Surfing Between Blue Humanities and Blue Economies in Cantabria, Spain

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Introduction

In 2009, Steven Mentz envisioned the urgent, and interrelated discourses of globalization, environmentalism, technology studies, and post colonialism guiding a twenty-first century scholarly trend he termed, "blue cultural studies." Before Mentz's call, scholars such as Philip Steinberg had examined the social construction of the ocean (2001), and since, performances of *thalassography*, or writing about the sea, have produced groundbreaking research across the humanities including Dan Brayton's *Shakespeare's Ocean* (2012) and John Gillis's *The Human Shore* (2012). New ontologies, epistemologies, and narratives that flow through, and frame, oceanic engagements continue to fill important disciplinary gaps and show the deep interconnections between humanistic inquiry and our watery planet. It is still unclear, however, how the blue humanities and its explorations of ocean histories, cultures, and politics can reach beyond academic and help to protect the ocean's liminal zones, including those into which an increasing number of humans enter the water with the intention of riding liquid bands of energy.

This essay suggests that surfing and surf studies, a small but growing field that is always already "blue," can help link and reorient discussions of the blue humanities and the so-called "blue economy." The blue economy, as defined by entities such as the United Nations and the World Bank, suggest the development of policies, laws, and management techniques that balance "improved human wellbeing and social equity" with "reduced environmental risks and ecological scarcities" (Smith-Godfrey 2016, 59). Shipping, fishing, off-shore mining and energy resources all form crucial links in the value chains of the blue economy, yet one of the most visibly impactful areas of the blue economy is coastal tourism, and within this sector, surfable waves generate health, happiness, and a number of political and cultural paradoxes.

Our collaboration developed during "baños" (i.e. surf sessions) near the town of San Vicente de la Baquera on the northern coast of Cantabria, Spain.

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Our time in the water, in the archive, and with various stakeholder groups and governing bodies has revealed surfing's potential contributions to the humanities. We also recognize that confronting terra-centrism and raising awareness about the contentious histories of reckless shoreline development, ocean over-fishing, dirty shipping, and the plastic pollution will not necessarily merge the blue humanities with the blue economy. The undulating oceanscape, a place we have separately and together floated awaiting the next ridable wave, is constantly in flux; when the wave moment arrives, the curling surface takes a unique shape, like a snowflake. The joy of that fleeting rush of ocean energy has proved popular, even addictive, and led to the explosion of surf culture from its epicenters: Hawai'i, California, and Australia. For the past fifty years, surfing has gone global, and the magnetic, seemingly smooth commune of mind, body, board, and breaking wave has pushed surfers to remote parts of the planet and provided something of a healthy escape from land-locked constraints.

What began as a religious and cultural practice is now a multibillion-dollar industry of clothing, gear, tourism, and competition. Scholars have estimated that the attraction of surfable waves contribute $51.2 billion to the communities surrounding the world's most reliable and accessible surf breaks (McGregor and Wills 2016). The participants of surf culture, surf tourism, and surf branding often seem so fully immersed in their pursuit of these waves that traditional responsibilities and ethical quandaries—including the overwhelming evidence of oceanic catastrophe—seem to dissipate. Which is to not even speak of the role surfing has played in extending colonial influence and capitalist enterprise.

We acknowledge the social, political, and environmental quagmires that intersect our surfing practice and the industries and infrastructures that surround it. We also maintain that any assessment of the ocean's value must include recognition of the oceanscape's heritage and patrimony. The wave is a site of energy transfer and "sea power" that may be factored into management of the blue economy. At the same time, as humanities scholars, we demand there is a difference between "price" and "value" of surf breaks. Indeed, the humanities can articulate and value local knowledge and cultural resources, reveal some of the nefarious power structures supporting surf tourism, and highlight some of the paradoxes of "sustainable surfing." Sustainable surf—as blue economic practice, as corporate branded lifestyle, and environmental policies—faces the same ardent challenge facing the humanities writ large: to quantify impacts through public engagement and environmental, social, and political change.

In Spain, the increasing calls for blue economy policies have complicated attempts to clarify the meaning and value of surfing within the blue humanities. If blue humanities are better leveraged against, and with, the outcomes of the blue economy across Spain, then surfing will not be viewed as merely a spark for tourism, an outcome of a consumer society, or a competitive sport;

it will also be valued as a voice of the sea and a vital way of being immersed in this critical planetary moment.

Sea Power and Writing Waves

> *"If there is a magic on this planet, it is contained in the water"*
> —Loren Eisley (1946)

The blue humanities chart an interdisciplinary study of powers exchanged within and across oceanic environments. While the name is new, studies of the ocean's multitudinous influence on history, commerce, and culture have been performed for at least the past two centuries. For instance, in 1893-1894, American maritime historian and naval theorist Captain Arthur T. Mahan published a series of articles on the history and future of "sea power." Mahan's texts include two "fundamental truths" about the ocean. First, "control of the seas," is "the chief among the merely material elements in the power and prosperity of nations" (1917, 52). In addition to naval supremacy, maritime technology and commerce begat material dominance because, "however great the wealth product of the land, nothing facilitates the necessary exchanges as does the sea" (124). Such a claim might provide historical support for a blue economy, as the capital amassed in coastal cities and exchange in transoceanic trade seems increasingly important to a nation's wealth and also threatened by the effects of sea-level rise, warmer oceans, and the other impacts of climate change.

At the time, Mahan's first fundamental truth was embedded in an argument for the strategic importance of the Hawaiian Islands, and thus should be considered in the context of "manifest destiny," a term which originated in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the clearest theorizations of manifest destiny's importance to the history of the United States also appeared in 1893 with Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis." The open areas of the western United States and the promise of contact with the unmapped and primitive West, Turner argued, acted like a magnet for Anglo-Europeans and the "frontier" mentality continued to rejuvenate the American spirit and guide American culture (and political expansionism) even after the frontier had closed. Turner's argument dominated the terra-centric studies of American history and culture for most of the twentieth century. Mahan's arguments in favor of valuing and extending "sea power," of the United States provides something of an alternative trajectory for a *bluer* American Studies, one that offers critical engagements with seascapes and ocean practices as way to supplement the political occupation, technological domination, and cultural cultivation of land and landscape in the Western hemisphere. Of course, at the time Mahan was writing, the U.S. was already exercising its manifest destiny by occupying and later, in 1898, annexing Hawai'i, the future site

of "American" surf culture. From its beginnings, surfing has struggled to balance its roots as an indigenous practice and a sport propelled and constrained by the trappings of imperialism.

Whereas Mahan's first fundamental truth points the importance of the blue economy, his second fundamental truth—that the ocean is "nature's great medium of communication" (1917, 124)—hints at the value of the blue humanities. "Perhaps," he adds, it would be better to see this medium as "the water." Mahan may have been thinking of *medium* in terms of "transportation," but water is not only a container or something to be traversed; it is a living, physical ecosystem. The ocean sends its messages like ripples in a pond which can extend beyond shores and saturate even the most land-locked ideas, policies, and future imaginaries. The approach to seas and oceans and other bodies of water as mediums conveying information corresponds to the scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic immersions of the blue humanities. The ways in which bodies of water *communicate* represents one of the critical and often overlooked aspect of "sea power," a form of power in which the sea inputs information into the computer of human political consciousness, and we should, ideally, output an appropriate conservation response. In fact, our own individual approaches to the field have been powerfully shaped by physical engagements with watery spaces.

Hours spent in and near the water have revealed to us some of the nuances of nature's great medium and how wind, swells, tides, and breaks can become part of its cultural mode. We trace this truth back to two of our respective intellectual icons, Loren Eisley and Francisco Giner de los Rios. In his seminal essay, "Flow of the River," Eisley describes floating on his back down the Platte River, the principle watershed of Nebraska (and the first natural body of water in which one of the author's of this piece learned to swim). Floating, flowing, and dissolving in the middle of the North American continent as its silt and dirt shifts particle by particle, from mountain to sea, Eisley feels one with the "gelatinous materializations out of the mother ooze." He avers that this mystical experience is singular: "Once in a lifetime, perhaps, one escapes the actual confines of the flesh. Once in a lifetime, if one is lucky, one so merges with sunlight and air and running water that whole eons, the eons that mountains and deserts know, might pass in a single afternoon without discomfort" (1946, 16). Eisley's use of the pronoun *one*—"if one is lucky, one so merges"—suggests that this transcendental moment of escape and merger releases one from all bodily concerns, including gender binaries. For Eisley, nature is not something to dominate or "manifest," but something to merge with.

Francisco Giner de los Rios, another precursor to the blue humanities, charts a similar release from the flesh and adds a post-human understanding of the oceans. In the late-nineteenth century, Giner de los Rios transformed the pedagogical theories of Krausism into a practical philosophy and his most representative text, "Paisaje" (1886) modernized the concept of "landscape" in Spain. One of his students, the philosoper José Ortega y Gasset

recalled his maestro telling him, "When the traveler arrives and asks the innkeeper, 'What is there to eat?' the innkeeper answers, 'Señor, whatever you bring.' Well, this is the landscape; what each one brings (Ortega y Gasset 1988, 48). For Giner de los Rios, to understand the Spanish landscape or seascape required bringing one's ideals but also allowing space and time for direct, and non-verbal contact. During nature walks with his students, he often interrupted discussions and admonished them to be silent, to "look and enjoy" like the plants and animals. While walking one day along the coast of the Mediterranean, he remarked, "I would not want to humanize the Ocean, but to be like it. Only then might I know its essence" (qtd. in Pijoán and Antionio 2002, 109). As one of the founders of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (The Free Education Institution), Giner de los Rios helped push for the creation of Spain's first national parks in 1918.

Eisley's calls to "merge" with water and Giner de los Rios understanding that he must avoid humanizing the ocean to know its essence exemplify a trope of immersion and dissolution which pervades both the blue humanities and writing about waves. Two passages from popular surfing memoirs, Danial Duane's *Caught Inside* (1996) and William Finnegan's *Barbarian Days* (2015) exemplify the surfer-as-writer's unstable engagement with words, experience, and oceanscapes:

> I thought again about throwing language all over a scene, wondered if the emotional mystery of one's response to place doesn't lie in the inchoate play of possible words, of felt meanings and poetries, of the sublime, the romantic, the picturesque, Zen; even, perhaps, something new. And perhaps that twinge of disappointment one always feels at the words chosen—and thus also at the glorious scene-comes from the dream that in that instant of indecision and all-decision before your mind clarified its response to beauty, you just might have held within you language finally saturated with all the earth's meaning. (Duane 1996, 211)

> I felt myself floating between two worlds. There was the ocean, effectively infinite, falling away forever to the horizon. This morning it was placid, its grip on me loose and languorous. But I was lashed to its moods now. The attachment felt limitless, irresistible. (Finnegan 2015, 40)

Like Eisley's study of ecosystems and Giner de los Rios' examinations of landscape, to narrate one's engagement with surfable waves seems to demand acknowledgement of a kind of powerlessness. These passages also lead one to wonder about the mental and spiritual habits cultivated by *riding* waves and how *writing* waves may increase the public's commitments to the environmental issues and economic injustices that intersect this ocean practice.

Extending a scholarly discourse community like the blue humanities to include surfers seems necessary considering our current environmental challenges. In this journal, Jeffrey Di Leo answered his rhetorical question, "Can

Theory Save the Planet?" with a tentative "yes" and suggests theorists, "go down and get their hands dirty in the eco-catastrophes—rather than merely pondering them from above" (2013, 31), because, ultimately, adapting the humanities to address current calamities, "gives us our best chance of saving the planet" (35). In the blue humanities, John Gillis says he was compelled to cross the time lines between "coastal present and coastal past" because half of the earth's population now lives within 100 miles of the ocean and, "never before has the scale or frequency of threats been as great as now, complicated by the fact that so many who live on the shores have no idea how to live there in a sustainable way" (2012, 4). The figure of the unknowledgeable, shore-crowded public is repeated by Mentz, who claims that over the past two centuries, the oceans have been transformed, "from a vision of chaos into a playground," or, from sites of violence and alterity to sites of tourism and leisure (2009, 998). Surfing is sport that demands risk, oozes with contradictions, and is, for most who practice or observe, beautiful and fun. The challenge that remains is to translate the felt experience of the ocean and its power into political action.

Critical Surf Studies and Activist Surfers

Surfing requires a physical immersion in the ocean's literal zones with the common goal of riding across the power generated as the wave breaks. As recreational activity, religious practice, competitive sport, and global industry, surfing has reoriented millions and minds and bodies towards the water's edge. Surf brands have capitalized on an adventurous, thrill seeking, self–reliant mystique and surf culture has become an increasingly consumer-oriented and profitable enterprise, especially in regions that can support tourist infrastructure around surf breaks. Therefore, while the immediate practice of surfing allows one to be momentarily propelled by one of nature's momentum, the surfer is also deeply embedded in often-strict power structures and socio-economic networks.

A recent swell of surf-related research has teased some of the nuances and contradictions of this place-based, environmentally-immersive, and individualistic phenomenon, shedding light on the ways it cultivates pleasure, risk, and adventure but also hedonism, thrill-seeking, and colonization.[1] In addition to the essays of *The Critical Surf Studies Reader* (2018), two recent contributions deserve mention: Scott Laderman's *Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing* (2014), and Karin Ingersoll's *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology* (2016). These thoroughly-researched academic texts open with

[1]Additional surf related research that implicitly addresses the overlaps between blue humanities and support for a blue economy include: Ford and Brown (2006); Hill and Abbott (2009); Corne (2009); O'Brien and Ponting (2013; 2015); Borne and Ponting (2017); and Borne (2018).

narratives of surfers poised on the edge of a what, at the time, were politically unstable and financially disadvantaged communities. In Laderman's case, the surfer is an American military contractor who had trained soldiers in El Salvador and was now returning to surf the relatively empty waves in the war-torn country. Ingersoll offers her own experience as a surf guide in Samoa. In both cases, the surfer enjoys a vision of stunningly beautiful, smooth, relatively unknown and unridden waves; however, the scholars shift to reveal some of the political and economic power structures that carried these surfers into "their" waves. Laderman argues that surf tourism began with American imperialism in the Hawaiian Island and has evolved into an "unofficial form of cultural diplomacy" (2014, 4) that has "inevitably been imbued with political meanings" (5). For Ingersoll, working at the Samoan surf camp revealed, "the impact our desire to ride waves had on those island locals," and that "despite our perceived identities as organic beings, surfers and neither innocent nor benign voyagers…we are now also a group of international, neocolonial capitalists 'discovering' new waves in Oceana (and elsewhere)" (2016, 14).

Riding waves is not possible without swell, the visible presence of energy moving through the sea. Similarly, as a cultural practice, surfing never occurs in power neutral environments. In many ways, surfers are the beneficiaries of economic and political power: in their pursuit of waves, surfers have helped to innovate aspects of tourism, geography, bathometry, oceanography, and materials science. Surfers have invented novel uses of plastics, resins, polyurethane, and neoprene. Yet, with a few notable exceptions of groups in Australia and Hawai'i (Walker 2011), surfers have not historically cultivated their political capital to combat environmental damage, even when it threatens the surf breaks upon which their practice (and sometimes their livelihood) depends. As surfer Craig Lockwood complained in 1968, "Surfers are among the most politically powerless groups in the USA today. We have no voice" (qtd. in Westwick and Nuehsal 2013, 145).

Recently, however, surfers have finally begun to make their voices heard. One of the most powerful surf-related organizations, the Surfrider Foundation, was founded as a grassroots political action group in 1984 in response to direct threats to the famous surf break in Malibu, California. Since then, their volunteer-activist network has expanded to include 82 chapters and more than 1 million supporters, volunteers, and activists that have worked on hundreds of campaigns to resist development that will restrict or harm surf breaks (Surfrider Foundation 2019). Other non-profit organizations including Surfers Against Sewage, 4Ocean, and Take3 (a simple directive to collect three pieces of trash each time one visits the beach), organize events and campaigns to help clean beaches and raise awareness about ocean pollution. These events and campaigns are encouraging, and yet most efforts seem to be reactionary and to gravitate towards the most highly visible, aesthetically pleasing, "epic" beaches and corresponding surf breaks. How

can surfers working to clean or protect "my wave" gain the willingness and agency to protect our planet?

No aspect of surfing is immune from criticism. Even sustainable surf tourism ostensibly allied to the new eco-conscious surfing movement, has proven contentious. Ruttenburg and Brosius argue, "many of the solutions proposed by proponents of sustainable surf tourism are in need of fundamental rethinking. By aligning with income-oriented, stat quo sustainability, the emerging field of sustainable surf tourism runs the risk of becoming sustainability greenwashing" (2018, 109). Indeed, support for eco-gear and "save the waves" campaigns often seem to ignore the cultural history and entrenched power structures that coalesce within a surf break and which demand interdisciplinary evaluations and collective action.

Surfing and Surf Break Preservation in Cantabria, Spain

The cultural of surfing emerged relatively late in Spain, but the ocean circumvents the nation, spatially and culturally. From the geographic point of view, Spain's continental territory is a peninsula, connected to the rest of Europe through the Pyrenean isthmus. Spain's borders also include the Mediterranean and Atlantic archipelagos and small enclaves along the African coast. While the current seats of political and corporate power may be situated in its two dominant metropolises, Madrid and Barcelona, the population has been increasingly concentrated in the periphery, around its coastal strips and islands. Spain boasts several international ports along the Mediterranean (Algeciras and Valencia), the Cantabrian (Santander), the Atlantic (Ferrol, Vigo) as well as the Canary Island port of Las Palmas.

In addition to international trade, shoreline tourism has been a key economic sector in Spain, with significant socio-economic and cultural implications. In the 1960s, during the Franco dictatorship, government and industry began to promote coastal tourism. The image of Spain as bullfights, wine-flowing fiestas, and flamenco performances has since been supplemented by constructs of Spain as a place of by desires for "sol y playa." During these same decades, surfing came to Spain through direct contact with foreign travelers who brought surfboards with them, and through images Spaniards saw in magazines, television, film, and other media. One would-be Spanish surfer even reported modeling his board based on the album cover of the Beach Boys'1963 *Surfing USA* (Esparza 205). In the 1960s and 1970s, several pioneering surfers and surf clubs arose in Cantabria, Euskadi, Asturias, Galicia, and Andalusia. With the arrival of democracy at the end of the 1970s, and the opening towards a consumer society, a socioeconomic and political context was being prepared that would favor the growth of surfing across Spain.

Since the late 1990s, politicians, investors, and individual citizens have increasingly viewed surfing in Spain as an economic resource for the local development of coastal communities. The romantic and stereotyped image of Spain now includes the sea, the beach, and shoreline recreation. Marine sports tourism, including surf tourism as well as swimming, windsurfing, kiteboarding, boating, and fishing are important strategic resources that would, ideally, adopt green practices and recommendations for "blue" economies—again, understood to be policies, laws, and management techniques that balance "improved human wellbeing and social equity" with "reduced environmental risks and ecological scarcities" (Smith-Godfrey 2016, 59). However, until recently, both government and industry have prioritized revenue growth over more balanced and sustainable models. In recent years, under the label of "sustainable development" and following the guidelines on blue economies of the European Union, which are based on the promotion of endogenous resources and the enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage of local communities, various stakeholders have begun to organize trans-European sustainability projects based on surfing.

Of course, the challenge of sustainability remains pending at many levels. Despite a framework for sustainability, the primary goal seems to be attracting European investment and the perpetuation of a short-term model that achieves rapid economic performance without balancing the environmental, social, and cultural consequences of the spaces and groups affected. In this context, we find a booming coastal population drastically affecting the quality of the oceanscape and the surfable waves. There have been environmental catastrophes of water pollution as with sinking of the Prestige oil tanker in 2002, which affected the entire north coast of Spain, as well as the dredging of sand that erased a world-class wave at Mundaka in 2003. In 2005 the World Surf League competition in Mundaka was suspended and in 2008 Spain lost its only competition on this global circuit.

Since 2008, two lines of preservation with different concepts, methods, and results have emerged. Both courses of action share the long-term legal conservation of surf breaks in Spain. One of these lines emerged in the Canary Islands, as a result of the collaboration between the Canary Surfing Federation and the University of La Laguna, where the first meeting dedicated to the waves was organized as a resource for economic growth. A decision was made to follow the "surfonomics" approaches applied to surf breaks by American and Australian conservation organizations. As part of these efforts, the Spanish Surf Federation supported an inventory and cataloging of surf breaks on a national scale in order to seek a legal solution to their lack of legal protection (Lobo 2010). Until now, the inventory has been restricted to the Canary Islands and a full catalogue is still pending in the rest of the national territory. This approach treats the surf break as a site for competition and growing economic resource. The legal justification was sought under the Spanish Sports Law (10/1990), which offers all federative sports the possibility of retaining their practice spaces. The main argument of this line of

work was that surf breaks should be considered as the "practice fields" of this popular sport. The consideration of surf breaks as sites for sport and economic resource continue to be highly valued by the tourism sector. After the declaration of surfing as an Olympic sport for Tokyo 2020, the catalogue project may receive renewed interest from the Spanish authorities.

In Cantabria, another approach to surf break evaluation and protection has developed. These efforts also arose from an initial collaboration between the local university and the regional surf federation. The leading academic, a co-author of this article, worked towards creating an interdisciplinary project between the natural and social sciences to vouch for the patrimonialization, management, and conservation of the sea, the littoral zone, and surf breaks. An early appeal for the protection of the surf break was linked to the definition of "hydrodiversity," which can be understood as the natural diversity of the hydrosphere and the natural diversity of the aquatic environment in its various states (González-Trueba 2006). Concepts such as hydrodiversity encourage stakeholders to approach oceans not only as habitats or *containers* of life, ecosystems, flora and fauna, but as *living* systems. The places and elements of the water world are neither part of biodiversity, nor of geodiversity, but they are undoubtedly they are part of the planet's natural diversity. The oceans, seas and other bodies of water are elements of nature with their own value.

This conception guided efforts in Cantabria because it presented surf breaks as places to practice surfing, as a potential socioeconomic resource, *and* a unique natural and cultural heritage. A process of patrimonialization of surf breaks has helped to assess and convert into heritage what had not previously been considered as such by politicians, technical managers and citizens in general. Surf break preservation efforts in Cantabria have contributed another new word to the Spanish language—"maresaje" (seascape). Until now, these watery spaces have been included under the term "paisaje" (landscape), but maresaje offers a proper noun that refers to the marine environment, its physical reality, its formal configuration, and its cultural significance (González-Trueba 2017). To link the "sea" (mar) with the scape (saje) holds the potential of moving Spain, to some degree at least, away from an anthropocentric and towards a more inclusive geocentric vision. If the language is the dwelling of the vital style of a town, with this new term the Spanish culture takes a step in its renewed attention for the marine space.

Blue Geographies in Cantabrian Coast of North Spain

In Cantabria, theory has led to action. Interdisciplinarity, instrumentation, valuation, patrimonialization, management, proposals for legal protection, conservation, environmental education, and dissemination have been

materialized with a decade of stakeholder engagement and legal protections. The first instrument designed for the dissemination of such values and messages was the *Manifesto for the Protection of the Waves* (2012), written by one of the authors and distributed to numerous political authorities during the events to celebrate the European Maritime Week. The *Manifesto* is a public declaration of the value and necessity of surf breaks as a natural patrimony, as spaces where the public can practice a sport and sites of socioeconomic and cultural resources. The Spanish Surf Federation, the regional surf federations, as well as various NGOs, municipalities, and surf industry stakeholders each ratified the declaration. The notion of "heritage and patrimony," applied to an aquatic element such as surf breaks, has made it possible to demonstrate the long cultural and geographical tradition of Spanish culture.

The concepts of surfing as culture and surf breaks as heritage are interwoven in the *Manifesto* to reconceptualize the notion of the surf community. Surfers and surf media often lunge towards the dream of the perfect, uncrowded waves used to justify ends and to ignore a reality full of contradictions and imbalances. An intercultural community commitment is a worthy challenge: the preservation of surf breaks and the defense of respect and admiration for the sea must reconfigure the sense of belonging and identity, not to a human group, but to the nature of the ocean.

In 2012, when the first reservation was declared in Cantabria, it was not only a means of protecting a natural habitat, but also protecting a cultural resource. In 2015, Mundaka was identified as a surf reserve. The next year, Mundaka was declared a site of "natural heritage" by the General Meetings of Vizcaya (Basque Country) and achieved legal protection as part of the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve by the Department of Environment and Territorial Planning of the Basque Government. This was the first legal protection of a surf break in Europe.

Among the tasks of political lobbying, since 2013, a surf community representative has been present during discussions of patronage for the protected natural spaces of the Cantabrian Natural Parks Network. The surfers have been given a voice and vote in the decision of future actions. In 2016, the process culminated with a parliamentary proposal for legal protection and Declaration of the Natural Monument of the Surf Breaks of Cantabria. Currently, a new declaration is being negotiated that brings together different levels of regional and national administration in Cantabria, as well as the creation of a strategy for a real sustainable surfing model in Cantabria (González-Trueba 2018).

In Cantabria, the idea that surf breaks are a natural and cultural heritage and a strategic sport and socioeconomic resource is already valid. In recent years, the path initiated from the academic efforts in Spain has been extended to convey the national surfing panorama to the different levels of public administration. Politicians, media, business sector, citizens have a new place of reference—the littoral zone—and group with a growing environmental and political interest—surfers.

How can the blue humanities help to materialize sustainable development and mitigate some of the uneven impacts caused by tourism, shoreline development, and climate change? In Spain, and particularly in Cantabria, this question relates to conservation of nature and the management of protected natural areas. Waves and surf breaks are a strategic resource and a unique heritage that must be valued, managed, and protected legally. The concept of heritage is key. Environmental efforts related to the blue economy run the risk of promoting sustainability without accompanying tools to maintain the proposed ecosystem for the long term. They thus become agents of tourism promotion, perpetuating models that prioritize quantity, short-term growth, and exploitation of resources, as opposed to the preservation of a heritage site *and* a natural resource.

The primary goals of our upcoming work with the Surf & Nature Alliance are to build more cohesion between the blue humanities and the blue economies in the form of a national surf break conservation program. Surf breaks are resources, artifacts, and instruments of inspiration. Again, the blue humanities can help to reconceptualize the practice of surfing, showing that it is not limited to the interests of the consumer society and competitive sport, it is also a means of amplifying the ocean's messages. The surfer who understands the littoral zone and its role in a broader ecosystem and political network can achieve a new way of looking, feeling, and valuing the sea. Surfing is a way of being and being a mode of civilization, a key to culture. The magic of water may only be perceived by the person who carries it inside. From the blue humanities we have inherited the challenge of cleaning the lenses through which we look at the seascape and its surfable waves.

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