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## Can surf culture foster loyalty towards surf destinations?

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### ABSTRACT

The sport of surfing is gaining increasing importance in the context of tourism. Surf tourism has emerged as one promising product of certain regions worldwide. Surfing, as a sport and as a lifestyle, has been grounded in surf culture, which is recognized as a potential attraction factor for certain surf destinations. Although previous research has been undertaken in the field of surf tourism, the impact that the visitors' perceptions of a destination's surf culture have on the overall destination image and on loyalty towards that destination is not represented in the peer-reviewed literature. Therefore, a research model is proposed and tested, aiming to contribute to the advancement of knowledge regarding the relevance and influence of surf culture. A survey questionnaire was carried out among visitors to a surf destination in Portugal – Peniche ( $N=430$ ). The model was tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Results reveal that the perceptions of surf culture contribute to a better overall destination image and a higher loyalty towards the destination, with the overall image also having a positive impact on loyalty. However, different components of surf culture have distinct impacts on overall image and loyalty. The study provides important theoretical contributions in terms of surf culture and the components of a surf destination image, as well as offers useful insights for the development of effective management strategies for surf tourism destinations.

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management

## Introduction

In recent decades, the number of surfers has significantly increased (da Rosa, dos Anjos, de Lima Pereira, & Junior, 2019), motivated by the imagery, proliferation, and commercialization of perfect and uncrowded waves in distant and exotic places (Holt, 2021; Ponting & McDonald, 2013). Surfing is considered a way of life and expression (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003), with surf culture being used in marketing strategies (Moutinho, Dionísio, & Leal, 2007). Along with the increase in surfers, the number of surf destinations has also grown (Ponting & McDonald, 2013), as well as the economic relevance of the surf industry

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(Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Mach & Ponting, 2021; Martin & Assenov, 2012; Ponting & McDonald, 2013), which has contributed to the development of surf tourism (Buckley, 2002; Ponting & McDonald, 2013). Surf tourism includes travelling with surfing as a main or secondary motivation, namely for the practice of surfing, to participate in surfing events, or simply to enjoy/or observe surfing activity (Buckley, 2002; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003; Martin & Assenov, 2012; Ponting & McDonald, 2013; Reis, 2020).

Research on surf tourism has increased exponentially in the past two decades, but little research has been done on surf destination image (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003) and surf culture (Buckley, 2002; Martin & Assenov, 2012; Ponting & McDonald, 2013; Usher & Kerstetter, 2015). Only two studies on surf destinations image (da Rosa et al., 2019; Usher & Ribeiro, 2020) have been identified, and studies about surf destinations' characteristics are mostly limited to an analysis of their physical and tangible characteristics (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; da Rosa et al., 2019; Iliuta & Wiltshier, 2018; Sotomayor & Barbieri, 2016). On the other hand, although some research has been found that identifies some aspects of surf culture (e.g. Beaumont & Brown, 2015; Booth, 2013; Caprara, 2007; Holt, 2021; Kampion & Brown, 1998; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011; Moutinho et al., 2007; Reis, 2020; Segabinazzi, 2011; Taylor, 2007; Warshaw, 2010), a search of the literature revealed no study that undertakes an in-depth analysis of this culture, and further studies are needed to characterize it. Furthermore, in contexts other than surfing, some research has revealed that culture may have an important influence on loyalty towards tourism destinations (e.g. Lu, Chi, & Lu, 2017; Sahin & Guzel, 2018; Suhartanto, Clemes, & Wibisono, 2018), but no studies have been identified that assess the influence of surf culture on the development of surf destinations' image, nor on loyalty towards these destinations. Studies about the behaviors of surf visitors and the characteristics that visitors value in surf destinations provide relevant insights on aspects that can influence the development of surf destinations' image (e.g. González, 2016; Jorge, Viana, Oliveira, Eurico, & Nunes, 2015; Ponting & McDonald, 2013; Reis & Jorge, 2012). However, no study has been identified that analyses the impact of visitors' perceptions of a destinations' surf culture, i.e. of a surf destination image in terms of its culture, on the overall image of that destination.

Considering the previously identified research gap, the purpose of this study is, in the context of surf destinations, to examine the impact that visitors' perceptions of a destination's surf culture have on the overall destination image, and on loyalty towards that destination. Therefore, a research model is proposed and tested, with the intention of contributing to the advancement of knowledge regarding the relevance and influence of surf culture. The article is organized as follows. In the next section, the theoretical background is presented, discussing the characteristics of surf culture as well as the influence of the destination image in terms of its surf culture on loyalty towards surf destinations. Next, the methods used in the empirical study are outlined and, subsequently, the results are presented and then discussed. Conclusions are drawn, and implications for the management of tourism destinations, as well as suggestions for future research, are proposed.

## Theoretical framework

### *Surf culture*

From an anthropological perspective, culture is related to human behavior and encompasses art, literature, and architecture, as well as ways of life (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Within this framework, culture manifests itself in various ways, materially and immaterially (Richards, 2001) and comprises several dimensions which are recognized by those who share the same culture: symbols, rituals, heroes, values (Hofstede et al., 2010), behaviors, traditions, ways of life, norms, beliefs (Reisinger & Turner, 2012), and symbols, such as objects and language (Hofstede et al., 2010; Richards, 2001).

Sport, considered one of the greatest cultural manifestations since antiquity (Hinch & Ramshaw, 2014), is a cultural phenomenon that integrates norms, codes, and symbols. It comprises social, ritual, and symbolic processes, reflecting the values of society and culture (Capretti, 2011), which originated the concept of sports culture. Sports culture is understood as a set of beliefs, norms, values, behaviors, language, signs and ways of life related to sports, which influence the way individuals perceive sports and engage in sports practices (Capretti, 2011). Each sport has its own rules and is practised in a different environment/territorial context, meaning that different sports practices can be associated with different cultures.

Some authors recognize the existence of a surf culture (Booth, 2013; Holt, 2021; Kampion & Brown, 1998; Warshaw, 2010), although this is a field in the process of definition and further studies are needed to characterise it. Surf culture seems to have become more popular and commercialized in the 1960s in the United States of America (Anderson, 2012; Holt, 2021; Kampion & Brown, 1998) and is currently known and represented on a global scale, both by surfers and by those who do not surf but who identify with surfing (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003; Reis & Jorge, 2012). Surf culture presents a multiplicity of meanings and people appropriate it uniquely and singularly (Anderson, 2012) according to their personal involvement level with surfing (Reis, 2020), the surfing destination's characteristics and the local culture (Booth, 2013). Surf culture, considered modern, radical, young and daring, also seems to have a very individual identity and is related to a way of life in communion with the surrounding environment (Iliuta & Wiltshier, 2018). In this culture, the passion for the sea gives rise to a unique way of living (Holt, 2021), as well as to appropriation and occupation of space (Ponting & McDonald, 2013).

Several features can be identified that characterize surf culture; they help to build its identity and are appropriated distinctly by each person (practitioners and supporters). These features include specific values, knowledges, beliefs, behaviors and symbols. This culture seems to be characterised by values associated with freedom, hedonism, respect, power and authority, stimulation, personal achievement, spirituality, companionship, and environmentalism (Anderson, 2012; Beaumont & Brown, 2015; Booth, 2013; Buckley, 2002; Caprara, 2007; Holt, 2021; Koehler, 2006; Reis, 2020; Segabinazzi, 2011; Taylor, 2007), as well as by knowledge regarding surf, such as the code of conduct regarding this sport (Caprara, 2007; Oliveira, Eurico, & Jorge, 2019). Those within surf culture are also likely to have some beliefs characterised by a certain spirituality and religiosity associated with nature and God (Taylor, 2007), as well as some specific behaviors, such as

behaviors expressing a territorial feeling of ownership – localism (Beaumont & Brown, 2015; Booth, 2013; Buckley, 2002) – in addition to participation in surf tours to search for the perfect wave (González, 2016) or in surf performances and rituals (Moutinho et al., 2007). This culture is also rich in symbols, such as a relaxed and peculiar vocabulary (Reis, 2020), surf music (reggae and pop-rock) (Segabinazzi, 2011), surfing objects (e.g. surfboards, surfing equipment, surfwear) (Kampion & Brown, 1998; Koehler, 2006; Reis, 2020), surfing facilities at the surf destination (e.g. flags, beach supports, surf schools, surf accommodation) (Reis, 2020) and surf brands (Reis, 2020).

### ***The influence of the surf destination's image in terms of surf culture on loyalty towards these destinations***

The tourist destination image is considered the sum of impressions, feelings, and ideas that an individual has regarding a specific destination (Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2014; Pike & Kotsi, 2018; Styliadis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017). According to Chen and Tsai (2007), the overall image of a destination can be influenced by both the cognitive image (what the visitor thinks and knows), the affective image (how he feels about it), and the behavioral image (how he acts according to the information he gets). Concerning the cognitive image, it can be related both to the destination's tangible/functional aspects (landscape, cultural attractions) and to its psychological/abstract aspects (hospitality, atmosphere) (Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007). The cognitive image, corresponding to the perception regarding destination attributes, is thus responsible for destinations' attractiveness (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014).

The literature suggests that several aspects are important in selecting and visiting surf destinations, such as good surfing conditions (e.g. good quality waves, variety and type of waves) (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; da Rosa et al., 2019; Sotomayor & Barbieri, 2016), opportunity to meet other surfers (da Rosa et al., 2019), food and beverage quality and prices, local community hospitality (da Rosa et al., 2019), safety, natural attractions (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013) and cultural attractions (da Rosa et al., 2019), among which surf culture emerges (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Iliuta & Wiltshier, 2018; Sotomayor & Barbieri, 2016). However, a search of the literature revealed no studies that specifically investigate the influence of cognitive image on the overall image of surf destinations.

Although surf culture is recognized as a potential attraction factor for certain surf destinations (Ratten, 2018; Reis & Jorge, 2012; Uekusa, 2019), its impact on overall destination image and, subsequently on loyalty towards the destination, is not represented in the peer-reviewed literature. However, within tourism, culture is one of the most important reasons for the decision to travel (Richards, 2018) and, consequently, cultural attractions are among the resources with the greatest capacity to attract visitors (Kim, Cheng, & O'Leary, 2007; Richards, 2001; Suhartanto et al., 2018). The various cultural features of a destination (tangible and intangible elements) are important because they provide opportunities to learn about the territory's history, symbolize the community identity and increase the economic vitality of such a destination (Chen & Rahman, 2018). Richards (2018) emphasizes that intangible culture, which is related to the local way of life, can be an element of promotion and differentiation of tourism destinations and consequently contributes to fostering proximity between the local community and visitors. In this context, Buckley, Ollenburg, and Zhong (2008) argue that there are even several

tourism destinations whose attractiveness lies not only in the material cultural component but in a landscape shaped by the inhabitants, which includes their ways of life.

Although many visitors want to experience something new and therefore have a strong tendency to choose destinations where culture and local way of life are different (Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012; Sahin & Guzel, 2018), visitors often appreciate that their culture is respected and like to travel to places where they can socialize with people with similar values, interests, and ways of life (Reisinger & Turner, 2012). Culture is becoming essential for the tourism system and plays a key role in destinations' strategic development (Richards, 2018), since it is used to enhance a place's reputation and make its image more genuine (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2010). The literature thus suggests that there is an influence of culture-related destination image on the overall destination image (Fawzi, Hussin, & Hashim, 2018; Lu et al., 2017).

Concerning sports culture, fans insert themselves in the cultural communities where they want to meet and contact people with a similar culture (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011). Regarding sports visitors, Funk and Bruun (2007) report that they have an interest in the cultural opportunities in the destination. Kim and Chalip (2004) also note that the greater the interest in the destination's culture, the more likely they are to visit the destination for sporting reasons, as sport and cultural activities complement each other in the visitor experience. Furthermore, sports tourists value the opportunity to socialize with other people who play the same sport and, therefore, share the same sport culture, at least partially (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011; Reisinger & Turner, 2012). Sports culture, as an image influencer, can thus be important in the development of a sports destination. Nevertheless, Funk and Bruun (2007) also point out that it is important to identify the destination-specific cultural aspects that are appealing to sports visitors, particularly surf visitors. This means that, although cultural elements are identified as important for the trip, a more in-depth look must be taken into the cultural experience at the destination to identify the cultural elements that are most relevant for sports tourism visitors. In this context, it is important to mention that the literature reveals that many people who visit surf destinations appreciate several aspects of surf culture as discussed above (Ratten, 2018; Reis & Jorge, 2012; Uekusa, 2019), which suggests that the surf destination's image in terms of its surf culture may be relevant and can positively influence the overall destination image. Considering the above-mentioned, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1. The surf destination image in terms of its surf culture positively influences the overall destination image.

Loyalty is of great importance for destinations because it is related to aspects such as behavioral intentions concerning destination recommendation and revisitation (Bigné, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008). For this reason, it is considered a key element in tourism management. Loyalty is an indicator of satisfaction, and is critical to destination success (Zhang et al., 2014), since repeat visitation is relevant to market growth, and visitor opinions are crucial in attracting new visitors, not only by traditional word of mouth but essentially, by comments and presence in social networks and blogs (Frias, Rodríguez, Alberto Castañeda, Sabiote, & Buhalis, 2012).

Concerning cultural attractions, Suhartanto et al. (2018) find that visitors with a relevant cultural experience at the destination have a more positive image of the destination and show strong intentions to revisit and recommend such cultural attractions as well as

the destination itself. Sánchez-Sánchez, De-Pablos-Heredero, and Montes-Botella (2021) and Wang, Lin, Yeh, and Liu (2011) also found that the cultural resources of a destination have a positive impact on loyalty. This leads us to consider that the dimensions of the destination image related to cultural resources may contribute to destination loyalty, and the following hypothesis is suggested:

H2. The surf destination image in terms of its surf culture positively influences loyalty towards that destination.

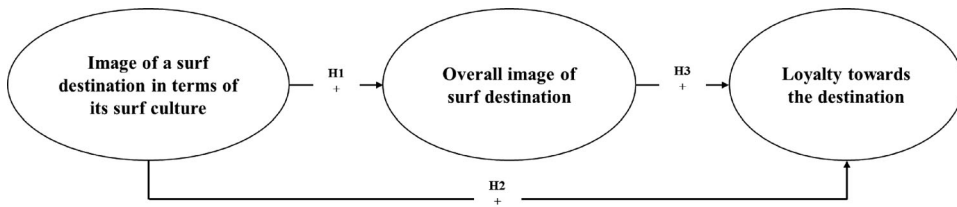
Several researchers have shown that the overall image has a positive influence on destination loyalty, particularly on the intention to revisit a destination (Kim et al., 2012; Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, & Andronikidis, 2016) and to recommend it to others (Bigné et al., 2001; Choi, Tkachenko, & Sil, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). When the perceived overall destination image is consistent, it conforms to reality and the travel experience is rewarding and positive, the result will be not only a high level of satisfaction for visitors and a positive evaluation of the destination, but also a strong probability of intention to revisit the destination (Tan & Wu, 2016), recommend it and share it with others (Chi & Qu, 2008; Wang & Hsu, 2010; Zhang et al., 2014). Consequently, the overall destination image affects individuals' future behaviors and consequently becomes an important vehicle for promoting destinations (Hudson & Thal, 2013). It is therefore essential to convey positive and appropriate images since favourable images contribute to attracting visitors and, subsequently, tend to influence revisiting and recommending the destination (Wang & Hsu, 2010).

Image also seems to influence loyalty in sports destinations, although the number of studies in this area is much smaller. Allameh, Khazaei Pool, Jaber, Salehzadeh, and Asadi (2015) and Chen and Tsai (2007) find that one of the factors influencing the revisit of sports visitors is their evaluation of the destination's image. Hallmann, Zehrer, and Müller (2015) and Frochot and Kreziak (2008) identify aspects of mountain destinations' image that led to an increased intention to revisit. In turn, Funk, Toohey, and Bruun (2007), Kaplanidou, Jordan, Funk, and Ridinger (2012), Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007), and Usher and Ribeiro (2020) find that a positive image of a sports destination is related to higher revisit intentions, not only to participate in sports events but also to visit the destination in question for leisure motives and recommend it to others. It seems, therefore, that the image of sports destinations is important to understand future behavioral intentions, in the sense that if the destinations are perceived as able to satisfy sports visitors' needs and interests, they tend to revisit them.

Considering that the literature suggests that the overall destination image exerts a positive influence on visitor loyalty towards a destination (intention to return and intention to recommend), although there is no empirical evidence on this influence in the context of surf tourism, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. The overall image of a surf destination positively influences loyalty towards that destination.

Based on the suggested hypotheses, a conceptual model is proposed (Figure 1), which highlights the relevance of the surf destination image in terms of its surf culture. It is posited that the surf destination image in terms of its surf culture has a positive influence on the overall image of these destinations, as well as a positive influence on



**Figure 1.** Research model proposed.

loyalty towards those destinations. It is also proposed that the overall image has a positive impact on loyalty towards these places.

## Research methods

### Study context

An analysis of the surfing literature reveals that surf tourism has become a relevant research field. According to Martin and Assenov (2012), between 1997 and 2011, 23 articles explicitly about surf tourism were published in international journals, and between 2012 and 2020, which Martin (2022) labels as the period of ‘academic professionalization’ of surf tourism research, 104 articles were published (Martin, 2022). In the period mentioned – 2012–2020 – a total of 20 articles were published about European countries (e.g. Anderson, 2014; Carvalho & Winden, 2018; Fadda, 2019; Fadda, 2020), 10 of which were about Portugal (Boqué Ciurana & Aguilar, 2020; Brochado, Stoleriu, & Lupu, 2018; Cunha-e-Sá, Freitas, Nunes, & Otrachshenko, 2018; Frank, Pintassilgo, & Pinto, 2015; Lopes & Bicudo, 2017; Machado, Carrasco, Contreiras, Duarte, & Gouveia, 2018; Ng, Phillips, Calado, Borges, & Veloso-Gomes, 2013; Portugal, Campos, Martins, & Melo, 2017; Ramos, Pinto, Chaves, & Formigo, 2019; Silva & Ferreira, 2014), which reveals the importance of surf tourism in the Portuguese context. According to Martin (2022, p. 132), ‘Portuguese research is primarily interested in surf tourist travel behavior, the value of resources, and environmental planning and development, with a focus on surfing resources, drawing a wide range of specialists across disciplines and approaches’. To the best of our knowledge this article is the first to provide an analysis of the impacts of surf culture.

With its strategically favourable location, Portugal has unique and quite favourable conditions for surfing. A significant increase in the number of surf tourists has been observed in surf destinations in Portugal (Bradshaw, 2021; Machado, Pinto Contreiras, & Carrasco, 2018), as in the case of Peniche, located on the west coast of Portugal, where the empirical study was undertaken.

Peniche has always been a territory which is associated with the sea. With a surfing community since the 1960s (Esteves, 2008; Silva, 2012), it is recognized by the international surfing community as a destination with excellent conditions for the sport, which explains the significant increase in the number of visitors to this destination for surfing or watching surfing activities (Jorge et al., 2015; Silva, 2012). The media exhibition of the World Championship Tour – Rip Curl Pro, Peniche – since 2009 has contributed to the development of surfing tourism in Peniche, where this activity currently provides a

very important contribution to the local economy (Jorge et al., 2015), with the growth of surf-related business (e.g. manufacture and repair of surf gear and equipment, surf schools, surf accommodation, surf-friendly restaurants and bars, Surf High Yield Center, local surf associations) and surf lifestyle entrepreneurship (Jorge et al., 2015; Silva, 2012).

### **Data collection and analysis methods**

To test the conceptual model proposed in Figure 1, a survey questionnaire was carried out. The questionnaire encompassed questions divided into four sections that were created based on the literature review: (1) surfing behavior; (2) surf destination image in terms of its surf culture and overall surf destination image; (3) loyalty towards the destination; and (4) sociodemographic profile. The section on 'surfing behaviour' used closed questions in which the respondents were asked about surfing practice, surf-related activities, and surf destination visits (number of visits and surf-related motivations). These questions were developed based on Buckley (2002), Dolnicar and Fluker (2003), Martin and Assenov (2012) and Segabinazzi (2011). The 'surf destination image in terms of its surf culture' was measured by asking the respondents to report their degree of agreement regarding 22 items using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = totally agree). These items represent the following aspects of the surf culture – values, knowledges, beliefs, behaviors and symbols -, selected from the literature making references to surf culture (e.g. Beaumont & Brown, 2015; Booth, 2013; Caprara, 2007; Koehler, 2006; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011; Moutinho et al., 2007; Segabinazzi, 2011; Taylor, 2007; Warshaw, 2010). The 'overall surf destination image' was assessed through an item adopted by Beerli and Martin (2004) and Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993), using a seven-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly negative, 7 = very positive). Concerning 'loyalty towards the destination', the intention was to assess future behavioral intentions related to destination loyalty. Therefore, this construct was measured through three items, compiled from the literature (Bigné et al., 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008), also using a seven-point Likert type scale (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely): one related to revisiting intentions associated with surf, one related to intentions to recommend the destination to friends and/or relatives and another related to conveying positive opinions about the surf destination on social networks or through the Internet. Finally, the last part of the questionnaire included a set of questions related to the respondents' socio-demographic profile (age, gender, education, country of residence and economic activity status).

The questionnaire was developed in Portuguese and English. Translation and back-translation were carried out to ensure clarity of language and minimal differences amongst versions. A pre-test contributed to a clear comprehension of the final questionnaire and the validity of the chosen items.

The target population was visitors to Peniche (tourists and excursionists), aged 18 years or over. Due to the impossibility of identifying the whole target population of the study, a non-probabilistic convenience technique was used. The questionnaires were administered face to face by the researchers, with the questionnaire being completed by the respondent. The data were collected in Peniche, in places which visitors usually frequent (e.g. beaches, surf schools, surf shops, accommodation, bars), in the summer of 2018, from May to October. Within a final sample of 440 respondents, 430 valid questionnaires were obtained and subsequently analysed.

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation was conducted to identify the dimensions of surf destination image in terms of surf culture. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) and the statistical software SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Da Silva, & Bido, 2015) were used to test the proposed hypotheses underlying the research model. Considering the aim of this study and the small amount of research concerning surf culture, surf destination image and loyalty, PLS was regarded as suitable data analysis to examine the relationships between the variables related to the central question under study – the influence of surf culture on surf destinations image and, subsequently, on destination loyalty. The focus of PLS-SEM is to identify a measurement model and also a structural model that explains variance by analysing linear relationships between multiple independent variables and one or more dependent variables (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014).

## Results

### *Sample profile*

The sample encompasses an identical percentage of men (51.7%) and women (48.3%), with an average age of 35 years old ( $SD = 12.0$ ). The majority had higher education (63.4%) and were employed (76%). There is a balance between domestic (50.3%) and foreign visitors (49.7%), with most of the foreigners being from Europe (86.2%).

Concerning surf behaviors (surfing practice, surf-related activities, surf destination visits), the majority do not surf (62.6%) and, among those who do (37.4%), there is considerable variability both in terms of surfing years ( $M = 6.5$ ;  $SD = 6.8$ ) and frequency with which they go surfing (although 69.5% of those who go surfing do it at least once a month). About 76.5% observe surfing activities and, although there is also a great variability at this level, 52.3% of those do it at least once a month.

The majority of the respondents have visited Peniche before with some purpose associated with surfing (65.6%), and there is a considerable number of respondents that visit Peniche more than twice a year (16.1%). The respondents stay an average of 8.5 nights, with their main motivations being to surf (with 3.4 on a scale from 1 'totally disagree' to 7 'totally agree') and following other people who surf (3.3).

### *Surf destination image*

Through an exploratory factor analysis, specifically a principal component analysis, the underlying factor structure about the surf destination image in terms of its surf culture was identified. The factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 were selected. One item with a factor loading below .50 was dropped. The factor extraction with varimax rotation enabled two factors to be identified (Table 1):

- Factor 1 – 'people who experience surf culture': encompassed items about the presence of people at the destination who experience surf culture since, for example, they use objects related to surf like surfboards and surfwear, know other symbols such as the vocabulary related to surf, go surfing, and observe surfing activities.

**Table 1.** Exploratory factor analysis of the surf destination image in terms of its surf culture.

	Surf Culture	Communalities	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Cumulative variance explained (%)	Cronbach's alpha
F1	<b>People who experience the surf culture</b>			<b>12.94</b>	<b>61.63</b>	<b>.965</b>
	Presence of people using surfboards	.811	.867			
	Presence of people who reveal surf behaviors	.823	.863			
	Presence of people who know surf vocabulary	.776	.838			
	Presence of people wearing surfwear	.775	.832			
	Presence of surfers	.762	.823			
	Presence of people who know surf	.735	.812			
	Presence of people watching/ observing surfing activities	.712	.741			
	Presence of people who like to talk about surf	.702	.724			
	Presence of people with a relaxed and carefree style	.596	.719			
	Presence of people looking for excitement/adrenaline from surfing	.751	.700			
	Presence of people with surf values	.738	.673			
	Presence of people who know the surf rules	.688	.602			
F2	<b>Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing</b>			<b>1.96</b>	<b>7.96</b>	<b>.934</b>
	Respect for the environment	.608	.760			
	Respect for local surfers	.653	.748			
	Respect for secret local surf spots	.728	.827			
	Respect for surfers with more status	.798	.857			
	Local surfing tradition	.678	.683			
	Surfing rituals	.709	.742			
	Vehicles suitable for the transport of surfing materials	.661	.664			
	Surf lifestyle entrepreneurship	.618	.594			
	Surfing media (e. g. magazines, newspapers)	.578	.705			

$N = 430$  Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 8001.339 ( $p = .0001$ )

- Factor 2 – 'respect and local dynamics associated with surfing': includes items representing a perception that in the destination there is respect for important aspects of surfing – including specific places (e.g. surf spots) and some surfers – and there are dynamics generated by surfing – in terms of traditions and rituals, as well as managerial dynamics (e.g. involving entrepreneurship styles and media related to surfing).

With a KMO measure of sampling adequacy of .959, the data should be considered adequate for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2014). Bartlett's test of sphericity shows an outstanding result, with  $\chi^2 = 8001.339$  and  $p < .01$ , which indicates the presence of great correlations among items. The solution of the PCA also seems appropriate since the two factors account for 70.96% of the variance explained and their Cronbach's alpha is  $> .7$ , revealing that both have internal consistency.

Some of these attributes have already been highlighted in previous studies, such as the interest of sports visitors in cultural opportunities (e.g. contact with the local community) (Funk & Bruun, 2007), and intangible aspects of the sports destination (e.g. local way of life) (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011; Reisinger & Turner, 2012).

### **Testing the proposed model**

The PLS estimation and assessment procedure is a two-step process (Hair et al., 2014): (i) the latent variable scores (LVs) and their associated items are estimated iteratively, which involves the validation of the measurement (outer) model; and (ii) the parameters of the structural (inner) model are estimated, to analyse the hypothesized relations between the LVs.

### **Measurement model**

The measurement model adopted in this study includes five constructs. The reliability of the constructs was assessed through the loadings of the items and the composite reliability (CR). The item reliability threshold is fulfilled since all loadings are higher than .7, and the internal consistency reliability is confirmed clearly above the cut-off of .7 (Hair et al., 2014). As for single-item constructs, as the construct equals its measure (indicator is 1.00), conventional reliability and convergent validity assessments are inadequate (Hair et al., 2014) (Table 2).

Concerning the validity assessment, the average variance extracted (AVE) values attest to a suitable convergent validity of the scales used, since the AVE values are all higher than .50. The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, the more demanding criterion proposed by Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009), likewise confirms discriminant validity, considering the threshold value of .90 (Table 3), revealing that the constructs are distinct and more strongly related to their construct than to any other construct.

### **Structural model**

The structural model, which tests the conceptual model hypotheses (Figure 1), was examined in terms of both the model's predictive power and the relationships between the constructs (Figure 2). The explained variance ( $R^2$ ) reveals the predictive power of the research model, with  $R^2$  values varying between .148 and .326 (Figure 2). The LVs with the highest variance explained by the model are 'intentions to recommend the destination' ( $R^2 = .326$ ) and 'overall image of a surf destination' ( $R^2 = .224$ ). In the case of the LV related to 'intentions to revisit the destination' ( $R^2 = .148$ ) only 14.8% of the variance was explained. It is usual that 'omitted variables account for a fairly large percentage of the variance' of constructs under analysis (Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, & Kock, 2017, p. 210). Some other factors impact the intentions to revisit the destination, such as novelty seeking, past vacation experience, safety (Chen & Gursoy, 2001), perceived value (Bigné et al., 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007) and satisfaction (Bigné et al., 2001).

To test the hypotheses proposed concerning the direct effects of the constructs under analysis, path coefficients and their significance level were analysed, with t-values being obtained with the bootstrapping procedure (5000 samples). Only two sub-hypotheses of hypothesis 2 were not supported (Figure 2, Table 4). Hypothesis H1 (H1a, H1b), which

**Table 2.** Measurement model assessment.

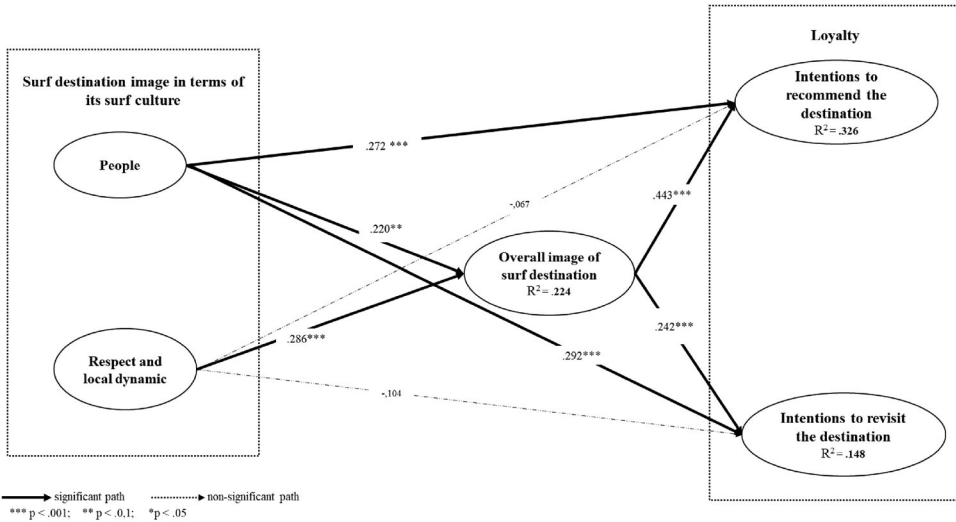
Constructs / Indicators	Mean	Standard deviation	Item loading	t value <sup>a)</sup>	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
<b>Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture – People who experience the surf culture</b>					.967	.712
Presence of people who know surf	5.598	1.321	.839	35.448		
Presence of people who know the surf rules	5.144	1.388	.795	31.960		
Presence of people looking for excitement/adrenaline from surfing	5.446	1.374	.853	44.398		
Presence of people with surf values	5.309	1.302	.843	39.181		
Presence of people who know surf vocabulary	5.502	1.343	.865	47.240		
Presence of people who reveal surf behaviors	5.616	1.284	.891	62.863		
Presence of people using surfboards	5.703	1.332	.876	46.553		
Presence of people wearing surfwear	5.637	1.336	.861	39.460		
Presence of people with a relaxed and carefree style	5.655	1.214	.765	21.412		
Presence of surfers	5.856	1.255	.851	44.163		
Presence of people watching/observing surfing activities	5.498	1.304	.842	42.290		
Presence of people who like to talk about surf	5.409	1.340	.836	40.365		
<b>Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture – Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing</b>					.942	.643
Respect for the environment	4.993	1.398	.727	21.371		
Respect for local surfers	5.124	1.419	.776	25.172		
Respect for secret local surf spots	4.942	1.547	.807	30.322		
Respect for surfers with more status	4.973	1.527	.860	54.442		
Local surfing tradition	5.305	1.446	.824	39.446		
Surfing rituals	4.998	1.464	.839	41.282		
Vehicles suitable for the transport of surfing materials	5.058	1.465	.817	36.719		
Surf lifestyle entrepreneurship	5.278	1.429	.802	34.682		
Surfing media (e. g., magazines, newspapers)	4.616	1.597	.753	29.566		
<b>The overall image of the surf destination</b>	6.007	0.985	n.a.	n.a.	1.000	1.000
<b>Intentions to recommend</b>					.902	.822
Recommend a surf destination to friends and/or relatives	6.14	1.257	.920	68.929		
Transmit positive opinions/impressions of a surf destination, in social networks or through the Internet	5.683	1.631	.893	46.926		
<b>Intentions to revisit</b>			n.a.	n.a.	1.000	1.000
Return to a destination for reasons associated with surf	4.524	2.223				

Notes. CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted; n.a.: not applicable (for single item constructs); <sup>a)</sup> t-values were obtained through the bootstrapping procedure (5000 samples) and loadings are significant at .001 level (two-tailed test).

predicts that the dimensions of the 'image of a surf destination in terms of its surf culture' have a positive influence on the 'overall image of the surf destination' is confirmed. The results support the positive influence of both dimensions, concerning 'people who experience the surf culture' ( $\beta = .220, t = 2.836, p < .005$ ), and 'respect and local dynamics associated with surfing' ( $\beta = .286, t = 3.918, p < .001$ ) on the 'overall image of surf destinations'. The fact that the influence is not very high may derive from the attractiveness and overall

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity of the constructs – heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

	People	Respect and local dynamic	Overall image	Intentions to recommend	Intentions to revisit
<b>Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture:</b>					
- People who experience the surf culture					
- Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing	.785				
<b>Overall image of the surf destination</b>	.440	.463			
<b>Intentions to recommend</b>	.472	.387	.598		
<b>Intentions to revisit</b>	.324	.229	.322	.536	



**Figure 2.** Structural model.

**Table 4.** Hypotheses testing.

	Path	Coefficient	t-value <sup>a)</sup>	p value	Supported
H1a:	Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: People who experience the surf culture -> Overall image of the surf destination	.220	2.836	.005	Yes
H1b:	Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing -> Overall image of the surf destination	.286	3.918	.000	Yes
H2a:	Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: People who experience the surf culture -> Intentions to recommend	.272	4.465	.000	Yes
H2b:	Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: People who experience the surf culture -> Intentions to revisit	.292	4.453	.000	Yes
H2c:	Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing -> Intentions to recommend	-.067	1.011	.312	No
H2d:	Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing -> Intentions to revisit	-.104	1.511	.131	No
H3a:	Overall image of the surf destination -> Intentions to recommend	.443	9.336	.000	Yes
H3b:	Overall image of the surf destination -> Intentions to revisit	.242	4.839	.000	Yes

<sup>a)</sup>t-values were obtained with the bootstrapping procedure (5000 samples)

image of the surf destination probably being influenced by many other aspects, as suggested in the literature, such as good surfing conditions (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; da Rosa et al., 2019; Sotomayor & Barbieri, 2016), opportunity to meet other surfers (da Rosa et al., 2019), surf events (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Iliuta & Wiltshier, 2018), local community hospitality (da Rosa et al., 2019), beach facilities (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013) and natural attractions (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). Most importantly, however, this study contributes to advancing knowledge about surf culture, showing that visitors' perceptions of surf culture have a positive impact on the overall image. Although the impact of the two constructs that represent the image in terms of surf culture is not very different, the perception of 'people who experience the surf culture' has a greater positive influence on the overall image of surf destinations than the perception of 'respect and local dynamics associated with surfing', highlighting the importance of the surf culture experience.

The findings confirm a positive influence of the dimension of the 'image of a surf destination in terms of its surf culture – people who experience the surf culture' on 'loyalty' (H2), namely on the 'intention to recommend the destination' (H2a) ( $\beta = .272, t = 4.465, p < .001$ ), and on 'the intention to revisit the destination' (H2b) ( $\beta = .292, t = 4.453, p < .001$ ). These results emphasize the crucial role of culture for destination loyalty (Sánchez-Sánchez et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2011), and highlight the need to ensure that visitors have a good image of surf destinations concerning its surf culture to foster revisit and recommendation of that destination.

Nevertheless, the 'image of a surf destination in terms of its surf culture – respect and local dynamics associated with surfing' does not have a direct significant influence on loyalty (H2c, H2d). However, the indirect effects – through 'overall image of the surf destination' – of this dimension of surf culture on the 'intention to recommend the destination' ( $\beta = .127, t = 3.638, p < .001$ ), and on the 'intention to revisit the destination' (H2b) ( $\beta = .069, t = 2.189, p < .01$ ) are positive (assuming a different sign from the direct effect) and significant (Table 5).

Hypothesis H3, which predicts that the 'overall image of the surf destination' has a significant positive influence on 'loyalty towards that destination', is fully supported, namely concerning the impact on the 'intention to recommend the destination' (H3a), with the highest path coefficient of the model ( $\beta = .443, t = 9.336, p < .001$ ), and on 'the intention to revisit the destination' (H3b) ( $\beta = .242, t = 4.839, p < .001$ ). The study confirms previous findings: destination image is positively related to future intentions to return to sports destinations (e.g. Hallmann et al., 2015; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Usher & Ribeiro, 2020) and to other destinations (e.g. Bigné et al., 2001; Choi et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2012; Stylos et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2014). However, this study reveals that this influence can also be observed in the case of surf destinations, an aspect that has been neglected in terms of research.

When considering total effects (Table 5), it is confirmed that the strongest impact is that of the 'overall image of the surf destination' on 'intention to recommend' ( $\beta = .443, t = 9.336, p < .001$ ). This is followed by the total impact of the 'image of a surf destination in terms of its surf culture: people who experience the surf culture' on loyalty (on 'intentions to recommend',  $\beta = .370, t = 5.482, p < .001$ , and on 'intentions to return',  $\beta = .345, t = 5.199, p < .001$ ). These second and third largest total effects attest to the importance of this dimension of surf culture.

**Table 5.** Direct, indirect, and total effects.

	Direct	Indirect	Total		
			Coefficient	t-value <sup>a)</sup>	p value
H1a: Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: People who experience the surf culture -> Overall image of a surf destination	.220**		.220**	2.836	.005
H1b: Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing -> Overall image of a surf destination	.286***		.286***	3.918	.000
H2a: Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: People who experience the surf culture -> Intentions to recommend	.272***	.098**	.370***	5.482	.000
H2b: Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: People who experience the surf culture -> Intentions to revisit	.292***	.053*	.345***	5.199	.000
H2c: Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing -> Intentions to recommend	-.067	.127***	.060	.869	.385
H2d: Surf destination image in terms of its surf culture: Respect and local dynamic associated with surfing -> Intentions to revisit	-.104	.069**	-.035	.522	.602
H3a: Overall image of a surf destination -> Intentions to recommend	.443***		.443***	9.336	.000
H3b: Overall image of a surf destination -> Intentions to revisit	.242***		.242***	4.839	.000

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$  for a two-tailed test based on 5000 bootstraps

These results reflect the effect of the surf destination image in terms of its surf culture on the overall image of this destination, as well as the key role that the overall image of a surf destination plays in visitor loyalty towards that destination. This reveals the importance of ensuring that visitors have a good image of the surf destination concerning its surf culture and shows that improvements in the overall image perceived by visitors will increase their likelihood of returning to that destination, as well as to recommending it to friends and/or family.

## Discussion

### *Implications for theory and practice*

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study allowed the identification of two dimensions and respective attributes that measure the perceptions of the surf destination's image in terms of surf culture: 'respect and local dynamics associated with surfing' and 'people who experience surf culture'. A model has also been developed and tested, which revealed several important issues regarding surf culture.

First, it shows that a 'surf destination image in terms of its surf culture' has a positive influence on the 'overall image' of these destinations and on 'loyalty'. This may happen because people who appreciate surf culture have a more positive image of surf destinations and want to recommend and visit them again in the future. Second, it also shows that the 'overall image of a surf destination' positively determines the 'loyalty' towards that destination. It is interesting to know that the positive impact of the overall destination image on loyalty also extends to surf destinations, which highlights that those positive perceptions of surf destinations as a whole may result in recommendations and future visits. Third, it was also found that the two dimensions of surf culture

have different impacts on loyalty. Although the awareness of 'respect and local dynamics associated with surfing' at the destination has a greater positive impact on the 'overall destination image', only the perception of 'people who experience the surf culture' leads explicitly to a higher loyalty towards the destination. This reinforces the importance of this dimension of the surf culture and highlights the power of having contact with people experiencing this culture at destinations.

This study also provides important managerial contributions. Considering the relevance assigned to surf culture, 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. In this context, it is important to promote the uniqueness of local surf culture, fostering the development of a competitive advantage, which is both differentiating and difficult to imitate.

Another important issue is to respect and safeguard the sociocultural authenticity of the local surfing community, including the various symbolic elements of surfing. Some policies may be relevant in this scope, such as actions that increase the awareness of residents of surf destinations concerning the relevance of respecting and promoting this culture. Codes of conduct may also be created to familiarise both visitors and the local communities with important aspects for respecting and preserving surf culture. However, this study also shows that it is important not only to promote respect for surf spots and surfers, but that is relevant to offer visitors the opportunity to observe people experiencing the surf culture, namely, wearing surfwear, using vocabulary related to surf, holding surf values, going surfing, or watching surfing activities. Creating events and activities related to surfing (e.g. surf events), but also facilities associated with this sports activity (e.g. tourism accommodation, restaurants and bars related to surf), may be very important strategies in this scope, not only to provide visitors with the opportunity to see people experiencing the surf culture, but giving them real opportunities to contact and interact with them in specific places or when involved in specific activities. It would also be interesting to encourage visitors to have a more in-depth experience of this surf culture themselves; they can be invited through promotional messages or by providing information in the tourism office to visit places where several surf-related aspects can be appreciated, to observe surfing activities or even go surfing.

### ***Limitations and future research***

This study has some limitations, and more research is needed. Regarding the geography of the study, it is confined to one surf destination. Therefore, it is suggested to replicate this study in other surf destinations, to confirm if the results obtained are similar. In future studies it would also be important to analyse potential determinants of surf destinations image in terms of culture, including factors in the research model that may have an impact on the development of perceptions regarding surf culture, such as interaction with surfers or with the local community.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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