 62 interviews were collected for study. More specifically, answers were collected from 12 local surfers, 9 local government representatives, 11 residents, 9 surf businesses and associations, 10 non-surf businesses (restaurants and accommodation), and 11 surf tourists. This data was collected from February-June 2023. Most of the interviews were conducted in person in the municipality Ribeira Grande; they were recorded and then transcribed. Other participants preferred to answer the questions in their own time and the answers to the interview questions were then emailed to this researcher. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method to identify similarities and differences in the informants' perceptions and opinions.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This dissertation is organized into 8 chapters presenting a theoretical framework to introduce the topics that will be analysed and researched; the description of the research and case study, in this case the tourism destination Ribeira Grande; the methodology used; and finally the research findings and conclusions. Chapter 1 is the Introduction that presents the research topic, relevance and research objectives. Chapters 2 to 4 are the literature review of the topics applied to the case study. Chapter 2 covers Sustainable Tourism and Destination Management, in which sustainable tourism development is presented and a brief overview of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development is given. Chapter 3 Destination Branding provides a detailed description of the concept of destination branding, its elements, process and importance for destination competitiveness. Chapter 4 focuses on Surf Tourism, where a general framework of surf tourism globally and in Portugal is given, as well as some of the main characteristics of this sector, importance and impacts to destinations. Chapter 5 presents the case study, Ribeira Grande, providing a description of its geographic, demographic, and socio-economic characteristics. A brief description of tourism and surfing in the destination is also presented. This is followed by Chapter 6 Methodology, which presents the research methodology and analysis, and the research objectives. The research method, interviews with stakeholders is explained. Chapter 7 presents the research findings and discussion, based on the interviews conducted with the stakeholders. Lastly, Chapter 8 ends the dissertation with the conclusions, research limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2- Sustainable Tourism and Destination Management

2.1 Introduction

In the last few decades, the negative implications of the tourism and travel industry have become more prevalent, reflecting themselves not only in changes to the natural environment but also in the deterioration of the wellbeing and quality of life of local communities. This urgent need to address the environmental and social impacts caused by tourism while still ensuring economic development have led to the concept of sustainable tourism, defined by the WTO (2001) as tourism that *“meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future”*, managing all the resources *“in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems”*. For sustainable tourism to be properly developed and maintained, destinations require a sound destination management plan to not only ensure the sustainability of tourism but also the competitiveness of the destination. Stemming from a review of the literature, Chapter 2 starts with a description of the concept of sustainable tourism development; followed by a brief overview of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and a review of Butler’s (1999) analysis on Sustainable Tourism. The chapter ends with a review of destination management and competitiveness.

2.2. Sustainable Tourism Development

The growth of tourism is inevitable and it is, undoubtedly, here to stay. It was thought that with the 2020-2022 COVID-19 pandemic, tourism trends would change significantly and tourists would alter their travel practices and preferences meaning a decrease in international tourist numbers and less pressure on certain tourism destinations. However, as the 2023 tourist and travel numbers show, international tourism is rapidly returning to pre-pandemic levels.³ The task then should be not on limiting growth but on managing growth in a way that is appropriate to the tourists, the destination environment and the host population (Liu, 2003), in other words sustainable tourism development. The concept originated from the need to narrow the gap between the impacts generated by tourism in the economy, society and the environment. It is not a special form of tourism; rather, all forms of tourism (including mass tourism) and destinations should strive to be sustainable (UNEP, WTO, 2005).

³ Data from the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (2023) shows that international arrivals reached 80% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2023 with an estimated 235 million tourists travelling internationally in the first three months, more than double the same period in 2022 (UNWTO, 2023).

Sustainable tourism has become a topic of extensive research and study, and numerous articles and reports have been written on the subject, covering different areas of the planet, challenges and advances. Despite the extensive coverage and interest it has got, due to its complexities, sustainable tourism continues to be a highly studied topic among academic and tourism practitioners. Ritchie & Crouch (2011) contend that there are four primary pillars of sustainable tourism and that appropriate policy and management solutions must be found for each of them if true sustainability is to be achieved. These four pillars of sustainability are: 1) the ecological-the protection and preservation of the natural environment; 2) economic-economic benefits, local labour, job security, attractive wages; 3) socio-cultural-policies and programmes that minimize adverse social and cultural impacts while fostering interest and pride in the local culture; and 4) political/governance environments. Key aspects of sustainable tourism development are: creation of new workplaces including employment opportunities in tourism destinations, preservation of the natural environment, climate change mitigation, pollution and waste reduction, and promotion of green and sustainable consumption practices (Streimikiene et al. 2020). According to Carvalho (2010), this new paradigm is characterised by well informed and demanding tourists, who value experiences, authenticity, uniqueness and social responsibility (cited in Almeida et al., 2020). For Streimikiene et al. (2020), we need to retain high satisfaction levels from tourists, assuring significant experiences, increasing their consciousness about sustainability, and propagating practices of sustainable tourism among them. The challenge is to achieve all three sustainability dimensions (environmental, economic and social) holistically while ensuring competitiveness.

The involvement in the planning process and the development of tourism and the collaboration of all relevant stakeholder groups including private/public organizations and the local community has also been argued to significantly facilitate sustainable tourism development, bringing benefits to the host community (Angelevska-Najdeska et al. 2012; Bornhorst et al, 2010; Byrd, 2007; Gunawijaya & Pratiwi, 2018; Reynolds, 2021; UNEP & WTO, 2005). In fact, one of the most important stakeholders in sustainable tourism development is the local residents (Gautam, 2022; Jurowski, 2011). How residents receive visitors and perceive tourism development are critical components for the success of a destination. Communities engage in tourism development with the expectation that a viable tourism industry will improve their quality of life (OECD, 2020), and studies have shown that local inhabitants' quality of life has a beneficial impact on their support for sustainable tourism development

(Gautam, 2022). Consequently, the value of tourism to a community must include the community members' feelings about and the perception of the conditions within the community, i.e. economic activity, climate, social/cultural institutions and environmental conditions. Jurowski (2011) asserts that policy makers need to understand the perspective of community residents in relation to how they experience tourism, that is, if it improves or worsens their quality of life. Contributors in the field agree that stakeholder collaboration is crucial for effective and sustainable tourism development as it has the potential to achieve common goals among all stakeholders, despite the many challenges (Bornhorst et al. 2010). Solutions to community-based problems are also often found through collaboration, and tension between the community and the private sector might be alleviated allowing all stakeholders to be involved in the tourism decision-making process (Towner, 2018). Sustainable tourism development defends that governments must recognize the different positions and interests of all stakeholders and work collaboratively to achieve common goals. Moreover, governments should take a leading role for significant progress to be achieved in sustainable tourism as they have the power and tools to make regulations and offer economic incentives to promote and disseminate sustainability practices and guidelines fostering an environment that enables and encourages the private sector, tourists and stakeholders to respond to sustainability issues (UNEP, WTO, 2005).

Sustainability has been viewed as holding considerable promise as a means for addressing the problems of negative tourism impacts while maintaining its long-term viability, but issues with the research, application and success of sustainable tourism have been found (Liu, 2003). In fact, with the increased competition between destinations and the need to ensure sustainable tourism development, destinations are faced with numerous challenges: 1) How to prosper economically without straining the local community and impacting the natural environment? 2) How to preserve and maintain the destination's cultural authenticity while at the same time providing attractive and lucrative tourism experiences and products? Streimikiene et al. (2020) suggest that the main competitiveness issues in sustainable tourism can be addressed by developing innovations in sustainable consumption practices in tourism services, attracting environmentally conscious consumers and providing new and environmentally friendly tourism services. Hopefully, in the near future, attracting environmentally conscious tourists will no longer be a priority if everyone develops their awareness of sustainability and if all tourism destinations work on the basis of sustainable development. The authors also highlight the creation of new tourism

products and services for a changing demographic profile of tourists while contributing to the welfare and needs of local communities. Sustainable development, however, is not without its critics. Hall (2019), for example, points out that sustainable development has become something of a truism amongst tourism policy makers, destination marketing organisation, and tourism researchers, and that tourism is actually less sustainable than ever at a global scale.

2.2.1 UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals

The principles of sustainable tourism development are built on the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴, which sets a series of far-reaching sustainable development goals (SDGs) that are integrated and balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Some of them are: sustained, inclusive and sustained economic growth; policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products; sustainable industrialisation and innovation; safe, resilient and sustainable cities; sustainable consumption and production patterns; development and implementation tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products; conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; protection, restoration and promotion of sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems; effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships (United Nations-Department of Economic and Social Affairs). Proposing to make tourism a catalyst for change, the UNWTO declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism de Development, positioning tourism as a tool to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UN 2030 Agenda, although seemingly inspiring and significant, is not without its critics (Bianchi & de Man, 2020; Boluk et al. 2019; Hall, 2019). Hall (2019) in his assertive and critical analysis of the 2030 Agenda, points out the emphasis of the UNWTO on sustainable tourism and its economic significance for the SDGs have become focal points for the study of tourism's contribution to sustainable development, despite the Agenda “ *only mentioning tourism three times- in the context of natural resource use and conservation, employment generation and the promotion of local culture and products, and the sustainable use of marine resources so as to increase the economic benefits to small island developing states and least developed countries*” (p. 1045). He adds that the

⁴ An ambitious call for action led by the General Assembly of the UN in 2015, with five key themes- people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. The Agenda aims to act as a global framework for development action shaping global, national and regional policies.

key factors considered crucial to the success of the Agenda 2030 are: enhanced competitiveness, the role of the private/corporate sector, improved management, and the use of technology in responding to environmental/economic and social problems. This, Hall (2019) argues, shows a focus on the promotion of the value of the market, growth, and competition, despite evidence of increased biodiversity loss and growing concentration of economic wealth in the hands of a minority. Bianchi & de Man (2020) contend that the Agenda is contradicted by the logics of growth, competitiveness and profit-making that fuel the expansion and development of tourism globally. Critics of the SDGs claim that such initiatives fail because they do not confront neoliberal rationalities and capitalism embedded in many tourism policy practices and which prevent achieving sustainability (Boluk et al., 2019; Hall, 2019). Hall (2019) argues that the managerial approach proposed by the UNWTO is rooted in the *“political and economic context of capitalistic resource extraction”* and that this approach is inherently political, calling for the need of a range of voices in tourism policy making. Bianchi & de Man (2020) are critical of the current tourism development model arguing that rather than addressing the structural injustices that entrench inequalities and perpetuate exploitative labour practices, the notion of sustained and inclusive growth proposed by the UN 2030 Agenda reinforces the growth driven tourism development model. Boluk et al. (2019) criticize the limited attention from tourism sustainability scholars about the UN’s SDGs and urge critical thinking in sustainable tourism, particularly regarding the dynamics of power, privilege, hegemony and hierarchical structures. The authors point out to the existing inequitable distribution of resources, privatisation of the commons, and wealth accumulating to a small elite as barriers to sustainability.

2.2.2 Butler’s “Sustainable Tourism: the state of the art review”

Butler (1999) in his pertinent work on sustainable tourism gave a critical review of the term and issues around it, arguing that many problems related to the concept were due to the lack of agreement and clarity over the meaning of the concept. Interestingly enough, 20 years later, the same lack of clarity remains. Butler pays particular attention to carrying capacity, control over tourism and mass or conventional tourism, claiming that these are the real challenges to the acceptance and successful application of sustainable development. To this day, these issues remain unresolved in many destinations. Many have to face the tough questions of: do we restrict the carrying capacity of tourism sites and profit less, do we profit more by restricting the carrying capacity and increasing prices? Do we control tourist numbers or do we impose a tourism tax? Butler further points out that tourism *“has*

become a form of ideology, a political catch phrase and, depending on the context in which it is being used, a concept, a philosophy, a process or a product" (Butler, 1999, p. 10) causing its misuse and abuse.

It has been widely agreed that mass tourism is non-sustainable. Butler (1999), however, asserts that we should not look at sustainable development as the problem solver of mass tourism and that there are two problems with this belief. Firstly, *"it is almost impossible to have a form of tourism development that does not have impacts upon the location in which it occurs"* (p. 12), no matter how small the tourism development. Second, Butler claims that all examples of mass tourism are yet to be proven to be unsustainable and that there is (at the time of writing) small empirical research into the effects of mass tourism development. He adds that *"the key problem with sustainable development in the context of tourism is not ensuring the continued introduction of small-scale, environmentally and culturally appropriate forms of tourism, but how to make existing mass tourism developments as sustainable as possible"* (p.13). The concept of sustainable development has also often been loosely used and has become a form of marketing strategy. As Butler refers, many small-scale tourist operations in all types of locations have called themselves 'sustainable' in the hopes of successfully attracting the right tourist', but, he claims *"too many inappropriate or poorly operated small-scale developments in the wrong location can be just as harmful and non-sustainable as a single large development"*(p. 14). Moreover, for a long time, the environment and the impacts on the physical location of tourism development were the central focus in discussions around sustainability. Butler was one of the first researchers to remind us of the need to look at the far-reaching cultural and social impacts of tourism. Nowadays, many studies have been conducted in this area, with many focusing on the residents' perceptions of tourism development and sustainable development, and the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in certain vulnerable host communities.

Three major unresolved issues in sustainable development are also discussed: carrying capacity, measurement and monitoring of sustainability. Butler stresses the need for limits on the number of tourists and alerts that once this number is exceeded, a range of negative, and sometimes irreversible effects, take place, such as changes in the environment or resident attitudes; a number of changes also occur in the nature of tourism and in the nature of the destination, meaning that the attractiveness and the viability of the destination decreases and tourism becomes no longer sustainable. Another issue is the measurement of sustainability. For Butler,

without performance indicators, the use of the term 'sustainable' is meaningless and simply a "hyperbole and advertising jargon". He notes the underdevelopment of the links between tourism policy and politics, criticizing the lack of attention on the political implications and aspects of tourism development. The third major issue Butler identifies is the relationship of sustainable development to mass or conventional tourism. He argues that many critics of mass tourism propose sustainable tourism as the ideal alternative, implying that the two forms of tourism are incompatible, whereas he believes that mass tourism is *"incredibly popular and is not going to disappear or be replaced by 'alternative' tourism"* (Butler, 1999, p. 17). As if foreseeing the future, Butler shows scepticism and questions the sustainability of, for example, alternative forms of tourism, such as ecotourism (supposedly a form of sustainable tourism) and the actual prevention of mass tourism. He observes: *"as these new forms of tourism become increasingly popular, there is every likelihood that they will become varieties of mass tourism; indeed many of them are taking on such characteristics very rapidly as they expand. The increase in numbers, the intensive marketing, the need for large accommodation and transportation units, the changes in the product itself, and the resultant impacts on destinations are all familiar trends in mass tourism. To assume that they will remain sustainable, if indeed they ever were sustainable in anything but name, is naïve and not supported by research"* (p. 18).

2.3 Destination Management

Destination management is central in the sustainable development and competitiveness of a tourism destination (Buhalis, 2000; Korossy et al, 2022; Mach & Ponting, 2018; Ruiz-Real et al., 2020; Ritchie & Crouch, 2011; Tasci, 2011; UNWTO, 2007; Wang, 2011). A destination is a geographical location that attracts visitors to experience tourism- it can be a resort, a city, a village, a tourism area, or even a cruise ship, meaning that a destination can be of any scale and can have different administrative borders. Destinations are where tourists spend their time and where the tourism resources, services, infrastructures and experiences are located (Korossy et al., 2022; Mach & Ponting, 2018). A destination can also be a combination of attractiveness and competitiveness that offers benefits that attract potential visitors and provides better experiences than other destinations (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020). It is also seen as a mix of physical and natural characteristics and a mix of products, facilities and services that together form the travel experience. Buhalis (2000) notes that destinations are an amalgam of tourist services, products and experiences that are consumed under the brand name of the destination.

Destination management is then the co-ordinated management of all the elements that constitute a destination (i.e. attractions, amenities, access, marketing, and pricing), using a strategic approach to linking all these separate entities (UNWTO, 2007), and demonstrating a commitment to a vision, where integrated and coherent planning of the territory takes into account the attractions, products and services, positioning and strengthening the destination. The main functions of tourism destination management are, for example: investment in the improvement of local tourism; management of financial, natural and human resources; service management; improving the tourist experience; developing new tourism products and experiences; reducing seasonality; qualification of human resources; establishing partnerships between the public and private sector; defining marketing and promotion strategies; forming a common vision for the destination (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Korossy et al. 2022; UNWTO, 2007). Moreover, it should create the right physical and social environment for tourism to be developed through planning and infrastructure to attract visitors meeting expectations and ensuring tourist satisfaction. Ensuring sustainable tourism development and destination competitiveness should be the goals of destination management (Wray et al., 2010). For this several conditions must be met and taken into account. The literature shows that effective destination management for sustainable tourism development stresses not only collaboration between the different stakeholders but also a shared and common vision among all them, namely: the national, regional and local government; economic and environmental agencies; tourism service-providers (e.g. hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, attractions, recreational companies); tourism operators; and the local residents (Angelevska-Najdeska et al. 2012; UNWTO, 2007; Wray et al., 2010). Achieving this goal is challenging, however, given the multiplicities and complexities of stakeholders. Research has observed that many of the stakeholders involved or impacted by tourism do not necessarily work together for a common goal for the destination (Korossy et al., 2022).

It is evident that the lack of proper planning and management of tourism can damage the destination's environment, cause social and cultural conflicts, and even alienate the host communities. Studies demonstrate that strategic and effective planning and management based can contribute to economic development, establishing a competitive advantage, conservation of natural, built and socio-cultural environments, community well-being and protection, the spreading of the benefits of tourism, a strong and vibrant brand identity, and outstanding visitor experience

(Ponte et al., 2021; UNWTO, 2007; Wray et al. 2010). Moreover, successful and competitive destinations have a strong level of support from their government, well-established tourism organisations, supportive local governments and leaders that foster and implement a shared vision for sustainable tourism across all sectors and stakeholders (Wray et al., 2010). Moreover, for sustainable destination planning and management, destinations must establish long-term strategic planning processes to guide the sustainable management, development and marketing of tourism through: the support of local community leaders, consultation with experienced tourism consultants, engaging the community in all stages of the planning process to ensure community ownership, establishing an communicating a shared vision for tourism amongst all stakeholders, specifying realistic goals and identifying priority actions and implementation strategies, and facilitating learning amongst stakeholders about sustainable tourism (Wray et al., 2010). Ponte et al. (2021) remark that “strategic planning in tourism, adequate product development, and the suitable preparation of a destination are vital tasks for establishing synergies and competitive advantages, while avoiding decisions with negative and irreversible impacts on the destination’s most attractive resources and on the brand’s perceived value” (p. 342).

One of the main goals of destination management is enhancing and sustaining the destination’s competitiveness. According to Ritchie & Crouch (2011), destination competitiveness is its ability to increase tourism expenditure, to attract visitors while providing them with satisfying and memorable experiences, doing so in a profitable way, while enhancing the well-being of the destination’s residents and preserving the natural resources of the destination for future generations. This implies a proper and well-coordinated process of tourism destination management and sustainable development as one of the destination competitiveness factors. Moreover, for a destination to be successful, empirical studies have found that location, accessibility, attractive product and service offerings, quality visitor experiences, and community support and key factors (Bornhorst et al., 2010).

Mohamed (2019) argues that destinations have to distinguish and differentiate each other creating competition and building a competitive advantage, achieved by creating added value for customers, by price differentiation strategy or by providing greater benefits to customers. Ritchie & Crouch (2011) posit that the effectiveness and efficiency with which a destination deploys its resource endowments leads to growth and development in its tourism sector, thus contributing to the creation of competitive advantages. Pike (2008) defends that destinations need a competitive

strategy that should include the sustainability of local resources, a balance between profitable businesses, an effective market position, an attractive environment, positive visitor experiences and supportive local residents to ensure the maintenance of long-term success and the achievement of equitable returns on resources. This competitive strategy can be rooted in sustainable tourism. Dwyer & Kim (2003) argue that to achieve a competitive advantage, a destination must ensure that its overall appeal and tourism experience offered is superior to that of the competition. Tsai et al. (2009) further add that the main variables that influence tourism destination competitiveness are: customer satisfaction, marketing, management, macro and microenvironment, human capital, price, environmental sustainability, and history and culture. One of the advantages of destination management is, without a doubt, to establish a competitive advantage and this can be done by establishing a strong and unique positioning (e.g. by offering a different kind of experience compared to other similar destinations, by developing the destination's attractions and resources in a way that highlights its unique characteristics) and by delivering excellent quality experiences by ensuring that all aspects of the visitor experience are of the highest standard (UNWTO, 2007).

For Wang (2011), sustainable destination competitiveness must be founded upon a visionary, proactive, holistic and visitor-centred management approach that balances the socio-economic and cultural development of a destination while integrating the interests of visitors, service providers and the community. This management approach places the local community and stakeholders at its core (Bornhorst et al. 2010; Buhalis, 2000; Mach & Ponting, 2018). Mach & Ponting (2018) emphasize inter-organizational cooperation as key, arguing that *"destinations could benefit from community-based governance in which local stakeholders compete and cooperate, build trust, and establish institutions and networks that promote mutual community interest through encouraging adherence to particular behaviours and conduct"* (p. 1848). Ritchie & Crouch (2011) also emphasize that in the process of developing a policy-driven framework for destination development and competitiveness, the following must be considered: a community philosophy that shows stakeholder consensus, destination vision, an audit of the destination's strengths and weaknesses, an evaluation comparing it to other destinations, destination positioning, and monitoring and evaluation of policies and their outcome. In addition, different management organizations must be well coordinated, and destinations have to be innovative and continuously seek new sources of competitive advantages.

A leading Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and a marketing plan have also been identified as influential variables in destination competitiveness and management (Aguilar et al., 2014; Blain et al. 2005; Bornhorst et al. 2010; Korossy et al. 2022; UNWTO 2007; Wang, 2011). A DMO is the organization responsible for the management, marketing, coordination and promotion of a destination under a coherent strategy.⁵ They have major strategic roles in destination marketing and management from information provider, community brand builder, advocate of the tourism industry to organizer and facilitator of destination marketing campaigns, and new tourism product developer. According to Wang (2011), the DMO is the community's single most important marketing organization, projecting a coherent image for that destination into various targeted markets. Bornhorst et al. (2010) go further and describe the roles of the DMO as working towards the enhancement of the well-being of destination residents, ensuring highly satisfactory and memorable experiences, while ensuring the provision of effective destination management and stewardship. The well-being of destination residents has become a main focus of study among the literature on sustainable tourism development, with several empirical studies focused on the residents' perception and satisfaction with tourism development in their communities. The UNWTO (2007) highlights that DMOs not control the activities of the different partners but bring together resources and expertise to lead the way. A high level of skill in developing and managing partnerships should be observed. Buhalis (2000) argues that DMOs should use legislative and management tools during planning and management of destinations to ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared between stakeholders and that sustainable practices safeguard the regeneration of resources utilized for tourism. Pike (2008) reinforces the importance of the DMO and claims that destination competitiveness can only be attained and sustained with commitment to a holistic and long-term perspective. Destination marketing is also primordial but developing a marketing strategy for destinations is a complex and challenging process due to all the independent stakeholders involved and to the unique nature of a destination (Wang, 2011; Buhalis, 2000; Pike, 2008). One of the major challenges is the difficulty of bringing together the different actors and stakeholders and working through the complicated world of tourism politics, influential stakeholders, local community and interest groups. This relationship and interaction creates major hurdles for destination marketers (Wang, 2011). Buhalis (2000) supports that destination marketing should balance the strategic objectives of all stakeholders as well as the

⁵ It can be government agencies; national tourism authorities: government-funded non-profit organizations; regional, provincial or states DMOs; dual-funded non-profit organizations; local DMOs; or members only trade associations.

sustainability of local resources and that strategies and actions should take into account the wishes of all stakeholders. Moreover, although DMOs have traditionally taken marketing responsibility for the destination product, the literature conveys that they often fail to control marketing activities and mixes of individual players and hence can only co-ordinate and guide, rather than undertake a comprehensive marketing strategy. Another challenge is that in most cases destinations already have a rich history, image and legacy developments, which need to be taken into consideration when developing marketing strategies.

2.4 Summary

For STD to be successful and ensure the competitiveness of tourist destinations, destinations must have strategic planning, a solid management plan, and a clear vision of how sustainable tourism is to be developed, maintained and monitored, including the participation of stakeholders. This should be based on a comprehensive, holistic and systematic approach in order to achieve the desired economic and social benefits while preserving the natural and cultural characteristics of the destination contributing to the present and future wellbeing of the destination host community. This section has presented the concept of sustainable tourism development and its challenges, and has provided an overall image of the importance of destination management. The following section describes the concept of destination branding and its role in destination competitiveness.

Chapter 3- Destination Branding

3.1 Introduction

Adequate tourism destination management is not only about how to sustainably manage a destination but also about what marketing strategies and plan to use to enhance the destination, leading ultimately to a competitive advantage that should bring socio-economic benefits for the local residents and destination. One of these marketing strategies is destination branding. Tourism destinations have become increasingly seen as a product that requires a brand, and as such, destinations should project their image and develop a brand that conveys or gives them identity, contributing to the destination's economic development and quality of life (Alves et al, 2022). In today's global tourism scene, destination branding, whose goal is to enhance the attractiveness, differentiation and uniqueness of a destination, has become a strategic tool to improve and maintain the destination competitiveness and position in the market. Numerous theoretical and empirical studies on destination branding have been conducted reflecting its relevance in tourism development and competitiveness (Aguilar et al, 2016; Alves et al. 2022; Buhalis, 2000; Caldeira, 2022; Ma et al, 2019; Milicevic et al, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Morgan et al., 2003; Pereira et al., 2012; Pike, 2008; Ruiz Real et al. 20202; Tasci, 2011; Wang, 2011). This chapter provides a review of the key concepts and arguments found in the literature on destination branding, relevant for this case study.

3.2 Destination Branding

A brand is *"a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors"* (Ariana & Kasapis, 2017). Brands identify the product and the manufacturer, they enable customers to assign specific quality attributes to the manufacturer, and they represent an image for the consumer. One of the major authors on branding, Aaker (1996), notes that there are three components of a brand: brand identity, brand image and brand positioning (cited in Pike, 2008). Morgan et al. (2003) remark that: *"in marketing terms brands differentiate products and represent a promise of value-they incite beliefs, evoke emotions and prompt behaviours. Brands have social, emotional identity value to users: they have personality and enhance the perceived utility, desirability and quality of a product. When consumers make brand choices about products-including destinations-they are making lifestyle statements since they are buying not only into an image but also into an emotional relationship"* (p. 286).

There is little doubt to the importance of branding as a marketing strategy tool and powerful weapon in the business world. Successful companies depend on branding strategies to attract and maintain customers by identifying their unique position for their product or service. Tourism destinations have been argued to be no different. In today's global world of tourism where the competition between destinations has intensified, the literature stresses that destinations must develop a brand and have effective branding strategies to stand out in the minds of tourists and enhance the chances of tourists choosing that destination over others competing for their visit (Almeyda-Ibanez et al., 2017; Alves et al, 2022; Blain et al., 2005; Christou et al., 2018; Hanna et al., 2021; Jalilvand, 2010; Pike, 2008). Destination branding can generate development and be the differentiating element when used in strategic development plans (Alves et al. 2022).

Proponents of destination branding argue that the need for destinations to portray a unique identity is critical and has become "*the basis for survival within a competitive marketplace*" (Morgan et al., 2003). It is believed that destination branding enhances destination image, is an instrumental factor for the consolidation and promotion of tourism destinations, providing economic, political, social and cultural value while being a generator of competitive advantages through differentiation (Almeyda-Ibanez & George, 2017; Ariana & Kasapi, 2016; Blain et al., 2005;; Christou et al. 2018; Hanna et al, 2021; Ma et al. 2019; Mohamed, 2019; Ruiz-Real et al, 2020; Tasci, 2011). Creating awareness by investing in the creation of logos, slogans and images as well as forming a relationship between the brand and the consumer is key to establishing an association between the brand of the destination and the desires of the consumer (Aguilar et al, 2016; Yuwo et al., 2013). Moreover, destination branding proposes that holiday destinations be transformed into brands that are constructed and developed by applying the marketing tools usually employed in the management of any brand (Aguilar et al, 2016). Supporters of this marketing approach assume that a strong brand can have a positive marketing effect because it attracts more favourable attributes and benefits perceptions, it attracts greater price premiums, results in consumers retaining more information, and it can assist tourists in consolidating and reinforcing their perceptions of a destination after the travel experience (Pereira et al., 2012).

Almeyda-Ibanez & George (2017) define 'destination branding as the set of marketing activities that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination conveying the

promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination. An effective and successful brand requires a unique selling proposition (USP) that is sustainable, believable and relevant (Blain et al., 2005) and it is this differentiation that is crucial in the determination of consumer destination choice. It is widely accepted that the brand should establish an emotional connection between the visitor and the destination as well as reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk (Ariana & Kasapi, 2016; Almeyda-Ibanez & George, 2017). Gertner & Kotler (2004) note that destination branding refers to strategic image management, which is an ongoing process of researching the place, image, segmenting and targeting specific audiences, positioning to support the desired image and communicating the attractions to the target groups. For Ashworth (2009), branding is the idea of discovering or creating some uniqueness, which differentiates one place from others in order to gain a competitive brand value. Others define it as *“a destination’s positioning in the mind of potential tourists and destinations’ competitive identity. It is what makes a destination distinctive and memorable and what differentiates the destination from all others. It is the foundation of the destinations international competitiveness”* (Milicevic, 2016, p, 36).

Mohamed (2019) concludes that branding is a process that determines the place identity, defines its positioning, and strengthens its image to increase its brand equity; creates and assigns meaning by generating associations in the minds of target customers; builds a fair and solid reputation built around strengths and assets; differentiates the place from others; achieves socio-politico-economic objectives and contributes to overall development. According to Almeyda-Ibanez & George (2017), *“tourism is a promise and destinations communicate the credibility of that promise by means of destination brands”* (p. 9). In the same vein, Blain et al. (2005) reinforce the importance of the promise of a brand. They postulate that: *“although the promise is not necessarily a guarantee, it extends a degree of comfort to visitors as they can more fully and accurately anticipate their imminent or upcoming vacation experience. As well as with other service organizations, if the promise cannot be delivered, the visitor is dissatisfied”* (p. 329).

3.3 The Elements of a Destination Brand

Destination branding is strongly identified with differentiation, identification, experience and promise, as well as with tangible and intangible aspects. It communicates the unique identity of the destination by differentiating it from its competitors. As presented above, the concept is becoming increasingly crucial for

destination management and as a key component of destination competitiveness. The features of a destination can create a differentiated image in the minds of the visitors, making destination branding a powerful tool for building the positioning of tourism destinations, conveying the experiences of tourists visiting a destination, and attracting the right market segment to optimize impacts. In order to build a strong and effective destination brand, several elements and conditions are required. The following section addresses the elements of a destination brand.

3.3.1 Brand Name and Logo

First, any brand needs an original name and logo. The development of a brand name is a key element in the development of its identity (Milicevic, 2016) and the brand name draws its value from the consumer's perception. Of equal importance is the brand logo. Logos are graphic designs used by destinations to identity themselves and help raise awareness of the brand it represents. Logos communicate an image and *"play a critical role in creating a readily identifiable, distinctive image for differentiating products"* (Blain et al., 2005, p. 332). Blain et al. (2005) highlight that destination logos can facilitate DMO marketing activities to establish brand image and identity, particularly important before the actual visitor experience, as consumers can choose among dozens of destinations. A logo may also influence the visitor choice behaviour, especially if the logo connects with the target markets that the DMO is attempting to attract.

3.3.2 Brand Image

Destination brand image plays an important role in travel decisions. Developing the right image for destinations determines their ability to satisfy visitors, as it allows them to develop realistic and fulfillable expectations. Pereira et al. (2012) remark that: *"when 'brand' is associated with 'image' it relates to the set of feelings, ideas and attitudes that consumers have about a brand. When brand' is associated with 'personality' it refers to the human characteristics of a brand which differentiate it from competitors"* (p. 84). As brand image is held by consumers, it is a perceptual process resulting from reasoned or emotional interpretation, affected and influenced by marketing, and can be strongly based on perceptions of reality rather than reality itself. Creating a differentiated destination image has become key for survival within a globally competitive marketplace where various destinations compete intensely. Qu et al. (2011) argue that the unique image of a destination needs to be regarded as an important brand association to influence the image of a destination brand. They agree that a strong, unique image is the essence of destination positioning for its

ability to differentiate a destination from competitors to get into the consumers' minds. Brand image is developed by individuals from the identity signals given out by the physical characteristics of the product or service and the messages conveyed via the marketing mix. For Qu et al. (2011) *"the unique image of a destination is critical to establish the overall image in the consumers' minds. A strong, unique image would increase the favourability of the overall image toward the destination"* (p. 468). As for Pereira et al. (2012), these scholars advocate that destination image is linked to the tourist's self-image, which is consistent with the arguments that lifestyle and value systems are key components in destination choice processes as consumers decide to visit a destination depending on whether it fits their lifestyle and offers a desirable experience.

3.3.3 Brand Identity and Personality

Destination branding has two important functions: identification and differentiation (Qu et al, 2011). Brand identity is critical for generalization of desirable characteristics projected by the supplier's perspective. It explains the expectations of a supplier about how a brand should be perceived by its target market. Defining a target market is crucial because some aspects of a destination may seem positive to one segment while ineffective to another. A brand also differentiates itself based on its special meaning and attachment given by consumers. The choice of holiday destinations can also be indicators of style and status and tourists often select them as expressive means to communicate their personality, interests and status. As noted by Morgan et al. (2003), the choice of holiday destination helps define the identity of the traveller and sets them apart from other tourists. A brand identity should also encapsulate the values of the local community and the essence of the visitor experience, and provide a vision to guide and motivate active stakeholders. As Pike (2008) fittingly highlights *"any destination brand must represent local residents' sense of place...this is their home"* (p. 186).

Moreover, although destination brands are not people, they can be personified and given human personality traits, such as "gentle", "modern", "open-minded", "creative". This is referred to as "brand personality". Studies agree that brand personality and personality features are a useful tool to understanding differentiation in terms of identity and image perceptions and represent the success of designing an appealing destination brand and positioning (Aguilar et al. 2016; Moutinho, 2007; Pereira et al, 2012; Tasci, 2011). Brand personality can be seen as a set of human personality traits associated with a brand (Aguilar et al, 2016). These can be associated both by

contact with locals from the destination or simply by the image of the destination. Moutinho et al. (2007) note that brand personality guides brand communication and adds value to the brand. For Tasci (2011), brand personality enhances brand equity by creating unique and favourable associations in consumer memory leading to strong emotional ties between consumers and a brand, affecting their consumption decisions. Pereira et al. (2012) reinforce that the perceived personality of a brand also provides consumers with the means to express themselves as brands usually help construct and maintain consumers' identity and help them experience emotional gratification. Moreover, it has been argued that *"people tend to select and use brands with different salient personality dimensions to emphasise certain aspects of their own personality"* (Aaker, 1999 in Pereira et al, 2012, p. 90)) Studies demonstrate that it is crucial to generate perceptions that raise interest and awareness, such as personality traits perceived by the tourists and the stakeholders (Aguilar et al, 2016). The DMO should then develop marketing campaigns and positioning that highlight the distinctive personality of the destination.

3.3.4 Brand Equity

Brand equity is the assessment of a brand's value (equity). The importance of measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of brand building and visitors' perceptions has been argued to be critical in the process and success of marketing efforts and destination branding and is amply discussed in the scholarship on destination branding (Almeyda-Ibanez & George, 2017; Ariana & Karapi, 2017; Caldeira, 2022; Pike, 2008). Brands must be evaluated, maintained and modified to fit changes in the environment and consumer demands.

The most common measures of branding effectiveness are the level of target markets awareness, the perception of the destination, the behaviour of tourists and their intention to revisit (Mohamed, 2019; Park & Petric, 2006). Brand equity can be analysed from two perspectives: from a financial perspective (market share, business volume, among other economic data) or through customer-based brand equity (CBBE), that is, from the perspective of the consumer (Aaker, 1991 in Pike, 2008; Caldeira, 2022). According to Caldeira (2022), brand equity from the consumer's perspective brings more inputs regarding the success of the brand, assessing elements such as awareness, loyalty, image and perceived quality. Understanding the consumer, in the case of tourism destinations, the tourist, allows for a better understanding of the effectiveness of the brand leading to a better application and reformulation of tourism strategies.

Whereas marketing creates interest, it is the consumer experience that matters most because, if satisfactory, this will result in brand equity-the ability to make a brand memorable, easily recognizable and of superior quality. Aaker's model (1991), the common framework for analyzing CBBE, sees awareness as the strength of the brand's presence in the minds of the consumers. It involves the consumer's recognition of the brand. Brand association is the increased familiarity with the brand through repeated exposure. These associations should be strong, favourable and unique. Brand resonance is the willingness to engage with the destination, which can be viewed in terms of tourist behaviour, such as visitation and re-visitation. Finally, and certainly the most critical is brand loyalty-the return or wish to return to a familiar destination and word-of-mouth referrals (Pike, 2008). Brand loyalty can strengthen the other components of brand equity and increase the brand competitiveness in the target market (Jalilvand, 2010). Quality is also crucial in brand equity as it affects the awareness, image and the customer's loyalty, and it affects the image of the brand in terms of price and value. Brand equity then are all the perceptions, emotions and associations that the consumer creates in their mind regarding the brand (Caldeira, 2022). For Yuwo et al. (2013), brand equity is central when addressing brand strategy as it involves: *"the assets, liabilities and value added to a brand involving the product or service's name and accompanying logos and symbols, which help it to be differentiated from all other competitors"* (p. 10). Hence the need to analyse a destination brand, in order to understand if it truly represents the destination and the local community, that is, if the cultural identity of the destination is promoted and shown, because these are key elements to distinguishing and differentiating a tourism destination (Caldeira, 2022.) Understanding the perceptions of tourists is primordial because they are the ones who consume and have the ability to recommend and share opinions about a destination, attracting new tourists and markets. In the age of social media with consumers constantly sharing their experiences, this has become even more relevant. So far, there have been few studies that measure destination branding effectiveness (Caldeira, 2022). Blaine et al. (2005) suggest that this can be done through consumer research. Such research should include measurement of visitor perceptions of the destination logo and image before and after visitation to assess whether the communicated image is congruent with the actual experience, which is the heart of visitor satisfaction. In their study on DMOs and destination branding, Blain et al. (2005) remark that DMOs do not often measure visitor perception, perhaps due to the lack of understanding of what and how to measure it.

3.4 Objectives, Development and Competitiveness of Destination Branding

Destination branding is considered to serve several economic, social, cultural and even political objectives and benefits. Contributors in the field agree that the main reasons for the implementation of destination branding are to build a desirable image in order to attract tourists, to differentiate a destination from competitors, to attract high spending tourists, to manage image, to increase the economic benefits of tourism and ultimately the living standards and quality of life of local residents (Tasci, 2011). In line with their vision of development, destinations are marketed as products with certain mixes of marketing elements, namely the product itself, the price, the place and promotional factors. The ideal result of destination marketing is the provision of a consistent and strong destination brand with a name, logo, and colour, which encompasses identity, character, and personality directed at one or more target markets with a distinctive position that translates into strong consumer-based brand equity and high tourism revenues (Tasci, 2011). A brand vision is an articulated description of the aspirational image of the brand (Milicevic et al. 2017). Morgan et al. (2002) in their study of destination branding in New Zealand found that to be a brand winner, destinations brands must be based on a vision that is founded on intensive stakeholder, consumer and competitor research. A brand mission summarises the reason for the brand's existence (Pike, 2008).

The main objectives of the destination branding process and creation of a durable brand are to identify the brand's values, create a desirable and appealing destination image with a suitable emotionally appealing personality based on the distinctive destination features, and to accurately convey and deliver this image to potential visitors (Milicevic, 2016; Morgan et al., 2003). This process should facilitate the creation of strong emotional attachment between the destination and potential visitors making the consumer want to visit or revisit the destination. The process of destination branding is not just about designing a brand, it is also a process where different actors are involved and who are crucial to the success of the brand. These actors usually have different perceptions about the destination, solutions for different problems that might surge and differing ideas about the desired image that will be communicated (Caldeira, 2022).

To ensure the success and competitiveness of a destination, there are a number of: effective marketing research and consistent service delivery; keeping the brand relevant to customers; proper positioning in the market by offering a distinctive value proposition; keeping the brand consistent and making sure all communication reflect

the brand's values; using a full repertoire of marketing activities; establishing and monitoring a focused brand positioning strategy based on sound research to stimulate congruence between the brand identity and the brand image; sustained support in the long run; and finally brand equity monitoring (Caldeira, 2022; Pike, 2008).

The involvement of the local community in the branding process is also key for the success and development of the brand, since the local residents are the ambassadors of the destination who interact with the visitors, passing on the destination's values, culture and traditions. The design, development, and maintenance of the brand is a continuous process where the different stakeholders are not just co-creators, but are continuously involved in the implementation of the brand, making destination branding an interactive process (Caldeira, 2022). Furthermore, for destination branding to be effective, destinations should define target groups to whom they are going to communicate a defined brand. The relevant target groups are different segments of visitors. When they know whom their main target groups are, destinations should build a brand that will influence the visitors' opinion about the destination (Milicevic et al, 2017). For Buhalis (2000), understanding destination types and characteristics is of paramount importance for its marketing. Each destination can only match certain types of demand and, hence, tourism marketers need to understand travel motivations to develop appropriate brands for the right target markets. Destinations should be aware of the needs and wants of active demand, and of the potential markets they can attract. They have to identify the seasonality patterns of their various markets and attract compatible segments (Buhalis, 2000). In fact, understanding and appreciating the type of destination (e.g. urban, rural, seaside, alpine, authentic, exclusive) enables marketers to develop a suitable destination marketing mix. Ruiz-Real et al (2020) agree that approaching the right target market and providing the most appropriate combination of local tourism products and services is the secret for successful destinations. Conducting a thorough SWOT analysis of the destination's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is also pivotal to identify how to best market the destination and what differentiates or can differentiate it from similar destinations.

Brand positioning and communication are also crucial aspects of destination competitiveness. *"A brand position is the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands"* (Pike, p.217, 2008). Studies

suggest that effective positioning can be a source of competitive advantage for destinations, particularly among competing destinations that can be considered close substitutes, for example two very similar beach destinations. Positioning refers to how a brand can effectively compete against competitors in a particular market, establishing and maintaining a favourably distinctive place in the minds of the target market segments that sets the destination apart from others. Pike (2008) comments that the successful positioning of a destination into a consumer's evoked decision represents a source of competitive advantage over the majority of competing places. He asserts that positioning is a vehicle for influencing brand image and hence destination attractiveness.

Positioning is concerned with three issues: market segments, the image of the destination brand in different segments, and strong destination brand features. The first step of positioning is the assessment of the image destination attributes in current and potential target markets, preferably in comparison with competitors. This assessment reveals the competitive advantage or core competencies of a destination in different target markets. An explicitly positioning strategy usually involves a catchy slogan to help the target markets get a mental image of the product. Positioning also requires a frame of reference with the competition. *"The desired market position, assuming one has been designed, must be presented to the market in a way that stands out from other attention seeking messages of rival destinations and substitute products. If successful, such a position will establish the destination as top of mind in the target audience"* (Pike, 2008, p.222). Tasci (2011) asserts that successful positioning provides a destination with a competitive edge and that destination position should be desirable, memorable and believable for the target segment; it must be distinct, superior and unique; but it must also be deliverable, affordable and profitable for the destination. Moreover, it is widely accepted that any product, in this case, destination, must be perceived favourably on attributes that are important for the target segment. It is important then to identify those attributes that determine product choice to form the basis of any positioning campaign (Pike, 2008). Furthermore, promotion is important in establishing, maintaining, reinforcing and changing a destination brand and its position. It is argued that promotion creates awareness, generates interest and stimulates desire resulting in action. A myriad of promotional sources with verbal and visual messages are used in destination branding. Tasci (2011) notes that the promotional materials must be flattering but realistic. For successful branding, all the information sources have to deliver unidirectional and consistent messages about the brand theme by using integrated

market communication (IMC), which influences people's perceptions and behaviours. According to Tasci (2011), an IMC approach is a strategic tool for destination authorities to differentiate and position their brands.

3.5 Development and Complexities of Destination Branding

Creating and developing a brand is a complex process. It must align the desirable image of the destination, the experience, its unique values and the consequent differentiation between destinations (Pereira et al, 2012; Milicevic et al., 2017). A brand personality must be identified and the brand's essence must be maintained and be consistent. *"The secret is continually to evolve and enrich the original brand personality, building on the initial strengths to strengthen their appeal and broaden the market* (Morgan et al, 2003).

The need for participation and consultation of residents in the generation of a place identity aligned with the brand identity is crucial in order to avoid an artificial place image (Caldeira, 2022; Hanna et al. 2021; Pike, 2008). The involvement of these stakeholders must start from the beginning, with them being treated as active participants in the brand design, instead of being mere spectators to whom the brand is presented after the design and development process is complete. All of this involvement can make the difference between a modest brand and a truly powerful brand (Caldeira, 2022). To avoid disjuncture between local residents and visitors, it is important to avoid significant differences in the perceptions of the brand, brand awareness, meaning and brand equity. It is then valuable to understand the residents' attitudes, roles and reactions to branding (Hanna et al, 2021). Empirical studies suggest that stakeholder involvement (Caldeira, 2022), partnerships and support in all phases of research, brand idea development, implementation, evaluation and control are crucial for successful destination branding (Pike, 2008). It is recommended that governments act as facilitators and use a bottom-up approach to not only empower local communities but also to reveal authentic brands truthful to local identities. Thus, destination branding should be seen as a collaborative process that includes all of the stakeholders involved in tourism development, including the local tourism providers, the host population, the visitors, the local business community and travel distribution intermediaries (Tasci, 2011; Garcia et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2003; Pike, 2008).

Developing and managing a destination brand is a complex undertaking in part because of the destination itself whose tourism product often encompasses a

multitude of elements and in part because of the different stakeholders involved (Almeyda-Ibanez & George, 2017; Cai, 2002; Caldeira, 2022; Marzano & Scott, 2009; Milicevic; Morgan et al, 2003; Pike, 2008; Tasci, 2011). One of main reasons are the unique characteristics of the tourism industry involving different stakeholders with different interests (Caldeira, 2022) and its multi-sectorial nature, involving the economy, the environment, infrastructure and services, and human resources. Destinations are also more multidimensional than consumer goods and other types of services (Pike, 2008). The existence of multiple and heterogenous stakeholders that usually lack unity (Almeyda-Ibanez & George, 2017; Marzano & Scott, 2009; Pike, 2008) and who exert different forms of power within the destination branding process in order to include their own values in the destination brand also complicates the process. Another challenge is ensuring that the different stakeholders pass on a consistent message and image about the destination to avoid a conflict of ideas when consumers think about the brand (Caldeira, 2022). Politics, the issues of who decides the brand theme and how they are accountable, the lack of control over messages about a destination are also critical (Cai, 2020). Often DMOs lack any direct control over the actual delivery of the brand by the local tourism community and have no access to visitors' contacts to assess consumer-based brand equity and brand loyalty. In fact, one of the greatest challenges destination marketers face is evaluating and measuring the success of a brand, and this is of extreme importance to assess the effectiveness and success of a brand (Caldeira, 2022). Caldeira (2022) highlights that there is a lack of studies that focus on tourist perceptions or on the success strategies of branding. Other complexities that have been revealed are the lack of funding and dedicated professional human resources (Pike, 2008). The complexities of developing a brand are also related to the development of the experiential element and the understanding of the tourists' decisional process. Another challenge faced is authenticity. What sells and has success is the brand that is honest and valuable. *"Branding should be an amplification of what is already there, not a fabrication. When positioning a country, the destination marketer should never create an artificial position; its positioning should root in reality and the destination's central truth"* (Almeyda-Ibanez & George, 2017, p. 15).

Collaboration is imperative to successful destination branding as there needs to be a cooperative and strategic approach (Perkins et al., 2020). However, this is more easily said than done. These authors note that enacting collaboration can prove to be extremely challenging as there may be difficulties with resource allocation, policy ideals, unequal contribution from involved stakeholders, issues with communication

and issues with the structure of the collaboration. Other challenges identified were unbalanced efforts from stakeholders, small business mentality, competition between stakeholders, differing opinions and lack of leadership. Because destinations are places of life and change where each consumer consumes and experiences the product differently, destination marketers also have less control over the brand experience. Destinations provide different experiences to different tourists and are not tangible products that can be returned if the consumer is not satisfied (Almeyda-Ibanez & George, 2017).

3.6 Destination Branding and Sustainable Tourism Development

As presented above, the aim of destination branding is to improve the competitiveness of a tourism destination. This in turn will lead to improved socio-economic benefits for the destination and local community. It is important that any destination branding be developed and communicated with the framework of sustainable tourism development in mind (Dinnie, 2011 as cited in Caldeira, 2022). This is based on a robust destination management plan that places sustainable development at its core and understands the role that destination branding has in the positioning of a destination in the tourism market.

As previously discussed one of the characteristics of sustainable tourism development is stakeholder involvement, namely the local community. Destination branding must ensure the sustainability of the destination for both visitors and tourists. In sustainable tourism development, three aspects are particularly central: a holistic destination management perspective, a long-term process and stakeholder involvement. This is equally fundamental in the case of destination branding. The literature on destination branding emphasizes the importance of the role of local stakeholders in the creation of an authentic and reliable destination brand (Ah, 2022; Caldeira, 2022; Reynolds, 2021; Mitropoulou & Spilanis, 2020; Zouganeli et al, 2012). Zouganeli et al. (2012) note that *“in developing a marketing plan, it is clear that if residents don’t perceived the destination in the same way as it is being promoted, no sustainable tourism model can be developed”* (p. 2). In their study of destination branding and sustainable tourism development in the island of Crete, Zouganeli et al. (2012) argue that *“destination branding can only be sustainable when hosts, policy objectives and tourists’ demands are in harmony”* (p. 6). They posit that internal branding is based on the approaches of sustainable development and expresses a bottom-up destination branding process. *“If local people agree with the image projected of their place of residence, they should be expected to ‘live the brand’.*

Otherwise the gap between reality and induced image can create dissonance when tourists, foreign investors and so on discover that the projected image of the (destination) doesn't correspond to reality" (Zouganeli et al, 2012, p. 6). For a brand to be sustainable, the image of the destination must not only appeal to the target markets but also to its residents. Destination brands must be in tune with the local communities and at the same time satisfy the needs of the market (Day, 2011 as cited in Caldeira, 2022). Hence, in order for a destination brand to be successful, sustainable tourism development and management cannot ignore the needs and views of residents. In the same vein, research shows that one of the strategies for sustainable tourism development and management is branding for highlighting destination identity. In an empirical study on city branding and sustainable destination management in South Korea, Ahn (2022) found that relevant stakeholders (government, locals, the private sector) were able to identify the unique characteristics of a destination, leading to positive impacts, such as economic prosperity, higher quality of life and perceived well-being, and community cohesion. In fact, one of the goals of destination branding is to improve the quality of life of the local community in a sustainable manner, through the reinforcement of the local identity, which can foster local pride.

Mitropoulou & Spilanis (2020) looked at the role of place branding in shaping sustainable island tourism and note that it can be a strategic planning procedure needed to achieve multifaceted sustainability of an island destination. Moreover, their research highlights that place branding can be a strong tool to protect locality and culture, acting as the basis for sustainable development. They stress, however, that: *"practitioners and local authorities who are mainly responsible for the design and implementation of place branding strategies need to incorporate sustainability in to their designs because in every single case there is a risk for a place to be destroyed due to its overwhelming success as a preferred destination"* (Mitropoulou & Spilanis, 2020, p. 24).

3.7 Summary

In sum, destination branding has become increasingly relevant in destination marketing and management. It is a strategic marketing tool that, if done right, allows destinations to be more competitive attracting more visitors. The process of developing a destination brand and ensuring its equity is not an easy process and destinations managers and marketers must constantly evaluate its equity.

Chapter 4- Surf Tourism

4.1 Introduction

Surf tourism is a growing and profitable tourism niche. With many popular surf destinations around the world already becoming crowded, unsustainable and unappealing to surf tourists, and with the known economic potential of surf tourism, other emerging destinations have looked at this sports activity as an attractive niche for local economic and social development. In the last twenty years, in fact, there has been an increasing number of studies conducted on surf tourism conveying not only the growing attention and popularity of this type of tourism but reflecting also the need to address the socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of this industry in various destinations around the world, both in developing and developed nations (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003; Buckley, 2002; Lazarow, 2007; Reis & Jorge, 2012; Towner & Milne, 2017). The urgency to address the impacts of tourism, in general, on destinations and populations has led to the focus on sustainability and sustainable tourism development. Surf tourism has been no exception with sustainability becoming a key component. Studies on popular, and often poorly managed, surf tourism destinations around the world, particularly in developing countries, show us the need to address and reinforce sustainable development in surf tourism destinations. In fact, destinations considering this activity as a selling point and local development strategy should have sustainability at their core ensuring the balance between the wellbeing of the local population and the preservation of the natural environment alongside economic growth and tourist satisfaction. This chapter gives a brief overview of the current global context of surf tourism; it provides a general profile of surf tourists and looks at the benefits and impacts of this activity, namely economic, socio-cultural and environmental. An insight of sustainable surf tourism as well as of surf tourism destination branding and marketing are also introduced.

4.2 Surf Tourism: Concept and Global Context

Surfing has its origins in the roots of several Pacific cultures, including Hawaii, Polynesia and Peru, with recorded surfing events dating back many hundreds of years (Lazarow et al. 2009). It is a water sport in which participants ride an ocean wave standing on a surfboard, prone on a body board, bodysurf without any form of board, or ride a stand up paddleboard, surf mat or a hydrofoil. Surfing takes place at locations where local conditions, such as bathymetry and the orientation of the coast to incoming swell, shapes waves into a favourable form of surfing (Arroyo et al.,

2021). Surfing has become major recreational and economic activity involving human interaction with diverse coastal environments and peoples and that has been expanding both in intensity in traditional locations and in new destinations, often in the developing world (Lazarow, 2007). Surf is estimated to be practiced by 17 to 35 million people around the world and growing at 30% per year with the industry of surf valued at around \$22 billion (SurferToday, 2022).

The popularity of surfing among participants, the concept of travel and exploration as a central part of surfing culture, the growing interest in the sport and the surfers' quest for the perfect wave have created the surf tourism industry (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). Surf tourism may be defined as the act of people travelling to either domestic locations for a period of time not exceeding 6 months, or international locations for a period of time not exceeding 12 months, who stay at least one night, and where the active participation in the sport of surfing is the primary motivation for destination selection (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003). For Buckley (2002), surfing becomes tourism when surfers travel at least 40 km and stay overnight with surfing as the primary purpose for travel. According to Buckley (2002), there are two types of surf tourism: recreational surf travel and commercial surf tourism. *"In recreational surf travel, surfers plan their own trips using their own equipment and transportation means and sleep in local accommodation or tents, motor homes or home mobile. The trips can be long or short, domestic or international, but not much money is spent per person/per day. It can be said that recreational surf travelling is as old as surfing"* (Reis and Jorge, 2012). Commercial surf tourism refers to tour operators that plan and organize tour packages that include, for example, surf tours, visits to surf camps, or exclusive access to famous surf breaks. Surf scholarship also identifies three types of surf trips: "charter yacht tours" or "boat trips", where surfers stay on the boat and are transported to the different surf spots, often quite far from the shore; "land based surf tours" or "surfaris", in which surfers travel on and stay in locations close to surf spots; and "surfcamps", which are lodgings dedicated to surfers, usually with a surf theme and decoration (Neves, 2021).

Although it is not easy to calculate the size and economic significance of the global surf tourism industry, it is estimated to be worth between \$70 and \$130 billion annually, making it one of the fastest growing segments of the profitable surf industry, driven by both visitation in existing surf tourism destinations and by the ongoing expansion of surfing to remote coastal communities in developing and

middle-income countries (Mach & Ponting, 2018).⁶ According to Hritz & Franzidis (2018), in 2015 there were 164 countries and 9000 destinations around the world where surf was practiced. Traditionally, surfing has been concentrated in particular areas with commercial surf tourism relying heavily on island nations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, such as the Maldives and Indonesia. Many of these islands are relatively small economies and have a traditional social framework. For them, surf tourism has become a significant factor influencing economic, social and environmental patterns and processes (Buckley, 2002). In the last decade, surfing has expanded in intensity in traditional surfing locations, for example in Australia's Gold Coast, the west coast of the USA, in Central America, and in Hawaii. Many developing countries, particularly in Southeast Asia and in the Indo-Pacific region have also seen a growth of surf tourism, often in poorly managed destinations. Europe also boasts popular surf tourism destination spots, being the most famous ones in Portugal and France. Other tourism destinations around the world have started to look at surf tourism as an attractive tourism product that may give them a competitive advantage over other competing destinations and as a tool for development. Examples can be seen in El Salvador, Chile, and in the Portuguese islands of the Azores and Madeira.

Surfers typically choose their surfing destination based on where the quality of the surf is high. Several factors determine the quality and consistency of the surf, namely the shape of the wave, which is determined by the consistency and size of the waves (swells), wave period, local wind conditions, the type of sea-bottom, the proximity to the shore, as well as the tides (Neves, 2021). Besides the quality of the surf, the destination's weather, scenery and quality of tourism facilities influence the success and appeal of a surf destination (Knaap & Vanneste, 2021). Previously unknown places can develop into important tourism destinations with surfing taking an important role in the local community's economy, as is the case of surfing destinations in South America (e.g. Las Salinas in Nicaragua) and South East Asia (e.g. Indonesia). Research shows that when a surf destination gains popularity, surf-related businesses are developed, such as surf schools, surf shops, restaurants, hotels, surf camps, contributing to local economic development (Neves, 2001); residents of surf destination often rely on surf tourism as a source of employment and major economic generator for the community (Usher & Kerstetter, 2014); and

⁶ This estimate, however, may be under calculated when considering that most popular surf destinations in developed and developing countries have hundreds of small tourism operations whose value has never been calculated (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013).

often it is the case that the most easily accessible and popular surf breaks around the world are crowded, and many of the uncrowded surf breaks are inaccessible. Currently, the global surf tourism industry involves thousands of tour operators, village home-stays, resorts, charter boats, wholesalers, retail travel agents and integrated services combinations. In 2007, 112 countries offered some sort of surfing tours or had available surfing information for tourists (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). Further growth of the industry is also expected with the development of more specialized services such as surf schools and the increase of surfing-related consumer brands (Moutinho et al., 2007).

4.3 Surf Tourists: Profile and Motivations

Studies on surf tourism provide different descriptions and analyses of surf tourists based on their behaviour and motivations (Buckley, 2002; Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003; Martin & Assenov, 2008; Reis, 2020). In general, they are characterized as a group whose numbers have been growing around the world, they are heterogeneous in their surf and travel motivations, their ages range from 16 to 50 and their levels of surf experience vary as well. The literature shows that surfers are adventurous, educated, have a high income and are financially able to travel. They usually travel to surf once a year and surf 3 or 4 times a week (Buckley, 2002; Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). There are many and varied motivations when it comes to surfing. Some of the identified motivations are: contact with nature; personal challenge; risk and adventure; escapism; sense of belonging; health and wellness; development of a personal lifestyle and philosophy; and sensation seeking (Reis, 2020).

Surf tourists are also characterized for being mobile and engaging in surf tourism at all levels of budget and luxury creating a considerable global tourism industry and impacting tens of thousands of coastal communities. They are depicted by the time and effort they invest in surfing and by their desire to travel in search for the perfect wave (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). For Buckley (2002), surf tourists are first defined as surfers and then as tourists. This concept highly impacts surf tourism as it affects the surf tourists' behaviour, since their ultimate motivations are related to the quality and variety of waves and secondly to the life around the ocean and beach. *"The search for the secret wave, the never before surfed beaches, becomes the essence of the surfing experience"* (Reis & Jorge, 2012). The age structure of the current surfing population (20's/30's) also suggests that the demand and ability to pay for surf tourism will continue to increase substantially worldwide gaining further

popularity as surfing becomes easier to learn (Buckley, 2002), given the number of surf schools and destinations for beginner surfers. For Dolnicar & Flucker (2003), surfers can be clustered according to differences in spending habits: 1) *price-conscious*-the oldest age group with many years of surfing experience and the highest level of income; 2) *luxury surfers*-individuals seeking superior accommodation, food and safety; 3) *price-conscious adventurers*-individuals with advanced surfing skills and who place an importance on health, safety and reliable tourism providers; 4) *ambivalent surfers*-for whom nothing seems overly important; and 5) *radical adventurers*-the youngest age group with the lowest level of income but with advanced surfing skills (cited in Hritz & Fazidis, 2018). Reportedly, the two groups with the highest willingness to spend per day are the price conscious adventurer and the luxury surfer having these two the highest income and most advanced surfing skills. Moreover, while price-conscious adventurers are likely to return to a favourite spot, luxury surfers prefer new destinations (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003). Hritz & Franzidis (2018) study on surf tourists in Willington, USA found that a surfer's level of experience does influence spending patterns. Their research revealed that as experience level increases, surf tourists are more likely to visit the destination more often and their length of stay is also more likely to increase as years spent surfing increases. The authors ascertain that "*the more experienced surfer is a highly attractive market segment and could lead to greater positive economic benefit for a destination*" (Hritz & Franzidis, 2018).

Martin & Assenov (2008) posit that there are three types of surf tourists and propose that surf tourism depends on the travellers' level of motivation for surfing and depth of experience. For these authors, there are *incidental surf tourists*, *soft surf tourists* and *hard surf tourists*. Incidental surf tourists are tourists who are on vacation and who decide to try surfing for the first time by taking surf lessons in safe surfing spots with low swells; soft surf tourists are somewhat experienced surfers, who do not necessarily select a destination solely for surfing; and hard surf tourists who travel with the sole purpose of surfing, either for leisure or for a competition. Surf tourists can also be categorized as *professional surfers*, *highly skilled surfers* or *recreational surfers*. Professional surfers compete professionally in elite surf competitions; highly skilled surfers seek the best place to surf with consistent waves and less crowded beaches while recreational surfers seek fun and relaxation. This last group can be regarded as having high economic potential as they usually seek surf schools, surf tours or beaches close to urban centres with plenty of activities and amenities.

Lazarow et al. (2009) add that many tourists who are encouraged to try surfing as part of a coastal holiday may be more likely to embrace the sport in the future.

According to Barbieri & Sotomayor's (2013) study, surfers have a strong disposition for surf tourism based on six leisure qualities (effort, ethos, career, identity, perseverance, benefits) that predict their destination preferences particularly related to the overall surfing experience of the destination, the variety of waves and the quality of the natural environment. Studies also show that although all surf tourists prefer non-crowded surf destinations, different segments have different preferences for the waves they would like to ride and for the overall surrounding of the destination including its facilities, infrastructure and easy access (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003). Barbieri & Sotomayor (2013) found that surfers perceive the surfing appeal of a destination as more important than the access and infrastructure. The most prevalent elements when choosing a destination for surfing are related to the quality of the waves in terms of abundance, variety and specialty, and the surrounding environment in terms of natural quality (Portugal et al., 2017, Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). Site accessibility in terms of easy access and closeness to a community or town are not as relevant. Research also shows that surf tourists seeking more pleasure-related rewards, such as enjoyment, recreation and socialization in their surfing trips, do not care much about the surfing conditions of the destination, whereas those seeking other benefits, such as self-expression and financial rewards, are more demanding on specific surfing characteristics of the destination (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). These results are important for surf destinations opting to either attract *"a broad clientele of surfers (e.g. providing alternative recreational activities) or a very specialized group of serious surfers seeking to master their skills"* (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013, p. 119). Jorge & Leandro (2015) in a study of Peniche, a popular surf destination in Portugal, found that what surf tourists most valued in the destination were: the quality of the waves, the surf culture and lifestyle, the quantity of different waves, the natural environment and the wave consistency.

Understanding the surf tourists' behaviour is, hence, of the utmost importance to the development and strengthening of marketing strategies for attracting or retaining surf tourists (Portugal et al., 2017). In fact, identifying these tourists and the reasons that motivate them to choose a surfing destination allows the tourism markets to more easily adjust their offer to the tourism demand and implement managerial actions to better serve those tourists. Furthermore, distinguishing the demographics and surfing

behaviour can help in crafting promotional messages targeting certain surfers' segments (Moutinho et al, 2007; Reis & Jorge, 2012).

4.4 Surf Destination Competitiveness

Surf tourism provides a business and economic opportunity for many destinations and is a niche market of adventure tourism, an increasingly popular industry. With surf tourists willing to search for and travel to destinations looking for unique adventure experiences and perfect surfing conditions, it becomes essential for destinations to understand how surfers select their destinations and how they compare and compete with each other, in order to boost destination competitiveness.

For that, destinations considering surfing as a tourism selling point must find out which attributes their surf spots can create as a competitive advantage compared to their rival destinations (Lopes & Bicudo, 2017; Reis & Carneiro, 2022) and identify their target market to better develop strategic marketing initiatives. Understanding surf travel behaviour, preferences and motivations has important planning, management and marketing implications for surf tourism destinations as it allows them to *"implement effective positioning strategies, increase market segmentation options, enhance product development and communication strategies, and generally improve marketing-mix strategies, particularly concerning the development of an effective surf spot brand"* (Silva et al., 2014). Moreover *"such information can assist the development or enhancement of surfing destinations as well as to guide businesses in the provision of complementary activities and services to enhance the satisfaction of their clients"* (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013, p, 112). For example, destinations can offer a variety of services and facilities for surf tourists, e.g. surf apparel shops, surfboard repair shops, surf hostels and camps, surf-themed hotels and restaurants, as well as other adventure tourism activities complementary to the surf travel experience (Reis & Carneiro, 2022). Hence, destination managers should ensure that their surf destinations have adequate services that can strengthen the surf identity (e.g. souvenir shops, surf related gear and clothing) and foster social network opportunities such as surf parties, events, and championships. All of this, while benefiting surf tourists, will help to invigorate the economy of local communities (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). Moreover, understanding surf tourists' travel motivations, behaviours, ages and levels can help destinations develop and offer better and more diversified travel experiences (Rosa et al., 2019). For example, travel experiences can be aimed at families travelling with children who surf, young surfers in their 20s and 30s who look for good quality surf spots but who also want to

have fun beyond the surf break, or more mature surfers in their 40s or 50s who can afford and value luxurious accommodation, exclusive surf destinations and quieter and more secluded surf breaks. Besides understanding travel behaviour and motivation, emerging and competing surf tourism destinations must differentiate themselves using their best attributes, predominantly the quality of their waves but also other natural, cultural and social features to highlight their uniqueness and special attributes projecting an appealing image (Reis & Carneiro, 2022). In fact, when it comes to tourism destination marketing, image is one of the most central elements in tourism attractiveness and positioning and surf tourism destination is no exception (Reis et al., 2022; Rosa et al., 2019).

As discussed previously, destination image plays an important role in the decision-making process of selecting a travel destination. The image of a destination leads to the intention of the tourist to visit or to revisit it (Rosa et al., 2019). In an empirical study on image and surf culture, Reis et al. (2022) revealed that a surf destination image in terms of its surf culture has an impact on the overall image and loyalty of a surf destination. Surf culture can be characterized by certain values associated with freedom, hedonism, personal achievement, and environmentalism, for example, and is expressed in surf wear, vocabulary and expressions, behaviours, beliefs and symbols. One of the most important aspects for marketing and management of a surf destination is its image association with 'surf culture', which must be encouraged and promoted in order to ensure the success of the destination as a surf destination. Important strategies towards this goal may be: increasing the awareness of residents of surf destinations regarding the respect and promotion of surf culture; promoting respect for surf spots and surfers; offering visitors the opportunity to observe the surf culture; and creating events, activities and facilities (surf hotels and accommodation, surf restaurants and bars) related to surfing (Reis et al., 2022). Reis et al. (2022) emphasize that *"surf destinations must be promoted based on their surf culture characteristics, always keeping in mind the feeling of freedom, the thrill of enjoying life, the presence of people performing surf-related activities and the respect for some aspects of surfing-surf spots and surfers"* (Reis et al., 2022, p. 402).

While there is an extensive body of research on destination branding and marketing, there is a scarcity in the literature on surf destination marketing, particularly research on surf branding and image. With surf tourism globally on the rise, with increased competition amongst destinations to attract and retain tourists and with the growing interest in using surf to gain a competitive advantage boosting local economies, it is

imperative that studies on surf tourism destination marketing and branding be carried out. One of the few studies conducted is that of Lemarié & Domann (2019) who examined the branding of Huntington Beach (HB)-Surf City USA. The authors note that *“in HB, surfing is not only a physical activity, but also a culture, a lifestyle, a set of commodities, and a brand (that) intends to attract businesses, residents, and visitors interested in being associated with beach culture and surfing”*(p. 402). The scholars highlight that place branding is not only directed to potential customers and investors but it also focuses on the creation of an identity of and within the community. They emphasize that *“a brand, like Surf City USA, and its associated events like the US Open of Surfing, needs to be lived and shared by locals. It has to create experiences within the city which must be authentic”* (Lemarie & Domman, 2019, p. 413). These are important elements to consider when seeking the success of the development and marketing of surf destinations.

Moreover, one, if not the most important, element in the development of a sustainable and successful surf tourism destination is an effective management and marketing strategy, which must be based on sound research of surf destinations, their unique attributes, their image and branding. Destination managers, responsible for growing tourism as an economic activity, must identify the right market segments with growth potential, and plan, monitor and evaluate the outcomes of their tourism-development efforts. In a study on surf tourism in Peniche, Portugal, Reis & Jorge (2012) found that surf culture and surf lifestyle are the differentiating and strategic elements in the management of a surf destination. They consider this to be fundamental for the sustainability of a surf destination, since it depends on the relationship between surfing and the land. The authors argue that surf and surf lifestyle influence not only surfers but also those who associate with this culture making this tourism segment an important development factor in many destinations. They add that *“surf destinations should, therefore, seek to become places that offer experiences related to the surfing lifestyle, rather than just places that have excellent conditions for surfing, but do not have anything else to offer. The surf destinations should have the ability to make a difference, to dream and create appeal. The only way for a surfing destination to become innovative, appealing and more easily marketable, is by being able to create competitive advantages and to communicate to specific segments”* (Reis & Jorge, 2012). The literature highlights that what persuades tourists to visit and revisit a destination is the level of visibility, knowledge and empathy with the destination and its values. Thus, studying surf destinations,

both well-established ones and emerging ones is key to developing effective marketing strategies grounded on appealing branding and image.

Hosting events, in this case surf events and competitions, is also considered an attribute of competitive destinations as events not only attract visitors but also help promote the destination. Associated with surf tourism are surf competitions, held in many surf destinations around the world. These can be regional, national or international. Sports events have been argued to help destinations develop economically, socially and environmentally, and aid in destination promotion (Jorge & Leandro, 2015; Martins, 2019; Neves, 2021). Economically, events can create employment, business development; environmentally, it can lead to natural resource preservation, the conservation of natural areas, and to rural and urban regeneration; culturally and socially, it can help promote the local cultural heritage, instill local pride, foster cultural diversity and social cohesion (Neves, 2021). In fact, hosting events is a typical tourism strategy for many destinations, hoping to either make the event (s) their main attraction, develop a destination brand around it or help develop its tourism sector. An event then, such as an international surf competition, becomes a tourism product, diversifying the tourism offer, and attracting a new market segment. Hosting a surf event off the high season is also argued to bring economic and tourism benefits (Jorge & Leandro, 2015; Neves, 2021). Surf events also attract great media attention, which can help promote the destination to other potential surf tourists and build its brand. Moreover, these events can help enhance and reinforce the image and identity of the destination brand and raise more brand awareness. In fact, events have become an increasingly significant component of destination branding (Chalip & Costa, 2006; Jago et al., 2003; Trost et al., 2012). When thinking about hosting a sports event, like a surf competition, it is fundamental to think about a myriad of conditions: the local community, the potential economic benefits it will bring, the promotion and exposure of the destination, the services and transportation available. It is important to remember that despite the claimed benefits of sports events for destinations, they are not without their controversies, particularly when it comes to events that are held only once and not annually in the same destination. Examples of these types of events are the football World Cup and the Olympics. It is true that they do bring exposure to the destination, but there must be a clear vision and plan on how the event will benefit the host community not just during the event but also after. An environmental risk assessment is also crucial to be carried out.

4.5 Surf Tourism Benefits and Impacts

Several studies have been conducted on the economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts of surf tourism in the destinations where it takes place (Buckley, 2002; Hritz & Franzidis, 2018; Knaap & Vanneste, 2021; Mach & Ponting, 2018; Martin & Assenov, 2008; Ruttenberg, 2022; Towner & Orams, 2016; Towner & Milne, 2017; Towner & Orams, 2016). Following is an overview of the reported benefits and impacts of surf tourism found in the surf literature.

4.5.1 Economic Benefits and Impacts

Contributors to the field of surf tourism argue that the industry can have a strong potential as a development strategy contributing to the economic growth of regions and countries (Hritz & Franzidis, 2018; Nelsen et al, 2007; Lazarow, 2009; Reis & Jorge, 2012; Towner & Orams, 2016, Wagner et al., 2011.). This emerging body of literature is often referred to as 'surfonomics' (Arroyo et al., 2021). Surf tourism has been viewed not only as a real or potential source of earnings and employment by communities and destinations worldwide but it has also become an activity of substantial economic relevance providing significant socio-economic value to host communities and playing a major part in the tourism strategies for many coastal locations (Lazarow, 2007; Towner & Milne 2017; Usher & Kerstetter, 2014).

Research shows that surf tourism has the potential to provide significant economic income and employment opportunities, enhance human and environmental resources contributing to the sustainability and enhancement of regional and local economics. Usher & Kerstetter (2014) in their analysis of Las Salinas, a small rural indigenous community in Nicaragua, examined the impacts of surf tourism development on local residents and concluded that tourism did provide new opportunities for business and employment opportunities with the development of surf camps, backpacker hostels, hotels and restaurants. *"Residents have not only come to rely on surf tourism as another major source of employment (...) but it has become one of the major economic generators for the community"* (Usher & Kerstetter, 2014, p. 326). The literature also indicates that the surf culture and lifestyle of a destination have the ability to attract more surf tourist segments, fighting seasonality and contributing to an increase in the consumption of food, accommodation and local resources, benefitting the local population and economy. Reis & Jorge (2012) assert that Peniche, a popular surf destination in Portugal, has seen positive financial gains from activities and businesses associated with surfing. They note that when using surfing as a marketing strategy, this appeals to both

surfers and non-surfers, e.g. surf championship viewers, who are still consumers and possible future promoters of the destination. Moreover, for many small islands and emerging tourism destinations, surf tourism is seen as a significant opportunity for economic growth. Buckley (2002) suggests that even in larger islands, surf tourism can be the leading edge of the economically important and increasingly popular nature, eco and adventure tourism sector, attracting families and individual surfers, hence, attracting different market segments. Hritz & Franzidis (2018) examined surf tourism spending in Willington, USA and concluded that surfers do bring economic benefits to a destination and that there are differences between surfers based on the number of years spent surfing. They found that surfers typically travel in groups of two to four people, spend money on a year-round basis, and as they gain experience surfing, they are more likely to travel more frequently and spend more money per day. The research also emphasized that since surfers avoid crowds, they are willing to travel in off season, which is encouraging for destinations as the economic benefit of a surf tourist is spread throughout the year.

Despite the known economic benefits of surf tourism, researchers have also found that it has exposed communities, particularly in poorer destinations, to certain negative economic consequences mainly related to its development (Buckley et al., 2017; Knaap & Vanneste, 2021; Ruttenberg, 2022). Some negative impacts highlighted in the literature are: the income inequality between surfing areas and adjacent areas where there is no surf impact (Román et al., 2022); economic leakages, as most surf related businesses in developing destinations are foreign owned and profits do not stay in the local host communities (Towner & Orams, 2016); the increase of prices that negatively impact the purchasing power of the local community (Román et al, 2022). Towner & Orams (2016) in their study of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands found that the development of the surf industry in this location created a handout mentality, foreign leakage and jealousy between members of the community due to an unequal distribution of wealth.

4.5.2 Environmental Impacts and Benefits

Most of the literature on surfing, consider surfing a positive motivator for environmental and coastal protection, raising awareness and action (Arroyo et al, 2021; Lazarow et al., 2007; Román et el., 2022; Teixeira, 2017; Towner & Orams, 2016). Arroyo et al, (2021) believe that *“surfing communities are deeply rooted and have strong interests in sustaining healthy coastal and marine environments. This*

creates the potential to be a conduit through which the political will for coastal conservation is mobilized and expressed” (p. 4).

Studies have commented on the increase of sustainable behavioural practices due to surf tourism. In fact, the major environmental benefits brought forth in the literature relate to sustainable behavioural practices and to the conservation and protection of the surfing space by surfers. *“Surfers develop a deep connection and awareness of the coastal and marine environment through the practice of their sport”* (Arroyo et al. 2021, p. 5) and this has led to the development of a global movement of surf conservation focused on stewarding and protecting surf breaks and their surrounding environments., which aims to *“leverage the economic, social, and cultural value of surf breaks in order to protect the various ecological and oceanographic processes upon which the quality waves depend”* (p. 4). Surfers are seen as caring for the health of ecosystems surrounding waves and having a strong voice for protection of marine resources and biodiversity. *“Poor water quality, coastal development, climate change impacts, plastic pollution and marine debris impact surfers enjoying the water as well as the flora and fauna that reside in the surf ecosystem”* (Arroyo et al., 10). In the Maldives, Towner & Orams (2016) found that raised environmental awareness among the local community, marine resource management, waste management and sustainability were significant positive environmental impacts produced by the surf tourism industry on the islands. Román et al. (2022) claim that surf tourism can raise environmental awareness associated to ocean literacy through beach clean-up campaigns, for example, and it fosters local ecological knowledge, which may contribute to coastal management plans.

Lazarow et al. (2007) adds that with growing affluence, tourists who are occasional surfers may become motivated to use some of their wealth to preserve surf breaks. In a study on surf tourism in Peniche, Portugal (Teixeira, 2017), local stakeholders admitted that surf tourism did bring some environmental benefits to the destination, through the contribution of environmentally concerned local businesses, promotion of environmental awareness. Teixeira (2017) found that stakeholders regarded the profile of most surfers as having increased local environmental responsibility and awareness and the encouragement of the preservation of the local environment due to the surf lifestyle of the surf destinations. Interestingly, Towner & Milne (2007), however, found that in the Mentawai Islands most surfers were motivated by a desire to protect their own surfing experience rather than the local community and environmental well-being. In fact, not all surf scholarship points to successful cases.

Surf tourism has also been argued to be responsible for causing negative environmental impacts (Buckley, 2002; Mach & Ponting, 2018). Mach & Ponting (2018) stress that surfers' stress on land-resources that support tourist visitation in sensitive coastal ecosystems exacerbate a number of environmental problems related to the over-extraction of resources to support tourism and the failure to deal with solid waste. Surf tourism has also been found to lead to increased water consumption, pollution of drinking water sources, destruction of reef systems and marine ecosystems, particularly in small islands, and pollution of beaches and surrounding areas (Buckley, 2002; Tantamjarik, 2004). Román et al. (2022) add that surf tourism also impacts the local flora and fauna, e.g. by trampling over sand dunes or encroaching on bird nesting areas, increases coastal urbanization, and may lead to unsustainable behavioural practices (Román et al., 2022). In a study conducted in Costa Rica, it was found that as surf tourism grew, so did a range of social and environmental challenges: tax incentives pushed local landholders to sell their land to foreign investors; impacts on watershed viability; theft and drug-related crime targeting tourists; social inequality; waste management; and dispossession of local lands via speculative real estate land grab (Ruttenberg, 2022).

Martin & Assenov (2014) developed a Surf Resource Sustainability Index based on 27 social, economic, environmental and governance indicators that measure the conservation aptitude of surf sites. The authors point out that surf sites around the world are increasingly under pressure from tourism, coastal development and pollution and that there is an urgent need to protect coastal surfing resources, such as coral reefs which are among the best locations in the world for surfing. Some strategies to manage and protect coastal surfing resources are the promulgation of Surfing Reserves. These *"identify surfers as integral stakeholders and custodians of sites and current policies range from symbolic recognition to comprehensive legislation and protection"* (Martin & Assenov, 2014, p. 128).

4.5.3 Socio-cultural Benefits and Impacts

Studies show that the increase in popularity of an area for surfing and its transformation into a surf destination can be a catalyst for socio-cultural benefits for the local community (Machado et al, 2018). Some of the identified social benefits include: environmental activism and awareness; surfing site preservation; safety provision for surfers and beach users in general; education and inclusion for the local community; and the development of infrastructure and services that benefit both the surf tourists and the locals (Román et al., 2022; Machado et al, 2018). Surf tourism

also exposes tourists to different cultures and ways of living and the same can be said about the locals who learn about their visitors, learn foreign languages and who work on enhancing their town to please tourists (Román et. Al, 2022; Towner & Orams, 2016). On the other hand, several studies point to the negative impacts of surf tourism in both mature and emerging destinations. The identified consequences are: conflicts between local surfers, fishermen and surf tourists (O'Brien & Ponting, 2013); localism behaviours towards surf tourists due to a lack of surf etiquette (Knapp & Vanneste, 2021); privatization of surf breaks; surf rage and overcrowding of surf breaks during peak surf tourism season (Buckley, 2002; Buckley et al., 2017; Knapp and Vanneste, 2021; Mach & Ponting, 2008; Ruttenberg, 2022; Tantamjarik, 2004); damage of cultural roots and degradation of local culture (Towner & Orams, 2016), and the lack of regulation in surf tourism development (Román et al, 2022).

In their study of Nouvelle Aquitaine, a popular surf destination in France, Knapp & Vanneste (2021) found that there are conflicts and tensions between local surfers and surf tourists over the carrying capacity of the surf breaks. Buckley (2002) notes also the risk to the local community associated with the dependency on surf tourism. Particularly in the absence of proper management, this may lead to internal divisions and conflicts in the host communities that compete for business from surf tourists or who cannot cooperate in the proper development plan of the destination's surf tourism industry. Contested tourism resources (surf breaks) and conflicts over site access, exclusivity and control have also been identified (Buckley et al. 2017) as well as increased competition amongst local entrepreneurs and crime, especially in developing nations (Buckley, 2002). Gentrification and loss or degradation of local cultural identity have also been found to be negative impacts of surf tourism related to foreigners' bad behaviours and influence (Mach & Ponting, 2018; Román et al., 2022).

4.6 Surf Tourism for Sustainable Development

The challenges posed by the growth of surf tourism, particularly in less developed destinations, have led to the field of sustainable surf tourism (SST) that promotes surf tourism as a sustainable development strategy seeking to harness the potential of surf tourism as a source of environmental conservation and socio-economic development. The majority of surf scholars argue that framing surf tourism into sustainable tourism development is essential to ensuring an equal balance of the economic, social and environmental impacts and benefits of this tourism product (Araújo et al, 2016; Buckley, 2002; Martin & Assenov, 2014; O'Brien & Ponting,

2013; Ponting & O'Brien, 2014; Teixeira, 2017; Towner & Milne, 2017). Assessing the sustainability of surf tourism destinations around the world has also been a growing interest among researchers (Araújo et al. 2016; O'Brien & Ponting, 2013; Tantamjarik, 2004; Teixeira, 2017).

In a study on surf tourism expenditure by Ponting et al. (2021), it was found that 92% of surfers are willing to pay more for sustainable tourism, stressing the international demand for surf ecosystems that are biodiverse, boast protection measures and have a sustainable tourism economy (as cited in Arroyo et al., 2021). Following the context of sustainability laid out by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, most of the body of research on surf tourism believes that the SST model is imperative to the long-term success and sustainability of surf destinations, and that it is pivotal to have a strategic, long-term coordinated plan and approach to surf tourism planning and development that recognizes limits to growth, establishes the carrying capacities of surf breaks, prevent unfavourable influences and maximizes the creation of value for local communities (Machado et al, 2018; Teixeira, 2017). Moreover, SST scholars highlight the need to empower locals to participate as owners in their local surf tourism businesses; the need for surf tourism management frameworks; the need to foster cross-cultural understanding by educating locals on their wave resources and encouraging sustainable pursuits, like surf tourism; and suggest SST as a poverty alleviation strategy (O'Brien & Ponting, 2003). When it comes to environmental sustainability, the literature argues that surf tourism should preserve and maintain biologic diversity and ecologic systems, and be developed within the limits of the carrying capacity. In an empirical study of sustainability and surf in Peniche, Portugal, Teixeira (2017) emphasizes the need to establish limits to the local growth of surf tourism so that the recreational carrying capacity of the surf breaks are not exceeded. This is crucial since the success of surfing destinations rests mostly on the conservation of non-crowded surf breaks. Furthermore, since surf tourism is an economic activity highly dependent on environmental conditions, its management must follow eco-tourism principles rooted in *"responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education"* (Román et al. 2022, p. 10). Furthermore, SST should be equitable in its impacts, contributing to a better quality of life of a community, with a balanced distribution of tourists allowing for a better allocation of resources and infrastructures and combating seasonality. (Araújo et al., 2022; Lopes & Bicudo, 2017, Román et al., 2022). O'Brien & Ponting (2013) postulate that SST should feature long-term and coordinated planning that

recognizes the need for limits to growth. One of the characteristics of sustainable surf tourism is also the reduction of tourism seasonality. Surf tourism can help to decrease a region's seasonality since the best waves occur during off seasons, usually in the winter, and it is a sport that can be done anytime of the year (Gouveia, 2013).

If SST development is to be successful, the decision-making process must involve an active and conscious participation of all stakeholders affected: the public sector, the tourists, the local community and public interest. Partnerships between multiple economic activities to stimulate competitiveness are also fundamental for the long term sustainability of a surf destination (Araújo et al., 2022). Research shows that an approach towards qualitative and not quantitative growth must be pursued through the participation of host communities (O'Brien & Ponting, 2013). In fact, coordination and involvement between global organizations and stakeholders (surfers, local residents, local government and other public and private entities) in defining a sustainable and long-term strategy for the development of the surf destination has been argued to facilitate strong governance in surf destinations that are resilient and effective (Mach & Ponting, 2018; Machado et al., 2018; Towner & Milne, 2017). Machado et al. (2018) in their study of Aljezur, Portugal, evidenced that cooperation between public and private entities based on the involvement and participation of all stakeholders was *"an indispensable condition for the economic sustainability of the surf product in the municipality of Aljezur"* (p. 698). Towner & Milne (2017) highlight that stakeholders together can formulate a sustainable approach to management, marketing and planning. In the same vein, Martin & Assenov (2014) see surfers as a key stakeholder group integral in coastal resource management. They stress that *"the role of surfers is essential when considering the identification, preservation, or mitigation of surfing resources into coastal planning and project development. Thus, by engaging surfers, inputs or concerns can be addressed early in the design process"* (p. 129).

SST development also implies the improvement in the quality of life, the contribution to social justice and care for the cultural heritage of destinations. For this, the integration of the local communities as partners is essential (Araújo et al., 2018; Buckley, 2002). Martin & Assenov (2014) claim that surfers have a role in conserving and enhancing natural and cultural heritage, in promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, in understanding and enjoying the environment through recreation, and in promoting sustainable social and economic development of local

communities. Reis & Jorge (2012) note that a surf tourism strategy *“should focus on surfing as a business, one that creates wealth, employment and local development, while, at the same time, focusing on environmental issues, through the improvement of coastlines, waves and local beaches’ access”*. Not all surf scholars, however, agree on the SST model (Ruttenberg, 2022). Some argue that surf destinations become dominated by foreign investment and tourism development, transformed into surf towns by and for foreigners and where the locals are subjected to a “relation of structural domination” typical of colonialism. Surfers become then settler colonialists and dispossess lands via neoliberal tourism and real estate development (Ruttenberg, 2022). According to Ruttenberg (2022), critical surf scholars argue that offering surf tourism as a driver for the sustainable development of global south surfing destinations *“produces an innocence common to sustainability discourse whereby broader problematics of climate change, capitalist neocolonial exploitation and concerns for social justice are seemingly eschewed by promoting more sustainable forms of tourism”* (p. 4).

4.7 Surf Tourism in Portugal

In recent years, there has been a growth in the number of studies conducted on surfing and tourism in Portugal (Araújo, 2016; Cale, 2012; Bicudo & Horta, 2009; Gouveia, 2013; Jorge & Leandro, 2015; Machado et al., 2018; Martins 2019; Neves, 2021; Springwald et al., 2019; Teixeira, 2017), highlighting not only a growing interest in this field but the need to address the impacts and benefits of surf tourism in different surf destinations of the country, given the popularity of this tourism niche in Portugal and its importance for the development of several national coastal destinations. Portugal’s extensive coast line (950 km) and wave quality has allowed a growth in the sector, attracting many surfers and surf tourists, and contributing to the economic development of coastal towns, as is the case of Peniche (Neves, 2021) and Ericeira (Martins, 2019). Popular and internationally well-known surf destinations are Peniche, Ericeira⁷, and Nazaré⁸, known for their surf competitions and excellent waves; other excellent surf destinations are Matosinhos and Leça da Palmeira, Espinho, Costa da Caparica, Guincho, Costa Vicentina. In the last few years, Portugal has gained great notoriety and media attention when it comes to surfing, and has become known globally as an ideal surf destination (Gouveia, 2013; Neves,

⁷ In 2011, the Save the Waves Coalition designated Ericeira as a World Surfing Reserve (WSR), whose main objective is to protect well-known surf spots. There are currently only four WSR in the world.

⁸ In 2011, Nazaré gained worldwide notoriety with the famous American surfer, Garret McNamara, surfing a 27-metre high wave.

2021). Peniche, known as “Capital da Onda”, hosts the Rip Curl Pro Portugal, one of the most important qualifying series events of the world surf competition, attracting millions of views online and more than 100 thousand spectators. In 2012, the impact of this event was around 8 million euros (Neves, 2021). Surf scholars claim that, in Portugal, surf tourism has the capacity to generate 3 thousand million euros annually (Bicudo & Horta, 2009).

4.7.1 Surf Tourism in the Azores

The archipelago of the Azores, often called the Hawaii of Europe, lies in the North Atlantic Ocean about 1,600 km west of mainland Portugal (See Figure 1- Appendix), and is spread by nine islands distributed by three groups: Oriental Group (São Miguel and Santa Maria), Central Group (Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico and Faial) and the Western Group (Flores and Corvo) (See Figure 2-Appendix). With a coastline of 667 km located in the North Atlantic Ocean, the Azores offers excellent surfing conditions and gets exposure to swells from all directions. The islands, located in the heart of the North Atlantic, are naturally exposed for most of the year to swells from distant storms and nearby fronts, as well as the rare and highly appreciated "inchas" or "August swells." These swells originate from storms far south, near the South Pole, and have the unique quality of reaching the southern coasts of the islands, often with little to no wind, resulting in what surfers consider "perfect waves." (Leal, 2023). The archipelago contains different types of surf breaks: reef breaks, point breaks and beach breaks. Winter is the most productive period for swells and the islands benefit from a 360 degree swell window, meaning that wave frequency is high as the coastline is exposed to all swell and wind directions (Arroyo et al., 2021). Currently, there are 80 surf spots in the Azores, with the majority (40 surf spots) located on São Miguel Island, the epicentre of the Azores surf scene, due to the variety of waves both in terms of quantity and of diversity. Terceira Island has the second largest surf community with a prevalence of high quality waves, being the wave of Santa Catarina considered one of the best in the Azores and in Portugal for bodyboarding. The Fajã do Santo Cristo in São Jorge Island is considered a surf sanctuary due to its uniqueness and outstanding waves. Other notable surf spots are the long beach break of Praia Formosa in Santa Maria Island, uncrowded reef breaks in Graciosa Island and several secret spots for adventurers and experienced surfers in Flores Island (Cale, 2012). The Azores offers much warmer waters than mainland Portugal, ranging from 16 to 24 degrees, meaning that surfers can surf without a bodysuit most of the year (Grauweihler, 2022). “In addition to being a refuge of nature and breathtaking landscapes, the Azores are a sanctuary for surfing in the

broadest sense, featuring waves of exceptional quality throughout the entire archipelago” (Leal, 2023). It is said that surfing was introduced in the Azores in the 1960s by American GIs, stationed in the American Military Base on the Island of Terceira who would surf in their free time. In recent years, due to the focus on sustainability by the regional government and in part due to the development of a strong surfing community in the Azores, more focus has been put on the protection of waves around the islands, with more surf organizations, such as Surfride Foundation Europe, Salvem o Surf, and Save the Waves Coalition, engaging in campaigns and projects to protect surf ecosystems across the archipelago (Arroyo et al., 2021).

Unlike mainland Portugal, surf tourism in the Azores is quite a recent sector with hardly had any studies having been conducted thus far on the topic, despite it already constituting an important and established tourism product of the Azores. Cale (2012) conducted a research study on the potential of surf as a tourism product for the Azores. Since then, with the liberalization of the Azorean airspace that brought more airlines flying to the Azores, with the focus of the Azorean Tourism Board on nature and adventure tourism, the archipelago’s commitment to sustainable tourism, with destinations, namely Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf hosting national and international surf events, and marketing the destination as a surf destination, and with the increased exposure of the Azores to the world, surf tourism has become a de facto and significant tourism sector in the archipelago, albeit still quite small, especially when we compare it to places such as Ericeira or Peniche in mainland Portugal. Proof of this growth is the observed and palpable increase in the number of surf schools, lodging for surfers, surf lessons and surf packages offered by local surf tourism operators, and number of surfers seen on Azorean beaches. To date there are no official studies on the number of surf tourists visiting the Azores nor is there any official reports on the impact of surf events or data on the number of clients seeking surf lessons and packages. It is important to mention the support provided by the Azores Airlines that also sponsors the surf events and accommodates the surfers’ equipment by not charging for the transportation of the surfboards. These events bring international awareness of the stunning beauty and excellent surfing conditions of the islands throughout Europe and the international surfing community.

4.7.2. Tourism in Ribeira Grande

4.7.2.1 Geographical and Socio-Economic Framework

Ribeira Grande is a municipality located on São Miguel Island, the largest island of the Azores. It is located on the north side of São Miguel island, in the middle of the island, and it is comprised of 14 parishes.⁹ It covers approximately 180 km² of territory, making it the third largest municipality of the Azores, and it borders all the other municipalities of São Miguel (See Figure 3-Appendix). It has a population of around 32, 036 inhabitants (about 13% of all the Azores) and the youngest population in the region. Ribeira Grande is one of the largest and more economically developed Azorean municipalities, due to its industrial sector, construction companies, food companies, dairy farming, and fisheries, which employ most of the population. Agriculture has had a major influence on its development and the industrial sector has benefited from this agricultural activity. The industrial sector, including important construction companies, has the highest gross value added and the highest turnover of the local economy. Despite the economic development of the municipality's industrial sector, one of the main socio-economic problems are social and labour vulnerabilities. In fact, this is the municipality with the worst social cohesion in the archipelago, due to the population's low education levels, high rates of school dropouts, and low qualifications, all of which make the access to the job market and to qualified employment much more difficult, leading to low salaries and a dependence on social assistance among a large number of the population. These situations have led to social exclusion, poverty and unemployment, especially among young people, who are more vulnerable to alcoholism, drug addiction and teenage pregnancy. Unemployment is also the highest in the Azores.

In recent years, the municipality has revealed a significant development regarding its environmental, economic and socio-cultural conditions. These have been influenced not only by regional, national and EU policies, but also by a set of policies and strategies developed at the municipal level that have contributed to the improvement of environmental and urban quality, social cohesion and economic development in the municipality (Plano Estratégico Ribeira Grande 2030, 2017). One of these strategic tools was the Strategic and Operational Development Plan 2014-2020, which was the basis for the Strategic Plan for Tourism 2015-2020. With the implementation of these plans, several areas have been reinforced and enhanced,

⁹ Calhetas, Conceição, Fenais da Ajuda, Lomba da Maia, Lomba de São Pedro, Maia, Matriz, Pico da Pedra, Porto Formoso, Rabo de Peixe, Ribeira Seca, Ribeirinha, Santa Bárbara, and São Brás.

namely: urban rehabilitation, requalification and increased focus on the coastline and waterfront part of the city of Ribeira Grande; renovation of energy infrastructure, water supply, and sewage; sustainable urban mobility; support to local companies and entrepreneurship; and recognition of historical and natural heritage. According to the Strategic Plan 2030, the different stakeholders of Ribeira Grande were invited to participate, including the local community, who was invited to provide comments, suggestions, and ideas for projects and initiatives on a website specifically designed for this. As a resident of Ribeira Grande, I can attest to the interest from the municipal government, through participatory and inclusive projects and initiatives, in reaching out to the local community to increase and awaken the residents' participation in public debate and interaction with the local government, in order to foster collaboration and develop common goals and solutions for the development of the municipality. Environmentally, in the last few years, there has been an improvement in the surface and subsurface water quality, with more attention being given to the sewage system and to domestic waste being dumped on the water stream of Ribeira Grande. Waste management is still an area in progress, but more investment in infrastructure has been made and more awareness campaigns have been led regarding the importance of waste management and reduction, and recycling.

Regarding the sustainability of the destination, there still has much room for improvement, although efforts have been made to address the weaknesses. Currently, one of the major issues is the water pollution in the stream mouth of Ribeira Grande- where domestic, human waste, and agricultural waste is illegally dumped on the stream which flows down to the beach of Monte Verde. Currently a water treatment structure is being built at the end of the stream, just before reaching the beach. Other issues are: loss of agricultural land for cattle, reducing agricultural and landscape diversity, and water infiltration in the soil; low recycling levels; and sewage problems. According to the Strategic Plan 2030, the strategic vision for Ribeira Grande is "sustainable growth, where the recognition of the community and the economic recovery are priorities, in order to achieve better social justice, a more resilient economy, and the better use of resources, in a territory that is more collaborative and projected externally" (p.34). The strategy highlights the improvement of the quality of life, of the socio-economic conditions, the protection and enhancement of natural and cultural resources, putting people and their needs first and addressing social and environmental challenges.

4.7.2.2 Tourism in Ribeira Grande

In the last few years, with the overall growth of tourism in the archipelago of the Azores, there has been an increased focus on the significance of tourism for the economic development of the municipality, an area rich in natural resources, attractions, and experiences. The municipal government, sharing the regional government's vision of tourism for the islands, has made tourism one of the key areas of strategic development. Ribeira Grande was the first municipality in the Azores to develop a strategic tourism development plan (Ponte et al., 2021). Already several and significant improvements have been observed in the municipal tourism sector, although there are still many areas for improvement. Ribeira Grande has seen an overall increase in its number of visitors, overnight stays and strengthening of its tourism sector (Table 1-Appendix). In fact, the Strategic Plan for 2014-2020 and the Strategic Plan 2030 have placed a focus on tourism in the municipality as a window of opportunity for the further development of its economy through employment and investment opportunities. The competitiveness and attractiveness of the destination have become central elements in the strategic development of Ribeira Grande. The strategic development process involved consultation with local stakeholders and tourists who selected nature-based tourism and local natural resources as the destination's most important features (Ponte et al., 2021).

Ribeira Grande's natural conditions, diversified attractions and resources, and vast tangible and intangible heritage allow for the development of different tourism products, currently offering a variety of experiences that can be enjoyed both indoors and outdoors: nature experiences: numerous hiking trails, waterfalls, valleys and lakes; nautical experiences: water sports (e.g. surfing), fishing with local fishermen, snorkelling; adventure experiences: paragliding, canyoning; geothermal experiences: natural hot springs, and geothermally cooked meals; rural tourism; sports: golfing, cycling, horseback riding, biking; cultural experiences: religious, music and gastronomic festivals, museums and monuments, Europe's only tea plantations; fairs and parades. The municipal government has placed great effort and attention on promoting Ribeira Grande externally through destination marketing, in order to promote its tourism attractions and activities and attract more investors, tourism agents and visitors. The municipal government is very active on social media platforms constantly advertising its numerous events and tourism attractions, from festivals to hiking trails. There are several reasons why tourists choose to stay in Ribeira Grande, namely the natural beauty, cultural heritage, outdoor activities, and gastronomy. Tourism, however, still faces many challenges. Some of the challenges

that have been identified are: lack human resources training in tourism; low quality and capacity of the existing infrastructures; lack of structuring of tourism services; weak signage on the streets and roads; reduced accommodation offer; lack of articulation between public and private efforts leading to competition; lack of preparation in the historic city centre to welcome tourists; litter in the main tourist attractions; little entrepreneurial initiative; weak night life; drug addiction; low safety; local mentality not prepared to welcome tourists; low level of quality service; poorly developed marketing and promotion efforts; poor development of nautical activities and tourism offer (Ribeira Grande's Strategic Plan 2015-2020).

4.7.2.3 Surf Tourism in Ribeira Grande

Surf tourism is relatively recent in Ribeira Grande, having seen a significant growth in the last 10 years, and compared to the main surfing destinations of mainland Portugal, surf tourism in Ribeira Grande is still in its infancy, but promising and with great potential. Not only have the number of people seen surfing grown, leading to increase in the number of lodging options in the municipality, especially those closer to the beaches, but Ribeira Grande has also established itself as one of the main stages of national and international surfing competitions.

Ribeira Grande has been hosting surf competitions for more than 10 years, including national and international surf competitions at Santa Bárbara and Monte Verde beaches, both located near the centre of the city. This year, 2023, Ribeira Grande hosted in late June the Allianz Ribeira Grande Pro, part of the national surf competition, and the Azores Pro part of the World Surf League in late September. The Regional Surfing Championship was held in February and April. The Liga MEO Surf, a national surf competition, organized by the National Surfers Association, has been coming to Ribeira Grande for 14 years. Major Portuguese male and female surfers participate in the Liga Meo Surf, including Azorean athletes, such as Jácome Correia, Peter Healion and Francisco Benjamin. Internationally, Ribeira Grande hosts one of the most important surfing competitions- the World Qualifying Series (WQS), and the Liga MEO Surf-Allianz Ribeira Grande Pro. The World Surf League (WSL) has been coming to the Azores since 2009 and returns each year, with the competitions in the archipelago becoming a staple of the European tour (WSL, 2021). The surf competition that the WSL brings to Ribeira Grande is the second division of surf that is divided into several regions around the world. This competition is part of the European qualifier to select athletes to compete in the first division. These surf competitions are webcast live on WorldSurfLeague.com. The Azores

Airlines Pro is one of the stops of the European Qualifying Series. The World Masters Championships has also been held in Ribeira Grande. The Azores Junior Pro is where Europe's best under-20 surfers fight for the regional junior title and qualification for the WSL Junior Championships. Despite the significance of the surf events, given the inconsistency of the Azorean waters and sometimes, due to severe weather conditions, surf competitions in Ribeira Grande are sometimes not as successful as desired. In October 2022, Santa Bárbara Beach was meant to hold the European Qualifying Series (EQS) and European Junior Qualifying Series (JQS) bringing some of the best European surfers to Ribeira Grande. However, due to relentless swells and a major storm, which critically damaged the event support infrastructure, the EQS competition had to be called off. This summer, in June, surfers who competed in the Liga Meo Surf competition, were not able to display their best surf moves as the waves were too weak.

The local government has made a clear and firm commitment to surfing and has led with several initiatives: a) the branding of the destination as Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf; the promotion and marketing of the destination as a surf destination, including in the Lisbon Tourism Fair (BTL); the financial support given to surf competitions held in the municipality; the construction of a surfer statue in the city of Ribeira Grande; the improvement of the beach infrastructure and support, including having lifeguards year round at the main surfing beach, Santa Bárbara Beach.

Surf tourism in Ribeira Grade attracts all types of surfers, from families taking surf lessons together to surfers of all ages and levels, and of all economic backgrounds. Surfing can be done year round in the destination. During the winter months (November to April) the Atlantic Ocean produces consistent swells for more advanced surfers, while the summer months are especially suitable for beginners due to smaller and more manageable waves. Currently there are three surf schools in Ribeira Grande: Azores Surf Centre and Santa Barbara Surf School Azores both located at Santa Bárbara Beach, each at opposite sides of the beach. Azores Surf Co is also a surf school operating in Ribeira Grande. Other surf schools from Ponta Delgada also take their students for surf lessons in Ribeira Grande. As for surfer accommodations, the Azores Surf Centre has a surf house near Santa Bárbara Beach, there is also the Azores Eco Surf Lodge and the Surf Beach Santa Barbara Secret Gardens. Although there are not many surf camps or surf hostels, the fact is that the number of overall accommodation options there has increased substantially

in the last 5 years. As for surf shops, there is currently only one surf shop in Ribeira Grande-North Surge.

Ribeira Grande boasts several beaches. Only a few, however, are suitable for surfing, namely Santa Bárbara, Monte Verde, Santa Iria, Baixio da Viola, Santana Beach. It offers some excellent surf conditions, with consistent swells and a variety of breaks suitable for surfers of different skill levels. The waves can range from mellow beach breaks to powerful reef breaks, making it a versatile destination for surfers. Areal de Santa Bárbara is one of the most extensive and beautiful beaches in the Azores, with a kilometre in length, and it is one of the main surf spots on São Miguel. It is the most consistent spot in the Azores. Set on cliffs that fall from the mainland to the beach, it is a classic Azorean black-sand beach break with powerful waves, often tubular and with decent size. The waves are suitable for surfers of all levels. In the summer it has some crowd due to the surf schools, and there are lifeguards all year round. The beach is well known for its world-class waves and it is the location of yearly national and international surfing competitions. There are also two surf schools located at this beach. Santa Bárbara Beach has a good access, supporting infrastructure, two surf schools where visitors can rent boards and take surf lessons, good environmental conditions, and there are two beach cafés, each at the end of the beach (WSL, 2021; Câmara Municipal da Ribeira Grande; Grauweiher, 2022). The Prainha de Santa Iria¹⁰ is considered the 'secret surf spot' of Ribeira Grande. It is an isolated spot suitable for surfers of all levels, of difficult access, outstanding wave quality, and natural beauty. Its access is through a difficult path on dirt and rocks and the beach is located on private property. Santa Iria's bay is protected from great ripples of the west and southwest quadrant (Câmara Municipal da Ribeira Grande). Monte Verde Beach is an excellent beach that works with any swell direction. Sometimes, it has very powerful waves. This long sandy beach is located in the city of Ribeira Grande and is suitable for surfers of all levels, depending on the sea conditions. It has hosted surf competitions. Despite its excellent natural features for surfing, Monte Verde Beach has been a neglected beach that only recently has started receiving more attention from the municipal government. Baixio da Viola Beach has one of the most powerful waves in the Azores, and it recommended only for experts and big wave surfers. It is characterised by tubular waves that break in a slab requiring a lot of experience. The beach is very exposed to the winds, with many ocean currents and rocks. Surfers must have a rescue and assistance team, with a

¹⁰ Santa Iria Beach is a controversial surf spot as local surfers wish to preserve it secret and wild, whereas some government members would like to see it have better access and be a known attraction.

boat and jet skis in the water ready to assist if needed, and they usually come once a year just for this big wave.

4.8 Summary

This chapter gave an overview of surf tourism around the world, noting its economic, social and environmental contributions and providing a brief profile of surf tourists. Surf tourism has become an important sector for tourism in Portugal, and the activity has huge potential in the Azores Islands, with the case of Ribeira Grande, whose destination brand is “Capital do Surf”. The chapter ended with a brief geographical and socio-economic framework of the case study destination, introducing the topic of tourism and surf tourism in Ribeira Grande. The following chapter will discuss the methodology applied in this study.

Chapter 6- Methodology

6.1 Introduction

Deriving from the research question, the main objective of this study is 1) to contribute to a better understanding of the role and potential of surf tourism and destination branding for the competitiveness and sustainable tourism development of Ribeira Grande; 2) to understand the perceptions and opinions of stakeholders; 3) to present recommendations on how to harness the potential of surf tourism and destination branding for the competitiveness and sustainable development of Ribeira Grande. Surf tourism, destination branding and sustainable tourism development have been broached in previous studies, but, the combination of the three topics applied to an emerging tourism destination in an island destination have not, which shows the relevance as a case study. This study adopts a qualitative approach to understand the perceptions and opinions of stakeholders, crucial in tourism development. This chapter presents the justification for the chosen methodological approach, the research questions and objectives, and provides a presentation on the data collection and analysis.

6.2 Research Method: A Qualitative Approach

This study used a qualitative research approach based on semi-structured open-ended interviews with different stakeholders affected by surf tourism or with a vested interest in it, namely local surfers, surf tourists, local business owners, local surf-business owners, local government, and residents), in order to understand their opinions and perspectives on everything related to surf tourism in Ribeira Grande. Qualitative research refers to research applying a range of qualitative methods, such as interviews, participant or on-participatory observations, focus groups, text and discourse analysis, in order to inductively explore, interpret and understand a given field or object of study (Ren, 2016). Qualitative approaches are often used to gather and analyse data to understand and explore different concepts, situations and phenomena. Scholars use it in tourism studies to gain insight into stakeholders' experiences, behaviours, perceptions and attitudes, allowing for deeper interpretation and making significant contributions to tourism studies. By helping the field obtain a deeper understanding of the social, cultural and political linkages within tourism (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). Based on the answers provided in the interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify and analyse recurring themes, opinions and perceptions. One of the advantages of qualitative research, opposed to quantitative research based on set questions in a questionnaire, is that it can be

more flexible and adaptive, allowing the researcher to modify or adapt questions as deeper understanding of the subject matter is gained or when other pertinent themes arise from the initial questions. Moreover, one question may lead to a completely different but relevant question based on the answer given by the study participant. Moreover, qualitative studies usually involve a smaller sample size. For this research study, a total of sixty-two participants belonging to different stakeholder groups were involved.

6.3 Research Question

With the selection of a case study, this research aims to understand the role and potential of surf tourism and destination branding for the destination's competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. For this, the study aimed to address the following questions: 1) What is the state of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande?; 2) What is the role and potential of surf tourism for the competitiveness and sustainable tourism development of Ribeira Grande?; 3) What are the current challenges and opportunities of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande?; 4) What is the role and potential of the destination brand 'Capital do Surf' for the destination competitiveness of Ribeira Grande?

6.4 Methods of Inquiry

The method of interviewing was used to collect data that would provide an interpretive opportunity to address the research questions. The chosen method of inquiry was the semi-structured interview, a qualitative data collection strategy, which allows participants to state their points of view and expand their answers. While most of the questions were open-ended (this allows the gathering of ideas and criticism), some asked for a yes/no answer (to introduce some objectiveness and to identify specific answers) asking for a justification on the choice. The same questions were asked to all the stakeholders for comparison purposes. Being this study an exploratory research study, follow-up questions were also asked depending on the answers provided, and the surfers were asked extra surf-focused questions, besides the questions common to all interviewees.

6.5 Data Collection and Analysis

A total of sixty-two interviews were collected across the different stakeholder groups, including twelve local surfers, nine local government representatives, eleven residents, nine surf businesses and associations, ten non-surf businesses (restaurants and accommodation), and eleven surf tourists. The aim was to have 6

to 10 participants from each stakeholder group. This data was collected between February and June 2023. Data saturation was observed, as new interviews were no longer providing new information or insights, and were not adding to the research. Most of the interviews were conducted in person in the municipality Ribeira Grande in places chosen by the participants; the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Other participants preferred to answer the questions in their own time and the answers to the interview questions were then emailed to this researcher. With the intent of protecting participant anonymity, the names of the participants are not disclosed in this study. To recruit participants, emails and phone messages were sent to different stakeholders, aiming to have a sample of each stakeholder group. Not all replied and some refused to be interviewed. The contact information of stakeholders was found on official government and business websites, social media, and by informal talks with participants who facilitated the contacts. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese and in English. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method to identify similarities and differences in the informants' perceptions and opinions. The transcriptions were carefully analyzed to discern main concepts and themes among the different stakeholder groups.

6.6 Interviewees Characterization

This study chose as participants different stakeholders with the aim of understanding differences and similarities of opinion and perception regarding surf tourism in Ribeira Grande. The participants came from the following stakeholder groups:

- 1) Local residents of Ribeira Grande between the ages of 20 and 50;
- 2) Non-surf businesses (e.g. restaurants and accommodation);
- 3) Surf- related businesses (surf schools and shops);
- 4) Government representatives (President of Ribeira Grande, the presidents of four parishes of Ribeira Grande, a City Council, members of the City Hall, and the staff from the Tourism Information Centre);
- 5) Surfers between the ages of 18-50 who usually surf in Ribeira Grande;
- 6) Surf tourists who had surfed in Ribeira Grande.

Table No. 1 Stakeholder Groups and Number of Respondents

Stakeholder Group	Number of Participants
Local residents	11
Non-surf business owners	10
Surf-related business owners	9
Government representatives	9
Local surfers	12
Surf tourists	11

Source: The Author

6.7 Summary

This chapter has covered the research justification, data collection and analysis. The process of data treatment has enabled the identification of several aspects regarding surf tourism, branding and sustainable development in Ribeira Grande as examined through the perceptions and opinions of stakeholders. The following chapter is the result of this study's methodological approach-the research findings based on the interviews with the stakeholders.

Chapter 7 - Research Findings: Stakeholder Perceptions and Interview Results

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 presented the methodological approach undertaken during the research stage, which allowed the understanding of the perceptions of the different stakeholders involved in surf tourism in Ribeira Grande. The current chapter introduces the results and research findings, through a detailed description and presentation of the main topics addressed in this dissertation, namely surf tourism, destination competitiveness, destination branding and sustainable tourism development, according to each stakeholder group. The chapter is organised into several sections, each referring to a different topic covered during the interviews. Each section is concluded with a brief summary that highlights the most relevant findings of each theme. The chapter starts with the stakeholders' perceptions regarding the development of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande.

7.2 Surf Tourism Development

Ribeira Grande has undeniably seen a growth in surf tourism in the last decade. The outstanding natural features of the destination initially attracted local Azoreans to its waves, mostly from the neighbouring city of Ponta Delgada, but already some from outside the island. In the 90s and early 2000s, the number of local surf enthusiasts grew, leading to the first surf schools. From then on, came the first national and international surf competitions that have been taking place yearly drawing some of the best surfers in the world. The alluring appeal of the Azores Islands and the increased tourism attention it has gotten, including the promotion of surfing as a tourism product has helped attract surf visitors of all ages and nationalities. This section explores the perceptions of stakeholders on the development of surf tourism.

Local Surfers

According to the data gathered from the interviews with local surfers, surf tourism has been growing steadily and they feel it has experienced a boom in the last few years, based on the number of people they see in the water either taking surf lessons or with rented boards.

"When we came here 5 years ago, there were very few surfers coming from abroad coming in summer and I have seen a change. There are more people coming in summer. I have seen maybe 100 people in the water (...). Of course, it will get fuller and fuller the more people will learn about this spot and the waves here" (Surfer, female).

The majority of the respondents regarded surf tourism development positively and see it as beneficial for the development of Ribeira Grande noting how the destination has changed for the better.

“It is a market niche that has grown in Ribeira Grande and created more jobs. Surf is already a generating element of the local economy, because Ribeira Grande is growing thanks to surf. Twenty years ago, Santa Bárbara beach was just a piece of land, there was nothing. Nowadays we have many people working there, tourists are coming, we have surf schools. Twenty years ago there were no surf schools. Nobody used to come here- only local surfers. And now surf has grown so much that the surf schools have huge wait lists for people who want to surf here” (ASBA, male).

According to the interviewees, back in the 80s, the ‘Areal de Santa Bárbara’, nowadays the ‘surfer beach’, was a sand extraction site, called the Cova da Burra (See Figure 4-Appendix), where locals extracted kilos of sand for construction. It was not considered a beach and only ‘dare-devil’ surfers from Ponta Delgada, as they were known back then, would venture to surf in the dangerous waters of the Areal. Looking at the pristine beach of Santa Bárbara (see Figure 5-Appendix), now full of happy surfers and sunbathers, it is hard to image such a grim past.

“It’s a differentiating factor, even in the way the locals use this beach. No one used to come to this beach 15 years ago. It helps the local infrastructure here. People from other parts of the island didn’t come to this beach out of fear, due to the north sea’s rough waters. (...) Surfing has created an aura around it, a lifestyle, and something that people like to be close to and associated with. (Surfer and Business Owner, male).

Local surfers also welcome surf tourism as it contributes to the improvement of services and amenities that they themselves use and that are currently lacking or in poor conditions. Some respondents expressed annoyance with the number of surf tourists taking lessons, particularly in high season during the summer. Overall, they perceived this number as high, meaning that to them there is some crowd, although this perception might be influenced by the nature of this stakeholder group, who usually prefer to have local waves for themselves and a reduced number of visiting surfers in the water.

“It’s getting to a point where locals can’t surf their home wave” (Big wave surfer and lifeguard, male).

This group complained about the disrespect for the surf code of conduct (i.e how to respectably behave on the waves with other surfers), and complained that having novice surfers surfing next to experienced surfers is often dangerous. They urged surf schools to be more responsible, and noted that this is one of the disadvantages of the development of surf tourism. One local surfer noted: *“Sometimes we have more surfers than waves”*. (Local Surfer, male). It was also pointed out that if surf

tourism does not grow sustainably, it might cause rejection from the local population, with some criticising the lack of manners displayed by many surf visitors, and the crowding of beaches, parking lots and restaurants. For this stakeholder group, the main vehicle that made Ribeira Grande known as a surf destination and raised awareness about it were the surf competitions, namely the world championships, which are broadcasted Live and receive attention on social media.

“The first international surfers who came here to the Azores did not even know the Azores existed. (...) A curious thing about these competitions is that they take place when the water is warm. And they thought: Warm water in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean? It was a complete surprise” (...) From there, surf grew and it has expanded. People started spreading the word (ASBA, male).

With other respondents highlighting the general attributes of Ribeira Grande as calling cards.

“It has to do with the perfect wave, with the water quality, with lodging so close to the beach where surfers can take their surfboard by hand, walking. And this type of tourists likes to be free, to have contact with nature and that’s why they come” (Big wave surfer and lifeguard, male).

Local surfers acknowledge that much work is still to be done in term of surf tourism development, particularly when it comes to environmental sustainability, especially if there is no proper tourism management or planning, arguing that Ribeira Grande still faces challenges when it comes to sustainable development. Most of the respondents fear losing one of the most valuable things they have, which is the tranquility and contact with nature, potentially turning the destination into a city with high seasonal population density due to tourism and spoiling it.

“mass tourism ends up changing the quality of surfing. People come to the island because it’s a place with great waves and few crowds. Once it becomes very touristy and overcrowded, I believe that some people may stop coming” (Local surfer, male).

Overall, from the interviews with the local surfers, there is a sense that on the one hand surf tourism brings development but on the other hand they fear losing what they value most-the ability to surf without worries and without being overwhelmed by tourists. Some surfers would prefer to see surf tourism development slow down or stay as is:

“I’m going to be cold, but direct. I would put a brake on this. It’s enough. We are selling an ocean product that is sustainable but we are being dominated by tourism. We are selling something that for us Azoreans is not compatible financially. We are selling everything because of greed (...) I would like my son to have the privilege to live what I lived” (Big wave surfer and lifeguard, male).

Surf Tourists

Surf tourists could not delve much into the development of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande but were instrumental in understanding the destination from their point of view. Surf tourists perceive Ribeira Grande as a wonderful surf destination, even on days when the sea conditions are not the perfect for surfing. They all said they would recommend it to other fellow surfers, and all felt enchanted by the beauty that is found there. Despite the imperfections they noted, such as the small number of surf services and amenities, they all claim to have had a very satisfying tourism experience. They also appreciate the lack of crowd and the local hospitality. Overall, they found it a pleasant surf destination and did not seem very bothered by the lack of services and amenities, although these would naturally be helpful. For this stakeholder group, surf tourism is not very developed, although some did prefer it this way, and the respondents saw potential in the destination.

“I think there is a lot of potential. Also, given that the Azores are a sort of bridge between the East Coast of the US and Europe, I would emphasize this, and build intentional partnerships with major brands, contests, event, and travel companies from the whole east coast of the US, specifically New Jersey and north where they are serviced by Azores Air” (Surf Tourist, male).

Residents

Of all the stakeholder groups, residents seemed the least involved or interested in surf tourism. To them, it is just another type of tourism that is found in Ribeira Grande, along with adventure tourism, thermal tourism, cultural tourism, etc.

“I don’t think this type of tourism niche makes a difference to Ribeira Grande in economic terms if you look at all the types of tourism that come here” (Local Resident, female)

Residents have perceived a growth in the number of surf visitors and noted the increase in the number of people walking barefoot holding a surfboard under their arm on the way to the beach, seeing a huge increase in the number of people surfing in Santa Bárbara Beach, the main surfing spot. It was interesting to note that most participants were hesitant in participating in this study as they claimed they knew nothing about surfing; were oblivious to the existence of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande; and felt they had nothing to contribute to the study. It is important to note that the involvement and support of the local community is a key element of sustainable tourism development and destination competitiveness, and thus it is necessary to further engage this stakeholder group in the discussion. From the interviews with the local residents, it is clear that they do support surf tourism in that it is part of tourism in genera, which is beneficial for the region, but they do not perceive it as the main driver of tourism in Ribeira Grande nor do they perceive it as

having a significant economic impact, as most of the interviewed residents find that surf tourists are not big spenders. They do welcome their environmental awareness and find it very positive for the development of the municipality.

Business Community

The business community interviewed for this study also welcomed the development of surf tourism.

“Surf has been growing a lot and it’s good for the local economy. Everything that comes from the outside is good for the local economy, because it will generate wealth. And if tourists stay in Ribeira Grande, even better” (Beach Bar Owner, male).

Some respondents did share the same view when it came to the spending power of surf tourists, believing they did not spend much. This perception might have to do with stereotypes or with not knowing in depth the spending habits of surf tourists. Overall, the business community has a positive image of surf tourism, but noted that there is still much work to be done. All voiced concern for the promotion of surf tourism when there is a polluted beach in the heart of the city and were worried about surf visitors visiting the destination and being disappointed. The business community also perceived the surf competitions as an advantage arguing that it *“has helped promote the destination as a prime location for the practice of this sport”* (Hotel Manager, male). Moreover, they shared a common belief that Ribeira Grande will grow sustainably as this is a focus of the current government and the Azores, itself, is already working on this.

“It will develop sustainably because the region is already developing sustainably, isn’t it? We have that brand. But there is the concern, the concern from those who visit us and from those who invest. Everything that will open and those that are already here will adapt to this reality and to sustainability. I see progress always linked to the sustainability of destinations and businesses” (Business Owner, male).

Surf Businesses

It was clear that all surf businesses welcome surf tourism and want to see it grow and develop, albeit sustainably. They perceive it as a positive addition to the tourism scene of Ribeira Grande and recognise the importance that the local municipal government has had in its promotion and in the support of surf competitions. The majority of respondents recognised the political will in supporting surf in the destination and overall they feel involved in decisions made regarding surf tourism development, although more could be done. Some respondents did express concern for overcrowding and unfair competition between surf schools. There seemed to be

some grievances between surf schools, which is also common in many surf destinations around the world. Some participants criticised the hunger for surf tourists that some surf schools have, leading to many learners in the water, many inexperienced surfers with rented boards, which they feel impact the surfing experience and can be dangerous.

“Sometimes it is crazy how many people there are in the water. This is extremely dangerous for the swimmers and the surfers. Many do not have experience and there is an excessive number of surfers daily in the water. This is the negative part of this tourist invasion” (Surf school owner and instructor, male).

Furthermore, the surf business community showed deep concern for the preservation of waves and for the current situation of Monte Verde Beach, often affected by poor water quality and lacking adequate beach supporting structures. They see these dire conditions as one of the determining factors impacting the competitiveness of Ribeira Grande as a surf tourism destination, arguing that you cannot develop surf tourism when you have a polluted beach in the heart of the city. Regarding the competitions, most respondents perceived them as positive for the promotion of the destination and welcome this type of events in their community.

“The competitions are good, and they are very good for motivating local surfers. It is a way of being able to surf with the greatest in the world. Those who come here are the 100 top on the world. It is a way to grow as a surfer, for the local surfers to dream big, and it is also a way to buy more affordable material. It gives a lot of motivation to local surfers” (Surf school owner and instructor, male).

Government

Being the local municipal government one of the main promoters of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande, and having been instrumental in securing one of the qualifying stages in the national Meo Liga and international WSL surf competitions, it is natural that the local government would be highly positive about the development of surf tourism. For this research study, several members of the local government were interviewed, including the Municipal Council President and Parish Council Presidents. It was important to understand whether those working for the government shared the same views and perceptions and whether they felt involved in decision-making. Overall, local government members perceive surf tourism development as constructive and encouraging. They view the development of this activity as growing steadily, having a beneficial contribution to the development of the municipality, not only economically, but also socially and environmentally, and as one of the main goals of the local government- making Ribeira Grande an established and known

surf destination, branding it as “Capital do Surf”. To the local government, Ribeira Grande is already perceived as the capital of surf of the Azores, given its excellent waves, its surf competitions and the increased number of surf visitors. From the interviews with local government members, it was clear that they believe strongly in this tourism product, finding it differentiating and giving a competitive advantage to this destination. They recognise some drawbacks and challenges, but argue that they are working hard towards improving them and have already accomplished a lot, as can be seen in the numbers of surfers visiting their municipality.

“The municipal authority has played a fundamental role in promoting various aspects of surfing, including three key events: the regional surf and bodyboard competition, the national surf championship, which is one of the stages of the MEO Surf League, and the world surf championship, which takes place here every year in September. Within these competitions, we always strive to go beyond the promotion that we have already embraced as a symbol of the municipality” (Ribeira Grande City Hall Staff, male)

Final Remarks

Overall, there are many similarities in how the different stakeholder groups view the development of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande. All stakeholders accept and welcome this niche market, they recognise that it is still in its infancy and that a lot more work needs to be done, particularly in terms of environmental sustainability, infrastructure development and promotion. From the interviews, the overall perception is that surf tourism is positive, and it is an added benefit to Ribeira Grande. One of the main themes resulting from the interviews was the surf competitions and their importance to the growth of surf tourism. What’s more, all stakeholder groups identified how surf competitions are valuable for the promotion and marketing of not only Ribeira Grande but also of the Azores, and they all perceive the municipal government as having a key role in the promotion and development of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination promoting surfing, endorsing surf events, and registering the brand “Capital do Surf”. Regarding the number of surf tourists and surf businesses, according to most interviewees, there is not an excessive number of surf tourists. For local surfers, however, there are already too many surf tourists, especially in the summer months, particularly beginners taking surf lessons. It was widely pointed out that there is a very low quantity of surf-related businesses, and that this should be addressed to reinforce the competitiveness and appeal of the destination as a surf destination. For most respondents, surf tourism has the potential to grow, it will continue to develop, but its successful development and competitiveness will depend on a number of determining factors that are key to developing sustainably and responsibly, as we will see further in this chapter. As surf tourism in Ribeira Grande

is still in its infancy, it was difficult for most stakeholders to identify current negative impacts, with the exception of local surfers, who point to possible overcrowding. Some stakeholders also identified a possible loss of local identity and authenticity; an increase in the cost of living for Azoreans; and crowding. When developing a tourism product or wishing to attract a certain target market, a SWOT analysis must be carried out, in this case, a SWOT analysis of Ribeira Grande as a surf tourism destination. The following section of the chapter presents the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination. These are important to take into account in the planning process of surf tourism development.

7.3 Surf Destination Competitiveness- Attributes and Weaknesses

For a tourism product to be successful, it is not enough to simply create and promote it. You need a whole set of conditions that must be met to ensure that the target market will be interested in the tourism product, pay for it, and will be satisfied, hopefully recommending it to others or becoming loyal to this product. The same applies to surf as a tourism product (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Koutoulas, 2004). In order for a destination to promote itself as a surf destination and ensure the competitiveness and success of its tourism product, the destination must offer a series of elements to ensure a satisfying, exciting and unique surf experience. First of all, surf destinations must, of course, have the appropriate natural conditions, i.e surfable waves, preferably world-class waves. It is even better, if these natural conditions are consistent year round and suitable for all surf levels. Any surf destination, or what is also known as a 'surf town' must offer the services and amenities that surfers usually need, e.g. beach support infrastructure¹¹. Surf destinations should also have proper environmental conditions, namely clean beaches and pollution-free seawater, as this is where surf tourists will spend most of their time (Reis & Carneiro, 2022; Rosa, 2019). A variety of lodging options should also be available, particularly close to the beaches, and it should offer an overall surf vibe, which can be characterised by the existence of several visual elements that convey surfing, for example surf shops, surf themed hotels and lodges, attractive cafés and chill out bars where surf visitors rest, refuel and socialise after time on the waves. A surf vibe can also be intangible. You do not see it but you feel it, through a relaxed and laid-back atmosphere. A surf town is even more special and unique when it is surrounded by unspoilt natural landscape that invites surf tourists to

¹¹ Showers, lockers, surfboard rental shops and surf schools, beach café, parking lot.

venture beyond the sea and discover other exciting experiences on land. The icing on the cake is when sustainable development is a key element in the development of surf tourism in a destination, involving the community and addressing local environmental and socio-economic needs. These can all be considered the surf destination's attributes- its unique and differentiating resources, tangible and intangible, that give it a competitive advantage among similar destinations and that are used to boost the destination image and brand (Reis & Carneiro, 2022). Examples are the destinations attractions, surf attractions (e.g. waves, surf spots, surf competitions), local surf industry (e.g. surf shops, surf schools, surf accommodation), accessibility (e.g. beach accessibility), infrastructure and support equipment (e.g. beach changing rooms, car parks), as well as destination atmosphere, local culture, and friendliness of the local community. Surf destination attributes are fundamental for competitiveness as they encourage surf visitors to visit and revisit, and destinations must create the proper conditions to satisfy the needs and interests of surf tourists (Reis & Carneiro, 2022). As such, it was very important to understand what stakeholders perceive as the surf destination attributes of Ribeira Grande, in order to understand what still need to be developed or enhanced to boost the destination's competitiveness as a surf holiday destination.

Local Surfers

The respondents from this stakeholder group perceive the waves, the surrounding nature and landscapes, the low crowd, the beaches with sandy bottoms, the wave diversity suitable for all levels, and the opportunities that are created based on the conditions of the wind and sea as the main strengths¹².

"There is no doubt that Ribeira Grande, given its geographical and bathymetrical orientation, and enjoying the predominance of the north swells, offers quite often perfect conditions and fantastic sceneries, mainly in the start or end of the day" (Local Surfer, male).

"More and more I am a defender of our waves here, our perfect waves. And why are they perfect? The wave is so beautiful, the colour of the water, the temperature of the water, the place, the landscape. And then you finish surfing the wave, you sit on your board and you can chat. You finish surfing and you can describe the wave. You can feel the vibration. We can feel the surfers' happiness" (Big wave surfer and lifeguard, male)

¹² Surf-related attractions, namely wave characteristics, the perfect wave, no crowd in the water, and isolated and unspoilt places to surf are the surf destination attributes most valued by surf tourists (Reis & Carneiro, 2022).

The location of Ribeira Grande on the north coast, where the waves are much more consistent, including in the summer; the surf competitions and events; the local gastronomy; year-around surfing; the stunning views surfers get of the land from the sea; lifeguards year round in Santa Bárbara beach; and the strength of the north coast sea were also considered as destination attributes. Local surfers also perceive it a safe destination with a good quality of life and affordable accommodation.

“The most important thing why people should come here, surfers can still find reasonable prices, housing, because a lot of surfers are younger people and they cannot afford a hotel and might rent an Airbnb” (Local Surfer, female).

Local surfers, experts on surfing in Ribeira Grande, were a rich source of information when it came to understanding the issues that affect surfing in the municipality. It was widely felt that the most serious weakness and the one strongly impairing its development and image is the situation of Monte Verde Beach, one of the two main surfing beaches. It is an important beach as it is located in the heart of the city of Ribeira Grande, meaning that it is the only city in the Azores with a beach, and considered a strong destination attribute, if its issues are addressed.

“Lets start with Monte Verde water quality. This is a big problem of course for the surfers, there are many cases where people have gotten sick. We hardly go to Monte Verde anymore. I have also been in the water a lot when the water was dirty. Especially after rainfall. Because there is this river that comes to the sea. I don’t know what is in the water but it is very dirty. It’s a pity because the river actually makes the surf spot such a good surf spot. It forms the sand banks. The river as such is very good but it’s super dirty especially after rain fall, sometimes you are in the water and I feel like I am in poop” (Local Surfer, female).

According to this stakeholder group, Monte Verde beach has suffered from serious water quality issues, pollution, litter, lack of beach support and safety.

“Monte Verde has access bad, it is very basic; they did not do anything, there are three ways, it is very basic. I don’t mind keeping it natural but it’s the whole picture that makes it looks like a neglected beach” (Local Surfer, female).

All local surfers expressed deep concern and were quite upset at the lack of attention the beach gets, as this is a great surfing spot. The beach is known for having litter, including drug use litter, especially in the winter months, when there are no lifeguards and no regular beach cleanups.

“Monte Verde Beach has a lot of litter everywhere, including syringes. I believe the government should provide more extensive environmental education to the population” (Local surfer, male).

Monte Verde Beach is also the stream mouth of the largest stream that crosses Ribeira Grande. While, according to this group, the stream is beneficial because it

creates sand banks, the stream is the source of poor water quality and contamination. There are often domestic waste discharges, agricultural waste discharges and run-off from farmlands in the stream. This has been the cause of frequent beach closures and human health conditions of surfers and swimmers. Local surfers complained that the government has been taking too long to address this serious matter. This situation is clearly responsible for the poor image the surf community still holds of Ribeira Grande as a sustainable surf destination, despite praising its waves and surrounding ambience.

“There’s a contradiction in Ribeira Grande wanting to attract those surfers in off season in the way that they take care of the beaches. I feel that there’s one beach life from June to September where everything is taken care of, there are always life guards also at Monte Verde, the beach gets clean or at least there are trash cans, and then there’s the second half of the year when no one seems to care so much about the beach, the trash cans are all taken away. (...) The beaches sometimes look so dirty and trashy in the winter. It’s not very attractive. And then of course while Santa Barbara is pretty well equipped with some amenities like showers and toilets, Monte Verde doesn’t have almost at all. (...) All in all Monte Verde could be such a nice beach but due to everything you don’t have the feeling that nobody takes care of it (Local Surfer, female).

Besides the issues with Monte Verde Beach, there was wide agreement that, although the waves in Ribeira Grande are outstanding and world-class, they are not consistent due to the winds and storms that often affect the island. This inconsistency, of course, affects the destination as a surf tourism destination, as surf visitors never know what waves they will encounter. First of all, they vary from season to season, and even worse, they vary from day to day. According to the surfing community, a surf visitor might get weeks of great waves, and another might get no waves. It is quite volatile compared to other surf destinations, where quality waves and good weather is guaranteed most of the time. Regarding the infrastructure to support surfers, local surfers feel that the current infrastructure lack the ability to provide a high-quality surfing experience and after-surfing experience, which affects both local and visiting surfers. For surfers specifically, there is the perception of a shortage of supporting facilities, for example adequate showers in Monte Verde, lockers in Santa Barbara, the lack of places to repair boards, and the lack of beach cafés and nightlife.

“I find it a pity there is only one café by the beach, there are enough requests for a second one. In high season you don’t get service because they are full” (Local Surfer, female).

“I believe the nightlife in Ribeira Grande is very weak. There’s a lack of options to have fun at night. Most of the surfers are young and also look for other leisure options besides surfing” (Local surfer, male).

For the surfer group, there is also a wide gap in terms of quality, access and safety among all the beaches and surf spots of Ribeira Grande:

“Here we have quite different situations in the various spots: Santa Bárbara is the most accessible and with better support and safety, which results in a bigger crowd and with the increased visibility come a greater attention to the environmental quality; Monte Verde, however, is the poor relative mostly when it comes to safety and environmental quality, which is surreal since it’s located right in the heart of the city. Then we have the more distant spots, like Santa Iria or Porto Formoso, that, because of their distance, or even because of the difficulty in accessing, for example, Santa Iria, become refuges when the sea grows, with good environmental quality, but where safety is often difficult to guarantee” (Local Surfer, female).

Surf Tourists

Surf tourists’ perceptions are particularly important to consider, because not only is the target market of surf tourism surfers, but also because tourist perceptions can be used as indicators of tourism destination competitiveness and can assist in the development of appropriate tourism policies and infrastructure. Understanding and taking into account surf tourist perceptions also contributes to forming a destination’s image and reputation. While a positive image can attract fellow surfers, a negative can deter them from visiting or returning.

Respondents pointed out a great number of unique features and positive aspects of the destinations that they find appealing, and overall, felt enchanted by everything they experienced. This is important as positive tourist perceptions give destination’s a competitive advantage, standing out from competitors, attracting repeat and new visitors, and allow for more effective and efficient marketing efforts (Reis & Carneiro, 2022). The participants identified the following strengths: the waves for all levels and the unique natural features; the natural heritage; the black sandy beaches and the cliffs; the fact that Ribeira Grande is located in an island that is not very developed; *“kind of a secret”* (Surf Tourist, female); the lack of crowd; the quality of the beaches; nature preservation; the surf schools; the frequency at which conditions are good for surfing practice; the fact that it is a destination abundant in nature and stunning landscapes: *“The Azores in general are a very nice travel destination, so if you can surf anywhere it’s just adding even more reasons to go there”* (surf tourist, female); the mild sea temperature compared to other European countries; the nice weather; and *“super nice locals”* (Surf Tourist, female); *“great central location close to a lot of other attractions (...), beautiful waves and views, nice sunsets”* (Surf tourist, male).

Surf tourists' experience in a destination is fundamental for destination image and development, often impacting investment in infrastructure and the development of sustainable tourism practices. As such, despite the identified strengths, the respondents also found several weaknesses with the case-study destination that merit considerable attention from investors and government. It is important to note that although surf-related attractions are the main surf destination attributes as they motivate the surf holiday, other factors affect the competitiveness of the destination, especially when we consider that many surfers also travel with partners and families, who also need to be entertained while they surf. Reis & Carneiro (2022) note that nightlife, recreational and wellness activities are increasingly significant in the surf tourism experience, especially when there are no conditions for surfing. Examining their opinions, surf tourists found some weaknesses in this regard and added the following: strong current; wave difficulty; Monte Verde beach conditions; the lack of nightlife activity; trash on the streets and beaches; buildings in ruins around Monte Verde; an underdeveloped coastline; not many surf shops or hostels; not enough toilet and changing facilities and poor facility management, even in Santa Bárbara Beach; lack of cafés and restaurants by the beaches; lack of proper public transport and bike lockers; drug and alcohol addicts on the streets. One surf tourist noted:

"Quick degradation and lack of conservation efforts, they just build things and let them degrade" (Surf Tourist, male).

The destination's weaknesses from the perspective of surf tourists are highly important to be taken into account. Most surf tourists travel significantly seeking the perfect wave. Many of them have visited different surf destinations around the world and have an overall image of their perfect 'surf town' and of the services, amenities and surroundings they require for an excellent surf holiday. It is important to listen to their views and, in fact, more studies on the perceptions of surf tourists in Ribeira Grande should be conducted, so that their views may influence and improve the destination's attractiveness and competitiveness.

Residents

It was difficult for residents to identify the strengths of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination, mostly because they do not surf and are not very familiar with surf tourism. Many of the respondents highlighted all the natural features of the destination, i.e., the lakes, waterfalls, beaches and bays, the volcanic beaches; as well as the picturesque villages and the excellent gastronomy, noting that when the

waves are not good or when surfers are not surfing, there is so much to see and experience in Ribeira Grande.

“What we have best is the experience that the surfer takes from these natural surroundings unspoilt by men” (Resident, female).

The overall perception among residents is that the best destination attributes are the good waves; the fact that the water is warmer than mainland Portugal; the strength of the Azorean sea; all the events and festivals; the welcoming nature of the local population; the accommodation close to the beaches that allow surfers to walk barefoot from their accommodation to the beach with just a surfboard and surf suit; the existence of urban beaches; and the fact that the surf destination is located on a beautiful island. As for weaknesses, they too expressed concern for the environmental conditions of Monte Verde Beach, as it also impacts them as locals who would like to enjoy their beach. Some respondents also noted the lack of a surf culture and identity, as there are hardly any surfer hangout places; the reduced number of lodging options; the reduced number of restaurants and nightlife; and the lack of interaction with the local community. The need to improve human resources qualifications was also expressed

“Ribeira Grande has a huge potential when it comes to tourism, but it has to learn a lot. The locals have to learn how to receive and interact with visitors who come here. We are still light years when it comes to customer service. It’s a handicap for the region” (Resident, male).

Business Community

The business community spared no effort in praising the natural resources of Ribeira Grande, namely the attractive beaches, the north coast, the hiking trails, and the tea plantations. This group is also of the same opinion as the residents that the destination has so much more to offer than just waves and beaches.

“A surfer does not surf 24 hours a day. Ribeira Grande has a huge potential because of that. It has breathtaking landscapes associated to the good waves and there are places that surfers didn’t even know existed, and that only local surfers know, like Santa Iria that has exceptional waves. Then we have all the other tourists attractions” (Restaurant Owner, male).

They argue that it is the combination of numerous leisure and tourism activities combined with the natural resources that make it a unique destination.

“I don’t think people come here just surfing. We’re not that fantastic beach in Ericeira. It’s a combination, you know: I like to surf, I like nature, and São Miguel offers that. It’s a fusion” (Snack-Bar Owner, male).

The group also highlighted the gastronomy; the natural conditions; the cultural heritage; the tea plantations; the support given by the local municipal government for

surf competitions; lodging close to the beaches; lifeguards all year round; small lodging options.

“One great thing we have is lifeguards all year round in Santa Barbara, which is unique and it gives great comfort to those who visit us, in case of problems, and it’s a big investment” (Hotel Owner, male)

As for weaknesses, they identified the need to improve services, infrastructure and human resources. Some business owners think there should be more that reminds people of surfing, not just the waves, if the destination wants to be the capital of surf; and of course the poor conditions of Monte Verde Beach.

“Monte Verde Beach is not clean, it’s not presentable, the access is not good. The road is not in good conditions, it’s all broken with a hole in the ground. It’s got grass, broken trees. (...) You can’t be a capital of surf with an almost wild beach in the centre of the city” (Snack-bar Owner, male).

Surf Businesses

As surf practitioners and as intimately linked to surf tourism, surf instructors and surf school owners were excited to talk about the destination attributes of Ribeira Grande, but showed very deep concern about what they perceive as the main hindrance to surf tourism development and sustainability-beach pollution and neglect. In fact, during the interviews, this stakeholder group delved deep into the current environmental issues of the surf destination, as poor environmental quality at a beach can severely impact their businesses. Regarding the destination attributes, the respondents praised the wave conditions during the summer months, which is when surf schools they offer the most surf lessons, as the sea conditions are calmer, which is suitable for beginners and for families with kids trying surfing for the first time.

“Ribeira Grande has great potential. Let’s think about the summer months which is when more people come here. It is good to surf during the summer. It has sand banks which are safer for beginner’s lessons. During the summer months it’s an advantage for Ribeira Grande because it is safe for children and for families to learn how to surf, and it is pleasant for swimmers” (Surf school owner and instructor, male).

Surf businesses pointed out that surfing can be done year-round in Ribeira Grande, although some seasons are better than others, that the water temperature is quite comfortable, and there are excellent waves for all levels.

“You can’t compare it to Peniche or Ericeira, you can’t compare it to many places on mainland Portugal, but there’s a factor here, which is the lack of people in the water, heavy waves, in the summer, there’s surfing for everyone. But the turquoise blue of the sea and the warm water is the difference because in the Azores, in August, we have the highest temperatures, and most people who come here from Europe have no idea. When I tell them that a wetsuit is not needed, they just look at me. And they spend two hours without a wetsuit.

The water reached 25 degrees this summer, so I think that's the difference."
(Surf school Owner, male).

Respondents also highlighted all the natural surroundings, particularly the view surfers get from the sea to the land and all the other attractions, such as Fogo Lake or Caldeira Velha hot springs, as well as all the tourism offer associated with nature; and the location as it is central in the island. For surf businesses, a surf holiday in Ribeira Grande is not just about the waves, it's about *"combining good surfing with an experience beyond surf, and Ribeira Grande has so much to offer"* (Surf School Owner, male). Besides the attractive features, the surf business community were highly critical of Monte Verde Beach and the neglect it has suffered throughout the years. The surf instructors interviewed for this study were, particularly, instrumental in understanding the issues with the beach importance of the stream and the issues surrounding it. The name Ribeira Grande means 'big stream' and this stream crosses the municipality and the city flowing into the ocean at Monte Verde Beach. The respondents argued that the stream is an attractive feature and that it creates great river banks at the beach making the beach safe for swimmers and surfers. According to a surf school owner, previous government plans proposed blocking the stream that leads to the beach, however, this stream is extremely important as it creates sand banks, making it safer for swimmers who can touch the bottom and creating waves for surfers. The stream, however, is often the victim of waste discharges by local residents residing by the stream or by dairy farmers up stream who use the stream as their personal dumping site. Moreover, according to them, Ribeira Grande has lost some of its prime surfing spots with building development.

"It was the biggest mistake Ribeira Grande has made till today. (...) Ribeira Grande has lots the pearl, the diamond (...) Back then, there was a small port and there was a wave that was a pipe line wave like the ones in Hawaii, a perfect wave (...) of high quality. It was a rock bottom, the wave was very consistent. They enlarged the port and destroyed this perfect wave. (...) Ribeira Grande was good because of Rabo de Peixe. (...) Ribeira Grande has lost its winning card. That was a wave that could have brought us many people in the winter months, experienced surfers from all over the world" (Surf instructor, male).

Government

Participants shared the same views as the previous stakeholder groups when it came to the unique features and strengths of the destination.

"The abundance of beaches, the quality of the waves, and their size, right from the presence of unique reef and beach breaks, according to experts and sports enthusiasts, are some of the points that set us apart. The strong cultural offerings of Ribeira Grande, ranging from traditional festivals to summer festivals, are also a great complement to the landscape and natural aspects of

the municipality, which further increases our demand” (President of Ribeira Grande City Council, male).

This stakeholder group highlighted destination attributes also identified by the other study participants, namely the excellent beaches, including some of the best beaches in the Azores, the affordable accommodation options; the sea; the nature; the local culture; the events and surf competitions.

“I believe that, for the tourist, Ribeira Grande is a discovery, with its trails, beaches, architecture. It's surprising” (Calhetas Parish Council President, female).

They also identified the museums, the rich gastronomy, and the diversified tourism offer as destination attributes.

“We have a bit of everything. It's not just the sea. Whoever comes will enjoy so much more that Ribeira Grande has to offer”. (Tourism Information Centre Staff, female)

It is important to note that historical and cultural heritage are also important as surf destination attributes as they complement the tourist destination offer, whereas natural attractions, such as lakes and forests contribute to the quality of the surf experience and to a positive perception of the destination image (Reis & Carneiro, 2022). The role and support of the municipal council in the promotion of surf tourism was also considered a destination attribute. The government also pointed to its initiatives and measures, such as having lifeguards in Santa Barbara Beach as a strength, which they hope to expand to Monte Verde Beach as well, and all the promotion they have given to surfing, either through the surf competitions or sponsorships.

Final Remarks

The most mentioned features and strengths for surf tourism were the beaches, the wave quality and variety for all levels, surfing year-round, the north coast, the natural surrounding beauty and attractions, the hospitality of the local community, and the low crowd. As for weaknesses, the stakeholders who are more closely involved in or influenced by surf tourism were the ones who were more expressive in pointing out these stumbling blocks in the development surf tourism. By far, the most mentioned weakness by every single stakeholder was the conditions of the Monte Verde beach from the water quality, beach cleanliness, access, showers, and supporting infrastructures. All the stakeholder groups perceive the environmental conditions of Monte Verde Beach a hindrance to sustainable development and to surf tourism competitiveness, and the government acknowledged that it is working towards its

improvement. Other weaknesses were the wave inconsistency due to the winds, and the lack of services, amenities and surf culture.

Reis & Carneiro (2022) argue that “the fact that a surf destination has a set of surf-related attractions and, consequently, good conditions for surf, may not be sufficient to perceive a tourism destination as capable of providing memorable and unforgettable surf experiences” (p. 298). In fact, all destination attributes must be constantly monitored and evaluated in order to guarantee strong surf destination management ensuring sustainable development and boosting destination competitiveness. Monitoring and assessing the attributes or lack thereof can help define appropriate and competitive strategies, contributing to the affirmation of the surf destination as an outstanding place for a surf holiday. Ribeira Grande already offers several surf destination attributes, albeit many of them in small scale. For example, while there are surf schools, shops and accommodations, these are quite limited in number, as was seen in the previous section on surf tourism development in Ribeira Grande. Moreover, even though there is infrastructure and support equipment, this is not the case in every beach. The same goes for beach accessibility. Furthermore, although waves are considered excellent, they are not always consistent. They are quality waves but they are not consistent quality waves everyday of the year. Overall Ribeira Grande does have many surf destination attributes, although some of them, can definitely be enhanced and improved, such as the nightlife and infrastructure, for example. As for surf culture and surf-related way of life, stakeholders did find that this is nonexistent in the destination. To the list of surf destination attributes considered fundamental for surf destination competitiveness, I would add environmental sustainability and sustainable development, which will be addressed in the next section of the chapter.

7.4 Sustainability in Surf Destination Competitiveness

As was presented in the previous section of the chapter, there is a set of attributes that a destination must possess to be competitive as a surf tourism destination. I would add that environmental, social and economic sustainability are necessary attributes as well of a competitive surf destination. In fact, there are several studies conducted on the sustainability of surf destinations around the world demonstrating the importance of addressing sustainability in surf tourism (Buckley, 2002; Martin & Assenov, 2014; O'Brien & Ponting, 2013; Román et al., 2022; Tamtamjarik, 2004; Teixeira, 2017; Towner & Milne, 2017). Currently there is also a sustainability

certification only for surf destinations, namely STOKE13, which proves that being certified as a sustainable surf tourism destination is also an asset and an attribute of a competitive surf destination, as increasingly tourists seek destinations that are sustainable and environmentally responsible. Peniche, in Portugal, is one of the surf destinations currently on the path to becoming certified as a sustainable surf destination (Surfer Today, 2017; Peniche City Council, 2017). This certification, adapted from the Global Sustainable Council's Destination Criteria, is awarded based on a variety of criteria, such as the destination's tourism plan, sustainability management system, community development, local employment and purchasing, cultural heritage preservation, surf resource management, and environmental conservation initiatives, including wastewater treatment and waste management (stokecertified.com). In order to receive the certification, surf destinations must not only meet a set of criteria but must also commit themselves to pursuing strategies that foster sustainability, such as ensuring the existence of a DMO, regulating the use of natural resources, ensuring surf resource conservation, mitigating seasonality, and empowering local businesses (Peniche City Council, 2017). Given the relevance of sustainability for the competitiveness of surf tourism destination, this research project also addressed the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the sustainability of Ribeira Grande. Most stakeholders discussed environmental sustainability, but other participants touched on other subjects of sustainability as well, namely community involvement and participation (social sustainability), and local economic development (economic sustainability). Following is an overview of the perceptions of the different stakeholder groups.

Local surfers

Surfers have been considered key stakeholders in the planning and development of sustainable surf tourism (Martin & Assenov, 2014; Springwald et al., 2019; Teixeira, 2017) and, thus, it is fundamental to gain insights into their perceptions of surf destination sustainability. It is argued that surfers play a fundamental role in identifying, preserving and mitigating surf resources and promoting principles of sustainability (Springwald et al. 2019). From the interviews with local surfers, there was wide agreement that overall Ribeira Grande is still lagging when it comes to environmental sustainability and in being able to call itself a sustainable destination. In fact, when asked if the destination was based on sustainability, the majority of respondents said no. This is largely due to the situation of the stream, i.e. the

13 Stoke Destinations-Sustainability Certification Programme for Surfing Tourism Destinations

pollution problem and the waste discharges on the beach. Local surfers were very vocal about this issue. It is commonly argued that surfers are protectors of the ocean as they, themselves, experience first-hand pollution from sewage, urban runoff and marine plastic pollution (Martin & Assenov, 2012; Springwald et al., 2019), and the local surfers of Ribeira Grande were no exception. They explained that the stream that flows to Monte Verde Beach often carries wastewater discharges, including domestic and agricultural. This waste not only contaminates the water but it also carries litter to the beach, making it quite unpleasant to swim, surf or even sunbathe and sometimes potentially risky to human health. Surfers have also seen syringes on the beach, large amounts of plastic, they have seen the water in strange colours, and the smell at the beach is often foul.

“The water quality is sometimes simply unacceptable” (Local surfer, male).

They argue that the municipal council should increase monitoring of the stream and apply heftier fines to those dumping their waste in the public stream. This view was also shared by the local residents. This stakeholder group expressed shock at how Ribeira Grande promotes itself as a surf tourism destination with these types of problems at one of its main beaches.

“The pollution problem in the stream of Monte Verde beach is inadmissible in a destination that calls itself the ‘Capita do Surf’” (Local surfer, male).

Surfers note that solving this issue has been quite slow and hope to see progress soon. One respondent argued that

“Ribeira Grande is facing a very serious sewage issue that is being addressed, because Monte Verde Beach is subject to waste discharges, and there have been human health problems reported. Nonetheless, this beach is magnificent and truly amazing, and needs to be improved” (Member of ASBA, male).

Participants were also appalled at the destruction of some of the destination’s best waves, namely the one in the parish of Rabo de Peixe due to the construction of a new fishing harbour and the one near Monte Verde beach due to the construction of the municipal swimming pools. Overall, local surfers argue that there is still poor wave protection and conservation. Local surf spot development is also one of the principles of sustainable surf destinations (O’Brien & Ponting, 2013; Teixeira, 2017). There was a wide perception that there is still a lack of local surf-sport development, although this perception was refuted by the government stakeholder group. The participants highlighted that not many young people in Ribeira Grande surf and that there is no high-performance surfing centre where athletes could train and improve their physical strength in order to compete with surfers from the mainland who are given access to all sorts of surf support facilities. Local community

involvement and participation in decision-making, empowerment and community knowledge regarding tourism is important in sustainable tourism development and can affect the sustainability of tourism development (Bornhorts et al, 2010; Fong, 2015; Gunawijaya & Pratiwi, 2018; Martin & Assenov, 2014). Local surfers noted that, although in general they do not feel involved in local decisions and discussions, some surf school owners and the surf association do participate and speak on behalf of the surf community. Local surfers did express some optimism for the future with many believing that surf tourism will develop sustainably. One surfer noted that the destination

“is learning from mistakes made in other parts of the world and by not committing the same mistakes, it will lead a sustainable path” (Member of ASBA, male)

Surf Tourists

Sustainable surf tourism adapts the principles of sustainable development, whose aim is to respect the current and future economic, socio-cultural and environmental welfare of the host community, while ensuring tourist satisfaction (Springwald et al. 2019). All the surf tourists who participated in this study were highly pleased with their tourist experience in the destination. The majority of them did not display much knowledge or awareness of the current environmental, social and economic sustainability of Ribeira Grande. In fact, only one participant mentioned the environmental problems at Monte Verde Beach. This lack of awareness about the situation with Monte Verde might have to do with the fact that most surf visitors surf in Santa Bárbara or in Santa Iria (the ‘secret spot’), which have good environmental conditions, and the fact that, as one surf instructor pointed out, it’s a hidden issue. Surf tourists did mention an important attribute of sustainable surf destinations which is the lack of crowd, meaning that the current number of surf tourists did not hinder their surf experience. Overall, the findings from the interviews with this group show that they were satisfied with their tourism experience as they did not highlight any serious problems either with the environment or with locals.

Residents

There is, within the participants of this stakeholder group, the perception that Ribeira Grande is not a sustainable destination due, once again, to the environmental problems of Monte Verde Beach.

“It’s not enough to have just nice beaches. We have a stream that flows to the beach and there has not been a concern to address this issue to improve the product that is surfing. The other day in the news, there were tourists who got

sick because of the quality of the water and I think that we still need to work on the topic of sustainability” (Local Resident, female).

Respondents shared the same view with the business community that there is a wide lack of environmental awareness from the general population, who continue to pollute and litter, and not understand environmental sustainability. As for local community involvement, one of the tenets of sustainable tourism development, residents perceive that overall the local community supports surf tourism, but is not very involved. According to one resident,

“there is already some involvement, some businesses thinking about this type of tourism, some local accommodations for surfers. I think it is starting slowly, but the brand has brought more people here and there has been more growth, meaning that there will be more involvement from the population thinking about this type of tourism” (Local Resident, female).

This group also perceives a growth in the number of surf visitors in their town but have not seen a growth in the number of locals surfing, noting a lack of engagement with the practice of the sport, making it difficult for the town to have a surf vibe and culture when the locals do not surf. As for the benefits of surf tourism, residents highlight that there is a growing sense that tourism benefits everyone, including surf tourism. They may not all benefit economically, but overall the destination improves its infrastructure, more services open and this is beneficial for locals. Most local residents did not see any personal benefits from surf tourism, perhaps because they only think of benefits as being economic benefits for businesses, and not how this reflects on the community as a whole. One resident did mention she benefits personally because the atmosphere in Ribeira Grande has changed with another resident describing how she benefits emotionally and personally.

“I like to come to the beach and watch people surfing. I appreciate this image. It’s something interesting and relaxing to see and appreciate” (Local Resident).

Participants also point out that they see no conflicts between the local community and surf visitors, and consider surf tourists to be

“tourists who behave in an excellent manner. They are very friendly, in a good mood and they don’t cause problems. They are relaxed people” (Resident, female).

Regarding the future of the destination as a sustainable tourism destination, the overall feeling was that if planning is done right, it can be sustainable.

“We have to learn from examples from other destinations that were sustainable nature destinations but that mass tourism ruined, for example, Hawaii” (Resident, female).

Business Community

Most respondents acknowledged the environmental problems and perceive them as serious hindrances to the image promotion of Ribeira Grande and to its tourism development. As one participant said:

"It's pointless to be working the surf brand with the problem we have in our beach. I'm a big defender of this. We have to work on our problems first to then start working on the benefits and on marketing. Being the capital of surf with the problems we have may turn itself against us" (Hotel owner, male).

"I recall a recent case, where two kids were infected with some virus after they went in the water in Monte Verde. They had intestinal problems. It's not enough being the 'Capital do Surf', you have to work it. The city council is already working on the sewage system to create better conditions. Surf is not about walking around holding a surfboard. It's about going in the sea and surfing. A person who goes surfing and then catches a virus because of the water is a very complication matter" (Beach-bar Owner, male).

This group also found that there is a lack of involvement in tourism decisions in general and find it very important to involve everyone, so that there is harmony and a shared vision. As far as the adoption of sustainable practices, there was some disagreement among the group. While some perceive most local businesses as not adopting sustainable practices and being behind in terms of sustainability and awareness, others believe that local businesses already pursue these practices in their operations and philosophy.

"We are still lagging behind. My company is part of the Sustainability Charter and I see very few companies from Ribeira Grande in the meetings. I don't know why. I think people don't know what sustainability really is" (Restaurant Owner, male).

Furthermore, it was noted that Ribeira Grande has a diversification of accommodation and, in fact, has many small-scale lodging options, meaning that revenue stays in the community and not in the hands of large hotel groups. One respondent, however, was critical of the type of new investments that are being approved and the pursuit of economic gains:

"I think there is a great focus on the economic matter, without looking at the population's well-being. There are constructions that inadequate for the natural surroundings. Hotels that seem out of place. In fact, hotels affect the authenticity of the place" (Local Accommodation Owner, male).

Stakeholders praised the government's work and initiative in the development of quality hiking trails that encourage people to spend more time in the countryside. As mentioned before, natural attractions and activities are also attributes of competitive

surf destinations and naturally of sustainable surf destinations (Springwald et al, 2019).

Surf Businesses

The most widespread perception among this group, as was seen in the other stakeholder groups, was that sustainability is still not an attribute of the destination-Ribeira Grande. Being most of the surf business community, surfers themselves they echoed the same sentiments as the local surfers when it came to environmental preservation and sustainability, focusing on Monte Verde as the culprit. All respondents would like to witness a drastic improvement in the conditions of this beach and were highly critical of the inaction, as quoted by one participant:

“Ribeira Grande has a severe problem, which is the flow from the stream to the beach. They have been planning to build a water water treatment plant but until today nothing has been done. It’s just talk. The priorities have been switched. What have they decided to do? They decided to build a statue in the middle of Ribeira Grande that I hear cost 70 thousand euros. The priority is the stream and building a waste water treatment plant, because sometimes they analyse the water and it is then forbidden to enter the water and surf in Monte Verde because the water is contaminated” (Surf school owner and instructor).

Surf instructors are often afraid to take students there due to water conditions that they argue can be quite harmful.

“I have seen that water strange colours sometimes” (Surf instructor, male).

“There are people who get fungi in their sick, who get nauseous” (...) It’s an issue that is hidden. Ribeira Grande does a lot of surf promotion, but it has a serious problem here” (Surf instructor, male).

Some respondents also voiced concerns about the unfair competition between surf schools that receive preferential treatment from the local government when it comes to setting up their schools in Ribeira Grande, citing difficulties in securing a place for their surf school near the beach, of a surf school monopoly, and illegalities. It was also pointed out that some surf instructors who teach in Ribeira Grande are not certified by the Portuguese Surf Federation. It was argued that

“in order to work more and better, we have to work in a system of equality” (Surf Instructor, male).

According to the STOKES Certification, critical to maintaining sustainable surf destinations is the enforcement of surf etiquette for safety and reduction of perception of crowd. Some surf instructors mentioned the excessive amount of surf students in the water during the summer, arguing that people are allowed to rent

boards without proper surfing knowledge or etiquette and that this can be quite dangerous for other surfers.

“It’s sometimes crazy how many people there are in the water. It’s extremely dangerous for swimmers and surfers. Many of them don’t have experience and there is an excessive number of surfers daily in the water. This is the negative part of this tourist invasion” (Surf instructor, male).

The surf business community did feel that apart from the problems mentioned above, Ribeira Grande does have certain elements of surf destination sustainability, as it is a destination that offers surf conditions all year round, in fact surfers can be found in the destination at all times of the year, since each season attracts a different type of surfer.

Government

The government is, of course, one of the main actors in the development, promotion and monitoring of sustainable practices in a destination. During the interviews with government members, these did stay away from more controversial issues, namely Monte Verde Beach, but did emphasize that the problem is currently being addressed with the construction of a wastewater treatment plant. However, despite government efforts, it is important to argue that environmentalism concerns everyone and it should start with the individual, and not necessarily with the government. The government argues that it is working on solving the wastewater issue, but simply cannot control every human action in the municipality. As mentioned before, local surf spot development is one of the principles of sustainable surf destinations (O’Brien & Ponting, 2013; Teixeira, 2017). According to the government, besides *“having a fundamental role in the promotion of surfing, namely three major competitions: the regional surf and bodyboard competition, one phase of the national surf competition Liga Meo, and the world surf championship”* (City Council Member, male), it has given support to the local youth in order to participate in surf competitions and to local surf schools to promote surf among disadvantaged youth. As for initiatives promoting sustainability among the population, the government referred to the environmental campaigns and beach cleanups it does with the local children and with the Liga Meo during the surf competitions.

Final Remarks

From the perceptions and opinions of the stakeholders, it was clear that they do not perceive the destination as being a sustainable destination. All the respondents gave very poor assessment of environmental sustainability in the destination. Despite the efforts from the municipal government to promote Ribeira Grande as the Capital of

Surf, the fact is that there is a pressing issue regarding the quality of Monte Verde Beach that has been neglected for years. According to the data gathered from the interviews with the stakeholders, sustainability standards are still lagging but progress is being made. Sustainability and sustainable development is not just about environmental sustainability. It is also about involving the community in the local decision-making process and involving all stakeholders to have their voices heard. From the interviews, there is wide agreement that there is very low involvement from the local community in surf tourism, both in the sport itself and even in recognizing this type of tourism, although the community has become more open to surf tourists and is quite receptive to them.

In sustainable surf tourism, it is important to engage all stakeholders, including the local community. Surf destinations should also have proper waste management, water conservation, environmental conservation, cultural sustainability, and economic sustainability. As the findings suggest, Ribeira Grande is not perfect when it comes to all the elements of surf tourism sustainability, but there seems to be political will and an overall feeling that the destination will develop sustainably.

7.5 Surf Tourism for Sustainable Development

As was presented in the literature review, surf tourism has been considered a motor of sustainable development for many destinations, bringing economic, environmental, and social benefits to host communities and tourist destinations (Arroyo et al. 2021; Hritz & Franzidis, 2018; Nelsen et al, 2007; Lazarow, 2009; Machado et al., 2018; Reis & Jorge, 2012; Román et al. 2022; Towner & Orams, 2016, Wagner et al., 2011). However, as with any other type of tourism, surf tourism sometimes also comes with negative impacts, particularly when there is poor destination management, which can cause conflicts between locals and visitors, leakage in tourism revenue, pollution and crowding. All of which can impact the competitiveness of a destination. Hence it is important to understand the benefits and grasp how destinations can take advantage of them for the development, sustainability and competitiveness of the destination. On the other hand, understanding the negative impacts of surf tourism is also crucial in order to avoid and mitigate those impacts. This section will present the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the benefits of surf tourism for sustainable development and its negative impacts.

Local Surfers

Surfers have been identified as a key stakeholder group in the planning and development of sustainability of surf tourism (Springwald et al, 2019). In this study, local surfers were a particularly positive group when it came to the benefits of surf tourism for sustainable development. As they are strong defenders of this sport and recreational activity, they were able to identify several economic, environmental and social benefits. Environmentally, the group emphasized that surfers, in general, are people who care about the environment, particularly about marine and coastal conservation. With surf tourism there are more beach cleanups and more attention is paid to the environment.

“Tourists are an added value. It is sustainable for the north coast. They come from extremely strict countries when it comes to the environment. They care about not leaving anything on the beach, they take the plastic with them, they collect it and take it. Surfers are friends of the environment” (Big wave surfer and lifeguard coordinator, male).

They find surfers good role models for young people and for communities in general, arguing that they can influence others’ attitudes and behaviours when it comes to the environment. As one local surfer said:

“Ribeira Grande attracts a specific type of tourist – surfers. These individuals are naturally connected to the environment and possess a strong awareness of protecting the surroundings in which they practice their sport- the ocean. This includes safeguarding the sea, preserving nature, minimizing waste, and embracing sustainability. Surfers are highly attuned to these principles” (Surfer, Member of ASBA, male).

Socially, they believe surf tourism brings a positive social and cultural exchange between people, bringing new ideas and perspectives. The group also praised the surfers’ lifestyle and calm attitude and found surf tourism to be beneficial to Ribeira Grande as it has influenced the local vibe, making what used to be a destination with the reputation of having tough, closed-minded people into a destination with a relaxed vibe with friendly and welcoming locals.

“A few years ago, Ribeira Grande was a very rustic town. People lived off agriculture, they had a different, more rugged character. Life was quite challenging; finding a place to eat was very difficult. The atmosphere was somewhat heavy. The 80s and 90s were especially tough; it was very complicated. With the recent opening up, there are people with very different perspectives. They’re showing that it’s possible to make a living from other things. These are individuals with modest demands, embracing a simple lifestyle. They have a strong connection with nature” (Local surfer, male).

Economically, local surfers found that surf tourism can help develop destination, as new businesses open up to cater to the needs of surf tourists.

“I believe that surfing can be the biggest driver of development for Ribeira Grande. Mainland Portugal has several examples like Peniche, Sagres, and Ericeira, where the city revolves around surfing. Not just surfing itself, but also themed bars, restaurants, shops, skate parks, brands” (Local Surfer, male).

Respondents, clearly aware of the impacts of surf tourism in other surf destinations around the world, did emphasize that surf tourism is only economically beneficial when everybody wins, especially locals and local businesses.

“It could improve the quality of life for the local people only if it’s done right, if the local people are taken into the boat, if they are encouraged to open up accommodations, nice accommodations. In every spot in the world where such development takes place you can’t make it in a way where only foreign investors benefit and locals are being slaves, you can set the example and encourage local people to take part in this movement” (Local Surfer, female).

Even though most respondents agree that surf tourism has advantages, this group believes that it can also be detrimental to them due to the potential excessive crowding on surf breaks, making them an impaired sector of the community.

“ We have one thing that is crowd in the summer, its too many people in the water, more accidents happen in the water. When accidents happen, they go to the outside, the people will know and will consider it a dangerous place and they will consider another option. Some schools give boards to people who don’t know how to surf very well and because of that, they don’t know the safety rules and have accidents with the other people in the water” (Local Surfer, male).

Surf Tourists

Surf tourists are considered to play a vital role in the sustainability of surfing resources. Surfers can identify areas that should not be developed and they help conserve and enhance the natural heritage, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources and the social and economic development of communities (Martin & Assenov, 2014; Springwald et al., 2019). Surf tourists, key players in surf tourism, identified several positive impacts of surf tourism. They consider surf tourism to foster environmental awareness, improve coastal protection as the government will be more willing to protect the coast for surf tourists to enjoy; it creates employment; it reduces seasonality as surfers can surf year-round in Ribeira Grande, including in winter when there is less crowd; it encourages local food consumption and healthy food consumption as surfers need healthy meals to fuel their bodies; and it encourages surf site preservation. This group did refer some negative impacts of surf tourism. They acknowledge that overall it increases prices; it often leads to economies excessively focused on surf tourism; there are sometimes social conflicts between tourists and locals, including local surfers; and that the popularity of a surf destination often leads to crowding. They noted, though, that these are not current

issues in Ribeira Grande, but as they are common issues in other surf destinations, it is important to keep these risks in mind.

Residents

Understanding the benefits of surf tourism for the sustainable development and competitiveness of a destination is fundamental when developing and adopting this type of tourism, particularly when it comes to garnering the support of the local community, a key element in the success of a tourism destination. If the local community sees tourism as an added benefit to their quality of life and well being, they will be more inclined to accepting and embracing it. In the residents' answers, it was clear that they have this common perception of the stereotype of a surfer: laid-back individuals with low spending habits, who like to spend most of their time enjoying the waves and chilling afterwards, but with a strong environmental conscience. Residents believe that surf tourism is beneficial in the sense that it helps promote environmental protection because surfers are known for their love of the ocean, and they believe that having laid-back individuals walking around their town gives a nice atmosphere to the place. This group identified the following benefits for sustainable development, many of them in agreement with the previous stakeholder groups: the improvement in the quality of life, because there is more attention given to the environment and to the ocean, meaning that everyone will benefit; job creation; more people learning foreign languages; the increase in the consumption of local products as they believe surfers like to eat local healthy food; and the contribution to a better management of natural resources, as the government will be more inclined to protecting resources for tourism. As with the previous groups, residents also noted that surf tourism reduces seasonality in Ribeira Grande, as they have seen surf visitors in both winter and summer. Economically, although residents find tourism in general to be a generator of economic development, there was a general perception that surfers are not the type of tourist who spends a lot on holiday. In fact, some respondents were not strong believers of the purchasing power of surf tourists and as such did not perceive many economic benefits, albeit not everyone. One respondent noted

“ I don't think that economically this tourism niche makes a lot of difference to Ribeira Grande, if you factor in all the type of tourism we get here” (Resident, female).

It is important to change these stereotypes, as the image the local community has of surf tourists can be the deal breaker in supporting or not surf tourism. Studies have shown that surf tourists have, indeed, high incomes and are willing to pay for

excellent surf holidays (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003). As for negative impacts, the respondents who participated in this study did not perceive any negative impacts from surf tourism, noting that surf tourists are relaxed, well-behaved visitors who do not cause problems.

Business Community

Again within this stakeholder group, there were some opposing perceptions when it came to the benefits of surf tourism for sustainable development. While some respondents see surf tourism as bringing economic benefits and businesses opportunities,

“Tourists bring money, they eat in restaurants, they rent houses in Ribeira Grande, they will generate this whole economy in the centre of Ribeira Grande. Tourism makes everything go around. In the accommodations, in the cafés, in construction. The entire economy revolves around it” (Lodge Owner, male).

“I see all types of surf tourists. You see people who live well and surfing is their hobby. There are those who are sponsored, those who have normal jobs and spend just the regular amount. For foreigners, our standard of living is cheap” (Beach-bar owner, male).

Others were sceptical of the economic contributions of surf tourists. An opinion shared by the local residents, as mentioned previously.

“These type of people have low purchasing power. They are young people with little money, they want to rent a car illegally, and they are not worried about contributing economically. But there are all types of surf tourists. I just notice that there are many who don’t spend a lot in the local economy. They don’t have a tangible impact in my perception” (Ecological Lodge Owner, male).

The business community highlighted that surf tourism can improve the local quality of life because it brings new services and businesses; it promotes environmental protection and the consumption of local products. Respondents also emphasized that it reduces seasonality in Ribeira Grande, with surf tourists also coming in the winter, which is great for the destination as it keeps the tourism and tourism related sector going throughout the year, particularly in the winter when there are good conditions for surfing and not a lot of tourism activity.

“This idea of including surfing in the tourism strategy is not a bad idea; it makes sense and we have the aptitude for it. It helps distribute the tourist load. The off-season is a great time for surfing and brings people who wouldn’t normally come here, precisely when we need activity. It can ease seasonality, especially with surfing events. (...) We also need to attract tourists with a sustainability mindset. The main concern is having conscious and responsible individuals” (Business Owner, male)

“There are surf tourists the whole year. The seasonality is much lower and I see it from in my business. There used to be strong months, July and August, now I have tripled the number of staff and maybe I still needed more. I have

noticed that we are doing this interview in February and I am here sitting and I have already seen tons of tourists going up and down with their surfboard. I already see a lot of surfers in February. (...) Santa Bárbara Beach has already become in a sense a tourism attraction" (Beach-bar Owner, male).

It was also perceived that surf tourists are environmentally conscious and responsible and have an ecological attitude, meaning that surf tourism is perceived to contribute to more environment-related initiatives and regulations.

"Surf tourists are usually super conscious about nature and sustainability. They are good tourists to have anywhere, and especially in our island. They are great tourists. They are super conscious about the environment" (Tourism Accommodation Owner, female).

It was argued that it is important for the local community to understand the importance of tourism, in this case surf tourism in Ribeira Grande, noting that they feel that the locals do not fully understand the benefits and are not very involved. For the business community, everybody should understand the economic, social and environmental benefits, so that there can be a shared vision and attitude towards tourism.

"For most people, surf tourism is banal. When people from Ribeira Grande understand what tourism can generate, it can be lucrative for everyone, but the people from Ribeira Grande don't understand anything. We have a very closed mentality. People are like: if everything is full, instead of being happy, they get irritated. The mentalities are very small" (Restaurant Owner, male).

"The community has to understand the benefits and right now the population of Ribeira Grande doesn't understand. I think they think tourism is not good and it will only ruin things. Tourism is only good if people gain from it, and they have to understand that they gain from it directly or indirectly, most of the time indirectly. There has to be an understanding that tourism is good" (Hotel owner, male).

The respondents from this group were not able to identify any negative impacts of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande, with one respondent noting:

"Negative impacts, no. People who come to do this surf tourism already have a different mindset. Specifically for surfing, they often have a high income and sometimes bring their families, stay for a week, and spend money in the local economy. I have nothing to say about tourism that focuses on surfing. A negative impact could be that they like it so much that they buy a house, and the housing prices go up" (Hotel Owner, male)

Surf Businesses

This stakeholder group, clear beneficiaries of surf tourism, provided several examples of surf tourism benefits, highlighting the economic benefits and economic diversification, noting that there are many opportunities for new surf businesses and job creation; and emphasizing infrastructure improvement; services development;

environmental conservation; increased beach cleanups; and a marked reduction in tourism seasonality, which surf schools particularly enjoy.

“People who go to Ribeira Grande will look for accommodation near the beach to surf. They will have lunch or dinner in Ribeira Grande. We have a surf shop in Ribeira Grande, they will want to buy clothes. Tourists will go to the surf schools for equipment and lesson” (Surf school owner and instructor, male).

Socially, they note that surf tourism can encourage more locals to take up surfing, especially the younger generation, although they recognise that the sport can still be an expensive activity for many families from Ribeira Grande. This group argues that it has been difficult for the local community to be involved in surfing, mostly because of the population’s perception of the north sea as being dangerous, but note that surf schools has developed projects to involve local children, especially disadvantaged children, reflecting positive social contributions.

“Currently there is not much involvement from the community. Only from the schools, the surf clubs, surf lodging, the beach bar and the resort. That’s it. The coastal community here in this neighbourhood lives with their backs to the sea, for them the sea is not positive” (Surf School Owner, male)

Regarding the negative impacts of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande, it was very interesting to note the differences in opinion between surf schools regarding the current number of surf tourists or crowd. Some are happy with the numbers and welcome more, while others are already noticing an increase in crowd and potential conflicts with local surfers.

“Every year, all of my partners have either doubled or tripled the number of tourists, and we have now reached a point of saturation and overload. We have to balance this, and we are somewhat concerned because we don’t want to turn this into another Canary Islands or Bali, where everyone is on top of each other practicing surfing. We already felt a bit of that this summer. So now we have to close the tap a little to maintain some quality, so it doesn’t become a sea of surfboards in the water. That’s our concern” (Surf School Owner, male).

Government

The government, being the main promoter of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination, highlighted several benefits of surf tourism for the destination and local community, and did not identify many negative impacts. This stakeholder group argues that surf tourism is a driver of economic development as it fosters consumption and lodging in the destination, boosting the economy, creating jobs, and diversifying the economy.

“People come to Ribeira Grande due to surfing and the beaches, and this brings economic development. They dine out, the local accommodations themselves thrive; word spreads and friends bring more friends next year” (Parish Council President, female).

“Tourism is good and it creates employment for our students. And there are people who have an entrepreneurial spirit and it’s great to see young people doing things to have the opportunity to build something” (Tourism Information Centre Staff, female).

Other mentioned benefits were the improvement in the management of natural resources; the reduction of tourism seasonality; the increased number of beach cleanups; and the growth in and improvement of infrastructure. In wide agreement with the other stakeholder groups, respondents also perceive surf tourists to be environmentalists and environmentally aware, which is a positive influence for the local population.

“Many times we think that tourism brings litter, but tourism brings education and makes us locals, the residents of the parish, look at our hometowns differently. Because they don’t want others to litter, they end up not littering themselves” (Parish Council President, male).

“From the outset, practitioners of this sport are usually aware of the dangers and environmental protection. Furthermore, surfing and the sea go hand in hand, and this has been increasing awareness and respect for this resource that is so dear to us. Moreover, environmental awareness has reduced the dumping of waste in coastal maritime areas, and we have observed an increase in shoreline cleaning efforts” (President of the City Council, male).

As for the negative impacts, while some surf businesses and local surfers worry about crowd, interestingly, the presidents of the parishes interviewed for this study were strong defenders of tourism, including surf tourism and saw no issues with having a high number of tourists in Ribeira Grande. This is an interesting view as sustainable tourism development looks carefully at the carrying capacity of destinations. It is important that going forward these members of government take carrying capacity and sustainable growth in consideration, as well as the opinions of the local surf community. Members of this stakeholder group did mention the natural increase in prices, namely in restaurants, which makes it difficult for many locals to eat out.

“The rise in the cost of living. Yes, because even with the increase in prices, our restaurants always further increase their prices in high season. (...) Tourism will make prices go up and it’s inevitable” (Parish Council President, male).

Final Remarks

All in all, the respondents from the different stakeholder groups perceived surf tourism as being beneficial for the economic, environmental and social development of Ribeira Grande, although some benefits were clearer and more palpable than others. This overall positive perception is highly valuable for the competitiveness of the destination as all stakeholders perceive surf tourism to be beneficial and worth

pursuing. Economically, most respondents from the different stakeholder groups felt that surf tourism can impact positively the local economy. Stakeholders identified the following benefits: economy diversification; economic development; local food consumption; new business opportunities, infrastructure and employment; reduction of tourism seasonality. Some respondents, from the residents and business group, did show some scepticism as to the purchasing power of surf tourists as they perceived surfers as low-spenders with a low incomes, although they admit that there are all kinds of surf tourists, and that currently many of them do spend and even come with their family, ending up spending even more and contributing to the local economy. The opinions were divided in this regard. Environmentally, respondents perceived many positive impacts of surf tourism. Even those respondents who did not know much surfing believe that surf tourism brings positive environmental impacts. The most mentioned positive contributions were: more regular beach cleanups; the promotion of environmental awareness and protection; the community's exposure to environmentally conscious surf visitors; the push to improve public transportation; and the improvement of sewage and waste management. Socially, participants suggested that surf tourism can help the local youth by not only inspiring them to take up a new sport but also by exposing them to different cultures, ideas and perspectives; surf tourism can help encourage the promotion of educational projects and youth inclusion in projects or activities related to surfing and the environment; and increased contact with different cultures that opens mentalities. The most mentioned negative impacts were the increase in the cost of living and crowd. This section ends the presentation of the research findings on the perceptions of stakeholders regarding surf tourism, competitiveness and sustainability. The next section covers another fundamental element of surf destination competitiveness-destination branding.

7.5 Destination Brand- Ribeira Grande “Capital do Surf”

Destination branding has become increasingly recognised as an important element of destination competitiveness (Blain et al, 2005; Milicevic et al, 2017). A destination brand has an image, an identity and a personality, which are elements that influence the perception and reputation of a particular travel destination (Qu et al., 2011). Destination personality, for example, has been found to have positive impacts on perceived destination image and intention to recommend (Aguilar et al, 2016; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). It is argued that a strong destination brand image can increase tourism, boost the economy and develop a sense of pride among the local community (Chon, 1990; Echtner & Richie, 1991). At the same time, a brand that

does not truly represent the image and identity of the destination can deter potential visitors, hinder the destination's tourism development, and negatively affect the overall tourist experience and satisfaction. When a destination adopts a certain brand to promote and market itself, it must make sure that the brand closely reflects the image and identity of the destination and that it is easily identifiable by any visitor. Brand equity is also crucial in the success of a destination brand as it is the perceived value and reputation of a destination in the minds of tourists, expressing their perception and image of a destination as a desirable place to visit or not (Caldeira, 2022). Brand equity also refers to the awareness there is of the destination. There cannot be destination brand equity without tourists even being aware of the brand. Brand image, reputation, USPs (unique selling propositions), marketing and promotion, visitor experiences, recommendations and reviews and well as consistency and evaluation are key factors that contribute to brand equity.

This section provides the perceptions of stakeholders regarding Ribeira Grande's destination brand (see Appendix- Figure 6), namely the destination's image, identity and personality. Participants were also asked about their awareness of the brand. The purpose was to assess: 1) stakeholders' awareness of the brand; and 2) brand congruency, that is, whether the brand's elements were in harmony with what stakeholders perceive of the destination and whether the brand image, values and promises are consistent and reflect reality. Brand congruency is a fundamental aspect of brand management and marketing as it helps build and maintain a competitive, reputable and recognisable brand.

Local surfers

Stakeholders were asked to name the first thing that came to their mind when they thought of the image and identity of Ribeira Grande. Local surfers referred the following: the sea; surfing; hiking; waterfalls; remote; a little behind time; beautiful city centre; relationship between the sea and the mountain; forests; the north sea; beach; nature; and the events that are held in Ribeira Grande. When talking about the image and identity of the destination and its brand, some respondents were quite critical:

“Good waves, bad maintenance of the beaches, lack of safety for bathers and bad training of lifeguards regarding the bathers/surfers!” (Local surfer, male).

In order to build and promote the identity of a destination, it is important that stakeholders feel involved but also identify with the promoted identity the destination brand is trying to sell. In other words, if a destination brand wishes to promote the destination as having a certain identity, it is crucial that the local community and all

stakeholders are on board and share the same perceptions. Many of the respondents felt that this was not the case in Ribeira Grande.

“Over the past twenty years, in various parts of the country, surfing has established itself as a fundamental anchor in the promotion and development of these territories' tourism. Places like Ericeira, Sagres, the southwestern Algarve and Alentejo, and particularly Peniche and Nazaré, have gained tremendous recognition and development by harnessing the natural resource that is the waves. Ribeira Grande, within the Azorean context, has enormous potential in this regard, which gives it a significant room for progression. However, it will be necessary to undertake a more structured effort in creating and implementing a strategy that establishes the foundations for a surfing identity that goes beyond mere promotional slogans or clichés, both in terms of infrastructure and the involvement of the economy and society” (Local surfer, male).

As for the personality of the destination, one respondent described it as a destination that is in changing, becoming more sustainable, having more quality, and attracting different types of people. Other descriptions were: peaceful; good waves; full of nature; rustic; and addictive. Regarding brand awareness, most participants were aware of the destination brand “Capital do Surf”. They have seen the logo on correspondence from the city council and on the t-shirts of local government workers. Most respondents did not feel that currently Ribeira Grande’s destination brand reflects reality, nor did they feel involved in the branding process. In fact, they were quite critical, as quoted:

“at this moment, I think the name Capital do Surf is just getting a ride from the good natural conditions” (Local Surfer, male); “at the moment it doesn’t represent reality but it has potential” (Surfer, female)

“Ribeira Grande unfortunately got the name Capital do Surf without the bases prepared. It has no bases for being Capital do Surf. An illusion was created, a statue of Capital do Surf. (...) There is a lack of conditions for surfing. It’s not just the name “Capital do Surf”. In a “Capital do Surf”, you have to have clean beaches, bathrooms, beach access, beach evacuation, it’s a whole process. Even in lodging, there is no high-performance surfing centre. We must have it. Many surfers can’t afford a hotel, they prefer the centre that has a bed, a gym and showers” (Big wave surfer and lifeguard, male).

Destination branding has been criticised as being a top-down practice, reflecting the interests of a selected group of powerful stakeholders, such as politicians or large business owners, whose interests might not always align with the interests and ideas of other stakeholders (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017). From the interviews, there was a sense that local surfers were not involved and that the branding idea came from within the local government and from surfers from mainland Portugal with interests in the Azores.

Surf Tourists

“Beautiful place and a great place to surf, not no real ‘surfer vibes’ (surf tourist, female); “I’ve never found a sense of ‘surf community’” (Surf tourist, male).

In fact, when asked if the destination brand reflected the image of Ribeira Grande, in a scale of 1 to 5 (1-completely disagree and 5-completely agree) the majority of participants gave a 3. As for brand awareness, surprisingly, most of the participants from this group had never heard of this brand before, only two respondents had seen the brand on street posters and signs. One respondent observed that there is not much advertising and that people have to find out on their own that Ribeira Grande is a surf destination. Clearly more international marketing efforts are required, especially among the international surf community.

Residents

The importance of residents’ perception and communication about their home region as a tourist destination has been increasingly acknowledged in the destination branding process (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017; Morgan et al., 2003). Considered important stakeholders in the promotion of their home destination, residents as well as visitors have the power to help create and promote destination image. It has been argued, in fact, that resident participation in destination branding can be seen as a form of citizenship with duties and responsibilities, and as such, understanding this responsibility might be relevant for engaging residents as destination branding stakeholders (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017).

From the interviews, residents described the destination personality as: quite family orientated; relaxed and safe; in development; humble; calm; authentic and genuine; cozy; conservative; and with friendly locals. One respondent noted:

“The image of Ribeira Grande is cosy, with a light and unpretentious atmosphere. The personality is laid-back, but very conservative, that is, any change in the municipality receives a lot of criticism from the population” (Resident, female)

For them, when they think of Ribeira Grande, they think of: Lagoa do Fogo; tea plantations; beaches; the future of tourism; nature, the sea; the green landscapes. The majority of the respondents felt that the brand does not fully represent the image and identity of Ribeira Grande, although they see it as something that can happen in the future.

“Ribeira Grande, the capital of surf. it might become, but for now, it's just a name. A name somewhat distant from reality, but it has to be worked on, and in that aspect, it has potential, and it's a good place for it. It's not just being the

surfing capital, and then not having the conditions to welcome surfers, and them staying in Ponta Delgada and coming only to surf. Ribeira Grande must have local accommodations; it has the two hotels that were recently built, but people have to travel to Ponta Delgada for lunch or dinner, because Ribeira Grande falls far short in this regard. In Ribeira Grande, we have more sleeping facilities than dining options. It's not just about creating a name; expectations must be met and conditions are taking time to be created" (Resident, male).

It was also noted that in order to be called capital of something, you have to have the elements to call it a capital, namely the distinctive elements that characterise it as such.

"You can't just say you are a capital of surf when you only have the beach. Ponta Delgada also has beaches and it's not a capital of surf" (Resident, female).

Moreover, respondents find that you need to have several surf destination attributes, as mentioned previously, not just good waves to promote yourself as a surf tourism destination.

"I understand that Ribeira Grande wants to name itself capital of surf, because they have great potential, the beaches and the north sea have great potential for this, but they have rushed, because they name themselves Capital do Surf 5 years ago without having the accessibilities and infrastructure. And it's been already 7 or 8 years, and everything is still the same. The Monte Verde beach is as terrible as it has always been" (Resident, female).

As for brand awareness, only a minority of respondents did not know the brand name and logo.

"I have heard that Ribeira Grande wants to position itself as the capital of surf, but I had no idea it was already the capital of surf. I don't know the logo". (Resident, female).

"This brand is not as well-known as people think. For the majority of common people on Earth, they don't know what Ribeira Grande is. They can't even imagine it. The Azores are known, and the Azores brand is already established. It's associated with nature and the sea. The Ribeira Grande brand is nothing compared to that. The Azores, yes, they are beautiful and recognized. Ribeira Grande, Ponta Delgada, and other cities still have a lot of work to do to become well-known" (Resident, male)

Business Community

Involving the local business community and understanding their perceptions regarding destination branding and marketing is also paramount as the business community can help promote and advertise the brand, if they believe in it. This, however, did not seem to be the case.

"things are not real. Capital do Surf. What surfing do we have here? What conditions do you have for surfers? (...) I think it's ridiculous for us to label

ourselves as capital of surf and then people come here and they must surely laugh at us” (Business Owner, male).

“The image Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf is a fabricated image” (Eco Lodge Owner, male).

It is argued that the perceptions of internal stakeholders, i.e., the local business community, as well as communicating and collaborating with them, is an essential part of destination branding and marketing (Choo et al, 2011; Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017). From the interviews, the business community expressed hesitancy in referring to Ribeira Grande as the capital of surf for a multitude of reasons.

“There's still a long way to go to become the so-called “Capital do Surf”. If you have a place that's the surf capital, you need to understand right away that there is a surf culture in the city. I believe that more promotion could be done, not just in terms of platforms, but visually. When you arrive here, you should instantly recognize it as a surf destination. It has to give the message of being the surf capital from every angle, not just when you enter through the roundabout. From every entrance point, you should feel it” (Snack-Bar Owner, male).

When thinking of the image and identity of Ribeira Grande, the business community mentioned the following: Caldeiras, Caldeira Velha; Monte Escuro, Lombadas, Lagoa do Fogo; development; the sea; gastronomy; good bread; tea; natural beauty; beaches; the coast; surfing. As is common with many destinations, it is difficult to pinpoint only one image and this seemed to be the case here.

There was wide agreement that the brand image of ‘Capital do Surf’ is still far from being a reality, with some expressing the feeling that perhaps something else should have been chosen but surfing.

“it doesn't represent the reality by far. It has potential because we have good beaches for surfing. We are promoting something that doesn't exist; we don't have the infrastructure, we are not prepared for it. We have beaches, we have waves, but apart from that, we have nothing. We are very basic. We don't have the conditions for those who come here to surf. Here we have Monte Verde with open sewage, but we also have Santa Barbara Beach, which is one of the most famous for surfing, and we don't have conditions. When the facilities close at 3 or 4 in the afternoon, there are no conditions. In the summer, they close at 6 or 7 in the evening, all the facilities, changing rooms, showers, everything closes, I don't think there are conditions” (Beach bar Owner, male).

“The only link you have here regarding surfing is that ridiculous toy on a surfboard. It's ridiculous! (..) You're transmitting something that is not real. You get here to Santa Barbara Beach and the only thing you have is the surf school, but you don't have anything else surf-related.”(Restaurant Owner, male).

As for destination personality, respondents find it young, and in development. As for brand awareness, this group was aware of the brand, but most of them did not advertise it in their businesses. This is mostly due to the fact that most respondents do not perceive the brand quite positively and are uncomfortable promoting it. It is important to recall their previously mentioned opinions on the current environmental conditions and lack of services, which adds to this attitude towards the brand.

Surf Businesses

Overall, this stakeholder group shared many of the same feelings and perceptions as the business community. Regarding the image and identity of Ribeira Grande, they mentioned the following: the sea; surfing; hiking trails; hot springs; the north coast; Lagoa do Fogo; nice sunsets; the sea life; summer; beautiful landscapes. They described the personality as: relaxed; traditional; a city with a rural feel; magic; enchanting; nice. From the interviews, it seems the surf schools, surf businesses and associations were consulted and participated in meetings regarding the development of the brand. All the respondents are aware of the brand, but feel that more needs to be done to promote this brand, especially strategies and initiatives from the municipal government, such as partnerships with businesses, merchandising with the logo “Capital do Surf” as souvenirs for visitors. In fact, this group had plenty of ideas and suggestions on how to improve the brand and better promote it, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

“There’s the name, the logo that appears in the city council’s mail, but I don’t see them doing much in terms of promotion” (...) I think there are no initiatives here to promote the destination. (...) Even with the surf competitions, we can see that it’s not very well advertised. Last year, there was a national competition, but they just stayed closed off. When it’s the world surf championship, it’s different. But you don’t see any billboards, no communication at all promoting the event; it exists, but only for a few. Only those who happen to go to the beach know that the event is happening. What could be done is to take advantage of the event and organize some activities so that people can watch the competition and have other things of interest to keep them there. There might be people who don’t surf but still want to watch, and if there’s something else to keep them there, I don’t know, there are various ways, they can learn from other surf destinations” (Surf shop Owner, male).

“I would add the word Azores somewhere in the slogan so people know where you are talking about. Most people in Europe and the US don’t know where Ribeira Grande is. ‘Ribeira Grande – Capital do Surf dos Açores’” (WSL Representative, male)

This group is also of the opinion that there needs to be more engagement with the brand and more involvement among different stakeholders, not just the surf community.

"I think there needs to be an exchange of ideas among the entities closest to surfing, including free surfers, those who don't have companies or clubs, and a sharing of opinions, so that being the capital of surf isn't just a name on a sticker or a t-shirt for a public servant, but goes beyond that. Starting with the coast, I know they are trying to address the issue of water quality. When we talk about surfing, it's not just about riding the surfboard; surfing is a whole world. There are dozens of sports related to surfing. Together, we can form a core of opinions that can create and make the title "Capital do Surf" a reality and help it grow" (Surf School Owner, Male).

Once again one of the most discussed issues when it came to Ribeira Grande's destination brand were the poor environmental conditions of Monte Verde Beach. This very group, very vested in surf tourism, seemed uneasy about the promotion of this brand, when there is a polluted beach in the heart of Ribeira Grande. They mentioned again the sewage problem and surfers getting bacteria from the contaminated seawater, but acknowledge that some work is being done, though very slowly, and that the surf community has been working with the local government and putting pressing on the local authorities to solve these serious problems.

"It's not just because of the sewage system, but also because of the fields, which are fertilized with manure and produce a terrible smell. If it rains, all that waste goes straight into the creek and the sea. Two years ago, we had the beaches closed for 2 days due to water contamination, with values 8,000 times higher than normal. These are things that were seen in the past and should not be seen in our times. Of course, the local government is trying to implement a a sewage system, laying down all the pipelines, but that's not enough because of all those agricultural fields and the fertilizers that end up in the sea" (Surf School Owner, male).

The same participant further explained:

"The rules of agriculture are still the same as they were 30 years ago. There is no oversight, no control, and tourists can feel this in the water. It's not visible what comes from the agricultural fields, but the houses on the beach are visible. There was a serious problem where the beach was closed last August for two days. How is that possible? There were some amazing waves. Some people were fined because they were not allowed to be surfing" (Surf School Owner, male).

Government

The respondents from this group found the image of Ribeira Grande to be associated with the following: the sea, the beaches; hiking trails; the landscape; the coast; nature; gastronomy; tea; and the festivals and events.

"The image of freedom. Despite not surfing myself, I have a great admiration for it. When I see young people on their boards, there's a sense of freedom

with adrenaline. The way they emerge from the sea with a relaxed expression is impressive. (...) I would say that the brand conveys the idea of change and irreverence" (Ribeira Grande City Council Staff, female).

"What identifies the brand's image is the sea. The logo itself doesn't say much to me. The true strength of this brand is the sea itself. Even though I'm not a surfer, when I arrive at the beaches, I immediately recognize surfing as a product and a distinctive image of Ribeira Grande. Even without a brand, Ribeira Grande is already the capital of surf" (Ribeira Grande City Council Staff, female).

Capturing the essence of a multi-attributed destination with a succinct and focused brand position that is both meaningful to the various target audiences and to stakeholders, while effectively differentiating the destination from competitors is a complex endeavour (Pike, 2005). Such is the case of the destination Ribeira Grande, with its multitude of natural and cultural attractions. This perception was evident in the opinion of one respondent:

"I don't believe that surfing is the only thing that characterizes Ribeira Grande. It's something that has been developed relatively recently and will need further development if that's the vision for the future. However, I don't think this would be the best approach. Ribeira Grande can't be defined by just one theme: we have the people, the trails, the sea, the gastronomy, and I don't think surfing is the most widely practiced sport by the locals. Perhaps out of 10 people, 3 might surf. I think it was more of a trend that developed and gained popularity because we saw others doing it. But if this is the vision we want for the future, then yes, it needs to be developed further" (Tourism Information Centre staff, female)

Perhaps this difficulty in identifying only surfing with the image Ribeira Grande (evident in the perceptions of all stakeholder groups) comes exactly from the variety of attributes. Surfing does differentiate the destination from other very similar destinations in the Azores. As for brand identity and personality, respondents describe it as authentic, welcoming, young, natural, and affable. The respondents representing the parishes did articulate the wish for more joint work between the municipal government and the parishes when it came to surf tourism or tourism in general. One respondent also noted the need for improved environmental quality, more services and a distribution of surf tourism throughout the destination, voicing the same concerns as the other stakeholder groups:

"The word Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf is a very powerful word. When we talk about the capital of something, we must have a differentiated service, and the differentiated service must always be a quality service in my view. (...) But to bet on Ribeira Grande as the surf capital, we must invest in the quality of the sea water. That is essential. We must invest in the entire waterfront area and in the redevelopment of that entire area. The issue of the seaside is crucial" (...) "I think the most important thing, if we want to be the capital of surf, is not to place a surfer in the middle of a fountain and call it the surf capital. We need to

create a series of infrastructures to become the surf capital and attract surfers here." (...) "There needs to be decentralization for Ribeira Grande to become the capital. Otherwise, the surf capital will be Conceição, where the beach is, or we could say it's Matriz, where the other beach is. We need to spread out a bit" (Parish Council President, male).

As the initiative to develop and promote the destination brand came from Ribeira Grande's Council, as such they are the main players in the marketing of the brand. In the interviews, they explained what is done to create brand awareness. One of the strategies is the existence of a van that has been turned into a mobile information centre to promote tourism in Ribeira Grande. It has a surf theme and, according to the respondents, it is present at almost all cultural and sporting events organized by the municipality. Moreover, during major surf events, this van is set up providing information to visitors. Other government-led brand promotional strategies are: having the brand logo on the local teams' football jerseys; local athletes who compete in surf competitions outside of the island and who are sponsored by the Council must have the logo and brand on their surfboard or equipment; a promotional video of the destination; the promotion of the brand in the Lisbon Tourism Fair (BTL). Some respondents have the perception that visitors hear of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination from word-of-mouth and from the live broadcasting of the surf competitions.

Final Remarks

According to the findings, most respondents were able to name the destination brand and logo of Ribeira Grande, except for the surf tourists, who are the actual target market of the brand and of surf tourism in the destination. Clearly, there is still much work to be done when it comes to brand awareness. From the interviews with the different stakeholders and from the analysis of their responses, it was possible to establish connections between the different points of views allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how stakeholders perceive the image, identity and personality of the destination. It was possible to ascertain that stakeholders view the image and identity of the destination not just as a destination of surfing, but as a destination of many attributes. Good beaches for surfing is just one of those attributes. The most used words to describe the image, identity and personality of the destination were: the sea, surfing, Lagoa do Fogo, development beaches, north coast, natural landscape, tea, calm, relaxed, welcoming, young. As with the other themes of the research findings, perceptions and opinions varied significantly within the same stakeholder group, although it was possible to find opinions in common

across all the groups. Despite the respondents suggesting words that can easily describe a surf destination, most respondents were highly critical of the relation brand name/image, at least for the time being, since not all conditions have been met to offer a high-quality surf tourism experience, partially due to the environmental conditions of Monte Verde Beach and to the lack of beach support infrastructure. Most respondents from all stakeholder groups felt that at the moment the destination brand Capital do Surf does not fully represent the image of Ribeira Grande, but can in the future with the proper attention given to its current weaknesses. The following section discusses the stakeholders' perceptions regarding the importance and competitiveness of the destination brand.

7.7 Destination Brand “Capital do Surf”: Importance and Competitiveness

As we have seen thus far, it is believed that one of the success factors of destination branding is the perception that stakeholders have regarding the destination. This is particularly important among certain stakeholder groups, namely the local residents, the local business community and the local government. The local government, responsible for the DMO, should be in charge of brand development, promotion and monitoring and hence must place importance in having a destination brand and in doing all it can to ensure its competitiveness. On the other hand, the business community must believe in the importance and competitiveness of the brand to help promote it and ensure there is a common vision among the group. Local residents, considered ambassadors of their hometown, must also believe in the perceived benefits of destination branding as their emotions and perceptions towards destinations and brands can influence brand ambassadorship and brand citizenship behaviour (Zhao et al. 2022). This section covers the perceptions of the different stakeholder groups regarding the importance and competitiveness of the brand “Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf”.

Local surfers

The findings reveal that overall local surfers support having this destination brand as it can contribute to the competitiveness of the destination and differentiate Ribeira Grande, although many areas for improvement were mentioned.

“it is through a brand that the product is advertised, and it's essential to have something visual that represents the ideology of Ribeira Grande as a tourist destination. Images and a brand leave more memory and have a greater impact than words” (Local Surfer, male).

“having a strong brand is crucial because that brand is what will set Ribeira Grande apart from other destinations and attract the type of tourists that Ribeira Grande aims to attract” (ASBA, male).

It was pointed out that the brand can be understood easily even to someone who does not speak Portuguese, because of the words ‘capital’ and ‘surf’ as well as because of the image of a surfboard and waves, which can be a competitive element. Most of the respondents find the brand to have great potential, but they agree that it needs to be improved, to have better promotional strategies, more stakeholder involvement, and better infrastructure.

“It needs to be worked on because it doesn’t make full use of the potential of Ribeira Grande; it could have a stronger connection with nature. This brand doesn’t set us apart from any other place in Portugal. In fact, there are many other renowned locations, notably Peniche, which could more easily claim that title. I believe the brand should focus on the unique aspects that Ribeira Grande possesses, which are not found anywhere else in the world” (Local surfer, male).

“In my assessment, I believe that at the municipal level, there will be interest and willingness to develop, although there is a lack of a strategic plan that establishes priorities and goals and involves all stakeholders. At the regional government level, apart from financial support for championships, I think there is a significant disconnect regarding both the promotion and the development of the potential of these sports. There is a lack of investment in infrastructure, improvement of access, beach support, and the areas where these sports are practiced, a greater focus on involving society at the school level, increased investment in a permanent lifeguard corps” (Local surfer, male).

According to several respondents, the brand is important and it can be competitive.

“Why not? It’s definitely good to have a brand but they just need to live up to it” (Local Surfer, female).

However, at the moment, participants find that surfers do not come to Ribeira Grande because of the destination branding. They think it is because of the surfers’ social media and the presence of the surf competitions, important, as we saw previously, for the promotion of the destination. They argue that once surf tourists are here, then they will find out about the brand and that will make it important for recommendations. Local surfers were also adamant that the poor environmental conditions must be met to be able to fully endorse the brand. They further note that there are still a lot of surf destination attributes that must be found in Ribeira Grande to make the brand more competitive, which will be covered in detail in the next section on stakeholder recommendations. Respondents voiced the following perceptions:

“I think it’s necessary to have the brand. The local council needs to do more, and essentially, they just need to replicate things from places where surfing is

highly present. It would be enough to go to Peniche or Ericeira and observe the kind of indicators that they have on the beach” (Local surfer and business owner, male).

Another perception is that it is important to market Ribeira Grande not just as a surf destination, but a surf destination and more. When the sea is not suitable for surfing, there is an array of adventure activities to be discovered in the destination that can be highly attractive to surfers, both water and land activities.

Surf Tourists

For surf tourists, destination branding affects tourist behaviour and emotions towards surf destinations, such as word of mouth, loyalty and satisfaction. Unfortunately as the participants from this group had never seen the brand before and were not familiar with it, they could not evaluate its importance or competitiveness. Nonetheless, based on their high satisfaction with the destination, it can be assumed that the destination brand has some competitiveness as surf tourists were satisfied with the experience, and according to their answer, they might return and would recommend it to others. The reasons the respondents gave for why they surfed in Ribeira Grande were varied and included: participation in a surf competition; visiting the island and taking a surf lesson; and some respondents always surf when they travel. Only three respondents answered that they had heard of Ribeira Grande and travelled to the destination for the sole purpose of surfing.

“I saw highlights of surf contests on social media from Ribeira Grande, which made me aware of the surf quality, and made me want to surf there”.

Residents

It is argued that destination branding influences residents’ place identification, place attachment, and support for tourism. In fact, residents are both key players and stakeholders in destination branding, and understanding stakeholder engagement in and perceptions of the destination branding process is primordial, as residents are informal, genuine and reliable sources of destination marketing and active proponents of destination branding who must become active co-creators in the destination branding process (Zhao et al., 2022). As such taking into consideration residents’ perceptions of the destination brand that was chosen for their hometown is fundamental for this study. The interviews revealed that the overall perception is that having a destination brand makes your destination stand out among competitors and attract more tourists.

“It’s still not a very well-known brand because it is still very recent, but it’s strong because it is diversifying and it ends up standing out in relation to other councils that have different images” (Local resident, female).

Nonetheless, the opinions were divided with some thinking that the Azores should be the brand and not individual places, and others finding a brand important for Ribeira Grande to stand out among similar places.

"The surf brand is a differentiating brand, but it's a brand that doesn't make sense because Ribeira Grande is very small. The Azores brand is already somewhat known. (...) Ribeira Grande can be the surf capital with more conditions and have potential within the Azores context" (Resident, male)

Some participants finding that destination branding should be an Azores wide effort, not just the work of a small municipality.

"The brand does have potential but it needs to be worked on. But I think it doesn't make sense for Ribeira Grande to do this alone, it should be a wider effort. Ribeira Grande is too small" (Resident, female).

Some respondents found that it was relevant for Ribeira Grande to have a destination brand as it was good for emphasizing the destination's personality and history of surfing, attracting a new market, and increasing overall tourism competitiveness.

"It seems to me like a wise and promising investment, considering the historical reality of surfing in Ribeira Grande, as well as the natural conditions for it. The fact that Ribeira Grande has a quite young population also contributes to the consolidation of this strategy" (Resident, male).

Just like local surfers, most participants of this group perceive the brand to have competitive potential but still needs a lot of work, especially when it comes to the destination attributes such as the environmental quality of the beaches, beach access in Monte Verde, beach infrastructure, and a surf tourism strategy.

"There needs to be promotion of the destination by the entrepreneurs. There must be a contribution from them. It can't just come from the municipality. It needs to come from the private sector with the city council, so that it has a positive impact. I don't see any promotion of the brand by the entrepreneurs. They could become brand partners" (Resident, female)

However, participants, especially the younger respondents in their 20s, did perceive Ribeira Grande to be a surf town and found the destination brand to be congruent, highly competitive and differentiating.

"It's distinctive because here we don't have any municipality that has dedicated itself to being a surf capital. And that's the reality. We may not have many local people who are into surfing, but at any time of the year, we look at the beaches and there's a surfer out there" (Resident, female).

As was seen in other sections of the research findings, there was an overall feeling that there is a lot of surfing going on in Ribeira Grande, but most of it is not done by

locals, who, in fact, are not emotionally connected to surfing. While locals have seen surfers since the 80s surfing their beaches, they have been mostly surfers from outside the municipality or even the island. Respondents argue that there needs to be more involvement from the local community in the world of surfing, by encouraging more local youth to take up the sport.

Business Community

While residents are the most affected stakeholders in destination branding, the local business community also plays an important role and their brand attitudes and perceived importance and benefits of tourism, in this case surf tourism, can have a significant influence in the competitiveness of a destination brand. Examining then the perceptions and attitudes of the local business community regarding the importance and competitiveness of the brand Capital do Surf is paramount, especially when other stakeholder groups perceive the local business community not to be very involved in the promotion of the brand.

“In terms of potential, the Ribeira Grande brand holds significant growth potential, especially with investments in tourist infrastructure, promotion, and the development of tourist activities. With increased awareness and visibility of the destination, it's possible to attract more tourists and generate more revenue for the local economy. (...) However, it's crucial that the marketing and promotional strategy remains continuous and well-targeted to achieve its objectives” (Beach Resort Sales Manager, male).

Some respondents were of the same opinion as the residents when it came to the branding of Ribeira Grande compared to the branding of the Azores in general.

“It's debatable. I don't know if it needs a specific brand. I think the Azores themselves already sell as a brand. This issue of municipalities creating brands is an effort at differentiation because there is a lot of competition. 90% of the people who visit São Miguel go to Ribeira Grande, but I highly doubt they know it's the capital of surfing. It's almost an internal strategy for local promoters. I don't think the image of Ribeira Grande as a surfing destination has caught on yet, in my opinion. But it's not a bad idea” (Business Owner-Lodging, male).

Destination branding complexity was further perceived in the respondents' answers, especially when they considered the multitude of general tourism attributes Ribeira Grande has to offer as well as the perception of a top-down approach to destination branding.

“This is a brand that stems from an internal effort of the local authorities. They identified it as a significant potential for Ribeira Grande because of the beaches. I understand the strategy. However, I believe that there is more to the municipality of Ribeira Grande, not to mention the orange production here in the orchards of Rabo de Peixe. But it's a good strategy” (Eco lodge Owner, male).

Nonetheless, the overall perception is that the brand is a good strategy that makes the destination stand out with a different tourism product.

"What sets us apart in all of this is surfing, and it's a winning bet that we have to keep developing. Because we have good conditions, good waves that the south coast doesn't have. But there are problems and things that need to be resolved" (Hotel Owner, male).

"It is important for Ribeira Grande to have a brand. It's a way of identifying it and standing out. It's not just about being Ribeira Grande-it's about Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf. It's a good marketing move" (Snack-bar Owner, male)

Sharing the same perspective as the residents, this stakeholder group argued that all in all it is an interesting marketing tool but that there is still a huge gap to be filled before the destination can brand itself as capital of surf.

"It was a good marketing move to take that name and put it on Ribeira Grande, but it was very premature. We need to work faster so that the existing problems don't tarnish the name that some already make fun of. It's like, 'Is it the surfing capital with all these problems?'" (Business Owner, male).

"The brand was a bit rushed, but I think it will make sense in the future. It will make sense because the coast has huge potential and together with sustainable tourism it is good marketing, no doubt, but in no way does it have all the conditions. Even surf tourism itself. People who come here are worried about sustainable tourism. And what do they see when they get here? Except for Tukátulá¹⁴, they go to Monte Verde and they feel like running. We don't have that vibe. But ok, things are done slowly, and I think it's important they have turned to the sea and surfing, because Ribeira Grande was all about the land, but it's still light years to be like other places. They used the brand as a calling card, but I don't think tourists feel deceived. With all the beauty of the island, it fills in the gaps of the weaknesses. But a well travelled surf tourist would never come here and say "this is the capital of surf", now way!" (Lodging Owner, male).

Surf Businesses

From the interviews with the surf business community, it is clear that the vast majority of stakeholders so far share the same view when it comes to the competitiveness of the destination brand. They believe it to be a strong and competitive brand, but at this moment it needs a lot of work on the ground and in terms of strategic promotion and marketing.

"I think it has potential, but it needs to be further explored. It's still not in its peak" (Surf shop owner, male).

Respondents noted that the brand has a lot of potential if there is more involvement, more strategic planning and more engagement from all stakeholders, and that there

¹⁴ Popular beach bar at Santa Bárbara Beach.

are so many opportunities for surf businesses and investment in Ribeira Grande. The perception was that the future can be quite promising for the surf destination.

“My current view is that it's a strong brand that needs to be enhanced. Looking to the future, I believe there are many opportunities here to grow in a sustainable way that encompasses various community niches. There are several opportunities here that can be seized for economic, social, and sports development. However, it's important that those making the decisions get involved in this cause, along with entities that have the knowledge and the desire to make things happen, because there are so many exciting things to be done” (Surf school, owner)

The findings also reveal the same concern with environmental issues, lack of infrastructure and the fact that waves in Ribeira Grande are not always consistent, which can be a weakness if a destination wants to brand it as the “surf capital”.

“The brand needs more work because I think Ribeira Grande is too focused on the surf competitions and then during the rest of the season, both in beach cleaning and pollution issues, there is little interest in continuing what happens during the competitions. I think it would be important as surfing is practiced year-round; there needs to be more promotion, more cleaning, and more dedication to the cause itself” (Surf school owner, male)

From the interviews, it was found that the surf businesses also believe it is important to have a destination brand and that the destination already has strong competitive advantages, such as the accommodations within walking distance to the beach.

“Yes, it is important to have a brand. It catapults and differentiates us from other places. Having something in our city that identifies us I think is something good” (Surf shop owner, male)

“From my point of view, Ribeira Grande is a surf town. People can leave their home with the board under their arms and go surfing. In Europe, there are very few places like this one. Ribeira Grande has grown so much from surfing but there is still so much to explore and work on” (Surf instructor, male)

Government

The government is a strong believer in the importance, potential and competitiveness of the brand. It was local political will that led to the branding of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination as a strategic move to differentiate Ribeira Grande but also to turn the city towards the sea. Locals have always been afraid of the north coast sea, but the vision of the current executive is that Ribeira Grande is a coastal sea with wonderful beaches and that this should be promoted and enhanced to make the destination more alluring and attract visitors. Given the excellent surf conditions and the surf competitions, the executive found it fitting to brand the municipality of Ribeira Grande “Capital do Surf”.

"I think it was very intelligent from the city council to call Ribeira Grande Capital do Surf because it is soundbyte that sells. "A very profitable bet for the present and the future, and it will put Ribeira Grande in the national spotlight."

It was very relevant to hear the perceptions of the parish council members as well. It was argued that more involvement is required, they should be more included when it comes to surf tourism questions and would like to see surf tourism be promoted all over Ribeira Grande and not be so centred in the city.

"It should be worked throughout the entire municipality, not just in the city of Ribeira Grande. It's important to have a brand, but let me tell you that Ribeira Grande has had a distinguishing brand for a long time, and this brand is called tea. We have the only two tea factories in Europe. Before being the capital of surfing, it should have been the capital of tea, but since it's not centralized in the city of Ribeira Grande, maybe surfing suits it better." (Parish Council President, male)

Another parish council president shared the same opinion urging the executive to look at the different parishes' potential and competitiveness as part of the destination brand strategy.

"And when we talk about the capital of surfing, there should be more events and not so concentrated in Ribeira Grande. The capital of surfing is the capital for whom? It's comprised of 14 parishes. We have to decentralize. Capital do Surf can't just be Monte Verde Beach. "

The urgent need to address the environmental issues brought by the polluted waters of the stream were also concerns raised by the parish council presidents, who mentioned that some already call the Capital do Surf- "the capital of poop and pee"- an expression that was heard also during the interviews with the residents and the local business community.

Final Remarks

As has been shown in this study, destination branding has become increasingly relevant for destinations as it creates brand equity, strengthens differences among competitors and enhances tourism destination competitiveness. This concept, of course, can be applied to surf destinations. Furthermore, destination branding is a powerful tool to achieve a competitive advantage that allows surf destinations to increase their attractiveness to surf tourists, enhance the place satisfaction of the local community, and boost economic growth for the local business community. As previously mentioned, stakeholders perceptions and attitudes towards a brand are key for the destination branding process and success.

The data collected through the interviews with the stakeholders suggests that the majority of respondents see having a destination brand as relevant for Ribeira Grande, distinguishing the destination and giving it a competitive advantage compared to other places in the Azores. All respondents agreed that there is a lot of work still to be done to make the brand more competitive and known. The next section ends the chapter on the research findings with the recommendations of stakeholders to make Ribeira Grande a more attractive and competitive surf holiday destination.

7.8 Stakeholders' Recommendations and Future Directions

Recommendations on how to enhance Ribeira Grande as a surf tourism destination and strengthen its destination brand were the last themes covered in the interviews with the stakeholders. After providing their perceptions on the development of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande, the destination's strengths and weaknesses, sustainability, and on the destination brand, respondents provided several suggestions in terms of initiatives and strategies to boost the competitiveness of the destination as a surf destination. The current section separately presents the perceptions of the study participants, followed by concluding remarks.

Local Surfers

As it has been shown throughout this chapter, it is clear that local surfers have mixed feelings about the local development of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande. On one hand, members of this stakeholder group understand the benefits that surf tourism can bring to the sustainable development of a destination and to the local community. On the other hand, most surfers fear the increase in the number of surf tourists as it would lead to crowd and poor surfing experiences for them. They do recognise, though, the need to improve Ribeira Grande if it wants to claim the title of 'capital do surf'. In the world of surfing, there is no one better to listen to than actual surfers. Following are their important perceptions and recommendations on how to improve the competitiveness of the destination. It is the most consensual idea among the local surfers that addressing the environmental issues of Monte Verde beach is the priority.

"There can't be any sewage discharge into the beach. While such discharges have occurred in the past, they are now strictly prohibited, especially due to the increased presence of people on the beach. Previously, people didn't frequent the beach as much. With the influx of visitors, aiming for a high-quality and sustainable destination, the standards of the sea, beach, and supporting facilities must be of high quality. You can't aspire to have sustainable tourism without maintaining the inherent quality associated with that type of tourism."

Monte Verde Beach is almost better than Santa Barbara Beach. It's conveniently located just 2 minutes from the town centre. (ASBA, male).

They suggest strengthening legislation and inspection of sites around the stream; constantly monitoring the environmental conditions and the adequate management of coastal areas, as well as the prohibition of food products with plastic near the beach. Respondents believe that in order to improve the overall surfing experience, there must be better regulation of surf schools; legislation and inspection; lockers for surfers to keep their personal belonging while surfing; board repair shops; regular bathroom and shower maintenance; year-round lifeguards and observation towers.

"Observation towers are necessary because with lifeguards present year-round, they need a sheltered structure where they can be protected from the weather, have communication facilities, and have equipment ready for rescue at any time. Here in Santa Barbara, as well as in Monte Verde, it is necessary to build lifeguard towers with a line of sight covering the entire coast to be able to intervene effectively. Since it's a surfing destination, this is mandatory and needs to be done" (ASBA, male).

Respondents also suggested a skatepark as surfers usually skate when the sea is unsuitable; improved beach access, safety, support in Monte Verde beach; and identifiers.

"Having an identifier there, even if the person doesn't surf, is interesting for them to know. People come with their children, they see the identifier, they search on Google and they find incredible images of the waves there. Everyone posts about those places. These identifiers would project surfing beyond Ribeira Grande" (Local surfer and business owner).

Local surfers also pointed out the need to improve the overall quality of services and amenities in Ribeira Grande.

"If you want to be attractive for surfers you have to think about what surf is all about. Surf is a lifestyle, they are longing for a healthy life, experience with nature. (...) A more modern approach to gastronomy concepts, especially at beaches" (Local surfer, female).

Respondents find that listening to stakeholders is key, and that there should be a more focused strategic marketing plan for surf tourism as well as the promotion of the destination brand by local businesses. Local surfers urge more joint work between companies, government entities and the population.

"Everyone must feel involved so that everyone can win, not just for now but for the future" (Local surfer, male).

According to participants, given the already observed incidents in the water with too many inexperienced surfers, the surfer code of conduct should be actively communicated by the surf schools to ensure a pleasant environment at local surf breaks. Very important to local surfers would be a high performance sports centre to

improve their surf level and attract more pro-surfers to their town who they could learn from.

Surf Tourists

The recommendations from this stakeholder group are crucial as they are the target market for surf tourism and have visited surf destinations having a bigger awareness of what makes a surf destination appealing and worthy of repeat visits. Surf tourists gave the following recommendations. It was believed that spot cameras for wave checks could help surfers know where to go. Improved facility management and the development of the entire coastline were also suggested, as well as more services in the developed areas (wellness, cafés, restaurants) and the development of the public transport system. Respondents suggested hosting national and international bodyboard competitions besides surfing competitions; holding a surf fair. Surf tourists would like more opportunities to connect locals and foreigners. Perhaps surf events should have a larger component that involves the locals. They recommend educating people about environmental protection, animals rights and sustainability; and suggest more frequent beach cleanups. Respondents also suggested stronger marketing and promotion efforts:

Residents

Residents believe that the overall involvement of the local population in surfing is low and that there is no surf culture. Respondents argue that to increase the number of local surfers, incentives and encouragement should be provided to local young people to engage in the sport. Residents would also like to see new surf tourism businesses open up, such as innovative cool cafés, that would encourage surf visitors to spend more time and money in Ribeira Grande. The same applies to more restaurants and lodging availability. It was also argued that there should be more international promotion of Ribeira Grande as a surf holiday destination, especially in countries with a lot of surfers. The perceptions of the interviewed residents are that more needs to be done among the business community to promote the brand. As with other stakeholder groups, residents also urge the need to improve the transportation system to reduce the number of rented cars and the need to constantly educate people on environmental protection. Heftier fines to those who pollute the stream and the natural areas of Ribeira Grande were also put forth.

“Surf is a state of mind, a way of being. I think that the municipality should reinforce the promotion of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination and as such it is fundamental to continue to focus on the quality of the supporting beach infrastructure, beach cleanups and safety, water quality and maintaining the

support given to surf competitions with greater visibility as well as encouraging the practice of surfing among the local population” (Local surfer, male).

Business Community

Respondents from this stakeholder group also stressed the need to tackle the environmental conditions. Stakeholders believe that strict monitoring, the application of fines and more education are required to effectively address this matter to reduce environmental impacts for the benefit of both the local community and visitors. More focus on the potential of Monte Verde beach was strongly encouraged.

“We should take a closer look at Monte Verde Beach. Not all cities have a beach in the city centre. If they can solve all the problems that beach has, in terms of infrastructure, sanitation, and everything else, that part is already facing the sea, we would have a valuable beach, and the Capital do Surf would greatly benefit from that beach” (Business Owner, male).

Another consensual recommendation was the need to create better infrastructure and services for surf tourists.

“In terms of infrastructure, completing the sewage system is crucial. It's not worth working on the surf brand while we're facing problems at the beaches. I strongly advocate for this: we have to address the problems first before we start working on the benefits and marketing. Being Capital do Surf with the problems we have can turn against us. (Business owner, male).

Once again, better promotion and marketing strategies from the municipal government were highlighted.

“The government will have to put more effort into promoting the destination as a surfing destination and more. There's always something very interesting to do because they might not have the ability to go to the sea, or sometimes the sea is rough and the person can't surf” (Surfer and business owner, male).

“On a marketing level, we should continue reaching areas where we haven't yet. We are working hard on national marketing, and we should expand to international marketing. There should be international marketing of Ribeira Grande. Those who visit us are more international than national. They have a different income” (Business Owner, male).

Surf Businesses

The surf business community, highly interested in the promotion of surf tourism emphasized as a priority the need to ensure the water safety and strong environmental standards at Monte Verde Beach. They urge better environmental monitoring and regulations. They would like to see more partnerships, more merchandising with the brand logo, and more local businesses involved in the promotion of the brand, even by simply having the logo in their establishment. They also recommend more regular beach clean-ups all year round, not just in the summer.

Government

Respondents believe in the efforts that have been carried out thus far in the promotion and development of Ribeira Grande as a surf tourism destination. It was argued that efforts and a focus in this type of tourism will continue in the future. Proof of this is the construction of the new wastewater treatment plant to prevent contaminated water discharges in Monte Verde beach. Future plans also involve development of the area around this particular beach, where future surf businesses will be able to set up. The government is also planning on having lifeguards and better beach infrastructure at Monte Verde in the near future. The commitment to environmental preservation and conservation were also expressed. It was also suggested that the 'secret' surfing spot (Santa Iria) be made known as it is a stunning location that would attract visitors to a smaller parish and contribute to its social and economic development. Proper beach access with a parking lot would be guaranteed and more visitors could see the beach and spend time in the parish.

Final Remarks

Respondents did not shy away from providing their recommendations to improving the destination as a surf destination to strengthen the brand and make it a true reflection of a sustainable and appealing surf destination, conveying a keen interest from all stakeholder groups in improving Ribeira Grande. As the destination is still in its infancy, there was no shortage of suggestions on initiatives, actions and strategies to improve its competitiveness and appeal as a surf town. The findings revealed that all respondents believe that the one determinant principle for the competitiveness of this surf destination is the need to address the environmental problems at one of the main beaches. This is crucial as a surf destination cannot attract tourist that will find a polluted beach and are unable to surf there due to poor safety conditions. Another determinant principle for the successful development of Ribeira Grande as a surf tourism destination is the development of services and infrastructure to meet the needs and interests of surf visitors.

Chapter 8- Conclusions

8.1 Main Conclusions and Recommendations

Surfing is a popular recreational activity that has created a profitable global surf tourism industry. Many coastal areas around the world have taken advantage of this activity and used their natural resources to develop the tourism product that is surf tourism, contributing to their economic development. Portugal has seen the development of several coastal areas, due to surfing. The Portuguese archipelago of the Azores also boasts suitable conditions for this activity and one particular destination, Ribeira Grande, has used its excellent waves as a competitive advantage and differentiating element to promote surfing. Currently branded the “Capital do Surf”, Ribeira Grande is rich in both natural attractions, natural resources, cultural heritage, and, of course, fantastic waves. Aiming to distinguish itself from other similar destinations in the Azores and attract a new market segment, Ribeira Grande has turned to surfing as a new and promising tourism product. In order to ensure success and competitiveness, research shows that destinations must continuously innovate, use their best resources and attributes and offer differentiating and unique tourism products and experiences.

As Ribeira Grande is still an infant when it comes to the development of its surf tourism sector, this research study found it pertinent to analyze the current situation of surf tourism in the destination to assess its potential in the competitiveness of the destination and in its sustainable development. Many surf destinations around the world have suffered negative impacts from surf tourism due to poor planning and management. Ribeira Grande, being in its early phases of tourism development, has all the tools and lessons, to be able to draw a sustainable path ensuring competitiveness and quality tourism, hence, the importance of this study. Important also in ensuring sustainable tourism development and destination competitiveness is the participation and involvement of all stakeholders in the tourism planning process. Only with stakeholders’ support and collaboration, can tourism development thrive. It was then key for this study to collect and understand the perceptions and opinions of different stakeholders to be able to paint a clearer picture of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande and all its adjacent themes. Many answers and insights have emerged from the data collected with the stakeholders. Stemming from such results, a set of final findings and conclusions is hereby presented, followed by the author’s

recommendations for the sustainable development and competitiveness of Ribeira Grande.

Surf tourism in Ribeira Grande is a recent phenomenon but one that has been increasing every year. The development of this type of tourism is welcomed by all stakeholders and it is seen as a positive contribution to the development of the destination. There are still many business opportunities within the surf tourism sector as currently Ribeira Grande does not have a substantial amount of surf businesses. Stakeholders provided several suggestions on types of businesses, such as surf hostels, cafés and surf souvenir shops.

The local municipal government is the main promoter of Ribeira Grande as a surf destination and as such has supported the hosting of national and international surf competitions, and has branded Ribeira Grande, “Capital do Surf”. It has been argued that competitive destinations have a strong level of support from the government and the fact that one of the main promoters of surfing is the local government already shows that the destination has the potential and tools to further develop successfully. Despite the commitment by the local government to continue to promote Ribeira Grande as a surfing destination, stakeholders did not shy away from praising the efforts, but also in pointing out weaknesses and crucial issues that need to be addressed. One of the main topics revealed in the interviews were the current environmental problems and dissonance between brand image and reality. Branding must not be a fabrication. If one is to advertise a destination as a surf destination, surf destination attributes must be ensured. It was found that, although Ribeira Grande offers many attributes, some of them are subpar, and some simply nonexistent, for example a surf vibe and culture. Findings revealed that Ribeira Grande needs to enhance some of its surf destination attributes (for example by improving the beach conditions, particularly in Monte Verde Beach, known for its poor environmental standards); create infrastructure and services to meet the needs and interests of surf tourists, and must unequivocally address the poor environmental conditions found in one of its main beaches. Before launching a destination brand, there must be a suitable preparation of the destination to ensure that the appeal and tourism experience is superior to competitors. Surf tourists cannot come to Ribeira Grande and find a contaminated beach. They cannot come and not find a surf hostel or a café that caters to them. It is not only about highlighting the unique characteristics of the destination. It is about ensuring the highest standards in the visitor experience and maintaining the brand’s promise. All stakeholders highlighted

the poor environmental conditions and neglect that have been unfortunate characteristics of Monte Verde Beach, a surfing beach in the centre of Ribeira Grande city. A competitive and appealing surf destination simply cannot market itself as “Capital do Surf” and have a contaminated beach. This was the most contentious issue found in the interviews and one that all stakeholders feel very strongly about.

At the moment of writing, the government has been working on addressing the environmental issues with the construction of a new sewage plant, firmly reiterating its commitment to environmental protection and sustainability. An interceptor is being built to collect the domestic wastewater, which will then be carried through the sewage system to the new water treatment plant. All stakeholders firmly believe that this is the main obstacle that needs to be solved and once this is tackled, Ribeira Grande’s future as a surf tourism destination will be prosperous and promising. Addressing the issue of environmental sustainability can already be said to be a positive aspect of surf tourism, as this has given a push to addressing the issue. Other important contributions of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande have been the decrease in tourism seasonality, the increased beach clean-ups and coastal area protections, the community development with investment in local infrastructure and services that enhance both the experience of tourists and the quality of life of residents. As surf tourism is still in its infancy, the findings did not reveal major negative impacts caused by surf tourism, except for some crowding during the busy summer months due to the number of visitors taking lesson, and a slight increase in the cost of living. This however may be due to tourism in general and not just to surf tourism.

Destination competitiveness and destination branding are closely linked. This research study also aimed to understand the stakeholders’ perception regarding the brand “Capital do Surf”. It was found that the destination selected a brand to differentiate it from competitors but unfortunately, most stakeholders, perceive it as a precocious move, albeit bold and strategic. Findings revealed that surf tourists were not aware of the brand and the other stakeholders argued that instead of starting from the bottom, by having all the necessary conditions for surf tourists, the brand process started from the top, i.e from the registration of the brand. They also felt that it was a top-down approach. It was argued that the brand is promoted without having the basis for it. Nonetheless, stakeholders see it as a strong and competitive factor in the marketing strategy of Ribeira Grande as it stands out from other destinations within the Azores and believe that once all conditions are set to meet the interests

and needs of surf tourists, as well as the environmental standards, there will be brand equity.

Based on the research findings and the perceptions of the stakeholders, the following recommendations are made to further increase the competitiveness and sustainable development of the destination:

- It is recommended that Ribeira Grande continue to tackle the water contamination issues of the stream leading to Monte Verde Beach and provide the necessary beach infrastructure for surfers, namely lifeguards year round, proper showers and bathrooms, as well as fix the access to the beach, making Monte Verde beach as appealing as Santa Bárbara Beach.
- Tourism planning and decision-making should involve stakeholders, including local residents. A bottom-up approach as well as consultation should be encouraged to avoid artificial destination image.
- Satisfaction questionnaires should be carried out among surf tourists to assess satisfaction, destination quality, and to measure the visitors' perceptions.
- A diversification of the surf tourism product should be offered. Suggestions are: adapted surfing; surf camps and holiday packages;
- Surf visitors should be encouraged to visit the municipality and not only stay close to the surf spots. This can be encouraged with the creation of a minibus system that takes visitors to different parts of the municipality.
- Marketing efforts should be strengthened with more international promotion in order to create more brand awareness. Destinations that offer direct flights to the Azores should be targeted. Strengthen strategic positioning. There should be merchandising of "Capital do Surf" for sale. Local investment should be encouraged to those wanting to open up surf-related businesses, such as surf hostels, cafés, souvenir shops.
- A high performance surf centre would also benefit not only local surfers and improve their level but would also encourage visitors to spend more time in the destination, fostering social exchanges and a surf culture.
- A surf destination management and marketing plan, using a variety of marketing mix strategies.
- A SWOT analysis of the destination's surf attributes must be carried out and continuous monitoring must be ensured to addresses any weaknesses.
- Foster a surf culture and vibe by involving the local population in surfing, particularly the younger generations. This can be done by building a sense of

community and engaging locals in activities like surfing workshops, free lessons, beach cleanups and conservation projects, surfing festivals that involve competitions, music, food and beach activities; charity surf events where participants raise money for the community.

- Provide more incentives for the locals to attend the surf competitions. This can be done by having food stands, music and other entertainment options to attract people to the beaches.
- Continue to educate the population on sustainability and environmental protection.

8.2 Research Limitations and Contributions of the Study

As this research study was able to count on the participation of sixty-two respondents representing different stakeholder groups, it was possible to obtain an overall perception on the different topics addressed and gain an insight into the differences and similarities of thought and opinion among the stakeholders. One research limitation of this study might be the fact that the researcher resides in Ribeira Grande and the case-study destination is a small place where many people know each other. Some of the respondents' answers might have been influenced because of this. The respondents might have feared their answers being shared with others and might have restricted their opinions, and some seemed to have wanted their answers shared. The study contributes to the academic debate on surf destination competitiveness seen from the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the development of surf tourism, branding and sustainable development. Moreover, this is the first study conducted on a surf destination in the Azores, contributing also to the literature on surf tourism development in Portugal.

8.3 Future Research

Although a qualitative study reveals significant insights, a quantitative study would also provide important data that could be quite useful in the development plan and marketing strategy of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande, especially among tourists. Hence, it would be interesting to conduct a quantitative study among surf visitors to Ribeira Grande. This could be done in different times of the year to establish patterns and differences. Their answers could be quite valuable. A study on the economic value of surf tourism in the Azores would also be pertinent.

References

- Aguilar, A., G., Guillen, M.J., Y. & Roman, N., V. (2016) Destination brand personality: An application to Spanish Tourism, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 18(3): 210-219
- Ahn, Y. (2022) City branding and sustainable destination management, *Sustainability*, 14(1), 9
- Almeida, P. (Coord.). (2020) Gestão de destinos turísticos. Politécnico de Leiria
- Almeyda-Ibanez, M, & George, B.P. (2017) The evolution of destination branding: A review of branding literature in tourism, *Journal of Tourism, Heritage and Services Marketing*, Vol. 3, Iss. 1, pp. 9-17
- Alves, L., Carvalho, &., Filipe, S. (2022) O branding de destino e de cidades: a marca Viseu, ICIEMC Proceedings, No. 3, Universidade de Aveiro, 22-29
- Angelevska-Najdeska & Rakicevik, G (2012) Planning of Sustainable tourism development, *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences* 22, 210-220
- Araujo, C., Martins, F., Breda, Z. (2016) The development of surf tourism and its impact on the sustainable development of a coastal destination: The case of Matosinhos, Conference Paper
- Arroyo, M., Dietz, M., Hodges & Gallegos, D.S. (2021) The Azores, Portugal: Identification and profiling of surf ecosystems for inclusion in Azorean marine protected areas, Save the Waves Coalition
- Barbieri, C. & Sotomayor, S. (2013). Surf Travel behavior and destination preference: An application of the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure, *Tourism Management* 35, 111 – 121
- Bianchi, R., V. & de Man, F. (2021) Tourism, inclusive growth and decent work: a political economy critique, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 29, Issue 2-3, 353-371
- Bicudo, P. & Horta, A. (2009) Integrating surfing in the socio-economic and morphology and coastal dynamic impacts of the environmental evaluation of coastal projects, *Journal of Coastal Research*, SI 56 (proceedings OF THE 10TH International Coastal Symposium), Lisbon, Portugal
- Blain, C., Levy, S. & Ritchie, J.R. (2005) Destination Branding: Insights and practices for Destination management organizations, *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 43, 328-338
- Boluk, K, A., Cavaliere, C.T. & Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2019), *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 27-Issue 7, 847-864
- Bornhorst, T., Richie, J. R. B., & Sheehan, L. (2010) Determinants of tourism success for DMOs & Destinations: an empirical examination of stakeholders' perspectives, *Tourism Management*, 31 (5), 572-589

- Buckley, R.C, Guitart, D. & Shakeela, A. (2017) Contested surf tourism resources in the Maldives, *Annals of Tourism Research* 64, 185-199
- Buckley, R. (2002) Surf Tourism and Sustainable Development in Indo-Pacific Islands-The Industry and the Islands, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10 (5), 405-424
- Buhalis, D. (2000), Marketing the competitive destination of the future, *Tourism Management* 21(1), 97-116
- Butler, R.W. (1999) Sustainable tourism: A state-of-the-art review, *Tourism Geographies*, 1:1, 7-25
- Byrd, E. (2007) Stakeholders in sustainable tourism development and their roles: Applying stakeholder theory to sustainable tourism development, *Tourism Review* 62 (2): 6-13
- Caldeira, F. (2022) Brand Equity de Destinos Turísticos: A marca de destino turístico Algarve (Master's Thesis), Universidade de Coimbra
- Cale, T. (2012) O surf como potencial produto turístico nos Açores, Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril
- Chon, K.S. (1990) The role of destination image in tourism: A review and discussion. *Tourist Review*, 45 (2): 2-9
- Christou, E., Chatzigeorgiou, C. & Simei, I. (2018) Destination Branding and visitor loyalty: The case of agrotourism, *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*
- Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations
- Dolnicar, S. & Fluker, M. (2003) Who's riding the wave? An investigation into demographic and psychographic characteristics of surf tourists, University of Wollongong
- Dwyer, L. & Kim, C. (2003) Destination Competitiveness: Determinants and Indicators, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 6:5, 369-414
- Earth Check (2019) The Azores-the world's first certified archipelago <https://earthcheck.org/news/the-azores-the-worlds-first-certified-archipelago/>
- Ectner, C.& Ritchie, J.R.B (1991) The meaning and measurement of destination image. *Journal of Tourism Studies*, 2 (2), 2-12
- Ekinci, Y., & Hosany, S. (2006) Destination Personality: An application of brand personality to tourism destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45 (2), 127-139
- European Travel Commission (2019) Report on European Sustainability schemes and their role in promoting sustainability and competitiveness in European Tourism, ETC
- Fong, S., M. Lo (2015) Community involvement and sustainable rural tourism development perspectives from the local communities. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 11, 125-146

- Gautam, V. (2022) Why local residents support sustainable tourism development? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*
- Gouveia, D. (2013) Perfil e motivação dos turistas praticantes de surf na escolha do destino Algarve (Master's Thesis), Universidade do Algarve
- Grauweihler, H. (2022) Surfing Santa Barbara on the Azores-Ribeira Grande's Finest, *Surfers Hangout*
- Grauweihler, H. (2022) Exploring Europe's Hawaii-Surfing on the Azores, São Miguel, *Surfers Hangout*
- Gunawijaya, J. & Pratiwi, A. (2018) How local community could contribute to the tourism development in rural area?, *KnE Social Sciences* 3 (11): 826
- Hall, C., M., (2019) Constructing sustainable tourism development: The 2030 agenda and the managerial ecology of sustainable tourism, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 27, No. 7, 1044, 1060
- Hanna, S., Rowley, J. & Keegan, B. (2021) Place and Destination Branding: A review and conceptual mapping of the domain, *European Management Review*, Vol. 18, 105-117
- Hritz, N. & Franzidis, A. (2018) Exploring the economic significance of the surf tourism market by experience level, *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management* 7, 164-169
- Jalilvand, M. R. (2010) Destination branding and tourists' attitudes (The case of Isfahan as a Tourism Destination in Iran), *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2
- Jeuring, J., H., G. & Haartsen. T. (2017) Destination branding by residents: The role of perceived responsibility in positive and negative word-of-mouth, *Tourism Planning & Development*, 14:2, 240-259
- Jorge, J.P. & Leandro, S. (Coord.)(2015) Estudo do impacto do Moche Rip Curl Pro Portugal 2015, GITUR-Grupo de Investigação em Turismo/ Instituto Politécnico de Leiria
- Jurowski, C. (2011) Tourism Development and Destination Community Residents, *Destination Marketing and Management: Theories and Applications* (pp. 284-299). Wang, Y., & Pizam, A. (Eds.). (2011). *Destination marketing and management: Theories and applications*. Cabi.
- Kasapi, I., & Cela, A. (2017). Destination branding: A review of the city branding literature. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(4), 129.
- Knaap, C. & Vanneste, D. (2021) Issues of Conflict Management in a Context of Increasing surf tourism, *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 65-82
- Korossy, N.; Holanda, L.A. & Cordeiro, L.D. (2022) Gestão de destinos turísticos: aspectos conceituais. *Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa em Turismo*, São Paulo, 16, e-2609

Koutoulas, D. (2004) Understanding the Tourist Product-Interim Symposium of the Research Committee on International Tourism

Lazarow, N. (2007) The value of coastal recreational resources: a case study approach to examine the value of recreational surfing to specific locales, *Journal of Coastal Research* SI 50, 12-20

Lazarow, N., Miller, M.L. & Blackwell, B. (2009) The value of recreational surfing to society, *Tourism in Marine Environments*, Vol. 5, Nos. 2-3, pp. 145-158

Leal, C. (2023) Surf em ilhas atlânticas, sinais dos tempos, Crónica-Azores 2027

Lemarié, J. & Domann, V. (2019) Branding Huntington Beach, Surf City USA: Visitors, residents, and business, *Society and Leisure*, 42 (3), 401-419

Liu, Z. (2003) Sustainable Tourism Development: A Critique, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 11 (6), 459-475

Lopes, J. T. & Bicudo, P. (2016) Surfing Tourism Plan: Madeira Island Case Study, *European Journal of Tourism Research* 16, 45-56

Ma, W., Schraven, D., Bruijne, M., de Jong, M. & Lu, H. (2019) Tracing the origins of place branding research: A bibliometric study of concepts in use (1980-2018), *Sustainability*, 11(11), 2999

Mach, L. & Ponting, J. (2018) Governmentality and surf tourism destination governance, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26 (11), 1845-1862

Machado, V., Carrasco, P., Contreiras, J.P., Duarte, A.P. & Gouveia, D. (2018) Governing locally for sustainability: Public and private organizations' perspective in surf tourism at Aljezur, Costa Vicentina, Portugal, *Tourism Planning & Development*, 15 (6), 692-704

Martin, S.A. & Assenov, I. (2008) Interdisciplinary approaches toward sustainable surf tourism in Thailand, 1st PSU Sustainability Conference, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket, Thailand

Martin, A. & Assenov, I. (2012) The genesis of a new body of sport tourism literature: A systematic review of surf tourism research (1997-2011), *Journal of Sport Tourism* 17 (4)

Martin, S. & A. and Assenov, I. (2014) Investigating the importance of surf resource sustainability indicators: Stakeholder perspectives for surf tourism planning and development, *Tourism Planning and Development*, 11 (2), 127-148

Martins, S. (2019) The Impact of surfing on Tourism in Portugal (Master's Thesis) Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Milicevic, K. (2016) Destination branding as a competitiveness factor: Case of Croatia, University of Ljubljana

Milicevic, K., Mihalic, T. & Sever, I. (2017) An investigation of the relationship between destination branding and destination competitiveness, *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 34:2, 209-221

Mitropoulou, A. & Ioannis, S. (2020) From insularity to islandness: The use of place branding to achieve sustainable island tourism, *International Journal of Islands Research*: Vol.1:Iss. 1, Article 5

Mohamed, B. (2019). Exploring place branding: State of the art and future research directions. *China-USA Business Review*, 18(2), 23-33.

Morgan, N.J., Pritchard, A. & Piggott, R. (2003) Destination branding and the role of the stakeholders: The case of New Zealand, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 285-299

Moutinho, L., Dionisio, P. & Leal, C. (2007) Surf tribal behaviour: a sports marketing application, *Marketing intelligence and Planning*

Município da Ribeira Grande (2021) Plano Estratégico Ribeira Grande 2030, Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação

Município de Peniche (2017) Peniche primeiro destino de surf no mundo a caminho da certificação de turismo sustentável

Nazli, M. & Musal, R.M. (2018) Surf Tourism Development: Perspectives in Alaçati Surf Spot, *Business and Management Studies* Vol. 6 (2): 390-409

Neves, P.F. (2021) A economia local do surf e o desenvolvimento de pequenas cidades-O caso de Peniche (Master's thesis), Universidade de Lisboa

O'Brien, D. & Ponting, J. (2013) Sustainable Surf Tourism, *Journal of Sport Management*, 27, pp. 158-172

OECD (2020) Tourism Trends and Policies: Chapter 3. Rethinking tourism for sustainable growth

Pereira, R.L.G., Correia, A.L. & Schutz, R.L.A. (2012) Destination branding: A critical overview, *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 13:2, 81-102

Perkins, R., Khoo-Lattimore & C., Arcodia, C. (2020) Understanding the contribution of stakeholder collaboration towards regional destination branding: A systematic narrative literature review, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 43, 250-258

Pike, S. (2005) Tourism destination branding complexity, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14 (4): 258-9

Pike, S. (2008) Destination Marketing: An integrated marketing communication approach, Elsevier

Ponte, J.C., Couto, G., Pimentel, P., Sousa, A. & Oliveira, A. (2021) Municipal Tourism Planning in an Island territory: The case of Ribeira Grande in the Azores, *Tourism Planning & Development*, 18:3, 340-364

Portugal, A., Campos, F., Martins, F. & Melo, R. (2017) Understanding the relation between serious surfing, surfing profile, surf travel behaviour and destination attributes preferences, *European Journal of Tourism Research* 16, 57-73

- Qu, H., Kim, L.H. & Im, H.H. (2011) A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image, *Tourism Management* 32(3), 465-476
- Raybould, M., Anning, D., Ware, D. & Lazarow, N. (2013) Beach and surf tourism and recreation in Australia: Vulnerability and adaptation, Bond University
- Reis, P. & Jorge, J.P. (2012) Surf tourism: segmentation by motivation and destination choice, Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Tourism Recreation, ESTM
- Reis, P., Caldeira, A. & Carneiro, M.J. (2022) Can surf culture foster loyalty towards surf destinations?, *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 26 (4), 387-407
- Reis, P.M. & Carneiro, M.J. (2022) Surf Destination Attributes, *Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing*, 295-299
- Ren, C.B. (2016) Qualitative research, tourism. In J.Jafari, & H.Xiao (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Tourism* (pp.1-4). Springer Publishing Company
- Reynolds, I. (2021) Reconsidering place branding: “connecting the dots” between placemaking, policy making and sustainable development, *Welsh Economic Review*
- Ritchie, J.R.B. & Crouch, G.L. (2011) A Model of Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability, *Destination Marketing and Management: Theories and Applications*, 326 - 339
- Román, C., Borja, A., Uyarra, M. & Pouso, S., (2022) Surfing the waves: Environmental and socio-economic aspects of surf tourism and recreation, *Science of the Total Environment* 826, 154122
- Rosa, S., Anjos, F.A., Pereira, M.L. & Arnhold, M. (2019) Image perception of surf tourism destination in Brazil, *International Journal of Tourism Cities*
- Ruiz-Real, J.L., Uribe-Toril, J. & Gázquez-Abad, J.C. (2020) Destination branding: Opportunities and new challenges, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 17, 100453
- Ruttenberg, T. (2022) Alternatives to development in surfing tourism: A diverse economies approach, *Tourism Planning & Development*
- Ruzzier, M., K, Antoncic, B. & Ruzzier, M. (2014) Cross-Cultural model of customer-based brand equity for a tourism destination, IUP
- Ryan, M. & Mizerski, K. (2010) Place branding for sustainable futures: A case study, *Place Branding and public Diplomacy* 6(1), 49-57
- Sharma, A, Pulido-Fernández, J.I., & Hassan, A. (2020) Sustainable Destination Branding and Marketing: Strategies for Tourism Development, CABI
- Silva, C., Seabra, C., Abrantes, J.L. & Faias, C. (2014) Motivations, involvements and place-attachment in surf tourism, *Revista Turismo e Desenvolvimento*, No. 21/22

Springwald, S., Jorge, J.P, Ramos, D. & Viana, A.S (2019) Environmental awareness of surf tourists: the case study of Peniche, Portugal, Proceedings Book-IX International Tourism Congress, Funchal

STOKE (2023) <https://www.stokecertified.com/criteria/surf/>

Streimikiene, D., Svagzdiene, B., Jasinskas, E.& Simanavicius, A. (2020) Sustainable Tourism Development and Competitiveness: The systematic literature review 29: 1, 259-271

Surfer Today (2017) Peniche is the world's first sustainable surf destination <https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/peniche-is-the-worlds-first-sustainable-surf-destination>

Tantamjarik, P. A. (2004) Sustainability issues facing the Costa Rica surf tourism industry, University of Hawaii

Tasci, A. (2011) Destination Branding and Positioning, *Destination Marketing and Management: Theories and Applications*, 113 - 129

Teixeira, A. (2017), The Sustainability of Surfing Tourism Destinations: A case study of Peniche, Portugal, Politécnico de Leiria

Towner, N. & Orams, M. (2016) Perceptions of surfing tourism operators regarding sustainable tourism development in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia, Asia Pacific *Journal of Tourism Research*, 21:11, 1258-1273

Towner, N. & Milne, S. (2017) Sustainable surfing tourism development in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia: Local stakeholder perspectives, *Tourism Planning & Development*, 14:4, 503-526

Towner, N. (2018) Surfing tourism and local stakeholder collaboration, *Journal of Ecotourism*, 17:3, 268-286

Turismo de Portugal (2017), Estratégia de Turismo 2027-Liderar o Turismo do Futuro

Tsai, H., Song, H. & Wong, K.F. (2009) Tourism and Hotel Competitiveness Research, *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 26:522-546

United Nations (2023) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organisation (2005) Making Tourism more sustainable: A guide for policy makers, UNEP and WHO

United Nations World Tourism Organization (2007) A practical guide to tourism destination management, Madrid, WTO

United Nations World Tourism Organization (2023) Tourism on track for full recovery as new data shows strong start to 2023, UNWTO

UNWTO (2022) World Tourism Organization, Sustainable Development

Ushakov, D., Ermilova, M. & Andreeva, E. (2018) Destination branding as a tool for sustainable tourism development (The case of Bangkok, Thailand), *Espacios*, Vol. 39, No. 47

Usher, L. & Kerstetter, D. (2014) Residents' perceptions of quality of life in a surf tourism destination: A case study of Las Salinas, Nicaragua, *Progress in Development Studies* 14 (4), 321-333

Wang, Y. (2011) Destination Marketing and Management: Scope, Definition and Structures, *Destination Marketing and Management: Theories and Applications MA: CABI*, 1-20

Wang, H., Yang, Y. & He, W. (2022) Does value lead to loyalty? Exploring the important role of the tourist-destination relationship, *Behavioural Sciences*, 12(85), 136

Wilson, E. & Hollinshead, K. (2015) Qualitative tourism research: Opportunities in the emergent soft sciences, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Volume 54, pp. 30-47

World Surf League (2021) Essentials: What you need to know about the 2021 Azores Airlines Pro

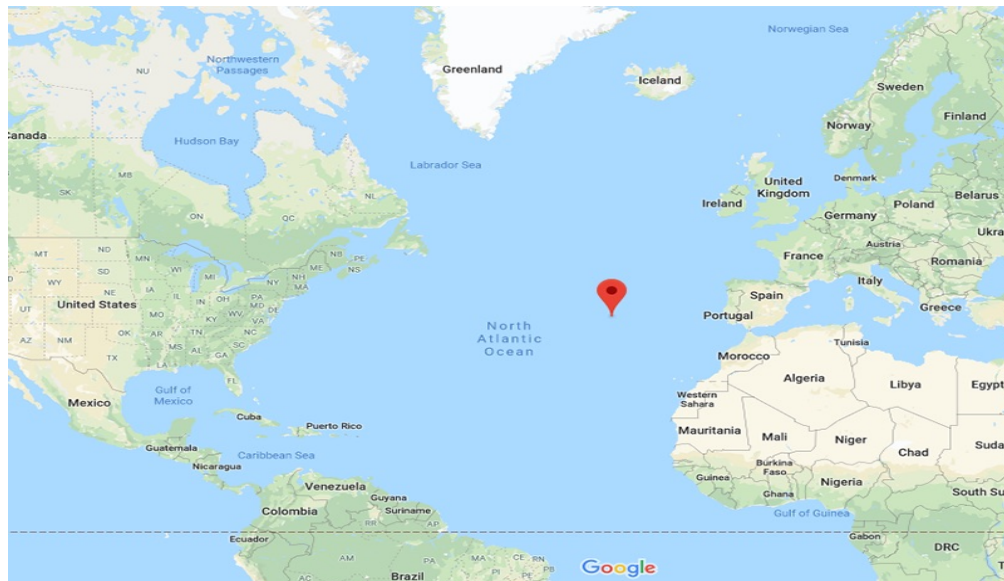
Wray, M., Dredge, D., Cox, C., Buultjens, J., Hollick, M., Lee, D., Pearlman, M., & Lacroix, C. (2010) Sustainable regional tourism destinations: Best practice for management, development and marketing. Queensland: CRS for Sustainable Tourism

Zhao, Y., Cui, X., Guo, Y. (2022) Residents' Engagement Behavior in Destination Branding, *Sustainability* 14 (10), 5852

Zouganeli, S., Trihas, N., Antonaki, M. & Kladou, S. (2012) Aspects of sustainability in the destination branding process: a bottom-up approach, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 21 (7), 739-757

Appendices

Figure 1: Location of the Azores



Source: Google Maps

Figure 2: The Archipelago of the Azores



Source: www.geology.com

Figure 3: Location of Ribeira Grande on São Miguel Island



Source: iac-azores.org

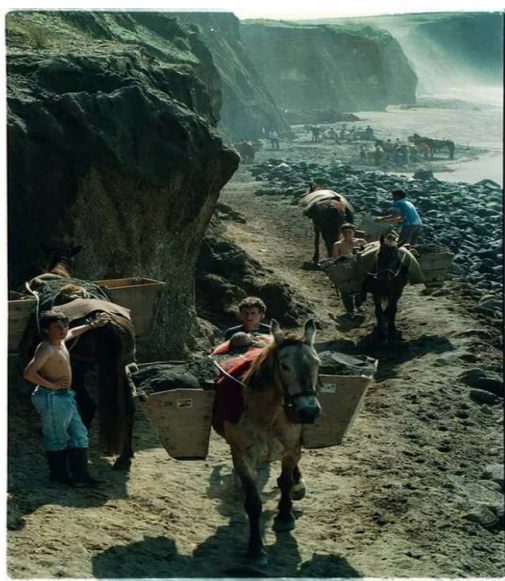


Figure 4: Santa Bárbara Beach in the 1980s

Source: Rui Correia



Figure 5: Santa Bárbara Beach in 2023

Source: The Author

Figure 6: Capital do Surf-Brand Name and Logo



Source: Câmara Municipal da Ribeira Grande

Table No. 2- Tourism Indicators for Ribeira Grande

Years	2016	2021	2022
Lodging capacity in tourist accommodation establishments and type	206	702	N/A
No. Nights in tourist accommodation establishments	20 326	99 520	144 196
No. of Guests in tourist accommodation establishments	4763	27 292	39 522

Source: National Statistics Institute (INE)

Table No. 3: Ribeira Grande-Surf Destination Attributes

Categories	References	Ribeira Grande
Surf-related attractions	Waves (quality, variety, consistency, quantity)	✓
	Good conditions for surfing (uncrowded destination, spots, waves, weather)	✓
	Good climate	✓
	Diversity of surf spots	✓
	Secret spots	✓
	Long surf season	✓
	Surf sponsors	✓
	Surf tours	✓
	Surf beaches (variety, quality, beauty)	✓
	Surf competitions and surf events	✓
	Surf culture and a surf-related way of life: environment/atmosphere/surf spirit/surf community/local surf culture/presence of surfers/surf rituals	x
Other attractions	Natural attractions	✓
	Historical and cultural heritage	✓
	Other leisure/recreational activities	✓
	Other tourist attractions	✓
	Nightlife	
Local surf industry	Surf Shops	✓
	Surf brands	
	Rental of surf-related products	✓
	Surf schools	✓
	Surf accommodation	✓
	Surf food and beverages	
Other destination elements	Good atmosphere (welcoming, sporty, relaxing)	✓
	Likeminded people	x
	Reputation/fashion of the destination	x

	Opportunity to meet surfers, non-surfers and the local community	
	Friendliness of the local community	✓
	Local culture	✓
	Safe and healthy destination	✓
	Good value for money	✓
Accessibility	Beach accessibility	✓
	Destination Accessibility	✓
	Proximity to accommodation	✓
	Proximity to urban centre	✓
	Infrastructure such as roads	✓
Infrastructure and support equipment	Lockers for storing personal belongings	x
	Beach changing rooms	✓
	Places to wash materials	✓
	Beach concession area (lifeguard, food and drink, children's play area, etc)	✓
	Car parks	✓
	Walkways	✓

Source: The Author (adapted from Reis & Carneiro, 2022)

Table No. 4- Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder	Importance + Influence	Interests + Needs	Alliances+ Conflicts	Impacts	Engagement Strategies
Local Surfer	-expert knowledge -cultural connection -foster community integration and engagement -promotion of the destination -surfing preservation	-preserving surf culture -ensuring access to waves	-Alliances: surf tourists, local government , surf businesses Conflicts: surf tourists	-resistance to surf visitors	-more involvement in surf tourism planning -more government support for local surfers -High Performance Sports Centre -Surfing clinics and workshops
Surf Tourists	-revenue generation -environmental awareness -diversification of the economy -infrastructure development and improved facilities -cultural exchange -drivers of the surf tourism market	-access to quality waves -enjoyable surf experiences -sustainable environment	Alliances: local government and surf businesses (marketing and promotion on social media/word of mouth) Conflicts: local surfers	overcrowding gentrification	-targeted marketing efforts -quality tourism experiences -surfing merchandise and apparel
Residents	-support or opposition to surf tourism	-economic benefits -job opportunities - environmental protection	Alliances: local surfers, local government Conflicts: surf tourists	-lack of support -poor engagement	-invite locals, especially the youth, to try surf lessons, attend the surf competitions by hosting social events that foster exchange between surfers and locals -Surfing festivals (surf, music, food and beach activities)/ Surfing

					photography exhibitions
Business Community	-shape the tourism experience (restaurants, hotels, tourism operators)	-increased sales	Alliances: surf businesses	-lack of support	-business partnerships
Surf Businesses	- shape the surf tourism experience -promotion -sustainable practices	-positive local economy -profitability -attracting surfers -providing quality services	Alliances: surf tourists (social media promotion), local government , business community Conflicts: other surf businesses (unfair competition)	-poor engagement -poor relationship between surf businesses	-business partnerships -government support
Government	-infrastructure -environmental policies -destination marketing and management	-economic growth -tourism revenue	Alliances: all stakeholders Conflicts: locals, local surfers, surf businesses	-support or lack thereof	-business partnerships

Table No. 5- SWOT Analysis Surf Tourism in Ribeira Grande

Strengths

- Mild climate
- Warm water temperature (16-22 degrees Celcius)
- Favourable conditions for water sports
- Excellent wave quality
- High quality beaches
- National and international surf competitions
- No crowd
- Located in the Azores- awarded as a sustainable archipelago
- Year-long lifeguards in Santa Barbara beach
- Located in a stunning island of natural beauty with numerous attractions and activities
- Free surfboard transportation on SATA (Azores Airlines)
- 15-minutes drive from Ponta Delgada (the main city of the island)
- friendliness of the local population
- Reasonably priced accommodation

Opportunities

- Destination brand Ribeira Grande-Capital do Surf (external marketing opportunities as a surf spot)
- Low number of local surf schools
- Job creation
- Investment opportunities (lodging, restaurants, bar, etc)
- High Performance Surf Centre
- Beach classification according to surf characteristics
- Protect the coastal areas and raise environmental awareness
- Destination competitiveness though surf tourism
- Sustainable tourism development
- Adapted surfing
- Surfer support infrastructures: skatepark; lockers
- Surfing holiday packages

Weaknesses

- Climate (prone to storms)
- Crowd in Santa Barbara during the summer months due to the surf schools
- Tourism seasonality
- Low number of surf guest houses/hostels
- Low number of restaurants and beach bars
- Water pollution in Monte Verde beach
- Poor access to Monte Verde
- Only two accesses to Santa Barbara beach
- Lack of beach infrastructure in Monte Verde
- Lack of a surf culture and vibe
- Low number of local surf schools
- Lack of nightlife
- Poor transportation network inside the municipality
- Drug addiction
- Sites of social degradation

Threats

- Storms and hurricanes
- Climate change
- Increased number of tourists on surf spots (crowd)
- The development of over-dimensioned and inharmonious projects that can hinder the landscape
- Sea pollution
- Reduction in the number of flights to the island

Source: The Author

Appendix 1- Script for the interviews

These were the general questions that were asked to all stakeholders. As this was a qualitative study, the researcher was able to ask further questions based on the respondent's answers and on the stakeholder group. This is one of the advantages of using open-ended interview questions. Some scale-based questions were used as well.

- 1) When you think of the image of Ribeira Grande, what is the first word that comes to your mind? What about the personality of the destination?
- 2) Do you know the destination brand of Ribeira Grande? If so, what is it and where have you seen it?
- 3) What is your opinion and perception about the development of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande?
- 4) What challenges, problems and impacts do you identify with the development of this type of tourism?
- 5) Do you feel involved in surf tourism decision-making? If so, what is your participation?
- 6) How can surf tourism contribute to the economic, social and environmental sustainable development of Ribeira Grande?
- 7) What is your opinion and perception of the destination brand of Ribeira Grande?
- 8) Do you consider the brand of Ribeira Grande, based on sustainability and on surf tourism, to be a strong and identifying brand? If yes, why?
- 9) What is your perception regarding the local community involvement in surf tourism and their support for this type of tourism?

- 10) Do you find that the local and regional entities attend to the needs of surf tourism in Ribeira Grande? What could be improved?
- 11) In your opinion, how can the interaction between the local population, public entities and business community contribute to the identity of the brand Ribeira Grande?
- 12) What would you suggest, in terms of actions, initiatives and structures, to make Ribeira Grande a more sustainable and competitive surf destination and enhance its brand?
- 13) How would you evaluate the number of surf tourists in Ribeira Grande?
Very few surf tourists 1 2 3 4 5 Many surf tourists
- 14) How would you classify the amount of surf businesses in Ribeira Grande (e.g. surf schools, shops, hostels,...)
Very low 1 2 3 4 5 Very high
- 15) How would you classify the quality of the beach infrastructure in Ribeira Grande (e.g. showers, bathrooms, changing rooms, ...)?
Very poor 1 2 3 4 5 Very good
- 16) What do you think is the importance of surf tourism for Ribeira Grande?
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 Very important

Local Surfers and Surf Tourists were also asked the following questions.

- Why did you choose to surf in Ribeira Grande?
- Briefly describe the surf breaks where you surfed.
- Briefly describe your overall surfing experience in Ribeira Grande.
- Would you recommend Ribeira Grande to other surfers? Why?/Why not?