

**Surfing waves and territorial transformation:  
the impact of surf culture on the socioeconomic  
and identity landscape of Anza, Agadir**

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**Abstract.** *This study examines the transformative impact of surf culture on the coastal district of Anza, located in Agadir, Morocco. Once known for its fishing and agricultural activities, Anza has undergone a significant shift in recent years, becoming a growing surf destination. Using a quantitative approach based on questionnaires distributed to surfers and local residents, the study explores how surfing influences the region's territorial identity, economy, and community relations. The results reveal positive economic impacts, notable identity changes, but also challenges such as overcrowding, environmental pressures, and insufficient infrastructure. The study proposes recommendations promoting sustainable tourism, participatory governance, and stronger community integration. It thus contributes to understanding how lifestyle sports like surfing can act as levers for territorial reconfiguration and socio-cultural integration in coastal environments.*

**Keywords:** *Surf culture, Territorial identity, Coastal development, Community integration, Local economy, Sustainable tourism, Anza, Agadir, Socio-cultural transformation, Environmental challenges.*

The coastal district of Anza, in Agadir (Morocco), is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the rise of surfing. Historically shaped by a rich Amazigh heritage and an economy based on fishing and agriculture, Anza has gradually evolved into a rapidly developing tourist area. This shift has been significantly influenced by surf culture, which has led to profound changes in territorial identity, economic structures, and social dynamics. Originally a recreational activity, surfing has become a catalyst for broader socio-economic and cultural transformations, bringing both opportunities and challenges for the local community.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on concepts of identity and territorial development. According to Lévi-Strauss (1979), identity is a virtual construct that individuals use to define themselves and their place in the world. Dubar (2005) expands on this perspective by describing identity as paradoxical, shaped by both individual characteristics and social affiliations. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) also highlights how group membership and emotional attachment to a territory contribute to collective identity.

To deepen this analysis, we incorporate several complementary theoretical approaches. Place identity theory (Proshansky, 1978) provides a lens to examine how surfing reshapes the emotional and symbolic connections that both residents and visitors maintain with the territory. The Tourism Area Life Cycle model (Butler, 1980) offers a useful framework to understand Anza's development phases, from its discovery by surfers to possible saturation. The concept of lifestyle mobilities (Cohen, Duncan & Thulemark, 2015) sheds light on the behavior of surfers, who are not merely tourists but individuals integrating their passion into their lifestyle. Lastly, social representations theory (Moscovici, 1988) allows for an exploration of the divergent perceptions of surfing among different stakeholders.

In this context, the central research question is as follows:

*How does surf culture influence the territorial, economic, and cultural evolution of the Anza district in Agadir, and what are the challenges associated with this transformation?*

To address this question, a quantitative approach was adopted. The study is based on a sample of 170 respondents (out of 200 anticipated), composed of both surfers and residents of the Anza district. The questionnaire for surfers was distributed online, through WhatsApp groups of three local surf schools: *Blue Waves School and Shop*, *Anza Experience*, and *Anza Swell Surf School*. For local residents, data collection was conducted in person, to ensure broader community participation. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, via Google Forms and Microsoft Excel.

The surfer questionnaire revealed that 35% of respondents had been visiting Anza for 1 to 3 years, indicating recent but rapid growth in popularity. Long-term visitors (over 5 years) made up 25%, reflecting a lasting attraction to the area. The quality of the waves emerged as the primary draw (60%), followed by the natural environment and the social atmosphere. Economically, 70% of surfers acknowledged their significant contribution to the local economy through spending on accommodation, surf schools, and other services. Socially, 75% reported positive interactions with locals, although only 40% had taken part in community initiatives—highlighting room for deeper engagement.

The resident questionnaire offered a more nuanced perspective. While 45% of locals recognized the influence of surfing on territorial identity, 35% viewed foreign surfers as a source of cultural enrichment. However, issues such as overcrowding (30%), environmental degradation, and lack of infrastructure were also raised. These findings illustrate the dual nature of surf tourism: it fosters economic growth and cultural exchange, but also places pressure on resources and environmental sustainability.

The study's conclusions support the implementation of balanced strategies for sustainable development. Environmental preservation measures, such as coastal clean-ups and regulated surf tourism, are essential to maintain Anza's natural appeal.

Community-driven initiatives could enhance social integration and promote collaboration between surfers and residents. On the economic front, targeted policies should aim to maximize local benefits while mitigating negative effects such as gentrification. Anza's future will depend on the ability of all stakeholders—residents, surfers, policymakers, and environmental advocates—to work together through this complex transition.

The case of Anza provides valuable insight into the dynamics of coastal communities undergoing transformation due to niche tourism. The tensions between economic opportunity, cultural exchange, and environmental pressure are not unique to Anza, but reflect broader global challenges. By proactively addressing these issues, Anza has the potential to become a model of sustainable development, demonstrating how lifestyle sports like surfing can coexist with local traditions to build resilient and inclusive communities.

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