

'Surf culture' in Australia: Commercial Culture as a 'Way of Life'

Stephan Schwanke

Surfing as a 'Lifestyle Sport' and the Importance of 'Surf Culture'

Over the last few decades, surfing and other so-called 'lifestyle' sports have developed into a seemingly 'recession proof', rapidly growing global multi-billion dollar industry. SIMA, the 'Surf Industry Manufacturers Association, cites retail sales of 7.48 billion \$ in 2006 and an average annual growth rate of 10% from 2003 to 2008 for the United States surf industry alone¹ and the development in the rest of the world appears to have been equally successful. This is usually attributed to the deep entrenchment of surfing in a surrounding culture that developed around the sport. For actual surfers, this culture functions as a traditional (sports) subculture, where authenticity, surfing prowess, and commitment are of central importance and the surrounding cultural elements are perceived as abstract expressions of the core values, emotions, experiences and ideas underlying surfing. The success of the industry can be attributed to its carefully managed association with this subculture and the linking of the culture's positive image in the public's mind with products, which effectively transform the elements and values of the subculture into a commodified 'lifestyle'.

Key factors in the success of the surf industry listed by SIMA substantiate this link, with the increasing entrenchment of the 'surf lifestyle' in the US market and the capitalisation on the purchase power of women being mentioned as key growth factors for the industry. Brand penetration, footwear, apparel, and accessories are also important factors and were listed amongst the top 7 "Top Industry Surf Trends" for 2006.

The relationship between the surf industry, surfers, 'surf culture' and the wider public is too complex, however, to allow for the drawing of a clear-cut distinction between these groups or the ascription of elements or developments to a particular group alone. While the surf industry has undeniably profited from the existence of an already established 'surf culture', many of today's well-known surf brands were founded by surfers and established from within 'surf culture' and are arguably a part of 'surf culture' themselves rather than just 'external exploiters'. Furthermore, the success of the 'surf industry' has also helped to popularise 'surf culture' and allowed surfing to survive and expand as a subculture. Therefore, it is at the very least questionable whether surfing could have survived as a

¹ Figures taken from: <http://www.sima.com/news-information/news-detail/id/68.aspx> and <http://www.sima.com/news-information/news-detail/id/25.aspx> [30.07.10].

subculture of substantial size without undergoing the process of commercialisation brought on by the development of the surf industry.

The surfing subculture itself is also fairly heterogeneous and a clear distinction between members of the subculture and people who 'only' bought into the lifestyle is often impossible to make. Not only has surfing branched out into various sub-disciplines, such as big wave riding, body- or kneeboarding, or windsurfing, that all have developed slightly different subcultures and – often conflicting – attitudes towards other subdisciplines over the years, issues such as geographical location and surfing opportunities, commitment levels, expenditure on surfing, age and the time of introduction to surfing also play an important role across all subgroups. As is often the case with subcultures, there is nevertheless a strong tendency within 'surf culture' to differentiate between 'core' and 'casual surfers' and people who are merely trying to copy the lifestyle, as well as a tendency to downplay or reject the involvement of the surf industry. However, these differentiations are strongly normative and almost always arbitrary. While the actual distinctions made between the subculture, lifestyle, industry, and wider society might be of little substantial value, the fact that they do exist and are perceived as relevant is an important characteristic of 'surf culture' and lifestyle sports in general. The success of 'surf culture' and by extension that of the surf industry as well as the increasing popularity of surfing in recent decades hinge on the perception of the culture as authentic and different from mainstream culture. The same applies within 'surf culture'. Subcultural standing and the ability to simultaneously cater to different groups within 'surf culture', ranging from self-identifying 'core surfers' to casual enthusiasts is essential for companies operating within the surf market.

This somewhat paradoxical aspect of 'surf culture' is best seen in the handling of the market by the surf industry. The 2008 SIMA Retail Distribution Study cites the loyalty of 'core surfers' (and 'core skaters') – the very groups that are most likely to resist commercialisation processes and place a greater emphasis on commitment, ability, and devotion to the sport – to the lifestyle and the increasing demand for footwear and accessories as two key factors for the resilience and overall consistency of the industry. Marketing campaigns are also frequently outwardly addressed at 'core surfers' despite the obvious intention to reach as many potential customers as possible.

In discussing 'surf culture' as a phenomenon of national significance in Australia, the country of interest in my chapter, it is only necessary to discuss the 'surf culture' in its entirety. I will therefore use the term in its widest possible sense and omit a more detailed further analysis of the inner workings of the culture. Neither will I summarise the current debate about its status as either a subculture or a lifestyle sport in this article. However, while these aspects are not crucial for a discussion of surfing's overall impact, the fact that they do exist and their perceived implications

are. The reason is that 'surf culture' in its entirety is also characterised by the existence of these traits, regardless of the form of their various concrete manifestations within the culture.

The Development of Modern Surfing in Australia and the Rest of the World

Surfing originally originated in Hawaii, where the sport was practised for centuries prior to the arrival of the first Europeans and nearly died out when the practice was discouraged by Christian missionaries. At the start of the early twentieth century surfing underwent a rebirth when the tourism industry started to promote Hawaii and – to a slightly lesser degree – California as tourist resorts, whose beaches were ideally suited to evoke an atmosphere of leisure and recreation in advertising campaigns. Although surfing initially had had significant cultural and religious meaning for Hawaiians, these aspects were no longer of any importance when the sport was rediscovered by the tourism industry and surfing was re-imagined as an activity purely undertaken for pleasure at the turn of the century.

While this is often being seen as the starting point of modern surfing, an equally good case can be made for the 1950s, when the release of the motion picture "Gidget" started a 'surf craze'. Prior to the release of "Gidget", surfing had managed to establish itself as a recreational activity in Hawaii and California, but had failed to gain further ground in mainstream America. The success of "Gidget" and other 'beach movies', as well as other commercialised products such as 'surf music', 'surf dances' or 'surf fashion' changed this situation significantly and turned 'surf culture' into one of the first and most popular post-war major youth cultures in the United States. One of the main reasons for this success was the perception of surfing as a 'clean' fun activity for teenagers. Towards the end of the 1950s, the earliest members of the 'baby boomers' had started to come of age and the economic boom of the post-war years had created a leisure and wealth surplus that offered new opportunities for the industry. Unlike previous generations, the 'baby boomers' possessed a significant amount of expendable income and free time and this had led to an increasing demand for new activities and products, with which to fill this now available leisure time. "Gidget" and other 'surf' and 'beach products' had been tailor-made for this new market by the then also emerging leisure industry and an involvement of the 'baby boomers' in these new activities was encouraged, partly because older generations felt that the youth deserved some fun before starting their working life, but mostly since it led to the creation of further economic wealth and new industries.

Today's surfers and surf industry are careful to separate themselves from these beginnings. Nevertheless, modern surfing and 'surf culture'

can arguably be described as a product of the cultural and tourism industries right from the very beginning. They were also always characterised by a fairly high degree of commercialisation and 'artificiality', given the emphasis on surfing as a fun and purely hedonistic activity for white teenagers in the 1950s.

While the initial surf boom was triggered by an already existing leisure industry that had no deeper connection to surfing, the starting point for the development of surf industries founded by 'baby boomers' and originating from within the culture can be placed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From the mid 1960s onwards, the leisure and wealth surplus started to dry up and the unwillingness of many 'baby boomers' to adjust to the new economic situation and abandon their previous lifestyle. Others refused to adjust their way of life and went in the opposite direction. A third group tried to find a way to continue their lifestyle by adopting a 'work is play' approach and started to re-develop the surf industry in order to finance their own lifestyle. In the following decades inter-generational tensions decreased and surfing developed into a subculture amongst others in the United States and other Western societies, until it started to grow significantly again from the 1980s onwards and ultimately turned into its current incarnation as a 'lifestyle sport'.

The one exception (other than Hawaii) to this development is Australia. Initially, Australia's surfing and 'surf culture' developed along the same lines as in the United States. However, the overall impact of surfing on society from the 1960s onwards has been considerably stronger than in the United States.

This is partly due to the excellent surfing conditions Australia offers and the strong influence of the Australian surf industry on the development of the global 'surf culture'. Australia has several of the world's best and most renowned surfing beaches, hosts some of the world's most prestigious and popular surfing competitions and festivals and has produced several of the world's best and most influential professional surfers. Australian surfers and surf companies such as Rip Curl, Billabong and Quiksilver have also been responsible for various innovations and major breakthroughs in the development of surfing from the 1960s onwards.² Thus it does not come as a surprise that Australia is also a popular destination for surf tourists and surf tourism has become an important part of Australia's tourism industry, one of the most valuable sectors of the Australian economy overall. Finally, surfing is also a popular recreational activity among Australians. In 2002, the Australian Sports Commission put the number of surfers nationwide at just under two million, which amounts to almost 10% of the entire population at the time.

² Alison Aprhys, "Rip Curl Executives Happy to be Wet Behind the Ears", *The Age*, 24 March 2008 (online edition, no page numbers available, <http://www.theage.com.au/business/rip-curl-executives-happy-to-be-wet-behind-the-ears-20080323-213x.html> [30.07.10])

In comparison, the American surfing population was estimated to cover between 1.7 and 2.4 million and the estimates for the global surfing population varied between 17 and 23 million.³ While these figures are already sufficient to make a case for Australia as one of the most important and influential countries for surfers, the impact of 'surf culture' on Australian everyday life is arguably even more impressive.

Surfing and surf cultural elements are frequently used in Australian advertising campaigns for a wide range of products and services that otherwise bear no relation whatsoever to the sport and professional surfers are often used as spokesmen for a wide variety of products and Australian art. Surf shops and retail chains can be found throughout the country, including the hinterland and outback. Surf clothing and accessories also dominate the national lifestyle and fashion market in lieu of brands such as Nike, Adidas or Hilfiger that are amongst the more popular and visible brands in Europe and the United States. Surf-inspired fashion is advertised by youth and lifestyle magazines and other media and seem to have replaced the more conventional counterparts in much the same way.

The Australian government from the local to the federal level has embraced surfing and 'surf culture' and there is a high degree of cooperation between the government and the surf industry. For the most part, this cooperation has taken place on the local or regional level, but efforts have also increasingly extended to the cultural sphere in recent years. Surfing and 'surf culture' have been featured in tourism and general image campaigns as prominent expressions of Australian culture and the 'Australian way of life'. The inclusion of public screenings of several classic surf films in the program of the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2007 and an exhibition on 'surf culture' as part and expression of the 'Australian way of life' in Paris in 2005, jointly hosted by the Australian embassy, Rip Curl and Quiksilver, being two particularly notable examples.

The impact of surfing and 'surf culture' can also be felt in the contemporary perception of Australia in other countries. For an increasing number of tourists, a surf course and/or a visit to famous surf regions has become as much of a 'must-do' as a visit to traditional tourist attractions such as the Sydney Opera House or Ayers Rock. Surfboards, board shorts and other products of the surf industry are often bought as 'typically Australian souvenirs' – a fairly remarkable development given that up until the mid to late 1980s Australia was still primarily associated with the bush and images taken from 'bush culture', such as kangaroos, boomerangs, or didgeridoos. This association of 'surf culture' with Australia has also been beneficial for the surf industry, with many companies stressing their Australian roots in advertising and marketing

³ Figures taken from Matt Warshaw, *The Encyclopedia of Surfing* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2005), 605.

campaigns and attributing a great deal of their success to their Australianness.

What makes all of these examples noteworthy is not only the cumulative overall effect. Even more important is that 'surf culture' appears to be at times a seemingly omnipresent feature of everyday Australian life so that the manifestations are seemingly no longer consciously recognised as belonging to 'surf culture' by most Australians themselves. Why 'surf culture' managed to have such an impact on national culture is an open question. Two explanations seem most promising: either surfing and 'surf culture' developed in Australia in a unique way and their success is a result of this development or surfing and 'surf culture' developed in much the same way as they did in the United States, but have been more significant for Australians. In the latter case, 'surf culture' either already contained values of special meaning to Australians in its initial globalised incarnation or allowed for a projection of meaning into it that resonated with Australians more strongly than it did in other countries.

Surfing and 'Surf Culture' in Academic Research

One of the earliest and most influential articles on surfing, sociologist Jon Stratton's 'On the importance of subcultural origins', was written as early as 1985. Stratton identified 'surf culture' as one of only two subcultures white America has ever produced and a commodity-orientated subculture that serves as an articulation of the bourgeois leisure dream. According to Stratton, 'surf culture' creates a close link between the consumed object and individualism and thus also works as an assertion of two of the fundamentals of American capitalism, consumerism and individualism. Being founded on the dominant ideological theme of consumption, surfing is an easily transferable culture between societies that share a capitalist economic structure and also much more endurable than subcultures that attempt to solve the inherent contradictions of capitalism. Surfing can therefore be accommodated by the dominant culture, since a basic empathy between the dominant culture and the subculture already exists.⁴

Although Stratton only used 'surf culture' as an example in his article and the article itself is rather short, his analysis nevertheless contains several key points, namely the importance of consumerism and leisure for the success of 'surf culture', the easy transferability and durability of 'surf culture' due to these factors, and – albeit implicitly – the connection between the coming of age of the first 'baby boomers' and surfing's rise to

⁴ Jon Stratton, "On the Importance of Subcultural Origins", in: Ken Gelder, Sarah Thornton (eds.), *The Subcultures Reader* (London; New York: Routledge), 181-190 (extract from: *Youth, Subcultures and their Cultural Contexts. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 21, 2 (1985)).

popularity in the early 1960s.⁵ Although Stratton's article is regarded as one of the most important works on 'surf culture' and has been widely quoted by subsequent researchers, his identification of 'surf culture' as a commodity-orientated subculture and emphasis on the importance of commercialism for its success have been for the most part ignored by other researchers. Most have chosen instead to concentrate on the hedonistic and individualistic nature of 'surf culture' and the role of the 'baby boomers', albeit mostly indirectly by focusing on 'surf culture's' status as a counterculture towards the end of the 1960s and the gradual change into a subculture afterwards.

This has changed somewhat with some British authors joining the discussion, in particular Belinda Wheaton. Wheaton has written several articles on surfing, and 'surf culture', both as a global phenomenon and an increasingly popular sport and subculture in the United Kingdom.⁶ Wheaton has also focused on 'surf culture' as a subculture and has been careful to note that commitment, skill and dedication are still important values within 'surf culture', but her main emphasis has been on surfing as a 'lifestyle sport'. 'Lifestyle sports' are characterised by surrounding cultures, where members can no longer be identified by shared behavioural patterns and values; thus participation through consumption is the only remaining link. It follows from this analysis that despite their different times of introduction and the existence of local and national subcultures surfing and 'surf culture' today are essentially a globally homogenous phenomenon and that the 'surf industry' plays an important role in the further proliferation of this culture. The identification of surfing as a 'lifestyle sport' appears to have been widely accepted as an accurate description of the current status quo by other researchers.⁷ However, almost the entire rest of the academic writing on surfing is of Australian origin and focuses exclusively on surfing and 'surf culture' in Australia.

The two most important Australian writers on surfing are Kent Pearson and Douglas Booth. Pearson was the first academic to write a book-length study of surfing and his "Surfing subcultures of Australia and New

⁵ Not coincidentally, the second white subculture Stratton mentions are the bikers, who also had their breakthrough as a major subculture in the 1960s and ultimately became the symbol for two American core values – freedom and individualism.

⁶ Key articles are: Belinda Wheaton, "'Just Do It': Consumption, Commitment, and Identity in the Windsurfing Subculture", *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17, 3 (2000), 254-274; and: Belinda Wheaton, "Introduction: Mapping the Lifestyle Sport-scape", in: Belinda Wheaton (ed.), *Understanding Lifestyle Sports. Consumption, Identity and Difference* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-28. Also of note is: Nick Ford and David Brown, *Surfing and Social Theory. Experience, Embodiment and Narrative of the Dream Glide* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2006), which provides a decent overview of the current state of research with special emphasis on the recent British literature.

⁷ Joan Ormrod is another notable British researcher who follows Wheaton's approach and Douglas Booth has also written some articles on surfing as a "lifestyle sport"

Zealand"⁸ is still one of the most thorough and relevant publications today, despite having been published as early as 1979. Their books and articles not only examined surfers, but focused on the various groups found within Australian beach culture, which has long been recognised as one of Australia's most important cultures. The main symbol of beach culture and also one of Australia's national icons in general are the surf lifesavers. In his analysis Pearson concentrated for the most part on the relationship between them and the surfers as the two main subcultures on the beach. Their relationship is described as an antagonistic one, with the newly merging, leisure-orientated, individualistic, mobile and anti-establishment surfers serving as antagonists for the already established, conservative, duty and discipline-orientated, and locally grounded surf lifesavers. However, Pearson is careful to note that the Australian beach culture in its entirety is based on 'anti-establishment' recreational activity. According to this analysis the individualistic, countercultural, and leisure elements of 'surf culture' only function as distinguishing elements in comparison to the surf lifesavers, the representatives of the conservative establishment from the surfers' point of view.

Douglas Booth, another Australian writer and social historian, also focuses on the relationship between the surfers and surf lifesavers. In his book "Australian Beach Cultures: The History of Sun, Sand and Surf"⁹ he emphasises the conflict between surfers and surf lifesavers to an even greater extent and interprets the development of the beach culture primarily in terms of shifting leisure patterns in society. Similar to Pearson's, this interpretation diagnoses a clear dichotomy between the surf lifesavers and the surfers, where the surf lifesavers function as representatives of 'orderly' or 'restrained' leisure, whereas the surfers symbolise the rise of 'new leisure'. However, the conflict between the two groups only mirrors the wider conflict between the countercultural baby boomers and the middle-class establishment towards the end of the 1960s, when the wealth and leisure surplus had started to dry up and the hedonistic baby boomers were seen in an increasing critical light. Booth's approach is more in line with those current authors who argue that a subculture must have some intrinsic meaning beyond its commercialised expressions in order to survive in the long run.¹⁰

However, while he makes a convincing case for the beach culture's national significance in Australia, his analysis fails to provide a sufficient explanation for the overall impact 'surf culture' has had on Australian society, or outside of the immediate boundaries of beach culture. While the beach culture is undeniably one of Australia's most important cultures,

⁸ Kent Pearson, *Surfing Subcultures of Australia and New Zealand* (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1979).

⁹ Douglas Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures. The History of Sun, Sand and Surf* (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2001).

¹⁰ Kent Pearson, *Surfing Subcultures*, 194.

over the years the impact of the multifaceted beach culture has nevertheless been smaller than the specific impact of 'surf culture'. Furthermore, while the surfers continue to be an important group within beach culture, both Pearson's and Booth's analyses reach the conclusion that the surf lifesavers ultimately prevailed in the 1960s, a result that is also substantiated by the fact that they are still seen as the main symbol of 'beach culture' today. Both Pearson's and Booth's analyses suggest that the success of Australian 'surf culture' is due to factors other than its role within beach culture. It is likely that these factors have to do with the meanings and values either projected into the culture by Australian society or already inherent in this society's culture. Based on Stratton's findings, surfing's role as an articulation of the bourgeois leisure dream is the missing element of this description.

Leisure as an Australian Value

Australia has always struggled with her national identity. Even today it is at least arguable that a lasting identity has not yet been found. This is partly due to the comparatively short history of Australia as a nation – the Commonwealth of Australia was only formed in 1901 – and the country's cultural isolation and distance from Europe, but also to its roots as a British penal colony and an accordingly conflicted relationship with Great Britain.

On the one hand, Great Britain always used to be the country's most important ally and the measuring stick for Australia as a nation and a strong British influence can be felt in many areas of Australian society. On the other hand, Australia has always been keen to develop its own identity and Great Britain has often been perceived as arrogant and patronising towards Australia. Especially Australia's early years as a British colony are often interpreted as a struggle against the British for freedom and independence and Australia's involvement in both World Wars, though a cause for national pride, is also often cited as an example of how badly Australia was treated by the British, with the losses sustained during the Gallipoli campaign in World War I being a particularly famous example of this. This ambivalent relationship has expressed itself throughout Australian history. Examples can be found in a wide variety of areas, ranging from the idolisation of the bushranger Ned Kelly as a folk hero and symbol of the fight against British oppression to the still existing obsession with beating England in cricket and other sports.

Within Australian society, the relationship between the two countries has often been mirrored in the relationship between the upper class and the rest of the population. Even though many of the early settlers were brought over as convicts, many also arrived as free settlers or as part of the colonial government. Their attitudes towards Great Britain were far more positive, given that they could see themselves as representatives of the 'old

country' and their 'Britishness' as an essential part of their status as the ruling class. This linking of 'Britishness' with social and economic status continued even when Australia became a nation and was still prevalent in the 1960s, when the surfing craze swept over from the United States.

However, at this point in time Australia was also undergoing an 'identity crisis' as a result of the Second World War, which had shown the nation that the country's fate seemed of little importance to the British. In this situation Australians re-orientated themselves and sought new political allies, which in turn led an increasing number of them question whether the dominant pre-war view of Australia as an 'essentially British' society really was all that accurate or desirable. This was especially true of the 'baby boomers', who felt increasingly unhappy with the existing status quo and Australia's status as an isolated 'outpost of Britain'. Dissatisfaction with the existing social order was also a defining characteristic for 'baby boomers' in most other Western countries and one of the key reasons for the generational struggles that could be observed throughout the Western world towards the end of the 1960s. However, while 'baby boomers' in other countries could still draw from already existing national values and 'renegotiate' their national cultures, young Australians lacked similar opportunities. Their only option was rejecting the 'British values' of the older generation establishment. This created a cultural vacuum that 'surf culture' and other newly emerging youth cultures could fill for time; the vacuum situation also gave these cultures more significance than might have been the case otherwise. The existing vacuum also meant that the 'baby boomers' would eventually need to build a new national identity around cultural values that had not been used previously by the dominant culture. 'Surf culture' offered a new focus of identity building and was also well suited to function as a cultural inspiration for other reasons. Being a white subculture and easily transferable and adoptable, due to it being founded on the dominant ideological theme of consumption, 'surf culture' could be re-imagined discretionary; thus it could easily be connected with into the existing dominant culture. More importantly, as a new articulation of the bourgeois leisure dream, 'surf culture' also contained the one cultural value in Australia that was perfectly suited to build a (national) identity. From an Australian point of view, the struggle against the British ruling class had always also been characterised by the attempts of the British, specifically the establishment upholding traditional 'British' values, to enforce discipline and control and suppress unrestrained hedonism.

The lifting of the daylight bathing ban in 1903 after a prolonged period of public protests and civil disobedience is often hailed as the starting point of Australian beach culture and one of the first 'truly Australian acts', because the ban could be regarded as an expression of British morality forced upon a more open-minded Australian population. As Pearson pointed out, the entire Australian beach culture is also based on

'anti-establishment' recreational activity. Therefore, unrestrained leisure as a 'subversive element' and controversial discussions about leisure can be found throughout Australian history and leisure continues to be a highly politicised and controversial issue to this day.

'Long weekends' and 'sickies' (i.e. sick days taken without being sick) and the leisure culture in general have been well-known features of everyday Australian life for several decades. The absence of a work ethic that was a concomitant of this accentuation of national culture is often cited either as the reason for the inevitable downfall of Australia. This argument, put forward by conservatives primarily, refers to important other features of Australian culture such as tourism and the leisure industry in general which are identified with the more liberal end of the political spectrum. In this context, it does not come as a surprise that most of the key literature on Australia's historical development commented on the importance of leisure and hedonism for Australia.¹¹ The debate is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, although it is notable that discussions now appear to take place under reversed conditions: whereas proponents of leisure as a positive 'Australian' value might have held a majority position in the 1960s, opponents now appear to be in the minority or at best on equal footing with their counterparts.

An interpretation of the success of surfing and 'surf culture' in response to the identity crisis the country suffered after the Second World War also hinges on two other factors. The first of these is the ability of the main actors, the 'baby boomers', to effect social change on such a large scale. The second factor is the likelihood of such a comparatively unusual, popular culture being accepted as a national culture. Both of these conditions appear to have been fulfilled though. As the historian Richard White has pointed out, Australians did not only never succeed at developing a national identity based on traditions – a feature that triggered the 'industry of image-makers'.¹² According to White, the very idea of a national culture cannot be applied to Australia because it is a genuine European concept. He argues that all ideas and concepts of Australian identity and culture discussed throughout the country's history have never been more than inventions of tradition by powerful interest groups in order to serve their own interests. Coupled with the state of uncertainty Australia found herself after the Second World War, this would certainly appear to allow for the creation of a 'leisure culture', since such a culture would not only have suited the interests of the 'baby boomers', but can also be seen as an inevitable outcome of Australia's historical development up to that point. The 'baby boomers' have long

¹¹ Two prominent examples are: Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country. Australia in the Sixties* (3rd rev. edn, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971) and Ronald Conway, *Land of the Long Weekend* (South Melbourne, Vic.: Sun Books, 1978).

¹² Richard White, *Inventing Australia. Images and Identity 1688-1980* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

been recognised as one of the most influential groups in Australian history and an embrace of a 'non-European' national culture would be the logical outcome of the attempt to derive an Australian identity through the rejection of the British influence and other traditional, 'European' notions of culture.

Furthermore, the overall development of 'surf culture' from a counterculture in the late 1960s to an increasingly influential subculture in the 1970s and early 1980s into a lifestyle sport with a significant standing within Australian society mirrors the simultaneous development of the 'baby boomers', who were initially in conflict with the establishment in the 1960s and ultimately ended up forming the establishment from the late 1980s onwards. Current trends also point to such a correlation. For example, the demographer Bernard Salt predicts the rise of a third Australian culture, 'culture of the beach', that is primarily the result of retiring baby boomers moving to the coast in a nostalgic effort to recreate the hedonistic days of their youth.¹³

Conclusion

How the development of modern Australia will eventually be evaluated is hard to predict at the moment. On the one hand, Australia's economic and overall development since the end of the Second World War has been overwhelmingly positive. Australia has successfully managed to complete several economic reforms from the 1980s onwards and is now the most deregulated country in the world, has one of the lowest unemployment rates among First-World nations and is in better demographic shape than Europe and the United States. The country has also managed to establish itself as one of the world's premier tourist destinations and seems poised to experience further growth in this sector due to the rapid economic development of its Asian neighbours.

On the other hand, it is uncertain whether the current economy will be sustainable in the long run. Australia has failed to develop significant industries outside of the tourism and leisure sector for the most part. As a consequence, the R&D as well as the higher education sector have also come under criticism in recent years. The country has also undergone significant demographic change since the 1970s, when a new Asia policy was introduced and Asian immigrants were finally admitted into the country. Given that the relationship with Great Britain and the deeper anti-British meanings of leisure is of comparatively little importance for these (and other non-Anglo-Celtic) immigrants and also far less relevant for younger Australians in general, it is also possible that the current 'leisure culture' might die with the 'baby boomers'. Seen from this longterm perspective, 'surf culture' might end up being little more than

¹³ Bernard Salt, *The Big Shift* (2nd edn, South Yarra, Vic.: Hardie Grant Books, 2004).

another episode in Australia's quest to find a national identity. In recent years, there have been several signs that this might indeed be the case so that another re-invention of Australia's national culture might be overdue. Perhaps the most important of these signs is the increasing number of violent social and cultural clashes between white Australians and predominantly Asian recent immigrants. In particular, Asian and especially Indian students have been the victims of racially-motivated attacks in recent years. This has resulted in declining student numbers, worsened diplomatic relations,¹⁴ and a general fear that the education sector, currently Australia's third largest industry, might suffer tremendously; the effects might also carry over into the tourism industry. Perhaps the worst incident so far are the Cronulla riots in 2005, which consisted of several weeks of street fighting between white Australians and immigrants. These riots started on the beach and were apparently triggered by a Lebanese family enjoying themselves on the beach in an 'Un-Australian' manner by staying on the grass behind the beach and not changing into beach attire. While this might seem like a fairly absurd reason to start a riot initially, the reaction becomes somewhat more 'plausible' if the idea of a 'leisure culture' is taken into account. If leisure really is an Australian value, a different form of recreation might indeed appear to be 'Un-Australian'.

Another potential danger might come from globalisation and the increasing importance afforded to leisure in the rest of the world. Leisure might have been an unclaimed cultural value in the 1960s and not particularly popular in the rest of the world, but this has changed in recent decades and leisure is now seen as a desirable value in itself in most countries, including Great Britain. This could possibly result in leisure becoming less of a distinguishing feature for Australia and might further reduce the cultural significance of leisure for Australians.

Finally, Australia's reliance on commercialised leisure enabled the country to become a successful tourist destination and reinvent itself as a great place to immigrate to, but this strategy might have been so successful that the very things that made the country a paradise for Australians in the first place might no longer be affordable for a significant number of the population. The attraction might even vanish entirely, since the leisure culture does not have any deeper significance for more recent immigrants. It remains to be seen whether this scenario is realistic and how this might affect Australia's surf and other cultural industries.

¹⁴ Soutik Biswas, "Why are Indian Students being Attacked in Australia?", *BBC News*, 12 January 2010 (online edition, no page numbers available, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/soutikbiswas/2010/01/why_are_indian_students_being_attacked_in_australi.html [30.07.10]).