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# **‘It’s the sea and the beach more than anything for me’: Local surfer’s and the construction of community and *communitas* in a rural Cornish seaside village.**

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports on a qualitative ethnographic study undertaken on a small rural village community in Cornwall, UK with a significant population of local surfers. It focuses on these local surfers’ interactions with the wider rural community they co-exist with, and in which ways this group might contribute to the formation, maintenance and identity of that broader rural community. The analysis presented draws together a range of broadly agreed conceptual notions of community with Victor Turner’s (1969) notion of spontaneous, normative and ideological *communitas* as dynamic emergent elements in what Whol (2015) refers to as a process of developing community sense through experiencing and communicating aesthetic judgments. Findings illustrate that notions of community were not restricted to a static and bounded geographical location. Rather, the village focused upon in this study was seen as a hub of a close and a wider de-territorialised community. Despite their obvious differences, there was a strong sense of *communitas*, community sense and aesthetic judgement between surfing locals and non-surfing locals, expressed through the sharing of experience of the inspired feelings of native place configured around relationships with the sea, the local beach, surf break and village life.

**Keywords:** Rural; Community; Ethnography; Surfing; de-territorialisation; *communitas*; aesthetic judgment

## Introduction

Seaside villages are one of a number of manifestations of the rural in the English countryside often imagined as a „picturesque place of safety and neighbourly community“ (Neal and Walters, 2008:279). However, as Barth (1994:13) notes „communities cannot be created simply through the act of imagining,“ prompting questions of what is involved in constructing and maintaining rural „community“? While such a broad question is beyond the scope of this article and the research that informs it, it has prompted us to consider the more focused question of the part played by a community of local surfers and the contribution they make in constructing and maintaining one rural community of which they are a part. Frequently described as „non-conformist“ (Usher and Kerstetter, 2015; Ford and Brown, 2006; Irwin, 1973), surfers have often been considered as living in contrast to the broader communities in which they reside „living differently and displaying irreverence“ (Booth, 2001: 16), with many studies focusing on surfer's interactions within their own surfing communities concentrating on issues of localism (Authors 2016; Bennett, 2006), individualism (Authors, 2015; Lanagan, 2003; Usher, 2017), and gender (Booth, 2004; Brennan, 2016; Loy, 1995; Nemani and Thorpe, 2016). The focus of this paper deliberately moves beyond such concerns to contemplate interactions with the wider rural community, and considers how this group contributes to the formation, maintenance and identity of that rural community in ways which also facilitate the extension of its sociospatial boundaries.

The emergence of the term local surfer, initially coined by Booth (2004), refers to surfers who have a sociospatial relationship with a given surf break they would typically describe as their *local* break. Connections between the local surfer and the surfing community is suggested throughout this literature on surfing subculture. For example, Booth (2004) labelled the small gatherings of local

surfers at their local surf break as „modern tribal groups“ and are described by Loy (1995: 267) as providing young men with „a sense of community“.

However, with the notable exception of Stranger (2010) the literature on the local surfer and community is very much confined to a focus on the local *surfing* community itself and little is known about the local surfers“ interaction with the wider community, that is the community they live amongst in the geographical area surrounding their local surf break and which invariably contains a diverse population of non-surfers at the same time. In order to achieve this focus, it is important to qualify that this paper intentionally moves away from both the community of surfers as an entity and the rural community as whole. Rather, this paper concerns itself with this understudied aspect of the contribution a small community of local surfers make in constructing and maintaining the broader rural community they are a part of.

Focusing on the career stages of a group of local surfers, Authors (2015) highlight that at the early *nurturing* stage of the local surfer career, they develop a sense of belonging, linking them to their local surfing community, and at the later *responsible* stage, local surfer’s surfing activities begin to function more explicitly as a community binding/building activity - expressed through activities such as, running local businesses, promoting community events and nurturing young surfers during surf sessions. In addition, further connections to community can be made in the phenomenon of *Localism*; „a preference for what is local...expressed through ideas, customs, attitudes and behaviours of the surfers in your local area“ (Bennett, 2004: 346). In their work on Localism, Authors (2016:10) noted how local surfers can be protective about the liminal space that is their local break from outsider surfers because „it is seen as part of their local community“ and that it is this attachment that gives rise to *communitas*, the experiential building block of their way of life as a local surfing community which also serves as an experiential bridge to the wider rural

seaside community as the shared appreciation of and attachment to -both expressed through aesthetic judgment- particular local marine spaces is also shared by many in the wider community. Therefore, this paper investigates the role the local surfer plays in the wider community, paying particular attention to how they interact with non-surfing community members and the non-surfing activities within that locality, and, importantly how their *communitas*, expressed through positive aesthetic judgements of beach, sea, surf break and local community values intermingle with similar values of non-surfing local residents, thereby adding a powerful impetus to this aspect of one rural community's sense of identity. In order to do this, we first revisit the notion of community with a critical gaze to establish the key elements of this concept that we have drawn on in the analysis.

## **1. Conceptualising Community**

Community acts as an appropriate theoretical lens through which to focus this paper. Since Tönnies' (1887) *Community and Society* identified the continuum of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* relations between people in society, notions of what community is and how it changes have been the subject of ongoing debate. More recently, Alleyne (2002: 608) reflects that community is „quite unsurprisingly a term which is impossible to define with any precision“. Despite this inherent ambiguity and debate, there are generally considered to be three conceptual elements underpinning community research which provide a starting point for our analysis; the concentration of the residents of the community within a delimited geographical area; the social relationships and interaction and, the idea of „common ties“ (Hillery, 1955).

Out of the ninety-four definitions of community considered by Hillery, seventy agree that the presence of area is a necessary element of community (Bell and Newby, 1971). Area is considered to be a location, physical territory and geographical continuity (Gusfield, 1975).

Metcalfe (1996) suggests that a condition of „community“ is having a stable, permanent settlement with Maclver and Page (1961) highlighting locality, which in one sense can refer to geographical closeness. Indeed, drawing on a discussion of the work of Etzioni (1995), Day (2006:16) takes the communitarian perspective that community formation involves, „a slowing down in the readiness with which people will flit between places, and a new eagerness on their part to put down local roots“. However, anticipating more recent discussions of community *de-territorialisation* (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007), Sennett (1977) contends the understanding of a community being a place on the map is much too narrow and people can have experiences of community which do not depend on living *near* one another. Giulianotti and Robertson (2012: 447) extend this idea commenting:

Local identities are not tied to a specific physical or geographical place or “territory”, but are instead highly mobile, as evidenced by particular migrant communities or by “virtual” groups which rely on media or communications technologies (e.g., Facebook groups).

By drawing together these notions, this study examines the idea that rural community exists within and beyond a delimited geographical area.

Surfing is a good example of what Wohl (2015: 301) drawing on Hebdige (1979) refers to as a „geographically dispersed“ subculture. Within this, local surfers are likely to experience the juxtaposition of being local to their own break, but an outsider to another. In this way, the local surfer is simultaneously localised and deterritorialised in both meaning and practice leading to what Authors, (2016) describe as a „glocalised“ identity. Such a perspective helps us imagine the existence of local surfers across the globe, potentially sharing little in common except their surf practice and a generic sociospatial relationship with a given surf break. Glocalised surfing identities also raises questions about surfer's relationships with and contribution to the wider local, rural communities of which they assume an active presence due to the way in which they simultaneously construct and

transgress physical notions of territory and boundary. While this is happening in other spheres of rural community life, glocalised surfer identities add impetus to such transformations - a point we return to later.

Social relationships and interaction are mentioned within many definitions of community, although the context of these relationships can vary. Of Hillery's ninety-four definitions, Bell and Newby (1996) note ninety-one mention the presence of a group of people interacting. Inkeles (1964) argues that in communities, residents exhibit a substantial degree of integrated social interaction. This view is mirrored in Gusfield's (1975) conceptualisation of the quality or character of human relationships, while Wellman (2001: 127) further specifies that community involves „interpersonal ties that provide support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity.“ Although Inkeles (1964) notes that a substantial degree of integrated social interaction occurs in any community, for Gusfield (1975), Maclver and Page (1961), and Wellman (2001) importance should be attached to the *type, quality, character* and *results* of this relationship rather than the *degree* of interaction. Qualities of interaction relate to the third generic component of community which Hillery refers to as „common ties“ (Bell and Newby, 1971). When Gusfield (1975) discusses social interaction, he recognises the existence of *bonds of similarity* as what unites a collectivity of people, a view supported by Maclver and Page (1961), Wellman (2001) and Sennett (1977) who each note some degree of social coherence, „interpersonal ties“ and shared action as a necessary component of a functional community.

Finally, Gusfield (1975) suggests that a homogenous culture can be a mark of community. Factors such as language, moralities and common histories can produce a particular sense of being/identity and act as a „common tie“ between people. Similarly,

Metcalfe (1996:16) concluded that communities were linked with a *unifying trait or a common interest* and that „the development of a sense of community was related to the stability and composition of the population“.

Part of the problem in defining community is that definitions tacitly co-present the problem of agency and structure, without addressing how these relate. Turner (1969: 69) forwards the Latin loanword, *communitas* rather than community „to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an "area of common living.““ Turner’s notion of *communitas* develops the collectivist assumption contained within Tonnies' (1887) idea of *Gemeinschaft* of a “unity of wills” (Christenson, 1984: 161) but replaces Tonnie’s inherent phylogenetic assumptions with a sociogenetic and constructionist perspective. *Communitas* is particularly helpful in approaching the „other dimension of “society” with which I have been concerned is less easy to define“ (Turner, 1967:126), such as the unifying traits, common interests, common ties and bonds of similarity mentioned above.

Echoing the sentiments expressed above, Turner (1969: 128) eschews „the notion that *communitas* has a specific territorial locus... *communitas* emerges where social structure is not“ thus existing in a dialectic relationship with social structures of community life. *Communitas*, he argues „is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom“ (p. 113). Contrastingly, „*communitas* has an existential quality“ (p. 127) involving relations between people and which develops „with experience of life in society“ (p. 128). *Communitas* contains „an aspect of potentiality...often in the subjunctive mood“ (p. 127) in that relations between people are generative of such aspects as symbols, metaphor and of agency and behaviour. In this sense, *communitas* is the idea of unstructured community bound together instead by threads of common experience and can take three forms, *spontaneous* (the central notion of the emergent experience of togetherness), *normative* (when togetherness states are transformed into more explicit formal forms of organisation) and *ideological* (where togetherness states become imagined



moralised ideals). Turner compares *communitas* to Bergson's notion of *élan-vital* (life force) which has the potential to break „in through the interstices of structure“ (p. 128) and reform or challenge structure, something he argues can be viewed as *anti-structure*. The dialectic, experiential and intersubjective aspects of *communitas* also align conceptually with Wohl's (2015) development (via Ardent,1977) of the Kantian notion of *sensus communis* or *community sense*. Wohl (2015: 300) contends that during everyday life, „Individuals sensuously experience their surroundings and communicate these aesthetic judgments“. Moreover, that expressions of aesthetic judgement with a group act, „as indicators of belonging or distinction, and their agreement or disagreement in these aesthetic judgments strengthens or weakens groupness.“ Following Wohl, the expression and negotiation of aesthetic judgement appear to form an important core of the *process* of community sense which contributes to the broader idea of *communitas* in its community building function.

The aim of this paper is to use these conceptions of community, *communitas* and aesthetic judgement as a series of sensitising concepts to analyse local surfers' interactions with the wider rural community, alongside those of non-surfing locals with whom they share affinities, with the aim of establishing how the surfing group contributes to the formation, maintenance and identity of this rural community. In our conclusions, we return to consider the implications of our findings and the utility of these conceptual ideas for the task undertaken.

## **2. Methods**

Data presented in this paper are taken from a larger qualitative ethnographic study conducted in a village in the South West of England. The village was chosen because it was familiar and accessible by the lead researcher (author 1), and compatible with the research question (Gratton and Jones, 2004) which was to consider the role played by surfing in a small rural community: Local surfers are seen as a central part of the local community in this village but crucially they are not seen as *the*

community. Nevertheless, this section of the community is disproportionately visible and active in establishing and maintaining community life, evidenced through their organisation of key community events which are open to all members of the community. An ethnographic strategy was selected to capture this.

Following Crow and Wiles (2008), the village was referred to by the pseudonym *Hessiock* and details relating to it, participants and non-participating residents anonymized and given pseudonyms. Hessiock, has its “own” beach break and what the researchers recognised as a significant local surfer population within its total population in 2009 of just under 1000 residents (OCSI, 2009). The population and geographical boundaries of Hessiock has remained relatively stable since the 1950s, being made up of people with local jobs living in Hessiock and residents commuting into a nearby urban area for employment. The ethnography combined observations made of 29 identified participant residents, considerably more resident’s behaviour were observed however, via participant observation in public spaces and finally documentary data. 16 participants were formally interviewed in either individual or small group settings (see Table 1). 10 of these interviewees were local surfers (LS) and 6 were non-surfing locals (NSL). When quoted below these are identified as LS or NSL respectively. All participants in this study are referred to as residents in this paper as they all reside, or have resided, for a period of their life within Hessiock.

| Name    | Biographical Information including approximate age at data collection<br>(given in brackets)                 | Local surfer (LS) or nonsurfing locals (NSL) |
|---------|--|--|
| Rachel  | Teacher. Moved to Hessiock when she married Jacob. (29)  | LS   |
| Jacob   | Lifeguard. Long term resident of Hessiock. (32)  | LS   |
| Michael | Retail representative for surf company. Long term resident in a village outside Hessiock. (25)               | LS   |
| Phil    | Self-employed photographer. Long term resident in a village outside Hessiock. (51)                           | LS   |
| Wes     | Self-employed carpenter. Long term resident of Hessiock but moved to nearby Town when he married Ruth. (29)  | LS   |
| Ruth    | Teacher. Long term resident of nearby City but moved to nearby Town when married Wes Deacon. (Estimated 30+) | LS   |
| Tanya   | Self-employed businesswoman. Long term resident of Hessiock. (Estimated 40+)                                 | NSL  |
| Martin  | Contractor for an oil company. Long term resident of Hessiock. (Estimated 40+)                               | LS   |
| Billy   | Student. Long term resident of Hessiock. (15)  | LS   |
| Andy    | Self-employed surf filmmaker. New resident of Hessiock since moving from nearby City. (29)                   | LS   |
| Tara    | Council worker. New resident of Hessiock since moving from nearby City. (Estimated 30+)                      | NSL  |

|       |   |     |
|-------|---|-----|
| Sam   | Carpenter. Long term resident of Hessiock but moved to neighbouring Town. (26)        | LS  |
| Steve | Self-employed builder. Long term resident of Hessiock and neighbouring Waverton. (27) | NSL |
| Reg   | Retired lecturer. Long term resident of Hessiock. (Estimated 70+)                     | NSL |
| David | Lawyer. Long term resident of Hessiock but living and employed in London. (32)        | NSL |
| Anne  | Long term resident of Hessiock but living and employed in London. (29)                | NSL |
| Mark  | Photographer. Long term resident of Hessiock but living and employed in London. (36)  | LS  |

**Table 1.** Participant information including biographical data.

Participant observations were made purposefully at key community events such as meetings for the annual winter surf competition and also opportunistically while being immersed within the flow of everyday rural village life. Observations were documented by the lead researcher after the event or observed situation had taken place, in order to facilitate a more richly detailed description (Kawulich, 2005) as opposed to relying solely on participants' memories and recall of events (Gratton and Jones, 2004). Documentary data from the community were also gathered and took a number of forms including minutes from key community meetings, websites to which participants had contributed, and photographs of key community events. In the analysis that follows observational and

documentary data inform the backdrop and context of the discussion while primary interview data form the focus.

Analysis of the various forms of data collected, followed Hsieh and Shannon's (2005: 1278) interpretation of content analysis which involved „the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns“. This analytical process corresponded to Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis, moving from the transcription of fieldnotes and interviews to formal coding of these and other collected documentation, searching and reviewing of themes and finally, to thematic definition and interpretation. Etic codes

(Heandland and Pike, 1990) generated from the conception of community and *communitas* highlighted were set alongside existing literature on community and evolved into analytical themes presented in the next section.

### **3. Analysis and Discussion**

#### *4.1 Identifying communitas: the bonds of similarity through shared experience of sea and beach, surf and village life*

The sea, beach and village life were overwhelmingly seen as a unifying trait and common interest to many of the residents, both LS and NSL alike despite their differing experiences of it. LSs Andy and NSL Tara strongly agreed with this view, Andy in particular, on recently moving to Hessiock immediately noticed the focus on the sea.

this place is just, it's all on the sea, wherever you are you can see the sea pretty much, in pretty much every house you can see the sea, or you know your near enough...it's kind of quite nice that everything seems to be focused around that.

(Andy; LS and Tara; NSL)

On being asked directly what they felt were the unifying traits and common interests shared within the village Anne replied; „it’s the sea more than anything“ and David followed „it’s the sea and the beach more than anything for me“ (Anne; NSL, David; NSL, Mark; LS). They go on to say that if Hessiock was not by the sea they would not return to the village so often from their time working in London. Frequent walks taken along the beach by the lead researcher often involved unintended encounters with LS and NSL, also on a walk. A brief moment where perhaps LS and NSL shared a common experience with each other. Although their particular experience of the sea may differ, residents shared interest in the sea and beach explains why *communitas* arises between these two groups within the community.

The village and village life was also seen as an important common interest. Rachel, another LS and relative newcomer to the village noted.

I guess your common interests are...where you live, and your interest in the things that affect your everyday life. So, you know you meet up with people in the village and you’ll talk about things that are happening in the village like the social events that are happening... or you might talk about what’s going on in the village, whose doing what to their houses and, what developments are happening... as well as what social events are going on. (Rachel; LS)

Jacob, a long-term resident, agrees and notes that any issues that affect the village give it a sense of shared experience (Jacob; LS) adding to *communitas*. Moreover, the shared experience of living and growing up in the village is highly significant as it represents; a unique shared experience...that does really draw people together I think, like that experience of having grown up in an area together, in a community together...having gone through your childhood in that place...that does sort of draw you together with other people in there and you tend to find that, you know, the

people who've lived there for a long time tend to automatically be able to communicate and maybe get on better with each other than people who are brand new to the area because there isn't that sense of shared experience (Jacob; LS)

Although village life can be viewed as a common tie, according to Jacob the shared experience of life in this particular seaside village is the tie that binds and generates ideological *communitas*.

In Hessiock, another element of ideological *communitas* is the strong presence of families and family life as part of the fabric of village life. Rachel reflects, „I think in terms of morals and values, we have a lot in common because...it's very family orientated, there are a lot of people here with children growing up in the schools...there's not a lot of crime, there's not a lot of drunkenness“ (Rachel; LS). Jacob points out that „people will look out for each other in a village you know, they'd be concerned about your welfare“ (Jacob; LS). Bauman (2001) views the ability of one member of the community to rely on another's good will as one of the seductions of community. Jacob compares the morals and values of Hessiock to his perception of those of people within a city, highlighting what he feels is the positive difference between village and city life;

If someone's just had an affair and a family is just breaking up in the village, that isn't seen as a positive thing...people would perceive that as, that's a really sad thing to happen and so, whereas maybe in a city people don't care...there's definitely a more, slightly older fashioned more traditional outlook on life, definitely in the village, and in Hessiock as opposed to the city.

While we do not seek to create a simplistic binary between rural and urban communities, there was a clear example of the *perception* amongst residents that their rural village values contrasted strongly to that of an urban existence which they described in terms aligned with a Durkheimian demoralised urban anomie (Marks, 1974) and Tonnies' (1887) individualised *Gesellschaft*. Moreover,

this further evidences the presence of ideological *communitas* arising from what Wohl (2015) terms the „affective valance“ created by concordant aesthetic judgements over the value of the nuclear family in this setting.

#### *4.2 Locales of social interaction the production of communitas*

Aside from the beach and sea itself, there are three village locales where Hessiock residents interact and where *communitas* and aesthetic judgement about it are formed and refreshed with the local surfing community playing a very visible part; the pub, the local surf club and the Working Men’s Club. The pub in Hessiock is an example of Oldenburg’s (1998) idea of a „third place“: an informal place where members of a community gather to relax outside of work and the home, and which he believed to be an integral space in a healthy society. It was considered by many to be one of the only constant locales for both LS and NSL residents to socially interact within the village supporting Earnshaw’s (2000) reflection on „The Pub in Literature“ as being a social environment that welcomes the spectrum of community residents and thereby fosters occasions for *communitas* to emerge. Steve states „it’s probably the only place, where you’re going to meet any cross section of society in one place cos there’s not really a lot else going on“ (Steve; NSL). Jacob agrees and notes that you are brought together with people who you would not necessarily otherwise mix with socially (Jacob; LS). The pub is seen as a „central point to the village“ (Tanya; NSL, and Martin; LS), which reflecting on those members of the community spread geographically far and wide, becomes a venue through which they can socially interact with more local residents, as Rachel states; „The guys you meet down the pub are guys that meet in the village who live in the village or who have lived in the village“ (Rachel; LS). In fact, a number of interviews were undertaken at the pub on request of the interviewees (LS and NSL). We return to this point later in our discussion of *regrouping* however, it is worth highlighting Rachel’s use of the term „guys“ is in reference to both males and females, despite its masculine connotations.



Next, the local surf club, which contrary to its title is a locale through which both LS and NSL residents publicly interact. Despite the membership being made up of predominantly LSs, the events of the club are explicitly intended for the whole community, including NSL residents. Local surf club events such as a raft race and winter surf competition serve as a stimulus to refreshing *communitas* by bringing together current locals with many of the NSL community who are living away from the village but return and regroup to attend it (for example people like Anne, David and Mark; NSL). In addition, LSs, who according to Rachel used to live in the close community but have had to move to the wider community also use the club itself and its events as a way to remain part of the close community (Rachel; LS). For example, at the time of data collection, Wes lived in Trevet (over 10 miles from Hessiock) but was actively involved in the organisation of events at the local surf club. According to Andy, Tara and Rachel, the local surf club played a vital role in their integration into the close community, when they were all relative newcomers to the village. Therefore, although their core membership may only consist of the insider LS community, the events that the local surf club run are successful in bringing together the close and wider community, and attracting NSLs back, highlighting the important role the LS plays in constructing and maintaining *communitas* within and around the village.

There are, however, tensions that emerge around making the events the local surf club runs about the *community* as opposed to being exclusively about *surfing*. A tension witnessed by the lead researcher on a number of occasions during interviews and participant observation. Some members of the local surf club were keen to express their views on this topic to the lead researcher during chance encounters. Taking the opportunity to try and lure the lead researcher out of an unbiased, silent stance to gain some gratification and allegiance on the topic. Andy, a LS, was one member who spoke out about this division, noting during his interview that one member saw the purpose of the club as solely surfing, wanting the club to create quality surfing events, whereas the majority saw

the club as a vehicle to the development of the close and wider village community. Andy believes the local surf club is better directing their events at the community rather than being specifically for surfers because; the people that are involved in it are good at organising community events... I don't know whether there's any point in making it a highly competitive surf competition once a year 'cause it doesn't...help any of the local surfers in the competition to have one a year and to just have it based around local surfers, that sounds like a community event not a...surfing event. (Andy; LS and Tara; NSL)

The Working Men's Club is the third locale through which predominantly NSL residents of the close and wider community socially interact through regular group meetings and a one-off or annual event for members. The members of the Working Men's Club only had one social event a year which was held specifically for them, the remainder of the year it was used as a venue for several other groups or clubs to meet up such as an art group, a drama group, a short mat bowls group, bingo, badminton, yoga, pilates, coffee mornings, and a hospice support group. Interestingly Reg, the oldest participant in this study (over 70 years of age), and Chairman at the time of data collection believes that many of the people involved in these outside clubs still become members of the Working Men's Club as they feel this gives them a sense of belonging to the village; people „pay their four pounds subs and that's their one contribution saying I belong to Hessiock“ (Reg; NSL). The Working Men's Club is well used within the village, however there is a tendency for it to appeal to an older age group as Jacob testifies;

I know a lot, you know, in the older age bracket that, there's quite a strong local community of people that meet at the Working Men's Club and that has weekly bingo and sort of coffee mornings and stuff like that. (Jacob, LS)

Although Reg describes the Working Men's Club as thriving within the village, the lead researcher noted a number of conversations where like Steve, they believed the working men's club is ageing and in need of renewal; „the same for like a hundred years...sterile and governed by people that are far too old and don't like change“ (Steve; NSL), an example of a representation „of the past“ from the imagined rural (Norman and Power, 2015: 50). Significantly, since the time of data collection the Working Men's Club has changed its name to „The Village Hall“ a possible attempt to shake off its „ageing“ and gendered identity and thereby generate a revitalised and more inclusive community.

In their work on the Women's Institute and the Young Farmers Clubs, Neal and Walters (2008) found that organisations such as these create social spaces in which club identity can perform specific rural community functions. It is tempting, but incorrect to conclude that the local surf club is for LSs what the working men's club is for NSLs, a place to perform specific rural functions. Community is produced and maintained through these community social spaces, in particular by defining, shaping, reproducing and organising local ceremonies, events, occasions, activities and traditions. A rift between these two groups was very apparent to the lead researcher during the data collection period as a whole and it revolved around the organisation of two events; the village carnival and the raft race. Once under the organisation of the Working Men's club, an attempt had been made to collaborate on both events with the local surf club, however this was not without its difficulties resulting in disputes over decision making and ultimately the local surf club gaining control of both events. Phil, a long-term resident in the wider community provides a rationale for the power struggle commenting on one event in particular, the raft race:

The Working Men's Club is kind of like ruled you know all the resources of the village for quite a long time...I think that you know they've had a few challenges to their authority over the last few years and I think this one was a particularly poignant one [this event]

has always been seen as sort of an icon of you know the community calendar and ... is again quite an important week run by the Working

Men's Club and I think it's the first time that someone's said no it's not your week, you know it doesn't belong to you and if we want to run something we will run something and I think it's been a real big shot across the bows and it is quite interesting ... to see you know these two sort of factions you know one which kind of represents the youth and moving up, you know and another hanging on to that sort of little bits of responsibility and power that they have (Phil Cole; LS)

In summary, within Hessiock what might be termed *civic* interaction takes place in three main locales; the pub, the local surf club, and the Working Men's Club where the spontaneous or existential *communitas* is converted into more normative, organised forms of *communitas* which in turn structure occasions for spontaneous *communitas* to re-occur.

However, the tension generated between the local surf club and the Working Men's Club, reveals ideological forms of *communitas* formed around discrepancies of agreement in the aesthetic judgements of what community membership should be about. This struggle, that was in the end „won“ by the LSs and their club, goes some way to illustrating the pivotal role the LSs play as leaders in their wider rural community, providing ideas and a vision for the future, and a focus around which community identity and belonging can be nurtured (Smailes, 2002a, 2002b). In this way, the surf club has come to better represent the community because of how it nurtures spontaneous *communitas* around the *collective aesthetic and mood* towards the beach, sea *and* village culture. In the next section, we consider how the LS's and their sense of *communitas* have also come to help redefine the community boundaries.

*4.3 The close and wide community. Deterritorialisation and fluid levels of community boundaries of village, beach, sea and surf.*

When asked about the symbolic and geographical boundaries of the village, the residents were united on what represented the boundaries of Hessiock, although it is clear that the local surfing community and the local surf club have been particularly instrumental in rendering the conception of community boundaries more fluid. On the East side of the village in particular many (including Mark, Anne and Tanya) highlighted the „S bend in the road“ which, if entering the village, gives you your first panoramic view of the sea and Hessiock, highlighting once again the sea as a native place for both LS and NSLs residents.

However, Waverton is the next village West of Hessiock, less than a mile away, and is closely linked with Hessiock both geographically and symbolically in the minds of the residents of both villages. Despite citing geographical boundaries between Hessiock and Waverton many villagers, both LSs and NSL residents alike, felt that Hessiock and Waverton (a neighbouring village) were inextricably linked and that there was no significant boundary as Jacob explains;

Waverton and Hessiock always sort of perceived as a little bit like one village by people in Hessiock... they haven't got separate councils or anything like that, you know, everything's done in harmony...the Waverton to Hessiock raft race is a joint event and, and you know the facilities in Waverton are used by Hessiock people and vice versa...it's not like umm a big divide at all really. (Jacob; LS)

Interestingly, although many of the LSs agreed that Hessiock and Waverton could be thought of as one village, their feelings towards the surf breaks in each village were significantly different. Michael notes that at Hessiock „you'd know everyone in the water...not Waverton as much 'cause they just come from all over“ (Michael; LS). Although Michael states that he surfs both Hessiock and Waverton,

he notes „Hessiock’s a better wave“ (Michael; LS). The combination of this being the Hessiock LSs’ local break and it being a better wave, fuels the construction of localism through insider and outsider status of those who surf there (see Authors, 2015). However, curiously, localism from Hessiock surfers does not seem to occur in Waverton, despite their feelings that Hessiock and Waverton are „one village“. Michael states „I mean Waverton is fine, I think Hessiock is the one if there were outsiders there, they wouldn’t get very many waves“ (Michael Howard; LS). Similarly, Billy noted that in his favourite spot outsiders would provoke a reaction from him „But in Waverton, I am not too fussed“ (Billy Reed; LS). Despite both NSL and LS residents seeing a *fluid* boundary between Hessiock and Waverton, the LSs’ insider/outsider belief exhibited in the form of localism, highlights a defence of Hessiock over Waverton that the NSL does not experience. More specifically, the spontaneous *communitas* emerging from the shared experience of riding this wave and the collective aesthetic judgement that values that experience feeds a sense of identity and ownership. However, this particular sense of *communitas* is nevertheless influential due to the way in which similarly disposed neighbouring LSs are welcomed as members of the wider community. These surfing relationships alter the dynamic of insider and outsider through surfing participation and along with it deterritorialising boundaries of the community.

There was also an indication that a feeling of community extended to the whole peninsula of South East Cornwall. As Rachel stated; „I think the boundaries are quite fluid...there’s quite a fluid community between here and I would say White bay...you flow quite easily between those communities although they are separate“ (Rachel; LS). Similarly, Anne often feels she is *home* from London once she enters the peninsula; „when we’re driving down it’s when we get over the Tamar bridge, then the windows go down and we take deep breaths and we’re like yeah we’re home“ (Anne, David and Mark; LS). Groups such as the Hessiock’s local surf club also indicate the fluid community

and boundaries that exist between the populations in this area, as Tanya and Martin state, the club is not just for

Hessiock, „it’s about you know surfing on this peninsula“ (Tanya; NSL, and Martin; LS). Returning to the LSs’ construction of insiders/outside, and feelings of localism Michael notes „I surfed Portwise last night (a location within the peninsula), I don’t really ever surf it and it was fine“ (Michael; LS) indicating that he is not considered an outsider at this location.

The geographical boundaries can seem to be unclear as there are those that view the community to be Hessiock, those that see it as Hessiock and Waverton, and those, who view it as the whole peninsula in which Hessiock sits. This dilemma is somewhat resolved by Rachel who suggests; „I’d say there are like levels so you’ve got the Hessiock boundaries...then you can extend that towards just outside Waverton and just outside White bay“ (Rachel; LS). Tanya’s use of the term „wider community“ within her interview supports Rachel’s idea of levels. Therefore, the geographical boundaries might be thought of as areas which then produce different levels of community. Firstly, the close community which consists of Hessiock and Waverton, and then the wider community which consists of everything within the peninsula of South East Cornwall, supporting previous suggestions that Hessiock is the hub (close community) of a wider fluid community territory. However, the wider community does not consider residents geographically spread beyond South East Cornwall. Although there are residents living beyond the boundaries associated with the close and wider community, it is their *association* with this location that produces a more clear-cut de-territorialised sense of community. Paradoxically, this is actively both promoted and defended by the extended LS population due to a spontaneous, normative and ideological *communitas* emerging from their shared relationships with the local beaches, surf breaks, village life and tacitly shared aesthetic judgements over the value of these. Therefore, it is more appropriate to state that this stable population has a *fluid association with a delimited geographical area* thus modifying our understanding of community

and the role that local surfers play in this modification through the propagation of their aesthetic judgements to the wider community.

#### *4.4 Regrouping by the sea: The shared aesthetic judgement of Hessiock as native place of village, beach, sea and surf*

Although the population of Hessiock is reportedly relatively *stable*, it is not *static*, with residents needing to leave for work, education and/or opportunities and experiences elsewhere. One notable group of residents consisted of former residents in their late teens and twenties who left for employment and/or University. NSL residents such as Anne, David and Mark, were brought up in Hessiock, went to University elsewhere in the country, but currently live in London because as Anne stated; „the type of job that I’m doing is quite specific...I probably wouldn’t be able to do that here“ with David clarifying; „I could do it but not for that much money“ (Anne, David and Mark; NSL). However, David stated „there’s just like...ten fifteen people that always come back down quite regularly“. Anne and David go on to say that if Hessiock was not by the sea they think they would not return to the village so often from their time in London indicating their shared aesthetic judgement over the sea in their sense of *communitas*. On being asked whether they would ever return to the village permanently Anne said „Yeah, we really, well we all really want it don’t we“ (Anne, David and Mark; NSL). Since the interview Anne has bought a property and returned to Hessiock. Day (2006:16), drawing on Etzioni’s (1995) communitarian perspective, describes this as „a slowing down in the readiness with which people will flit between places, and a new eagerness on their part to put down local roots“. Interestingly, LSs such as Wes, and Tanya and Martin’s daughter, left the village to go to University only to return part way through their degrees, because they did not like being away from the area. Many LSs have also left Hessiock for short term opportunities and experiences in the *traveller* stage of their surfing careers (Authors, 2015). However, there is the intention to return to



Hessiock, despite there being the draw of a better surfing experience elsewhere. For example, Jacob and Rachel, both LSs, spent seven months travelling, working and surfing in New Zealand before deciding to return to Hessiock. Jacob notes that this trip involved a lot of surfing: „I pretty much surfed everything I came across in New Zealand“ (Jacob, LS).

One interpretation of these behaviours is that the population remains relatively stable because many NSLs and LSs alike return to the village (regularly and permanently), due to the draw of „native place“, which as Laurence and Cartier (2003:10) consider, serves as „a deep wellspring of lasting memories that cannot be easily erased.“ Native place for surfing and non-surfing identities appears to be composed of prominent positive aesthetic judgements towards the local coastal waters and beach that is quite clearly shared, albeit experienced in different ways by the LS and NSL respectively, a point returned to later. Authors (2015) discuss the „native place“ of the LS noting that it develops through the frequent congregation at the local beach break (Booth, 2004), informing their reactions (of localism) when their native place is being co-habited, reinterpreted and contested by „outsider“ surfers. A sense of belonging or normative *communitas* is therefore noted, a concept which McManus *et al* (2012: 22) argue is „created through cultural and social constructions along with local interactions, personal experiences and individual actions and beliefs“.

Therefore, although native place is felt by both surfing and non-surfing community members alike, it is the differing way it is experienced by the LS that produces the powerful feeling towards surfing their local break perhaps draws the former LS resident back more readily to Hessiock than the former NSL resident. This draw is something that contributes to enhancing the stability of this local rural community in a broader sense and is a topic that warrants further and more focused research in the future.

It is also significant that the current residents of Hessiock continue to view these groups as members of the community despite not living there for a period of time, an example of what Devine

(1992, cited in Crow and Allan, 1994) refers to as *regrouping* found through their study of Luton which showed kin and friendship regrouping following long distance geographical mobility (see also Smailes 2002a). For example, David noted „everyone I know has kind of got this understanding that you know you’re coming back“ (Anne, David and Mark; NSL). Rachel expressed that „people are always happy to see old faces again“ (Rachel; LS) and considered that the return visits by these people are important in them *continuing to be considered* as part of the community of Hessiock. Rachel concluded they are „very much part of the community even though they don’t live here all the time“ (Rachel; LS), indicating that regrouping appears to refresh spontaneous and ideological *communitas* and thereby re-affirm community membership. Jacob agreed with this adding: people who have grown up in the village but maybe don’t live there anymore but maybe have got parents that live there, definitely still seen as being local and from the village even though they might not live there anymore. (Jacob; LS)

This open attitude towards *regrouping* is evidence of the evolving constructions of „place“, „home“ and belonging, reflects the conclusions of Ni Laoire (2007) and Norman and Power (2015:51) that modern rural communities are „relationally constituted through multiple spatial practices, such as „moving away“ and „returning home“. Such an interpretation is consistent with Sennett’s (1977) arguments that community as being a place on the map is much too narrow and Turner’s (1969) idea that *communitas* is not spatially located. It also reminds of Massey’s (2005) caution against viewing places as *too* static or bounded, arguing for an „extraverted“ sense of place that people can have experiences of community which do not depend on living near one another. Indeed, Parsons (1951, cited in Day 2006), insightfully observed that the „base of operation“ for a community was being broadened by the development of mobility and communications, what he described as commuting by „mechanical means“. The normalising of such multiple spatial practices indicate that community membership is becoming increasingly de-territorialised with „the local and the global coexist[ing]“

where more intense interactions take place in a specific physical setting but increasingly occur across extended spans of time space as well (Meyrowitz, 2005). Giulianotti and Robertson (2007: 134) use glocalisation in the context of North American based supporters of Scottish football teams to explain the transplantation of the original local culture to a new context, positing,

„the local“, rather like „a culture“, is not a geographically fixed entity, but an aspect of mobile cultural particularity...Migration promotes the intensive „deterritorialization“ of the local, as reflected in football by the international appeal and supporter bases of leading clubs.“

This supports the point that a community, which itself can be seen as „local culture“, can be spread over several locations, thereby providing an extension of the processes which create what Anderson (2006: 6) refers to as „imagined communities“.

In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.

In applying this idea Hessiok can be interpreted as the *hub* of a more extended, fluid, deterritorialised and “imagined” community rather than a bounded community of and by itself, and it appears that the forms of *communitas* and aesthetic judgement propagated by the LS community significantly maintains this hub.

Significantly, there is also socioeconomic mitigation built into this perspective of community membership especially amongst the LS segment of the community. Rachel and Jacob consider that unaffordable housing means that some LSs are unable to live in the village, despite wishing to. This suggests a desire and commitment to be part of the community is mitigated by larger neo-liberal social forces identified by Phillips (1993) as *rural gentrification*, driven by what Thompson *et al*

(2016:166) define as *amenity migration* involving „the movement of people due to the draw of natural or cultural amenities“. It also seems to align with a particular version of this phenomena, what Costello (2009, citing Burenly and Murphy, 2004) refers to as *seachange* in South Australia - an in-migration of relatively affluent retiree and pre-retiree residents looking for a new life by the sea. LS Wes is an example of a LS who had to contend with this having to live in Trevet (a nearby location) due to house prices despite growing up in Hessiock. However, since the data collection period, Wes has returned to Hessiock, overcoming the barrier of house prices by building his own house. Martin remarked that there were a number of people who were once like Wes, living elsewhere due to the house prices in Hessiock, commenting, „they’re part of the community as far as we’re concerned...even though they don’t live in the village anymore“ (Tanya; NSL, and Martin Heel; LS) illustrating it is still possible to preserve ties of kinship (Williams, 1983 cited in Crow and Allan, 1994) due in large measure to the LS’s activities which engender a *communitas* and positive shared aesthetic judgement emerging from the specific seaside location and village life.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The aim of this study was to contribute to an underdeveloped topic of study within the surfing subculture literature and consider the LSs’ interactions with the wider rural community it often exists within, considering how this group contribute to the formation, maintenance and identity of that rural community. Community, *communitas* and aesthetic judgement were applied as a theoretical lens through which to analyse the LS, in a rural seaside village in South East Cornwall, UK. In contrast to the traditional views of surfers being nonconformist to traditional social norms (Usher and Kerstetter, 2015; Ford and Brown, 2006; Irwin, 1973) and „living differently“ (Booth, 2001: 16) the LSs were seen to exist in relative accord with the residents of their community and contribute actively to the construction of the local community, its forms of *communitas*, and the distinctive shared aesthetic judgements which contribute to a sense of togetherness.

In line with the views of Sennett (1977) and Massey (2005), the Hessiock community was not restricted to a static and bounded geographical location, but residents living in the wider community and beyond, were still, so long as they shared key experiences and aesthetic judgements towards the sea, beach and village life, considered part of the community. Therefore, we agree with Giulianotti and Robertson (2007: 134) who contend

„migration promotes the intensive „deterritorialization“ of the local“, and the migratory movement of LSs and NSLs alike seem to be instigating something akin to Anderson's (2006) notion of an de-territorialised „imagined community“. Nevertheless, there remained a sense that Hessiock was the physical hub of the community, representing the close community that continued to generate *communitas* around broadly consensual feelings and aesthetic judgements of native place (Laurence and Cartier, 2003) amongst LS"s and NSL alike. Places such as the pub in Hessiock were important for all members of the community to socially interact and provided a central public venue for geographically mobile residents to return. The LS, through the local surf club, had significant control over events which were a catalyst for bringing geographically mobile residents back to the hub, interacting with the close and wider community. These events created social spaces where spontaneous *communitas* could be generated and refreshed, providing a necessary temporal and spatial point of connection for geographically mobile residents to sustain their *communitas*. However, in organising these events, the local surf club, challenged the control of another non-surfing community group, The Working Men's club which for some, caused disturbance in the two identities and brought to the surface a series of questions over what shared aesthetic judgement and ideological *communitas* really represented this community. Despite their obvious differences, there was evidence of *communitas* between the LS and many NSL residents. Although they experienced them in different ways, *communitas* emerged by a strong sense of shared experience the sea and beach, village and village life with its assumed traditional moral values, it was also underpinned by

an aesthetic judgement of the sensorial and identity value of these things. Following Wohl (2015) in this community sensorial familiarity of and fondness for this particular stretch of sea the surf and beach acted as something of a shibboleth for “groupness”. These elements align conspicuously with Appadurai's notion of *locality* articulated as 'a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects' (Appadurai, 1996, cited in Helvacioğlu 2000). Suggesting that the *kind* of rural seaside community that Hessiock has come to represent is that of a reinvented *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 2002) in the form of an imagined de-territorialised fluid locality ultimately built around the *communitas* and aesthetic judgements emerging from the appreciation of physical place of Hessiock, its village, beach and local waters.

The implications of this research are significant for our understanding of surfing subculture and its interaction beyond with the wider rural communities they often exist within. This analysis compliments and builds on Strangers' (2010: 1117) work on surfing culture, which he argues, is „a substructure ... based upon shared foundational experience of transcendence– a sublime loss of self in the act of surfing. This “collective consciousness” that exists on a global scale’ (Stranger 2015: 1119), underpins the LS population’s contribution to shaping the processes of community sense and refreshing forms of *communitas* around positive aesthetic judgements on the sea, beach, break, community and family values. Moreover, LS drive the (re) propagation of these judgements through providing regular opportunities (through surfing) for the renewal of spontaneous and ideological *communitas*.

It also adds to growing evidence (see for example, Guodong, Green and Garcia Gutierrez, 2016) that physical cultural activities more generally serve a more significant function in rural community life than merely being a source of locally derived leisure. This study, also opens up

questions for future studies of both surfing and rural communities, including for example; how these ideas extrapolate to other LS communities across a variety of geographical locations; the way in which surfing and *communitas* impacts upon regrouping behaviours; how newcomers to such rural locations become immersed in *communitas* and thereby accepted as close community; and the impact of lifestyle entrepreneurship in local rural settings, in particular amongst the LS community. In addition, we deliberately narrowed the focus to focus on the LS population but clearly future research should consider NSL residents in such communities and their experience of interacting with the LS population and indeed their views on the impact activity of surfing more generally for their community identities.

Finally, we conclude with Abrams and McCulloch's (1976:24) point that „definitions come after analysis not before it“. The discussion of the elements that made up the sensitising concepts of community and *communitas* have served complimentary functions in illuminating the data and our interpretations in ways which provide a dual focus on structure and shared experience respectively. Moreover, the use of the two ideas helps suggest how the interrelationship between agency and structure might be played out in community settings. Evidence of the de-territorialisation of community identity, is commensurate with this approach as territorial location as a primary factor seems to have given way to subjective shared experience, mood and judgement of what it is to be a member of to this community. This has led to an adjustment in our understanding of what we understand community to be incorporating the idea that the stable population are *associated* with a delimited geographical area as opposed to being *within* a delimited geographical area. Taking this into consideration a community in its broadest sense might be viewed *as a stable population associated with a delimited area who share experience and aesthetic judgements over unifying traits and common interests.*

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