

Contribution to the trilateral scientific agenda

Subgroup 4: Cultural Heritage

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Introduction

The cultural landscape of the Wadden Sea Region (WSR) is the product of human-nature-interaction over the past 2,500 years. From a cultural perspective the WSR has always been a laboratory of water management where coping with a challenging environment was paramount. Human activities like land reclamation, peat digging, salt extraction, diking, dredging, port construction etc have profoundly affected the topography of the area, resulting in a cultural landscape with a fragmented geography of islands and mainland peninsulas without major urban centres. Together with a potentially hazardous environmental background of storms and floods, this has strongly influenced the economic development of the area as well as the mentality and perceptions of coastal dwellers.

Although the WSR is predominantly rural today, trade has been and continues to be a major factor in constituting 'Wadden society', starting with early medieval Frisian commerce and leading to considerable wealth generation in the medieval and early modern period. Until the 1870s the WSR was a supplier of tonnage and crews, of dairy produce, grains, building materials (bricks) and even of luxury goods (tiles, silver) to the nearby commercial centres of Amsterdam, Bremen or Hamburg. At the same time it was a catchment area for migrants and seasonal workers from the hinterland, attracted by the prosperity, the demand for labour and the high wages of the marshes. Throughout the entire WSR dozens of shipyards flourished and over the centuries they were catering for a large inland and coastal sailing fleet.

Politically, the WSR has been fragmented for centuries, subject to wars but also rich in cooperation and trade negotiations. The concept of trilateral unity is, however, a recent construct whose origins can be traced back to ecological thinking and the framing of the WSR as a unique and transnational ecosystem by conservation institutions. Over the last 20 years various efforts have been made to enlarge the conception of the WSR to encompass cultural aspects to the degree that some people today are even talking about a *Wadden Land*.

Based on the historical development, the question arises if there is today something like a regional identity of the Wadden Sea area and how it is constructed or sustained based on a common cultural heritage and challenged by current existing interdependencies, diversities and dynamics. Recent developments call for an investigation of the driving forces and mechanisms enabling and hindering greater regional integration. Strong political interests are at stake on multiple political and administrative levels – from local to global level – and a better understanding of the policy processes and the existing governance structures is needed, including the effects of the recent designation as World Heritage Site.

As a constantly changing 'monument' of topographical, political and administrative shifts and changes, the area is a fine example of the interaction between humans and their natural environment, allowing us to learn the ways in which our ancestors coped with and utilised their environment and connected within the region and beyond. This can hold important lessons for coping with today's challenges, not only related to climate change but also to sustainable

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development. To protect and develop the cultural and historical qualities of the wider WSR is just as important as protecting and developing its marine World Heritage heart itself.

The aim of a cultural heritage-related research agenda for the WSR is to contribute to a better understanding of past and ongoing societal processes and their intricate relationship in the WSR. It addresses pressing questions analytically and empirically, creating information and knowledge to enhance regional understanding and also support decision processes.

The following includes the discourses of different disciplines involved in research related to cultural heritage, comprising a) the humanities - historians, archaeologists etc. – dealing with cultural heritage as such (tangible and intangible), posing questions to historic times and communities and b) social sciences – anthropology, human geography, sociology, political sciences, planning, design, etc. – dealing with the management and use of cultural heritage for present days purposes.

Major achievements to date

The trilateral LANCEWAD project carried out between 2000 and 2007 mapped cultural elements and sites in the entire WSR (e.g. shipwrecks, nautical signalling, dwelling mounds, sluices canals, ditches etc.). The project delivered an inventory of the cultural-historical elements and structures in the Wadden Sea area and disclosed a number of regional cultural connections and similarities. The intention was to use this mapping for a coherent description of the history of the WSR as a whole, developing an outline of shared cultural traits and local or regional characteristics. A range of results were published in the LANCEWAD report and the so-called Essex report in which the landscape of the Wadden Sea area was compared with similar coastal areas elsewhere.

Over the years a number of research projects have been carried out that have focussed on the immaterial culture(s) that exist(s) along the WS coast. E.g. in the mid 1990s, Hamburg University hosted the humanistic cross-disciplinary project “Bilder der Küste” and later between 2001 and 2005 the project “Natur im Konflikt” with scholars from Germany and Denmark, focused on the interaction between the nature protection scheme and local resistance. Part of this project had a trilateral scope. Today, individual projects on the WSR are being carried out from a number of universities in the three Wadden Sea countries.

Persistent knowledge gaps

Whilst ecological investigation looks back on more than 25 years of active and coordinated research and monitoring, cultural heritage-related studies still appears to be project-related, widely dispersed and often disjointed. With a view to the geographical, political and administrative fragmentation of the area, it is time to correct this.

a) Within the humanities, i.e. historical investigations and analysis

Knowledge gaps particularly relate to the history of the region and the understanding why the WSR looks the way it does today. A description and analysis of historical development has been carried out for parts of the region, but no systematic overall description has been carried out highlighting connections, similarities and differences. Many scenic and archaeological relics (e.g. mounds, historical towns and villages, old dikes etc.) have been preserved, but to be able to interpret these traces, it is important to know how, when and why they originally appeared.

The documentation of the tangible and intangible heritage of the WSR is an end in itself but it should also be scrutinised for the present-day use of history for various purposes. The LANCEWAD inventory, for example, should be made accessible and expanded to encompass the historical landscape as a whole and its constituting cultural-historical elements and developed into a monitor.

b) Within the social sciences, i.e. contemporary investigations and analysis

The knowledge of the WSR seen from a contemporary perspective is rather limited. Some (mainly national) investigations have been made in the area of natural resources management, but the interest in cultural heritage policy and perceptions have been limited. Thus, knowledge gaps include studies on intangible (cultural) understandings of the life being led along the Wadden Sea shores, including questions of identity, values, dreams and frustrations, as well as the ways these sentiments are influenced by power structures and discourses.

Crucial cross-cutting themes and questions include the following:

1. Which traces and artifacts of the Wadden Sea Region heritage can be identified?

Heritage is the tangible and intangible expression of historical development. Some of it is subject to preservation; other parts are unnoticed or unknown. Material elements of the known heritage were mapped within the framework of the LANCEWAD project, but there is still a need for an analytical stocktaking and interpretation. Immaterial/intangible heritage includes phenomena such as language, music, literature, art, food, dressing habits, festivities, place names, but also traces of diseases linked to the Wadden Sea environment; these elements also require mapping and analysis.

Comprehensive GIS-based monitoring of the cultural historical landscape as well as continuous monitoring of the ongoing processes, challenges and changes is elementary for the analysis and understanding of the past in order to learn for the future. Knowledge of the material and immaterial heritage should be provided for those who manage or deal with this heritage.

2. How can we learn from the past adaptability and resilience of the littoral society in the WSR?

The WSR historically has been a laboratory of engineering and water management. As far as the visible elements are concerned, the remaining artefacts of human intervention in the Wadden area provide us with indispensable information about the evolution of the cultural landscape and the engineering capabilities that allowed natural hazards and threats to be dealt with.

Present day risk management, understood as a societal process, can be supported by analysing former adaptive capacities and forms of resilience. Scrutinizing past responses to natural hazards and climate challenges can disclose (hidden) adaptive capacities, yielding important lessons for meeting today's challenges of climate change. Thus, the knowledge on present day societal awareness, the perception of threats and adaptive capacities can support the development of place-based strategies for risk management and can help to understand and increase societal resilience in the WSR.

3. What are the historical roots of governance and societal cohesion in the WSR?

The concept of *landscape democracy* relates to questions of ownership, rights and place related participation. The Ostfriesische Landschaft, Dyke and Water Boards, cultural societies are only some examples for institutionalized social capital. The role of this social capital as a cohesive force should be explored, as well as its role in engendering political resistance against central powers with or without the support of regional administrations. Institutional structures offer windows to interactions between the WSR and adjacent territories and changing forms and patterns of governance.

The interaction between the WSR and the adjacent territories should also be considered from a demographic point of view. This includes the study of internal migration patterns (e.g. between the mainland and the islands, between the islands themselves and between parts of the mainland), as well as the decentralized geographical structure and its influence on the administrative patterns in the region.

Concepts such as territoriality, cross-border regions as “soft spaces” and relational space can be used to investigate transboundary connections and the impact of borders on spatial development. The concept of place takes into account local values and local understandings of places and landscapes. Institutional barriers to spatial integration, such as different administrative setups, decision-making structures and traditions should be investigated, as well as different concepts of landscapes, planning philosophies, planning objectives, and knowledge traditions, to lead to a better understanding of (shared) values and the potential for integration in the area.

4. What might constitute a cross-national regional identity in the WSR?

Is there a Wadden Sea identity and why does identity matter? Region-wide cultural traditions could be seen as constituting elements of a wider Wadden society. There are various connecting elements (e.g. village churches, organs, architectural structures), but also many regional rather than circum-regional traditions and routines such as drinking tea in East Frisia, boseln, Frisian skating and kaatsen, skûtsjesilen or Danish cake boards and many others. Continued modernization processes increasingly threaten the existence of these traditions and routines but at the same time, in some instances they experience resurgences. And how is identity changing due to a changing political context, e.g. being part of Europe, being part of new global constellations or as destination for tourism?

History, heritage and traditions are considered to be important factors in shaping the identity of the population of the WSR. However, it is unclear what constitutes identity, whether there is a common (emerging) Wadden identity, how this relates to other, parallel identities, and whose identity this might be or might have been in the past. Analysing place-based and regional identity can support the creation of ownership and engagement in the protection of the WSR as world heritage.

5. Are there any remnants of historic regionality and networks?

For centuries, trade has been a major factor in constituting ‘Wadden society’ especially along the Wadden Sea coast. The mutual maritime cultural and economic contacts of yesteryear are reflected in the so-called ‘Pesel’. The walls of many of these *best rooms* in North Frisian and Danish Wadden island farmhouses are lined with decorative tin-glazed earthenware tiles dating from the 17th to the early 19th century. Most of these tiles were produced in the West-Frisian town of Harlingen, to which many whaling commanders and skippers maintained close contacts. Current economic networks do not seem to exist at this scale. Is it possible to identify remnants of former cooperation and networks? Has the WSR been fragmented over time due to globalisation processes? What other shifts have taken place that might explain the loss of these networks?

All three countries share similar socio-economic problems, e.g. the problem of gentrification of the islands (challenging islanders life and tourist developments in all three countries); renewable energy production on- and offshore with associated impacts on the landscape; efforts towards CO₂ reduction and climate change adaptation measures; dealing with demographic changes and their impact on social cohesion and infrastructure. There are ongoing learning processes arising from these changes which can be scrutinized and shared among the WSR communities.

6. Is there a gender bias in the Wadden Sea Region?

Historically the WSR is a male story of Störtebecker(s), Hauke Haien(s), Theodor Mommsen(s), Peter Stuyvesant(s), Willem Barendsz(s) or Abel Tasman(s). Where have women spent their time in history? Male bias can also be detected in natural resource management, with no obvious reasons to explain this. Thus, it is important to scrutinise who is participating in what, why and under what circumstances, and who might find themselves excluded and who is choosing to stay out. What are the effects of these processes on local understandings of cooperation, local life and identity, as well

as on the functioning and style of management in the Trilateral Cooperation? For the future development of the WSR there is a need for inclusion and respect for gender issues, not least as democratic elements of an equal and participatory society. This holds also true for the research community itself. How balanced or biased is the research community and is there anything to be done about it?

Main questions relevant for policy

Awareness of the cultural historic dimension of the WSR, not only at political and administrative levels but also among social and natural scientist and the regional and local public, is a prerequisite for the successful conservation and development of the special qualities of the Wadden cultural landscape. Its fragmentation does not make that easier, but increasingly we realize that the landscape of the WSR and its history is a precious edge of the European continent that deserves protection. This implies that the cultural history of the Wadden Sea in all its variation has to be presented as a coherent narrative and foster a dialogue about the parts of the past which can offer relevant input for future policy. This narrative can be used, together with the existing sense of place and appreciation of the area as home for the people, to develop enhanced future development strategies. Which driving forces and mechanisms enable or hinder greater regional integration? What can politics learn from the ancestors' coping with and utilising their environment? How can ongoing policy processes be constructed in a way to address the interlinked challenges of climate change and sustainable economic development? Which new governance structures are needed in order to fill the area with life and commonly construct a vivid and livable World Heritage Site?

Suggestions for transdisciplinary themes

Constructive interdisciplinary research in the trilateral WSR could focus on the following:

- the interaction between natural characteristics, landscape as well as past and current settlement in the WSR (in cooperation with geosciences, subgroup 1);
- coastal management informed by a historical perspective, including different and changing perceptions of the sea (e.g. as a challenge to be met or as a threat (in cooperation with climate and water specialists, subgroup 5);
- biodiversity in a historical perspective (in cooperation with ecologists, subgroup 2); and
- traditional economic activities and pathways of development in the WSR such as agriculture, shipping, fisheries, trade, handicraft, tourism (in cooperation with economics, subgroup 3).

Histories can explain to a large extent how regional identities evolve over time, are constructed and can be maintained. In order to develop suitable, sustainable and accepted development strategies in the WSR, there should not only be explored the cultural heritage in a comprehensive trilateral perspective but also the awareness of how cultural and political heritage really is and always has been. The development of the WSR depends on its people and the supportive action which is based on their sense of place and understanding of common tasks. A common research agenda can help to strive into that direction.