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Adventure sports, risk, and human-more than human wellbeing: local responses to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

Deportes de aventura, riesgo y bienestar humano: respuestas locales a los desafíos de la pandemia COVID-19

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Abstract

The impact of, and responses to COVID-19 has dominated discussion in every area of life, and fields of academic activity. In this paper I consider some of the impacts and considerations in relation to activities that have been conceptualised as adventure sports. My intention is not to show how adventure is being done differently, rather to use the exceptional circumstances of lockdown to highlighted the multifaceted, meaningful and affective 'everyday' experiences of those who engage in adventure sport as part of their everyday practices. My focus is empirical research conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand during lockdowns (2020-21) focusing on coastal communities and surfing specifically. This 'journey through lockdown' illustrates the ways in which coastal spaces are experienced as therapeutic landscapes that can foster physical and emotional health and wellbeing from those on the shore, to full-immersion activities such as surfing, influencing people's sense of wellbeing, collective identities, and forms of belonging. However, in the same ways that COVID has exacerbated many health inequities, it is important to be attentive to the ways in which the wellbeing benefits of coastal spaces are not available and extended to all. A range of cultural, economic, socio-demographic, and political factors contribute to a dis-connect with, or exclusion from various bluespaces. Diverse subjects and bodies access and experience bluespaces in different and unequal ways, impacting who can use blue spaces, and how it can be used. Lastly, the lockdown situation was also informing in understanding the often-romanticised nature of adventure sport participants relationship with the natural world, and more widely how this translates, or not, to broader responses to our climate emergency.

Palabras clave

- *Aventura*
- *Deporte saludable*
- *Surfing*
- *Espacio azul*
- *Vigilancia*
- *Riesgo*
- *COVID*
- *Nueva Zelanda*
- *Bienesta,*
- *Relaciones humanos-océano*

Resumen

El impacto y las respuestas de COVID-19 ha dominado la discusión en todas las áreas de la vida y campos de la actividad académica. En este artículo abordo algunos de los impactos y consideraciones en relación a las actividades que han sido conceptualizadas como deportes de aventura. Mi intención no es mostrar cómo se hace la aventura de manera diferente, sino utilizar las circunstancias excepcionales del confinamiento para resaltar las experiencias "cotidianas" multifacéticas, significativas y afectivas de quienes practican deportes de aventura como parte de sus prácticas cotidianas. Mi enfoque es la investigación empírica realizada en Aotearoa Nueva Zelanda durante los diversos confinamientos (2020-21) que se centra en las comunidades costeras y el surf específicamente. Este 'viaje a través del confinamiento' ilustra las formas en que los espacios costeros se experimentan como paisajes terapéuticos que pueden fomentar la salud física y emocional y el bienestar de los que están en la costa, hasta actividades de inmersión total como el surf, lo que influye en el sentido de bienestar de las personas y las identidades colectivas. y formas de pertenencia. Sin embargo, de la misma manera que COVID ha agravado muchas inequidades en salud, es importante estar atento a las formas en que los beneficios para el bienestar de los espacios costeros no están disponibles y se extienden a todos. Una variedad de factores culturales, económicos, sociodemográficos y políticos contribuyen a una desconexión o exclusión de varios espacios azules. Diversos sujetos y cuerpos acceden y experimentan los espacios azules de formas diferentes y desiguales, lo que afecta quién puede usar los espacios azules y cómo se pueden usar. Por último, la situación del confinamiento también contribuyó a comprender la naturaleza a menudo romantizada de la relación de los participantes de los deportes de aventura con el mundo natural y, más ampliamente, cómo esto se traduce, o no, en respuestas más amplias a nuestra emergencia climática.

Introduction

'Concepts and practices related to risk' have been central to people's understandings and experiences of the COVID-19 health crisis (Lupton and Lewis 2021). While health risk and its management have been the central focus through the pandemic, restrictions imposed on activities deemed as 'too risky' such as adventure sports have had widespread impacts on outdoor leisure and sport participation. Around the world, as part of their preventative public health measures, governments issued directives to abstain from sport and leisure activities perceived to involve heightened risks and/or remote environments such as backcountry hiking, mountain-biking, snow sports and water-based activities (e.g., surfing, boating). In New Zealand, the Minister of Health made news headlines after he was caught breaching his own government's rules by driving to a mountain biking park (Manch and Cooke 2020). In this paper I explore the ways in which people who engage in adventure sports have made sense of their loss of individual mobilities and perceived freedoms to engage in everyday adventure sport practices. Leisure and adventure, are cultural practices that have long been imbued with ideas about mobility, freedom and escape from the everyday or the mundane (Cohen and Taylor 1992; Rojek 2010). They are also activities where culturally specific and subjective 'perceptions of risk', have long been recognised as an important influence on the decision making of participants and of regulators (Davidson 2008; Stranger, 2007; Bell, 2017). The COVID-19 health crisis therefore provides a unique lens to explore and re-assess how adventure sports are understood and given meanings by participants, decision makers, and wider publics.

My focus is Aotearoa New Zealand,[1] a country with a reputation as a nation of outdoor enthusiasts, and where adventure has long been a prominent feature in the nation's cultural identity, leisure lifestyles and tourism industry (Kane 2013). New Zealand's majestic physical landscape is promoted as a mecca for adventure sports enthusiasts, and Queenstown billed as the worlds 'adventure capital' (QRC 2019). However, my focus here is on domestic adventure, specifically coasts, coastal communities and those who use them for adventure or lifestyle sporting pursuits such as surfing. Surfing is an adventure activity long associated with ideas about freedom. As Olive has articulated; "I often see, hear and read people connecting surfing with freedom" (cited in Britton Olive and Wheaton 2018,147). In this paper I consider community responses to the loss of mobility and freedom experienced during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Aotearoa, with a focus to access to beaches and participation in water-based adventure sports such as surfing. My case study explores surfers' experiences and challenges through lockdown (March-June 2020), particularly the impacts on the wellbeing of individuals and communities. The responses amongst surfers, and other water based adventure sports participants highlights the significance and meanings of coastal recreation in people's everyday lives, and the multitude of ways in which so-called adventure sports are experienced. I also outline how in the context of the COVID-19 health crisis, risk assessments of adventure sports became sites of surveillance and contestation. Discourses of risk and responsibility were mobilised to ban adventure sports, leading to contestation about the justifications for the prohibition of activities intended to engender good health and wellbeing, and a shaming of people who were presented as behaving irresponsibly. Nonetheless, I suggest that while risk is a framing device for publics, rather than seeing adventure sports as exceptional events or activities that privilege types of risk, novelty and transcendence, they can usefully be understood as everyday lifestyle practices.

The paper is structured as follows. First I briefly conceptualised adventure, and situate it within literature on therapeutic landscapes, highlighting every day, local adventures through engagement in outdoors and lifestyle sports (Wheaton 2013; Gilchrist and Wheaton 2016). Then, to contextualise my research I discuss adventure sport's significance and meaning within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. My empirical case study, its methodology and thematic findings follows.

Deconstructing adventure

Adventure as a concept has a long history with various academic and popular lineages across a range of academic areas including outdoor education, sociology, history, psychology, philosophy, leisure and tourism (see e.g. Beames et al. 2018; Lyng 2008; McNamee 2007; Brymer and Schweitzer 2017). However, as Varley suggests adventure is a fluid concept that needs "some conceptual anchors" to be used meaningfully (2006, 174). I therefore start by briefly outlining what I mean by adventure and adventure sport, and consider some of the conceptual challenges.

Adventure activities have long been characterised by their absence of boundaries, conventions or social constraints (Simmel 1919). Central elements across the literature include uncertainty, skill development, novelty/excitement, transcendence, liminality, and uncertain physical and mental challenges, often framed as 'risk' (see Breivik 2010; Stranger 2007). Breivik (2010, 262) also highlights that their social organisation as sports, tends to be less formal than organised sports, and "represent a freedom from or opposition to the dominant sport culture." However, historically, ideas of adventure have highlighted and romanticised either myths of geographic discovery or extraordinary and high-risk activities like scaling Everest, with privileged white men as its heroic subjects (Kane 2013; Kane and Tucker 2007; Bell, 2017). Such narratives often mythologise a European colonising history, prioritising the features of exploration, class privilege and maleness in understandings of adventure (Kane and Tucker 2007; Cosgrove and Bruce 2005). Indeed, as Beames et al (2018) discuss the roots of adventure is intertwined with the histories of colonization and centuries of male capitalist endeavours (Beames et al. 2018). Therefore, as is being increasingly recognised, it is important to trouble dominant discourses about adventure sports, including those that have privileged features such as masculinity, youth, whiteness, and being able bodied (Kane 2013; Wheaton 2009; Beames et al. 2018; Laurendeau 2008; Bell 2017). It is also important to consider the different contexts in which adventure take place. Although urban adven-

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[1] Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand. I use this in the article to recognise te reo Māori as an official language, and the significance of understanding names and the ways they reflects our history, and place in the world.

ture sports such as parkour, are being increasingly recognised (Atkinson 2013; Wheaton 2013), natural environments have often been seen as important elements in understanding adventure, emphasising romantic connections with nature, spiritual renewal, and the challenges of responding to and coping with nature (Varley 2006; Stranger 2007). Research has also highlighted shifts in forms of engagement, particularly due to the growth of commercial forms like adventure tourism (Palmer 2004; Loynes 1998).

The concept of risk has also been somewhat of an preoccupation in popular discourses about adventures sports (Stranger 2007; Bell 2017), which as discussed in this paper have been amplified in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. An extensive literature exists on adventure sport, outdoor education, tourism and risk, demonstrating that risk is socially constructed, with social, cultural, and demographic factors, and different world views and experiential factors, influencing perceptions of risk (e.g. Stranger 2007; Gilchrist 2007; Bell 2017; Fletcher 2008). However, public risk perception is increasingly driven, communicated, and amplified by the media, which plays a significant role in fuelling societal perceptions (Furedi 1997), and has contributed to widespread mis-perceptions in Western Nations that society is more dangerous than in past (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Furedi 1997). Risk avoidance and safety has become an obsession in many contemporary Western society which Furedi (2006) terms 'the culture of fear'. Furthermore, risk has increasingly become a political and moral discourse (Beck 1992; Furedi 2001, 1997). These discourses of moral failure are clearly evident in the ways the media report on various adventure sport events and disasters (Gilchrist 2007; Brown and Penney 2014; Davidson 2008), and also in debates about children's lifestyle becoming increasingly indoorised and inactive (McDermott 2007). Thus, despite societies fixation with risk measurement and management (Furedi 1997), as I illustrate in this paper, it is the perceived risk as opposed to the actual risk that is ultimately used to make decisions about involvement in outdoor adventure activities (SPARC 2010).

While recognising these different trajectories of adventure, my focus in this paper is on the everyday, more local adventures through engagement in outdoors and lifestyle sports (Wheaton 2013). I suggest that adventure sports can usefully be understood as everyday lifestyle practices that contribute to identity, belonging and wellbeing rather than as exceptional events, or ones that privilege types of engagements such as risk, novelty and transcendence. Similarly, Mackenzie and Goodnow (2021) promote the idea of 'microadventures' in everyday environments, which

they argue have flourished during the COVID-19 pandemic as people took refuge from the global crisis "seeking nature and adventure benefits" (2021, 65).

To explore such engagements, place-based interpretative research that focuses on the 'green' and 'blue' spaces (e.g. Barton et al, 2016; Couper, 2018; Humberstone, 2011) where such adventure takes place is valuable (Olive and Wheaton, 2021), and underpins my empirical research on coastal bluespaces and adventure. As the next section outlines, this approach helps to reveal the multifaceted nature of people's engagements, and to expose how spaces of adventure become sites of contestation, where individuals, and particular communities, are marginalised or excluded (Olive and Wheaton, 2021).

Spaces of adventure: blue and green spaces

In introducing a special issue focused on "blue spaces, sports, bodies wellbeing and the sea" Olive and Wheaton (2021) highlight the growing socio-cultural interest in what has been termed 'blue spaces' across a range of humanities and social sciences disciplines (see Bell et al. 2015; Foley et al. 2019). In contrast to greenspaces such as parks, fields, mountains, and forests, blue spaces focus on bodies of water including oceans, harbours and coasts, rivers and reservoirs. This research "recognises that our relationships to water can shape our identities, sense of belonging and place, and influence our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing" (Olive and Wheaton 2021, 4). These engagements range from those who watch, listen and smell from the shore, to sport on and in the water (Bell et al 2015). Given the importance of sport, leisure and physical cultures to "how we access and experience blue spaces – from everyday routine encounters to tourism" – this "growing emphasis" on the role of blue spaces in the relationship between sport, leisure and wellbeing is not surprising (Olive and Wheaton 2021, 4).

It is important to briefly discuss wellbeing here, as it has become important in relation to why blue and green spaces, and adventure sports have social significance (Carpenter and Harper, 2015). Furthermore, wellbeing is increasingly at the heart of primary care and public health policy particularly during the pandemic where wellbeing outcomes or difficulties have become key debates for people and policymakers (Weed 2020). While wellbeing has been diversely defined across disciplines, centrally it comprises the multidimensional, subjective and holistic dimensions of a life (Liamputtong et al, 2012; Mansfield et al 2020) connecting to a spectrum of social, cultural, eco-

nomic, spiritual, cognitive, emotional, physiological, and symbolic processes. Within blue space research, 'place-based' understandings and promotion of wellbeing are increasingly advocated (Foley et. al 2019; Bell et al 2015) an approach that emphasises the cultural and environmental specificity of wellbeing for specific populations, and importance of centralising people's emotions, affects and experiences (Bell et al 2015).

In relation to coastal places, Gesler's notion of 'therapeutic landscapes' (1992), has been used to suggest the ways in which they provide various physical, social, and spiritual benefits (Coleman and Kearns 2015; Foley et al. 2019). These can include; spirituality and an ethic of care and responsibility for the environment; experiences such as connection to nature and a sense of belonging; and capabilities such as physical and mental health, skills and knowledge (Bryce et al. 2016). Engaging in full-immersion adventure sports such as surfing have been recognised as fostering particularly strong connections, and multi-sensory wellbeing benefits (see Olive and Wheaton 2020). For example lisahunter and Stoodley explored surfers' experiences, feelings and 'entanglements with water' (2020, 4). They highlight the pleasures surfer's experiences just "waiting for a wave" or the splashing of the water, and through connections made with human and non-human others in the wates (2020, 19). Furthermore, from place-based belonging an ethic of care may develop, contributing to the ongoing management, safeguarding, and restoration of place (Olive, 2015). As Booth reflects, sports "in nature engenders very real relational sensibilities with the nonhuman material world" (2018, 10), and allows us multisensory interactions with various elements from plants and animals, weather systems, as well as sporting equipment and clothing (see also, Evers 2019).

Nonetheless, this body of research also recognises that relationships with coastal bluespaces are complex and context-specific, moreover, "diverse subjects and bodies access and experience blue spaces in unequal ways, impacting who can use blue spaces, and how they can be used" (Olive and Wheaton 2021, 8). Despite the romanticism that is often expressed by ocean lovers, blue spaces can have risks (e.g. drowning and pollution, see Evers, 2019), creating fear and disengagement (Wheaton et al. 2020; Olive and Wheaton 2021). Intersecting economic, political, cultural and historic processes have led to the marginalisation and exclusion of individuals and communities in local contexts (Gesing 2019; Foley et al. 2019; Wheaton et al. 2020). As research across diverse national contexts (including England, Ire-

land, South Africa, USA, and Australia) has illustrated, coastal spaces can operate as places of white retreat and safety (e.g. Phoenix et al. 2021; Wheaton 2017), or sites where the cultural and spiritual significance of one community is in friction with others (Whare 2010). Recognising these power relations that shape the discursive construction of the beach as a 'utopia' is an essential step in understanding how people can, and do, experience coastal adventure sport and leisure generally, and surfing specifically (Britton, Olive and Wheaton 2018, 161).

In the next section I contextualize the case study by discussing adventure sports participation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Adventure in Aotearoa New Zealand

Adventure has long been a prominent feature in New Zealand's cultural identity, with the mythology of the egalitarian "adventurous, migrating, outdoor pioneer" (Kane 2013, 136) providing for New Zealanders an identity distinct from both its neighbours Australia, and from its British Colonial past (Kane 2013). Sir Edmund Hillary (1919-2008) has been portrayed as the benchmark of the typical adventurous Kiwi (Kane and Tucker 2007; Kane 2013), who even in the 1990s, was still named (in annual media polls) as the most respected New Zealander.

People in New Zealand have high levels of engagement in the outdoors (SPARC 2010). While there are important differences in the styles and nature of these engagements, and across socio-demographics, including ethnicity, gender and age, (Active NZ 2017) some broad factors contributing to New Zealand's reputation as an nation of outdoor enthusiasts are worth noting. First is the relatively unpopulated nature of the country with green and blue spaces being relatively accessible to most communities (EHINZ n/d). Even in many urban areas there is a relative lack of dense housing and green space availability making urban living qualitatively different to many cities across the world. Alongside this, Kiwis are proud of their majestic, clean and green environment; positive attitudes to the natural environment create a sense of pride and belonging (Hughey et al. 2016). Popular greenspace recreation activities include hiking/tramping, hunting, camping, and mountain biking (Active NZ 2017). As research published by the Department of Conservation (2019) showed that 91% of New Zealanders participated in outdoor walks in conservation areas, and 52% had been on longer day-long walks in the outdoors (Department of Conservation 2020 cited in Espiner et al. 2021, 7). How-

ever, as in many national context, those "actively involved in outdoor recreation" are over represented by white ethnicities and those with higher incomes and with higher education (Espiner et al. 2021, 37). New Zealanders also have particularly strong relationships with coasts; in this island nation with vast coastlines, many cities are on the coast, and nowhere is more than approximately 100km from the sea (Newzealand-now.govt.nz.2020). Popular blue space engagements include swimming, fishing, paddling, surfing and boating (Eames 2018), with coastal spaces providing multiple and overlapping cultural, spiritual, health, and ecological, as well as economic, values and benefits (Wheaton et al. 2020).

Attitudes to risk and safety are socially constructed, varying across cultures and nations (Lupton and Tollock, 2002), therefore it is important to consider these along with experiential factors that impacts attitudes to risk. While empirical studies that evaluate national attitudes to risk-taking or avoidance in New Zealand are lacking, it has been suggested that the countries pioneering history, has likely impacted contemporary cultural perspectives about risk and uncertainty (Kane 2008; Jelleyman et. al. 2019). These cultural attitudes have implications for outdoor and 'adventure' activities, as embedded in family, schools and community practices. Schools is Aotearoa have a long tradition of including Education Outside the Classroom [EOTC] to extend the school curriculum (Hill et al. 2020). Unlike many European countries, being barefoot outdoors, including in school sport is prevalent. However, as Watson *et al.* (2020) show, there are on-going challenges and barriers to the provision and delivery of EOTC, including the costs, and health and safety considerations which have led to a reduction in schools offering these experiences. Despite the relatively low population density, lack of traffic, and close-knit nature of many communities, there is also evidence of parental fears about traffic and stranger-danger (Jelleyman et, al, 2019). As commentators have argued, there is a growing discrepancy between New Zealand's external and self-image as a pristine, healthy, active and adventurous nation and the reality of a country whose population is increasingly urbanised, and sedentary, (EHINZ n/d; Sport NZ 2020), and encumbered by inequities and exclusion.

Within these broad trends it is also important to recognise culturally specific attitudes to the outdoor, particularly for Māori, the indigenous population of Aotearoa. Māori have historically held a very strong connection to the natural world, and have a more holistic understanding of our environment than European worldviews. Māori sees the environment as an interconnected whole (Durie 1998); all parts of the environment are infused with life force and are connected by whakapapa, the descent of all living things from the original creators of life, and the genealogical relationships between all lives. As Wheaton et al. (2020, 89) outline, Māori gain a sense of identity and belonging from their "connection with the natural environment, while iwi (tribes), subtribes, and whānau (family groups) derive their sense of mana (authority and prestige) through this connection (Durie 1998; Smith 2004; Waiti and Awatere 2018)

Alongside this Māori recognise that along with the privileges the environment provides come the responsibility to care for it and maintain it for future generations. For example, this commitment is expressed as *kaitiakitanga* – the practice of guardianship and environmental management grounded in a Māori world view (Wheaton et al. 2020, 89). Recognising these histories, ontologies and knowledge systems are essential for understanding the ways in which Māori continue to develop and express relationships to the natural world, including through forms of leisure and adventure (Waiti and Wheaton 2021; Wheaton et al. 2020), and also the ways in which Te ao Māori continues to impact both the indigenous people in Aotearoa, and the country more widely. Māori practices also challenge Eurocentric ideas of the adventurer subject (as Western male and white), for example through the resurgence in traditional forms of adventure such as ocean (waka) voyages (Waiti and Wheaton 2021), and traditional navigation techniques, such as stars.

Adventure sport during the pandemic: Surfing in Aotearoa New Zealand

Having contextualised adventure sports in Aotearoa, the remainder of the paper explores responses to the loss of mobility and freedom experienced during the first COVID-19 lockdown with a focus to access to beaches and participation in water-based adventure sports such as surfing.

The first case of the corona virus was reported in New Zealand on February 28, 2020. At that time public health experts advised the government that Aotearoa could stop the virus from spreading, and even wipe it out entirely, if they implemented a strict and speedy lockdown. This initial COVID-19 national-lockdown began 25 March 2020, and continued until 27th April. The nation returned to Level 1 (i.e. no restrictions) on midnight June 8 2020. Alongside this, in early 2020 New Zealand's borders were closed to international visitors except residents (with some notable exceptions such as sporting teams). At the time of writing (Oct. 2021) the boarders are still closed, a

situation which has had a significant impact on adventure tourism as an economy. Subsequent regional and national lockdowns have been used to control outbreaks of the virus, including the Delta variant outbreak in September 2021.

In New Zealand the initial lockdown was considered 'strict 'with severely restricted movement' (Pew Research 2020). At the time of the first national-lockdown I was living on the coast, and was a regular surfer. I was also involved in a research project exploring surfing, identity and belonging in Aotearoa, involving participant observation at beaches and in community spaces, duo-ethnographic research and in-depth interviews (Wheaton Olive and Waiti, 2019). While participant statistics for informal sports like surfing are often inaccurate (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2017), national survey data shows that surfing is a popular recreation along the coastlines of both main islands year round (Sport NZ 2017; Sport NZ, 2015). Reflecting international participation trends, the activity is male-dominated yet the numbers of women participants are increasing, as is inter-generational engagement. During the lockdown (March-July 2020), when unable to surf, I continued my participant observation in and around surfing spaces. My field notes explored my experiences, daily interactions, conversations, and emotions, including walking daily on the beach, and via social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram) including sites frequented by surfers locally and around New Zealand. I also collated national newspaper articles that discussed beaches, water-sports or surfing, and publicly available social media groups about surfing and water sports (e.g. Surfing New Zealand, Surf Life Saving). All of the social media posts used in the discussion are from public sources, or, permission has been granted from the author. However, I am mindful of the complexity of research ethics in digital spaces; therefore, all social media posts are anonymised, and place names or identifiers removed. The data – written notes, social media posts, newspaper articles - were analysed thematically to identity key themes and also significant events (Braun and Clarke 2014). I subsequently collaborated with other researchers who had also documented coastal communities during lockdown in Aotearoa, and Australia (see Wheaton et al. 2021). Some of these finding are drawn on in this article.

The discussion considers three thematic areas. First, the importance of everyday coastal adventure sport participation for people's sense of wellbeing. Second, the ways in which discourses of risk and responsibility were mobilised to ban adventure sports, leading to contestation over the justifications for the prohibition of activities which are intended to engender good health and wellbeing. I show that surfers were increasingly under surveillance from the media, from authorities such as the police, and from each other, impacting coastal communities cohesion and wellbeing. Third, I consider how the pandemic has brought a re-appraisal of many environmentally unsustainable sporting practices. I draw attention to the ways Māori throughout Aotearoa New Zealand had a particularly pro-active response to protect both their community, and the environment. Lastly, through highlighting the diverse impacts of the pandemic, I underline the uneven impacts of the pandemic especially for older people who do adventure sports, and ways that inequalities, including access to the wellbeing benefits of outdoor physical activity and adventure sports, continue to exclude and marginalise some groups.

Lockdown and restricted adventure-as-leisure

In many countries around the world, some allowance was made for some form of daily physical activity or exercise during lock downs (Weed 2020). In the UK, for example, exercise was initially limited to one hour daily, and to walking, cycling, and jogging (Weed 2020). This lockdown period saw significant increases in walking across New Zealand (Espiner et al. 2021). However, one of the keenest aspects of public debate in the early weeks of lockdown focused on the 'rules' for exercising outdoors, and on access to green and blue space. In New Zealand, the early advice (25 March) from the Police Commissioner on national TV, made it clear that outdoor exercise was encouraged, however it had to be in your local community: 'you are not allowed to drive to the beach or to a park or to anywhere non-essential' (covid19.govt.nz 2020). Initially, this ruling appeared to also allow surfing for those who did not have to drive. As a newspaper report on March 26 suggested, "after police took no action against boardriders in Christchurch" it appeared that surfers were "free to ride the waves as long they adhere to social distancing rules" (Kenny 2020b). Debates about the importance of coastal leisure for physical health (i.e. exercise) and wellbeing soon became prominent in national media. Some rural dwellers revelled. As Humberstone (2021) observed, for local ramblers this was 'lockdown in paradise' … summer weather, no cars on roads, and easy access to walks.

Surfing banned

A week or so later into the national lockdown, a joint release from the Ministry of Health and New Zea-

land Police stated that 'New Government rules specifically prohibit surfing and boating, and swimming (Leahy 2020). The banning of surfing caused widespread concern, and debate. An online poll by Surfing New Zealand revealed that 58% of surfers believed surfing should be acceptable with social distancing (cited in Thorpe, 2020). Via on-line forums, and in day to day conversations, surfers, along with many ocean-user communities including swimmers, kite-surfers, kayakers, paddlers, stand-up-paddle boarders, argued that they considered their sports as 'essential' or as 'daily exercise'. However, rather than emphasising surfing as a form of physical exercise, these posts pointed to the importance of its mental and spiritual benefits. For example; "[Surfing] is good for our mental sanity" and "[surfing] is essential for mental health purposes". The all-encompassing nature of surfing was often expressed in social media posts, showing the ocean's place as a 'therapeutic landscape' (Gessler 1992) and surfing's importance for peoples' perceived wellbeing.

As noted above, ocean immersion activities such as surfing and swimming have been recognised as fostering particularly strong connections, and multi-sensory wellbeing benefits (Foley 2015; Britton and Foley 2021; lisahunter and Stoodley 2021). These experiences and relationships were consistent with those described during lockdown, such as one surfer who said, he would "surf every day if he could", but during lockdown has "been visualising surfing to compensate" (social media post). Many referred to how "the absence of surfing made them feel frustrated or unhappy." Others recounted simply watching the ocean, feeling mounting frustration at being unable to get into the water. In summary, multiple comments by men and women of all ages, revealed the importance of everyday coastal adventure sports for their sense of wellbeing, and the importance of the ocean and beach in their lives. However, the wellbeing impacts also appears to be linked to a sense of mobility, no matter how small, to places that are considered different from 'home' (Mackenzie and Goodnow 2021). Media worldwide highlighted that people sought our green and blue spaces, reflected in "unprecedented visitation at national parks and wilderness areas" (Mackenzie, and Goodnow, 2021, 65). In Aotearoa, research shows "huge increases" in outdoor activity (Espiner et al. 2021, 22), including surges in "adventure pursuits" (Mackenzie, and Goodnow 2021, 62) and in sale of equipment such as bicycles (Jamieson 2020) immediately following the lift of the lockdown restrictions.

When the lockdown restrictions began to be lifted, despite government advice to 'stay local' and that it

was 'not a time to try something new', news reports stated that Kiwis took to the beach in their masses, "in the water, walking their dogs, watching the sunrise and all sorts" (Piper 2020). It was not just regular surfers who descended on New Zealand's beaches; around the country surf breaks had much higher than usual numbers of people (Kenny, 2020). For example a Wellington surfer of 28 years reported "he had never seen so many surfers there at once" and that "It was like a seal colony of 150 plus surfers stretching across the whole bay" in contrast to up to 40 people on a regular weekend (Nightingale 2020).

The unusual circumstances of the lockdown also showed how surfers had previously taken-for-granted their mobility and freedom to access to the coast (Britton Olive and Wheaton 2018):

> this is a surreal situation that none of us have ever experienced before. Those of us who live on the coast have never been told we cannot go in the ocean and would never imagine that day would come (cited in Sumner 2020).

Multiple social media posts suggested that surfers had never thought of this experience as anything less than an entitlement.

Discourses of freedom, risk, and responsibility

> Please NO rock fishing, fishing from a boat, surfing, kite surfing, knee boarding, stand up paddle boarding, paddling, snorkelling, surf ski, or diving etc etc— during the Covid-19 lockdown. ... and yep we know it sucks. If you get into trouble, you take our emergency services away from where they need to be. . . . STAY HOME SAVE LIVES. (social media post from Surf Life Saving New Zealand News, March 2020)

As Lupton and Tullock (2002) have shown, a tension exists between the interest of endeavours with inherent risk such as adventurous activities, and the belief of a safe society which has been so central in modern welfare policies. These tension were heightened during the pandemic. Government dictates to refrain from sports activities perceived to involve heightened risks and/or in remote environments, including surfing and water sports, were common around the world. The New Zealand government, health ministry and police argued such sports "could lead to the participant requiring medical treatment or search and rescue efforts." These actions were necessary in order to avoid straining health systems; that is an accident would

add potential pressure on existing services should COVID cases have risen suddenly, particularly in rural or remote areas with limited health services, as well as exposing emergency responders and creating transmission concerns. Those partaking in outdoor activities perceived as too risky were positioned as 'being selfish', because of the valuable public service resources they would take up should something go wrong. As noted above, the media often amplifies ideas about acceptable risk with risk-taking positioned as a moral statement such as (ir)responsibility (Brown and Penney, 2014). This "self-endangerment" through adventure was "cast as the pinnacle of moral failure" (Gartside, 2020b). In the New Zealand national media, surfers were often personified as irresponsible, individualistic, selfish risk-taking rule breakers, reflecting long-standing stereotypes (Booth, 2001). National Newspaper articles featured many stories about surfers who breached the lockdown rules, and had to be been tracked down by the police (Sumner, 2020; Piper, 2020). For example in one photo of a surfer raising his middle finger to a policeman circulated with claims it "depicted an act of defiance by a hedonistic reveller against a hard-working member of law enforcement" (Garthside, 2020a). However, it subsequently became evident that the surfer was not swearing at the policewoman, but rather the photographer.

Unsurprisingly, some social media posts challenged the idea that surfing was particularly risky; raising important and relevant questions about how risk is 'measured', and the moral and political imperative driving such discourses about individual and collective risk. This point was vividly illustrated by a surfing journalist covering an incident where during a violent storm during the pandemic (in the UK) the surfer's leg rope snapped, and his board was washed up on the beach "prompting panic from onlookers" (Garthside, 2020b). After the surfer disappeared from sight, two lifeboats and a helicopter were dispatched to look for him. This led to widespread condemnation of the 'idiot' surfer, who was deemed by the masses to have selfishly put the lives' of his rescuers at risk. Yet, as Garthside (2020b) points out, this was an exceptional event; that generally surfing is far less dangerous than it appears to the bystander, and this incident – that made it into the mass media- is "the exception that proves that rule":

> Thousands of surfers tackled the stormy seas as (storm) Ciara hit… surfers of all abilities tried their luck in a wide variety of conditions. From what we can gather, very few got into enough trouble to require the assistance of a lifeboat (Gartside 2020b).

In New Zealand, the ACC collate data based on all injuries in the home, sport and workplace. Given this data is based on reported injuries to a health provider (i.e physio, doctor, etc) and is the basis for subsidised treatment costs, the figures are considered relatively valid, and widely available. Therefore as a number of social media posts pointed out, the government's risk assessment of surfing was flawed:

> I've been seeing a really big hit at surfers by social media, and media, the government and even surfers have made the choice not to surf so I thought I'd check out some ACC stats… We are allowed to cycle, jog, and do fitness training at home in the yard. We are not allowed to surf as the risk of injury is supposed to be really high and we might clog up emergency services. Cycling, jogging, fitness training rate right way up there in the top 20 sports injuries … surfing… it's not even listed meaning it's number of injuries it's not equal to the big 20 listed. I know when I ride my bicycle on the road I'm actually frightened of the dangers… it's so bizarre to not do my generally only form of exercise, paddling around in the sea, hunting waves away from others.

> Most accidents actually happen at home. I understand surfing sounds more risky and dangerous but to look at the [ACC] numbers its not.

> The argument is not backed up by the data and if that was the rationale jogging should be banned.

Debates about this (mis)perception of risk, who was considered safe to participate (people who lived right there, or were very skilled), and the justification for the prohibition of activities which are intended to engender good health and wellbeing, continued. Those who choose to follow the lockdown rules often agreed that the rules were flawed, but accepted that not overwhelming the health service, or straining health and emergency workers was an issue:

> it did you get in trouble someone has to rescue you… You're in danger of affecting your rescuer that's why this rule is in place

Other argued that people should make their own risk assessments; if you except the fact if you get into trouble that no one is coming to help you, "I see no problem if you're living right there and you don't push it and take unnecessary risks."

Although it was a small minority of surfers who continued to oppose the lockdown rules, the outpouring of anger and frustration continued. Vociferous and on-going debate about surfing took place across all media and featured prominently amongst coastal communities' social media (i.e., community Facebook pages), leading to increasing surveillance of surfers, particularly through social media.

> *The cop should issue fines I'm not stuck at home going stir crazy with a toddler and my husband working for the health service so you idiots can surf and prolong this bloody lockdown.*

Surveillance and contestation

"So many people turning into judgemental right-eous F*@#KS." (social media post)

Coastal communities and surfers particularly were under surveillance from the media, from authorities such as the police, and from each other (Tapaleao, 2020). As commentators have shown "the coronavirus pandemic has stirred up a surveillance storm" with the monitoring and tracking of people under the 'public health' banner, existing on an unprecedented scale (Lyon, 2020). Furthermore, these forms of surveillance have broadened, including what has been termed sousveillance, that is, person-to-person surveillance conducted by individuals rather than state actors (Monahan 2006). Journalists described "the dramatic rise in public shaming brought on by the lockdown measures" driven by the "click hungry media" along with "battalions of furious keyboard warriors." (Garthside 2020a). However, as an article in a surfing magazine noted, while people attacking each other on social media is nothing new, what was perplexing about so-called '#covidiot' shaming, is that "many of the most high profile examples focus on those previously heralded as society's more virtuous: i.e. "healthy-living, fit and active folk like cyclists, joggers and of course, surfers" (Garthside 2020a).

Sousveillance by citizens in these communities was widespread, particularly through social media. Posts publicly 'called out' those individuals who flaunted the rules, or attempted to 'name and shame' individuals. Others posted photos of people in the line-up or their vehicles parked up the surf break. Within these forms of surveillance the boundaries between 'public and private' and 'state and citizens' became increasingly blurred. For example, as one social media user pointed out, "Pretty sure it's not lawful taking photos of people without permission… Just saying." Further blurring these boundaries, the live webcams

used by surfers to check out the surf conditions, became used by the police, and by citizens, to see and punish surfers breaching the rules:

> *Surf2Surf, which provides live cameras of New Zealand surf reports and swell forecasts, said police and NZ Coastguard are now using their cameras. They were tweaking and adding some camera views for them and would be stopping their camera imagery to the public, as well as reports and forecasting.*

> *Person 1: Bloody idiots, surfing (place name)—I can see several people via the [web]cam… come on stay home. If you mess this up we're all going to be grounded for longer. Selfish. [39 comments, 40 likes and some dislikes]*

> *Person 2: Someone go down and pop all the tyres on their cars, wankers.*

> *Person 3: Someone call the cops [8 likes]*

Soon after surfing was banned these webcams were turned off to avoid confrontation.

Over time, the police stepped in and erected fences to close off car parks near beaches, and beach access.

This community policing of surfers and other water users impacted many residents in coastal towns and cities, leading to a lack of social solidarity and for some, public trust.

> *What has this world come to watching them, finger-pointing and shaming. ..this whole thing is embarrassing*

The sociality of surfing and cultural wellbeing of coastal communities, was challenged:

> *I've got mates who have been mates with each other for 30 years and they've fallen out over whether we should be surfing. It's brought the worst out in people because they can't do what they love*

> *I'm not saying people should be surfing but in the end the stress everyone is causing by constantly watching and focusing on other people and what they shouldn't be doing is way more hurtful.*

National and local organisations including local board rider clubs, Surf Life Saving New Zealand, and

Surfing NZ, appeared to take a pro-government position using social media to reach out to their members asking them to comply with the regulations, and to create cohesion:

> *Sharing the stoke doesn't look like us policing the waters and that's not what we will be committing our time and energy to. We would love to see a surf community stand together in solidarity and unite against COVID-19. Many of us chose not to surf at this time and we hope that those who are still surfing could take time to reflect and join us and staying out of the water (Board rider club post to members).*

However, despite such efforts, and the NZ government rhetoric of empathy though 'being kind' to each other (Friedman, 2020), the lockdown exposed and amplified underlying tensions in these communities. These included between surfers and non-surfers, 'locals' and non-locals (variously defined), and those who are permanent house dwellers and so-called 'freedom campers' (see Kearns *et al*, 2017). In particular, the large numbers of people visiting coastal communities, and especially those escaping from the cities (often by night) to stay in their baches (holiday homes), exacerbated existing concerns about the takeover of coastal towns by urban elites buying second properties. In particular, rising house prices creating lucrative holiday rent opportunities, were contributing to local residents being displaced. For Māori, gentrification was further compounding their loss of ancestorial land through colonisation (Collins and Kearns, 2008).

> *There's been a cultural and demographic change here. Money is coming into town, but especially my Māori community can no longer afford to live here and my people are dwindling… we've looked after tourism for a long time, perhaps we should look out for locals and the land itself.*

Alongside side this was the localism practiced by some surfer 'local' surfers, who believe they a sense of entitlement and authority over access to places (Beaumont and Brown, 2016; Evers, 2009; Olive, 2015, 2019):

> *Just fucks me that these guys are visitors to our village and they are flouting all the rules, that they don't exist*

In summary, despite media and government attempts to evoke an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991) through its constant idiom of 'our team of 5 million' being 'in this together,' a sense of 'them and us' between the coastal community and city dwellers fragmented this sense of collective identity.

Human-more than human relationships: ocean wellbeing

"Back to Nature, Stayin Positive. Stoked to see my feathered friend today."

Commentators around the world have used this time of crisis to rethink how we see the world and reconsider alternative ways of being and living (e.g. Rajan, 2020), including a re-appraisal of environmentally unsustainable lifestyle practices in the sport, leisure and tourism industries. Environmental activists such as Monbiot (2020) have argued this moment calls for "a Great Reset" to reconsider the way we see ourselves and our place on Earth. Such ideas were clearly evident in Aotearoa. Social media posts referred to the benefits of removing humans from landscapes and seascapes, seeing this as a time for the earth to 'heal' and for the balance to be 'restored' (see Media Release Sustainable Recovery from COVID-19, 2020.). For example, recognising the problems of recreational and commercial fishing for local ecosystems, one social media comment read "The sea looks so peaceful at the moment, I wonder if the fish would replenish after couple of weeks of lockdown. What are the chances of dolphins making a return?'" Such comments reflect the literature showing New Zealander's strong identification with the natural environment and its protection (Hughey, Kerr, and Cullen, 2016):

> *on the West Coast of NZ watching the sun. Feeling the arms of safety take over...... Enjoy your safety (male surfer).*

> *I feel lucky. My lockdown experience has been one of neither isolation or loneliness, . . . Just a few minutes of intentional quiet each day, whether sitting or perhaps walking in nature, with practice, is all it takes to feel steady' (female surfer).*

Others discussed the joys of less human impact (e.g., fewer cars or airplanes overhead), and the different sounds such as "hearing the birds not traffic."

Māori throughout Aotearoa New Zealand had a particularly pro-active response to protect both their community, and the environment. As outlined, a Māori world view sees an intergenerational responsibility to care for the ocean and land; the lockdown

period was seen as providing a chance to heal and re-align from human pressures:

> 'Papatuanuku, Ranginui and Tangaroa are sighing a breath of relief. They are regenerating and resetting the earth and ocean.

Papatuanuku (Earth mother), Ranginui (The Sky Father) and Tangaroa (God of the sea) are central to the Māori creation narrative that exemplifies the intimate link between humans and the natural world. During the lockdown, Māori also applied rahui (bans), that is traditional restrictions such as to prohibit food gathering and all recreational activities on the waterways. For example, Māori leaders established a rahui on the Waipa and Waikato rivers to ensure the lifeforce of these waterways were able to recover and to contain the spread of COVID (Leanman, 2020). This was explained as being "about informing the people and letting everyone know that, actually, because the waterways are a source of spiritual inspiration for our people, they need time to recover too" (Leaman 2020).

Māori (surfers and non-surfers) often pointed out that the ocean was not solely for surfing; that the beach was 'like a pataka kai (pantry) where people actually go gathering for food around the shoreline', or a place to "engage with the Māori deities" (social media posts). Certainly surfers and non-Māori also posted photos of the unusually empty beaches, landscapes and seascapes with comments reminding their social media friends of the majesty of their surrounds, and the joy and privilege these nature-scapes could bring. However, discussion of the health and wellbeing of the places themselves, while evident, was less visible than those of the loss of individual freedom. Despite surfers common assertions of themselves as environmental stewards and of the role ocean places play in their wellbeing, many surfers' relationship with the natural world are contradictory. This paradoxical relationship is particularly evident in surfer's mobilities and consumptions of environmentally toxic and unsustainable equipment (see Wheaton, 2020). Such contradictions were also evident in this case study; while there was some reflection amongst surfers on this being a time to step back, reflect, and change their behaviours, many others were only able to see what they were being denied (i.e. ocean access).

(Re)producing forms of exclusion

The uneven impacts of the pandemic around the world, and also in communities, has vividly highlighted how health inequalities continue to impact our socie-

ties. It has also brought into relief ongoing inequities in who has access to the benefits of outdoor physical activity and adventure sports, and who is excluded. Many marginalised groups in Aotearoa, as elsewhere, including (but not limited to) the homeless, those with poor health and/or disabilities, living in poverty, trapped in abusive households, stranded due to newly closed borders, were unable to access any of these adventure activities or their wellbeing benefits. There are also essential workers, including in coastal towns, for whom the pandemic brought increasing pressure and less leisure time. Although in general, people with employment and financial-security have been less negatively affected than those without on-going jobs, there are also some more contradictory patterns in the impacts of COVID on communities. For example, some coastal residents had government wage subsidies; others were able to work from home, experiencing increased leisure time and flexibility, facilitating their capacity to engage in adventure sports. In contrast, some urban elites found that their economic capital was of little value for providing enhanced leisure experiences in lockdown situations, their freedom to access the outdoors curtailed to a greater extent than some less financially privileged rural residents. Newspaper reports worldwide claimed the Pandemic was leading to people reconsidering city living (see e.g. Kelly and Lerman, 2020), including in Aotearoa (Olsen, 2020), further contributing to the housing-based shortages for less privileged people in coastal areas.

While older people were identified as having particularly high health risks in the pandemic, and in many contexts bore the brunt of fatalities, research has also shown the pandemic has impacted upon older people in diverse ways, including in relation to shifting perceptions and moralities about age-appropriate risk-taking in leisure and adventure activities. As Humberstone (2021) has highlighted, pre-pandemic, many adventurous activities in blue and green spaces, including surfing, have been seen as, and actively promoted as contexts for healthy active ageing (Wheaton 2017b). In her research on lockdown experiences in the UK and New Zealand through the pandemic, Humberstone (2021) shows how the over 70s have often been lumped together as one homogeneous group, labelled as 'vulnerable' and 'at risk'. This, she argues changed both peoples own self-image, and other people's perceptions of older people, in terms of what one should do, and what is considered responsible behaviour. This 'othering' of older adults, as well as the segregation of other social groups, has impacted the ways in which people can participate in adventure sports, further contributing to their marginalisation (Humberstone 2021).

Discussion and conclusions

As Rojek (2010, 1) has argued, leisure has long been "almost irretrievably fused with the concept of freedom." For adventure sport, such freedoms have included 'escapes' from the "stresses, rigidity, social norms, and institutionalization that are features of late modern society" (Beames, Mackie and Atencio, 2018, 11). Yet as the critical analysis of leisure has long identified, while we might feel like our leisure provides freedoms, these are always partial, and relative, shaped and constrained by a range of social, cultural, historical and geographical factors (Coalter 1989; Green Hebron Woodward, 1989). As Britton, Olive and Wheaton (2018, 147) contend "surfers focus on feelings of freedom, they think less often about their ability to access and experience this freedom"; yet their experiences of 'freedom' and the beach is contingent and relative to intersections across race, sex/gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, history, culture and geography. Those who actively seek escape through adventure inhabits a world of relative privilege. Yet, in the unpresented changes to social lives and mobilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts on those who pre-COVID took their perceived freedoms to access the outdoors for sport, exercise, leisure and adventure for granted is nonetheless informing in understanding adventure sports and their significance and meaning in these people's lives. Furthermore, as social contexts change, so do cultural understandings of adventure, and the features that are privileged (Kane 2013).

In this paper I have drawn attention to the many ways so-called adventure sports are experienced and given meaning. I have highlighted that while risk and its management remains a framing and regulating discourse, rather than being seen as exceptional events that privilege types of risk and novelty, and people, adventure sports can usefully be understood as everyday lifestyle practices which provides multiple physical, affective, spiritual and social wellbeing benefits. Furthermore, as Mackenzie and Goodnow argue in assessing how adventure travel philosophies and practices can, and should be reimagined in the pandemic, microadventure which champions adventures in nearby places that are "low-carbon and human-scaled, is an enticing alternative for both current and post-pandemic conditions" (2021, 63). I have also promoted the value in taking a place-based empirical approach, exploring the spaces or 'therapeutic landscapes' (Gesler 1992) where adventure takes place, and the multifaceted nature of different peoples engagements. Diverse subjects and bodies access and experience adventure spaces in different and unequal ways. Therefore place and context-specific research approaches help reveal how socio-cultural, historic, economic, and political factors impact upon, and create, inequities in access, disconnect and exclusion for individuals and communities. This approach also helps to reveal how spaces of adventure become sites of contestation where power is reproduced and contested (Olive and Wheaton 2020).

Lastly, amongst the many issues that the global COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief is the way we see ourselves, our relationship to more-than-human others, and our impacts on the planet. For many social commentators this has provoked further concern about our climate emergency and the intertwined nature of the health of humans and of the oceans. Certainly, many people experience a greater connection to the natural environment through adventure sport (Humberstone 2011; Booth 2018). However, our understanding of adventure needs to better address the interconnections in the wellbeing of humans and more-than-humans without romanticising the benefits, and ignoring the unsustainable nature of many adventure sport practices and industries (Wheaton 2020). Adventures in "nearby nature that are low-carbon and human-scaled, is an enticing alternative for both current and post-pandemic conditions" (Mackenzie and Goodnow 2021, 62). Achieving more environmentally sustainable lifestyle practices across adventure sports remains one of the most pressing challenges, involving people being prepared to give up some of their freedoms and privileges.

Acknowledgments

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