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Working for a Sustainable Surfing Community: Becoming a Local Surfer at a New Home Destination

Hanbeom Kim and Sun-Yong Kwon *

Department of Physical Education, College of Education, Seoul National University, Gwanak-Gu, Gwanak Ro 1, Seoul 08826, Korea; geni3000@snu.ac.kr

* Correspondence: kwonsy@snu.ac.kr

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Abstract: South Korea used to be a non-surfing region until it experienced a remarkable realization of the surfing phenomenon, the so-called “surfing boom”, during the past couple of decades. The nonexistence of surfing communities or cultures offers a unique context that surfers have to deal with to become local surfers. The migration status of surfers further complicates the process of local surfer identity construction. This particular context provided migrant surfers with unique socio-spatial challenges and tasks that led them to a certain desire for sustainable surfing milieu. This paper aims to explore the experiences of early migrant surfers when constructing their local surfer identity. Data were collected through fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The early migrant surfers perceived becoming local surfers to be a process of making a new life while they were settling on their new “home”. Thus, they desired a sustainable surfing environment not only with the surf breaks but also with the whole regional community they live in. Hence, becoming a local surfer was becoming a local villager at the same time. They put forth multilateral community endeavors to construct and maintain social and emotional bonds with local authorities, local native residents, and the community environment. Through their interactions with the wider rural community, it was hoped that they would also actually contribute to the formation and maintenance of that rural community for sustainable surfing.

Keywords: surfing; local surfer; community; sustainability; South Korea

1. Introduction

The global popularity of surfing has increased substantially over the past half-century. As surfing is gradually becoming part of a global lifestyle and tourism phenomenon, a growing body of literature has explored aspects of surfing culture at a range of global surf destinations [1–15]. However, except notable recent writings [16–18], there is little research on surfing cultures across East Asian countries, in particular, South Korea.

While South Korea was easily identified as a non-surfing country, the new exotic lifestyle culture, surfing, has witnessed a rapidly increasing national popularity during the recent two decades. It is generally agreed among the first-generation South Korean surfers that the process for South Koreans to first access and experience surfing at South Korean beaches began sometime between the late 1990s and the early 2000s. While the overall surfing history in South Korea covers the last 20 years, it is estimated that the surfer population—those who possess their own surfboards—was around only 100 or 150 by the mid-2000s. This number grew to around 1000 during the last half of the 2000s and to around 3000 at its maximum in 2017. However, the recent phenomenon of the so-called “surfing boom” sparked around 2012, with an estimation of 200,000 having experienced surfing at least once. This so-called South Korea’s surfing boom is worthy of academic attention to fill the blanks in relevant scholarly research.

Of course, the surfing boom can be articulated by closely examining the formation and progression of South Korean surfing culture. As surfing is not indigenous to Korea, in particular, the formation and development of South Korean surfing culture have been significantly involved with the processes of transnational cultural acceptance, negotiation, and modification. It is obvious that western global influences are influential. Furthermore, intra-Asian encounters and networks have also been significant (e.g., possible influences of Japanese surf culture on Korean surfing such as the introduction to surfing in Korea and the surfing entry into the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Korean surfers' transnational interactions during their overseas surfing trips to Asian regions including Indonesia, Taiwan, and Japan). It would be worthwhile to investigate ways in which surfing as a western lifestyle sport has been negotiated and transformed through South Korean local translations [19,20]. As part of the broader research on South Korean surfing culture, however, this paper intends to focus on the process of becoming local surfers whose surfer identity construction is involved with the formation of a new surf culture within the local context of South Korean beaches.

Certainly, researches on surfing phenomenon and culture require serious grounding questions to understand surfers' lives and identities within various surfing locations and communities. A notable line of surfing research has focused on surfing subcultures or subcultural formations in which surfers individually construct, confirm, and negotiate their identities [2,8,21]. As such, the detailed process of surfer identity formation has been the main research focus to understand the surfing subculture. For example, Langseth [21] used Donnelly and Young [22]'s analysis of identity construction in sports subcultures—involving four different stages of pre-socialization, selection and recruitment, socialization, and acceptance or ostracism—in order to explore the identity construction among regional surfers in Norway. Furthermore, studies within the broader inquiry of surfer socialization focus on how surfers develop from being neophytes to be accepted members of a surf subculture. Particular attention is given to the mechanisms behind subcultural learning of “how status hierarchies are learned and how the value systems of surfing are internalized and incorporated” [21], p. 5. It is assumed by this line of research that there is an established surfing subculture in which a novice becomes an experienced subcultural member.

However, it seems questionable whether the so-called “first-generation surfers” in South Korea benefited from their learning experiences from a pre-established surf subculture to become experienced subcultural members. The early phase of the country's surfing development—the period of the 2000s—was not privileged to have identifiable and relatively stable surfing subcultures. Then, a possible scenario would be the era of pioneers in which the surfers of those early days went through different learning experiences than the relatively predictable identity construction stages discussed in the existing literature (e.g., [2,21]). It is possible that their surfer identity construction is not easily explicated by the existing stage categories of surfer identity construction. As such, their surfer identity construction process and the surfing experiences within merit further investigations.

This paper focuses on local surfers and communities at selected beaches of Yangyang County, Gangwon region. The recent South Korean surfing boom is largely attributed to the fact that surfing has considerable high cultural and economic visibility in the Gangwon region, in particular, Yangyang County. It is notable that surf shops and schools are highly concentrated along the Yangyang beaches, often depicted as the national surfing mecca by commercial media sources, where the proportional growth of the regional surfing business has also contributed to the increasing demand and supply of easily-rideable surfboards and economical wetsuits. It is also notable that local surfers in the Yangyang County are mostly migrant residents who have moved and settled to start surf businesses (shops, schools, lodges, and clubs) and at the same time pursue their surfing lifestyle. It is inferred that surfers in Yangyang County have experienced a particular process of becoming new local residents as well as local surfers.

Particular attention is paid to the fact that surfer identity is likely bonded to the locality of particular surf breaks. To elaborate, surfer identity construction involves the process of “socio-spatial identity formation” through which surfers learn how to surf and interact with other local surfers

and share communal experiences at a particular surf locality [2]. As such, the process involves surfers' local identity construction. With the focus of the current paper on migrant resident surfers at Yangyang County, the migration status of surfers further complicates the process of local surfer identity construction. In particular, the nonexistence of existing surfing communities or cultures offers a unique context that surfers have to deal with to become local surfers.

Under such understandings, this study is to explore the process of local surfer identity construction at newly developed surf beaches in Yangyang County. We attempt to understand local surfers' perspectives on what it means to be a local surfer and ways in which they have formed their own local surfer identities. We especially focus on what experiences they have, what they most value, and what relationships they form to become local surfers in an area where surfing is completely unc customary.

2. Local Surfer Identity

Surfing is considered a form of lifestyle sport that has its own unique subculture in which members construct their identities as surfers [23]. The question of surfer identity—"Who is a surfer and how does one become a surfer?"—has drawn a lot of scholarly attention. There has been a concentration of studies on surfer identity construction to explore and understand how surfing subcultures are built, defined, and contested [2,3,8,13,14,21,23–26].

The cultural significance of surfer identity is manifested by the surfer socialization process of obtaining culturally learned sensibilities by which surfers make a distinction between members (us) and non-members (them) of a subculture [21]. Through this learning process of becoming a subcultural member, the person's everyday life matters are fused with and deeply embedded into the subculture [22]. It is noted that the process of surfer identity formation is complex and multi-faceted [23,27]. As such, defining who is a surfer is known to be associated with a number of factors.

As a heuristic strategy to navigate the complexity of surfer identities, making a provisional distinction between surfer identity and local surfer identity would be useful to map the discussion of surfer identity formation. Thus far, the identity of surfers is known to be related to many characteristics such as environmentalism, masculinity, race, ethnicity, and nonconformity [23,27]. It should be pointed out that a surf subculture is likely to be linked to its specific geographical locality of surf break as much as to those broader identity resources. In other words, surfing cultures are built around the lives, identities, and specific community cultures of "local" surfers at a particular surfing location [2]. It is important to note that the formation of surfer identity involves the process of becoming and being recognized as a local surfer at a particular surf break.

As such, the locality is recognized as an important factor related to the formation of surfer identities. Studies indicate that where they rode waves and where they lived became important factors when surfers formed their identities [1,23,27]. Therefore, the process of local surfer identity formation involves becoming a member of a subcultural group sharing certain specific socio-spatial qualities that define what it means to be a local surfer in a particular surfing location [1,15]. In this way, the construction of local surfer identity centers on the notions of locality—place, space, and territory. This identity–locality nexus is manifested in various ways. In the literature, for example, local surfers are characterized as resident surfers who have surfed a break for a long time, have maintained property ownership, have possessed a high level of knowledge of local surf breaks, and have contributed to community development [1,8,23,27,28].

The amount of time spent at a particular surf break is a significant identity resource to build a strong attachment to the surf location. For local surfers, it is important to have a strong connection to the surf breaks where they learned to surf and have spent many years surfing. In this way, the amount of time spent surfing at a particular surf location is considered as an important part of local surfer identity [8,21]. This time-bound local identity often extends to the matter of the birthright to be a local surfer. For example, as noted by a local surfer in Las Salinas, Nicaragua, "Someone can live here for 50 years but he is not a local . . . For us, locals are only the people that were born here and are from this beach" [23], p. 470.

In the case of migrant surfers, the question of birthplace intensifies the issue of who local surfers are. Studies argue that it varies across surf localities. According to Usher and Kerstetter [23], resident foreigners in Nicaragua vary on whether they thought of themselves as local surfers. Their varied responses were attributed to the issue of whether you had to be born in a place to be considered a local surfer. The Nicaraguan surfers believed that birthright was an essential qualification for a local surfer. However, Usher [27] discovered that the majority of expatriates in Pavones, Costa Rica were found to confidently consider themselves local surfers, although resident local surfers did not agree. From the expatriates' perspective, local surfers were people who lived in the location for a long time and surfed the wave on a regular basis.

In addition to a long period of residence and birthright, property ownership is also thought to be an important part of being a local surfer [27]. For example, an expatriate in Pavones said, also confirmed by other expatriates, " ... for me, you'd have to live here longer than say, you know, 7, 8 years? And you definitely have to own property and have a house" [27], p. 227. Furthermore, the recognition of a local surfer status is also given by the possession of surfing knowledge and skills associated with the surf break [1,8,14,21,23,27]. For instance, becoming a member of the surf subculture requires a considerable period of acquiring forms of symbolic capital, which involve skills and subcultural knowledge about rules and surf spots [21].

The extent of local community involvement and contribution is also closely associated with the process of surfer identity formation [1,23]. Resident foreign surfers in a Nicaragua surf location are only considered to be local surfers if they help local residents out or are friendly [23]. As the surfer's sense of belonging and attachment to a surf-shore community is integral to local surfer identity development, local surfers naturally become participants in and advocates for their own surfing communities [23]. Furthermore, focusing on the extension of local surfers' socio-spatial boundary beyond their particular surfing community, Beaumont and Brown [4] show that local surfers actively contribute to the formation, maintenance, and identity of the wider rural community they are a part of.

The idea of local surfer identity appears stable, coherent, and shared within a particular local surfing community. This relatively enduring process involves sociocultural communities in which subcultural members are attached through the sharing of embodied sensorial, aesthetic, and gendered experiences [29–31]. Localism is a symbolic manifestation of this identity–locality nexus. It reflects the cultural know-how of a particular surf space and reproduces the local surfers' shared sense of embodied togetherness [30]. It is notable in this sense that the process of becoming a local surfer involves ways in which "one's local community status and one's surfing career are durably fused as a disposition and identity through a lifetime of practice in a community setting" [2], p. 83.

It is arguable that since the formation of local surfer identity involves diverse identity resources and elements such as gender, race, ethnicity, career, environmentalism, forms of subcultural capital, and sociocultural-spatial qualities; the surfer identity construction process is complex and contested in nature. The process reflects the complex categorization between "us" and "them" which often involves ambiguous and irrational processes [28]. In this context, the question of surfer identity often renders contested manifestations of who is a "real" surfer. As such, "being a local" is a highly contested category, implying who "we" and "them" are is continuously negotiated [21], p. 15. It is with this understanding that South Korean local surfers have also negotiated a complex combination of subcultural identities which exposes the dynamic positioning of individual surfers in local surfing contexts. This complex and contested nature of surfer identity construction would render salient for the migrant surfers at Yangyang County.

3. Methods

It is notable that South Korea's recent surfing boom has manifested through diverse surfing scenes at different surfing locations in which local surfers construct their own subcultural identities within particular sociocultural-spatial and material contexts. It is generally known that three surfing zones are regionally established within the Korean peninsula—Busan, Jeju, and Gangwon where surfable

beaches are located along the local coastlines. While the three locations are major surfing scenes leading to the development of South Korean surfing culture, there is a range of distinctive surfing development processes associated with different geographical conditions such as weather and climate characteristics, local demographics, and community infrastructure. For example, it is said that Jeju local surfers tend to maintain a relatively exclusive local boundary. In spite of being one of South Korea's most famous domestic and international tourist destinations, Jeju island is known for preserving its strong traditions of specific local culture. As such, being a "real" local surfer is closely tied with birth at the surf location. In the case of Busan, surfing culture is more open and welcoming due to the locations of two surfable beaches closely adjacent to South Korea's second-largest metropolitan city. Gwangwon beaches are mostly rural fishery villages which, for several decades, have struggled with continuing economic and population declines. A majority of local residents are the old whose descendants live in urban cities for jobs and study. Accordingly, local surfers in the region are primarily migrants who make a living off their surf business.

This study intends to explore the ways of building a surfing culture in a particular region where there was no organic local surf culture. As the first scholarly research newly exploring South Korean surfing culture, the underlying methodology of this project took an exploratory approach. Also, an interpretive approach was used to understand local surfers' perspectives on what it means to be a local surfer and ways in which they have formed their own local surfer identities. Alongside these methodological considerations, an ethnographic approach was taken to investigate the process of local surfer identity construction.

This study focuses on selected surfing beaches in Yangyang County, Gangwon Province, and is based on data collected through ethnographic methods including fieldwork and in-depth interviews. The data was collected over a year from March 2017 to July 2018.

First, a series of short period fieldworks (one-day visits or several days' stay) were conducted. At the time of the initial fieldwork, suitable acquaintance with local surfers was not achieved. It was necessary to enroll in learn-to-surf courses offered by a local surf shop for a better opportunity. The shop owner was one of the key informants, and an experienced local surfer who helped the connection with other local surfers throughout the periods of fieldwork, field notes about significant events, cultural phenomena, conversations, and reflexive experiences were taken. The fieldwork material was analyzed in conjunction with in-depth interviews.

A series of in-depth interviews were also undertaken. The understanding of the surf subculture was extensively enhanced by a series of in-depth interviews that focused on a core group of local surfers—early settled surfers. In particular, it was possible to document the beginning and development of surfing culture in South Korea, primarily based on the interview data. A couple of key informants recommended local surfers for interviews. Interview participants were made contacts through snowball sampling. Not all the local surfers we made contacts were friendly when approached for interviews. We felt that they guarded against us and kept a distance from us or introduced other surfers for contact. However, those local surfers who agreed to interviews were cooperative and willing to share their surfing experiences and perceptions. They were willing to talk as they wanted to let us know how much they love surfing, how good and safe surfing is, and how they work hard to make sustainable surfing communities. The interviews were conducted with nine local surfers in total, and all of them were males from their late 30s to 40s—five resident local surfers from Yangyang County, three Busan local surfers, and one surfer from Seoul. Interview participants were selected according to the study objectives to explore what it means to be a local surfer and how local surfer identity is constructed. Eight of them were considered the 2000s' early pioneer surfers, and also the so-called "first-generation surfers" in South Korea. The remaining one was a younger newcomer who had started surfing in 2010 when he had traveled to Bali, Indonesia. Two of them first learned surfing when they were international students in Australia and the United States.

The interviewees were well informed on the wider research purposes and on who would be conducting interviews and observations. A written informed consent to participate was obtained prior

to conducting each interview. Interview participants were asked questions related to their experiences about surfing and being local surfers, who they considered to be local surfers, and their perceptions of the surfing culture in South Korea. The interviews were semi-structured as an interview guide with planned topics. A certain degree of flexibility was allowed, that is, the interview guide was used in a way to allow follow-up questions or points of elaboration which came up during the interview. For Yangyang local surfers, a series of follow-up interview sessions were conducted. All the interview data were recorded after the consent of the participants. Each interview session took approximately 90 to 180 min. The interviews were all fully transcribed and analyzed.

Additionally, a wide range of surfing-related documents was located and collected during the period, and types of the documents included media reports (i.e., newspapers and magazines), surfing essay books, research reports, and online documents for various resources (e.g., surfing organization websites, online surfing communities, and surfers' online blogs and social networking sites). Since there is a paucity of intellectual references or scholarly writings on surfing culture in South Korea, the process of document analyses took cautious consideration to verify the consistency and truthfulness of materials and information from the collected documents. In particular, a series of data comparisons from multiple sources were conducted, and the data verification process was also checked through the in-depth interviews.

4. Findings and Discussion

It is notable that the majority of the Yangyang local surfers are migrant residents, indicating that they have undergone a transition period of becoming and being recognized as local resident surfers. Obviously, migrant surfers have to construct their new local resident identities [23,32]. However, the process of local surfer identity formation is not static or without conflicts. Rather it involves a complex contested process in which surfers have to negotiate with prevailing cultural principles and regulations of the rural communities. In particular, throughout the negotiation process, as they settled in their new home, they actively developed a sense of local surfer identity perceiving surfing as a fundamental aspect of their lives beyond a simple individual lifestyle pursuit. It is shown that early settled surfers strived to be acknowledged as real local villagers as they pursued constructing and maintaining social and emotional bonds with local authorities, local residents, and the community environment.

4.1. From Travellers to Settlers

Those surfers who have settled early as permanent residents at the Yangyang County began surfing sometime during the early 2000s. A set of shared characteristics can be identified among the early migrate surfers. They are all male surfers in their late 30s and 40s with more than 10 years of surfing experience. The group of early settled surfers is said to consist of around 12 or 14 surfers who moved and opened their surf shop businesses along the coastline of Yangyang County from approximately 2008 to the early 2010s. It can be said that most of those early setter surfers were forerunners having led surf shop business development in Yangyang County.

Most of them had made acquaintances with each other through a range of shared surfing experiences during the 2000s—the formation period of surfing communities in South Korea. Some of the early settled Yangyang surfers started surfing at Busan beaches. They also connected with surfing peers to proceed with their weekend surfing through online surfing communities. A particularly significant early surfers' networking occasion was surfing competitions and events, hosted by Busan and Jeju local surfers, in which they came to know of the existence of a wider surfing community and actually got acquainted with other surfers. It is interesting to note that one of the significant shared experiences among the early pioneer surfers has been overseas surfing trips—particularly Bali, Indonesia—in which they came across or made new acquaintances with Korean surfers. Winter surfing has also been a significant juncture where they were able to practice their surfing skills together with

relatively good quality swells and share a sense of togetherness, becoming real surfers. It seems that through those early surfing expeditions, they gradually built up a kind of comradeship.

Another notable characteristic among the Yangyang local surfers is that they have backgrounds in quite serious pursuits of board-sports such as snowboarding, skateboarding, and wakeboarding. In particular, the early settled local surfers used to be avid snowboarders who had shared acquaintances as peer boarders. Some of them were well-known for their high-level snowboarding techniques and careers within the snowboarding community. Their choice to settle in Yangyang seems reasonable because the majority of South Korea's ski resorts are concentrated in the Gangwon Province. It is estimated, and also pointed out by the Yangyang surfers, that the South Korean surfing population is expected to continuously increase, given the current estimation of a six million snowboarding population and the trend of snowboarders to increasingly adopt a surfing lifestyle. Also for the early settled surfers, their skateboarding experiences were frequently noted from the interview data. They indicated the reverse sequence of surfing development compared to the "Western" society in which surfing is known to have stimulated the beginning and development of other board-sports including skateboarding and snowboarding. This bond of sympathy through board-sport experiences is one characteristic among the Yangyang local surfers that is distinctively different from Busan and Jeju local surfers. With this background, the typical lifestyle pattern of the Yangyang local surfers tends to have a seasonal distinction—they spend winters either mostly engaging in snowboarding at nearby ski resorts, sometimes surfing when swells arrive or taking overseas surfing trips when finances are flexible.

When the early settled surfers first began surfing and quickly became addicted and launched surfing trips every weekend during the 2000s, the idea of becoming a local surfer was not clearly materialized. Rather they were a kind of surf travelers who drove down to Busan beaches or flew to Jeju beaches to learn and practice surfing. However, they were desperately in need of new surfing spots other than the Busan and Jeju breaks where surfing was restricted during the summer beach season, and waves were often inconsistent and fickle.

Particularly the early surfers' decision to move to Yangyang County was mainly motivated by the travel distance of their weekend surfing trips. Most of them were located within the Seoul Metropolitan area and it took about 10 h of round-trip driving to Busan beaches. They needed new surfing spots which were located close to Seoul. Consequently, many early domestic surfers diligently and desperately pioneered to search for surf breaks along the Gangwon coastline because Busan and Jeju beaches were too far to travel to every weekend.

Although I began first in Busan, the city per se did not cooperate with me ... In particular, there was no place for surfers at Busan beaches because there were too many sea bathers ... At that time, he [one of the first settled Yangyang surfers] would come from Seoul every week, and he asked me to check Gangwon Province because it was too far and hard to come to Busan.

(LS 06)

Gangwon beaches were favored by the early wave searchers due to the relative proximity to the Seoul Metropolitan area where almost half of the Korean population reside, including themselves. In particular, due to the hosting of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics—PyeongChang County is one of the administrative districts of Gangwon Province close to Yangyang County—the transportation infrastructure has significantly improved and it now takes less than two hours to drive from Seoul to the Yangyang coastline.

As they had discovered the real joy of surfing, their whole life rapidly became centered around surfing. Their decision to move to a place where they could maintain their surfing lifestyle was a natural consequence. They desired to adopt a less mobile lifestyle and get into more permanent and/or structured surroundings for surfing. It was around the year of 2008 that some of those early pioneer surfers moved to Yangyang County to pursue their surfing lifestyle. They settled in Yangyang

County by opening a surf shop business without much focus on the growth objectives of strategic entrepreneurship. They settled as new local residents by starting surf shop businesses, and this pattern of migration became gradually popular in the region. The business profile of a typical surf shop focuses on the operation of surfing lesson programs, which tend to be provided along with a composition of surfing-related services such as equipment rentals, accommodations, foods and drinks, club memberships and surf goods and services offered by a kind of combined management of a surf shop/school/lodge/café/club.

The number of surf shops in Yangyang County increased to 16 in 2014 and 41 in 2016. Yangyang County quickly rose to become a surf mecca in South Korea. It is suggested in the interviews that the new inbound early migrants have played a primary role in shaping the whole rural community into a thriving lifestyle tourism site during the recent decade. The County has become the nation's most popular surf tourism location, primarily being responsible for the recent surfing boom in South Korea. Surfing towns have formed along the Yangyang coastline, and during the summer season, the towns are packed with tourists and visitors who want to enjoy a surfing culture in which surf shops, surf schools and lodges, pubs, bars, cafés, and restaurants provide uniquely different exotic experiences compared to the typical coastline landscape of South Korea. As the recent surfing boom has been spreading rapidly, new surfing locations are also developing along the south and west coasts of the Korean peninsula.

4.2. *Becoming Local Villagers*

However, the whole settlement process did not occur automatically. As migrant surfers, once they arrive, they must negotiate the formation of new identities as residents within the local communities and the surrounding surf breaks [23,27,32]. For example, migrated surfers had to make efforts dealing with a range of challenges, conflicts, and struggles with the institutional arrangements and cultural traditions of the seaside rural villages. The process of becoming a “local” surfer involved a range of negotiations and contestations with the established cultural and institutional order of the rural beach villages—different from their surfing traveler experiences during the 2000s.

When I first started surfing school, there were many conflicts within the region with various people and interest groups. It's because the beaches aren't just for surfers only. There are beach vacationers, public authorities, local villager associations, fishermen unions, and other those living off of the beaches and waters. These people unwelcome surfers. There are ongoing negotiations of becoming members of the community. But that said, if like one day, all of a sudden, there is a rude surfer who acts whatever he or she wants, and then the negotiations go back to square one.

(LS 06)

The Yangyang beach villages have clearly reflected a similar pattern of rural decline found in typical South Korean rural communities, and then the inbound migration of “young” male surfers in their late 30s and 40s, with easily noticeable nonconforming appearances (long hair, extremely tanned, and tattooed), was considered strange and eccentric by native local villagers.

The natives of the village, the elders, were not favorable to the young blokes. Those young guys, gang-like guys, who were coal-black, with long hair ... looked like rough-and-tumble amateurs whom they had never seen ... went completely crazy when they rode waves, but did not seem like bad guys. It seemed that they inspected us, to find out what we were doing, monitored our every movement.

(LS 03)

It was highlighted in the interviews that elderly villagers viewed migrant surfers to be deviants or potential losers who did nothing worthwhile in cities and ended up moving to rural villages. Obviously,

their negative impressions were further aggravated as local villagers perceived surfing as “indolent, wasteful, selfish, and institutionally unanchored pastime” [33], p. 95. Certainly, these images appear to echo what Booth [33] describes as the irreverent nature of surfing culture—signifying lack of discipline, self-indulgence, and decadence.

Notwithstanding this initial unwelcoming atmosphere, the newly settled surfers attempted to engage in becoming culturally accepted members of the village community. This was identified as the most significant component of local surfer identity formation. For example, they tried to be polite to the villagers. They paid attention to their language and behavior. They greeted the villagers courteously and tried not to smoke or drink. Also, they kept their manners so they would not be pictured through irreverent or non-conformist images. The deviant impression of surfers was intentionally hidden with hard effort for easier acceptance as conforming migrants. As Beaumont and Brown [4], p. 64 demonstrate, the local surfers actively engaged in interacting with the native non-surfing local residents and contributed to the construction of a sustainable surfing-friendly local community, in contrast to the conventional views of surfers being nonconformist to traditional social norms [23,34] and “living differently and displaying irreverence” [33], p. 16.

Early settler surfers highlighted that their new surf beach is now their “home” place. This new “home” demanded not only becoming villagers themselves but also being approved by local native villagers. It appears that the fulfillment of such demands was a prerequisite for becoming a local surfer. It is also noted that the process of becoming a local surfer is not simply equivalent to wave riding activities per se, it is rather a quality formed around “an emotional connection to the world that confers to surfers a sense of who they are and how they must live” [1], p. 239. From this understanding of surfing spatiality, surfers build up their sense of local identity from not only aquatic spaces but also territorial spaces—a “surf-shore assembly” in which surfer identity is forged through a co-constitution with both the terrestrial and the littoral [1]. As such, becoming a local surfer involves the process of creating a strong degree of belonging and place attachment to the whole geographical space of the beach village.

As a consequence of living in their new home community, they engaged with a range of community activities, projects, and partnerships with local villagers and local authority agencies (local administrations, municipal authorities, and coast guards). They became participants and advocates for their surf-shore territory—in spite of surfers’ ambivalence to organization, they organized beach cleans, community events, and supported young surfers [1], p. 241. In these ways, as Anderson [1], p. 242 persuasively pointed out, “surfers’ surf-shore spatiality becomes definitive of local surfing lifestyles—it is not just a place people surf, rather it’s a way people live”.

As we have settled and lived at this unexplored surf location where no one ever surfed . . . we try our best to get along with local villagers and make efforts to help them understand surfing . . . and voluntarily do neighborhood and beach cleans . . . help out and rescue swimmers or novice surfers when in danger . . . also, try to voluntarily alert and regulate inexperienced surfers . . . cautiously taking leadership roles in keeping order in line-ups . . . communicate and work with local authorities and coast guards . . . this way if we surfers continue to extend our efforts to protect surf breaks, then in 5, 10, 20 years we would become proud of ourselves as local surfers, and other surfers would also acknowledge and respect us as local surfers.

(LS 07)

It is notable that, for those newly settled surfers, the sincere desire to become a village local has naturally formed from the process of becoming a “real local” surfer. In this way, from their perspectives, the idea of “real local” surfer is strongly associated with the extent of community contribution to sustainable surfing.

4.3. Surfers' Workings for Community

The early settled surfers put forth a multilateral effort into establishing sustainable surfing in their new home. This was done by building their own local surfer community while actively contributing to the wider rural community. They especially endeavored to transform the local native villagers' prejudice and misconception against surfing into an understanding of surfing's true value and meaning while, additionally, providing actual opportunity to experience surfing. Their community endeavors paid particular attention to how they interacted with the non-surfing community members and the non-surfing activities within the wider locality they are a part of. Through their interactions with the wider rural community, they acknowledge that they actually contributed to the formation and maintenance of that rural community [3].

Since community activities have required a range of collective efforts, the early settled surfers formed their own organizations. The Korea Gangwon Surfing Association (KGSA), formed in 2014, is said as one of the most representative local surfer organizations. Although there were more than 40 shops in operation, the number of KGSA members has been kept to less than 20 shops while the membership has been open to all the surf shops in Gangwon Province beaches. The members of the surfer organization share common characteristics—early settled surf shop owners, all male surfers, in their late 30s and 40s, with more than 10 years of surfing experience, also with snowboarding backgrounds, and more importantly, the fact that their relationships were built together during the formation period of Korean surfing culture.

The KGSA carried out the important role of cooperating with local public authorities and law enforcement agencies for settling on a safe and sustainable surfing culture. The first step of that was to make the public officers experience surfing and know what surfing is. For instance:

After the last meeting with the coast guard office, they actively began showing interest in surfing. Last time, a good opportunity was made for the police superintendent, the heads of individual centers, security officers, and coastguard managers to experience [surfing] first-hand.

(LS 02)

The KGSA played an active role through two major contributions regarding surfing. First, it is said that the KGSA played a central role in enhancing legislative and institutional issues that imposed unnecessary municipal regulations on surfing activities in the region. Second, they wanted local public authorities to understand that surfing can actually contribute to making a safe beach. This is because sustainable surfing is closely related to safe beaches. In other words, the institutional or legal regulations would be strengthened if any accident happens from surfing which could possibly lead to the prohibition of surfing. Therefore, local surfers prioritized keeping the local beaches accident-free and safe as one of the most important agendas. To this end, the surfers tried to establish a safe beach culture and become more solid through communication with the local public agencies. For example, in April 2017, the KGSA formed an official partnership agreement with the municipal coast guard office which is the main law enforcement agency of the Water-Related Leisure Activities Safety Act. A primary concern of the agency has been the matter of water safety maintained by regulative provisions and measures. The regulations centered on the reduction of water-related accidents are the agency's key performance index. One of the KGSA's proposed partnership projects was the inclusion of surf rescue methods into its search and rescue procedure. By a series of consultations with the KGSA surfers, the agency has come to realize that surf rescue would make search and rescue speedier and predictable. Along with the project, surfing lessons have been also provided to coast guard members and local lifeguards. As they have been working with the law enforcement agency, the KGSA surfers have built up a mutually supportive relationship with the agency, which previously perceived surfers as habitual rule violators who constantly challenged and resisted institutional procedures. The agency is now positively cooperative with surfers' needs as long as the needs do not exceedingly violate the law and safety measures.

In these ways, the KGSA has operated as a representative body to communicate with village people and local authorities. It is highlighted in the interviews that the KGSA members' contribution to

the Yangyang surfing community has also been beneficial for other surfing shops and related business owners as well as local village residents. The main purpose of the organization has been said to contribute to the desirable and sustainable development of their surfing locales. As a result, the effort of the surfers trying to keep the beaches safe has been recognized, and the KGSA was recognized with a safe award certificate from the local coast guard in 2018.

It is also notable that, for the early settled surfers, the process of pursuing a local surfer identity has also involved a strong sense of responsibility towards the environmental sustainability of places. They consider themselves environmental activists. Local surfers have regularly organized campaigns and community events for beach cleaning. The series of efforts related to the surfers' beach environment did not simply mean clearing the ocean. They were trying to give the village a bright image by doing community activities for village beautification and decoration such as repairing old buildings, setting up signposts, or creating photo zones at main village roads and areas. The surfers were also trying to inform the rural community about the nature-loving surfing culture in order to enhance the community environment to be more friendly and sustainable for surfing.

The early settled local surfers also put extra efforts to develop intimate relationships with local residents. They constantly paid attention to what the community needs, especially for the community residents, and tried to help. For example, Hyeonnam-myeon—a village in Yangyang County—is a geographically large place with a surf break but has a relatively small population. They had only 49 elementary kids who had nothing to do with themselves after school. As a response to that, the local surfers found a reading club and built a library out of an empty building in the village, providing a space where kids can read and play. As a part of the library project, for example, they held movie-watching events where local villagers and children were invited.

We played the movie “Fisherman’s Son”. We just wanted to spread the message for protecting nature ... We invited the parents and kids we met from the library project. They were surprised that surfers were trying to protect the village and love nature. Well, not to blame them, but they thought surfers were just men about town who play sports like golf.

(LS 03)

The local surfers were voluntarily practicing environmental preservation, safety rescue activities, and educational activities in order to form a communal bond with the whole community. It was thought by the local surfers that “such ‘bonds’ are social, cultural, psychological, and emotional in nature, and tie a place and its residents together in a constitutive co-ingredience that builds up over time and becomes part of a local culture and lifestyle” [1], p. 241.

Through this whole process of community relationships, those early settled surfers came to develop more knowledge and understanding of their wider socio-spatial boundaries. From this perspective, a surfer’s identity is not simply in the sea, but in the surf-shore assemblage [1]. Consequently, their local status is acknowledged and confirmed by the extent to which they develop and possess in-depth knowledge, and embody know-how and sensible understanding of their surf-shore spatiality within which they have formed a unique surfing subculture [30,31,35].

Through these cumulative experiences of being locals, they came to develop a strong sense of responsibility for the surf-shore ecology they belong to. It is through their longer-term relationships and connectivity to the whole surf-shore community, that local surfers seem to develop a sense of surfing ecology involving “ecological sensibility” and “sustainability-based ethics” [35].

Surfing is more about being a part of nature, not about using artificial tools or facilities, it needs to be closer or friendlier to nature ... And at some point, one tries to protect nature, care about the environment, think about the whole while looking back at oneself ... It is magical how one’s mind could love oneself and others and eventually dream about a beautiful life through surfing.

(LS 03)

There are a lot of surfers who relate surfing to life rather than taking it only as a sport. Because it takes up a lot of part in life and makes change through it . . . Talking about myself, my mind wanting to live with nature and protect my region made me throw away my anonymity of city life. Instead of that, I've grown tolerance and thoughtfulness, started contemplating things and reflecting on myself, and cherished the relationship and love with others.

(LS 06)

As such, they clearly demonstrated their felt responsibility for surfing ecology as a crucial qualification of what it means to be a local surfer. However, this sense of environmental stewardship is to be questioned, given the surfing culture's reliance on the petro-chemical industry (e.g., surfboards, wetsuits, surf wax), and the nature of the surfing boom based on the commercial tourism industry. Since this paradoxical aspect was not clearly identified or mentioned by the local surfers, it seems that they are probably inspired to act out of self-preservation, not necessarily a realization of environmental justice or acutely developed ecological ethics [36]. This critique can extend to further highlight another contradiction that "polluted leisure confuses any benefits or potential care emerging out of an ecological sensibility" [37], p. 434.

It is obvious, however, that they expressed a sense of ownership based on their felt responsibility for the surf-shore community. The early settled surfers perceive themselves to have principally contributed to transforming the previously desolate rural beach villages into surfing-friendly communities. As they develop a sense of ownership and entitlement to the surf-shore territory, the whole process also is associated with the construction of "real local" surfer identity. It is also notable that, for those early settled surfers, the process is perceived as a significant way to become "real local" surfers, that is, the process of local surfer identity formation. The question of who is a "real local" appears to be associated with the amount of community engagement—the extent of surfers' efforts towards making their new home villages desirable and sustainable surfing beaches. As such, becoming a real local surfer is being recognized as a real local villager. This answer sets the boundary of who the "real local" surfers are, which seems to separate the early settler surfers from the late coming migrant surfers, at least, from the perspective of those early settlers.

5. Conclusions

The surfing-related phenomena appearing in South Korea today have sociocultural characteristics different from those in the academic studies conducted thus far. Traditionally, the fact that a person has become a local surfer means that he/she was born in the relevant community or lived in a region that belongs to a certain beach or coastline area for a certain period of time. That is, as shown in previous studies, local surfers are persons who were born in regions where the history of surfing has continued over several generations [2,21,23]. However, in South Korea, surfing has a relatively short history and most first-generation surfers, in particular, those in Yangyang, are migrant settlers as local surfers. Therefore, it may be difficult to understand surfers in the South Korean society in terms of the identity resources asserted as major characteristics of local surfers in previous studies, such as the amount of time that surfing has been experienced, the level of surfing skills, and places of birth [8,21].

The early settler surfers cognized surfing as a process of making a new life while they were settling on their new "home". Thus, they desired a harmonized and sustainable surfing environment not only with the surf breaks but also with the whole regional community they live in. Hence, becoming a local surfer was also becoming a local villager at the same time. It was not just about bonding with waves and beaches; it was more about building a socio-spatial identity with the whole village. For this process, the surfers cautiously acted and spoke with manners to refine their deviant and negative impressions. They also put effort into tightening sustainable bonds with the local authorities, native villagers, and community environment to be approved as members of the regional community. Becoming a local surfer who is also a local villager depends on how well one knows the village. It was a process of understanding the way the village is operated and acquiring in-depth knowledge of the

whole environment of the village with the beach. On top of that, it was an important process of having a sincere cooperative relationship with the local authorities, and it was also a process of building intimate and sustainable relationships with local villagers. Furthermore, it was also the process of “real local” surfer identity formation, one that shares the responsibility for making local surfing communities sustainable with the first-generation early migrant surfers.

It would be worthwhile to consider the critiques of being a local surfer for further research. For example, those interviewed did not acknowledge the existence of the problems of localism. Rather they seem to highlight an instrumental version of localism in constructing their sustainable surf community, consciously distancing from their understanding of Western surf localisms. Furthermore, while they did not mention their policing of non-locals and their enforcing of local privileges, it is clear that they possessed a sense of responsibility towards keeping the beaches safe. A significant privilege of the Yangyang early settled local surfers seems to be their connection with the fishing village fraternities and local public authorities. While not described as a privilege, the network is considered necessary for maintaining the surf break, and thus, the following privilege is also quite natural to them.

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