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Royal Geographical Society with IBG
Advancing geography and geographical learning

Towns and cities need surfing lessons, according to geographer

Surfers are a model for global citizenship, according to geographer and sea-kayaker Dr Jon Anderson from the University of Cardiff who will be presenting his latest findings in London today at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)'s annual International Conference.

People may think of surfers as nomads with a carefree obsession for catching the perfect wave. But Dr Anderson says their focus on protecting what is most dear to them – coastlines – is turning them into stewards of the sea.

“Surfing is a typical example of something that can contribute to tension in a local area. Tensions between travelling surfers and local users of a beach can often lead to conflict and sometimes violence. As so many surfers now travel to catch the perfect wave, the need for surfers themselves to deal positively with this tension has emerged. As a consequence, the concept of shared responsibility has blossomed,” Dr Anderson said.

Dr Anderson says that today’s highly mobile and often disenfranchised society should look to the sea. “There are bound to be more and more clashes between ‘local’ people and ‘outsiders’. Many local people simply want to protect the essence and culture of their local area. Both local and travelling surfers have realised this and are increasingly showing a mutual respect and shared responsibility for preserving surfing areas. By applying a value to local areas, like surfers have done, communities can only stand to benefit.”

Looking ahead, Dr Anderson thinks there is even the potential for those in power to place a value on the waves. "Surfing brings tourism, and that brings not only extra money to the region, but it sends a message to decision-makers that there is something worth protecting here, not only in terms of community but also in terms of economics. We need to understand what drives people to value and protect their local environments - whether that is by the sea, or in the city."

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Notes to Editors

1. For further details contact the media and communications office on 020 7591 3019, 07719 712 978, or email press@rgs.org

2. Dr Jon Anderson ‘s presentation ‘Surfing mobilities and place attachments: tensions in lifestyle mobilties’ is part of a wider session at conference on Wednesday 31 August. See: Lifestyle Mobilities 1

3. The annual International Conference is the largest gathering of academic geographers in Europe, with more than 350 sessions, featuring more than 1,300 speakers from more than 35 countries. Delivered over three days, almost 1,500 delegates will attend sessions on topics as diverse as localism and big society, health and quality of life, energy management and low-carbon initiatives while artistic performances and plenary speakers will explore the conference theme ‘The Geographical Imagination’. Chaired by Professor Stephen Daniels from the University of Nottingham, the conference is 15% bigger than 2010 in terms of sessions, papers and attendance. Delegates and speakers represent a variety of disciplines both inside geography and from across multiple fields including economics, history, art, philosophy and public health. One third of delegates are postgraduate researchers, while one quarter are from outside the UK (predominantly Europe, North America and Australasia). Full details on the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2011 “The Geographical Imagination” can be found at www.rgs.org/AC2011

4. The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) is the learned society and professional body for geography. Formed in 1830, our Royal Charter of 1859 is for 'the advancement of geographical science'. Today, we deliver this objective by developing, supporting and promoting geography through research, expeditions and fieldwork, education, and public engagement, while also providing geographical input to policy. We aim to foster an understanding and informed enjoyment of our world. We hold the world's largest private geographical collection and provide public access to it. We have a thriving Fellowship and membership and offer the professional accreditation 'Chartered Geographer' www.rgs.org

5. A high-resolution image of Dr Anderson is available on request: