



Reprint of: 'Heimat' as a boundary object? Exploring the potentialities of a boundary object to instigate productive science-stakeholder interaction in North Frisia (Germany)[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The North Frisian Wadden Sea represents one of the best researched natural regions in the world. Since the end of the 1980s, scientific research has been carried out to scientifically study, analyse and assess this intertidal coastal zone under the conceptual umbrella of ecosystem research. The outcome of this assessment materialised in the establishment of the Nationalpark Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wattenmeer. Its implementation caused considerable conflicts between coastal inhabitants, national park authorities and government officials. Arguments in these disputes revolved around the validity and relevance of scientific knowledge generated to assess and legitimately protect the tidelands and areas of the Wadden Sea. In summary, the whole implementation process was locally perceived as a politically endorsed top-down enforcement strategy only allowing scientific knowledge for decision-making purposes while local concerns and 'knowledges' were not included. To learn from these developments and past mistakes, we compare concepts of co-management, boundary work and boundary objects (BO) to theoretically and methodologically explore their potentials to generate shared meanings and instigate communication in the context of future managing purposes. Against this theoretical background, we propose the empirical show-case example of the German concept of 'Heimat' as a BO to assess its applicability to study place-based meanings and to illustrate it as a practice-oriented point of entry to initiate productive science-stakeholder interaction (SSI) in managing the North Frisian Wadden Sea.

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1. The North Frisian Waddensea: a contested intertidal landscape

The Wadden Sea Area along the European North Sea coast represents one of the best researched natural areas in the world. Officially described as a wetland site with tidal flats, it stretches 500 kilometres from Den Helder in the Netherlands to Skallinge north of Esbjerg in Denmark. Characterised by a unique flora and fauna, the Wadden Sea coast is a key resting place for migratory

birds and was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2009¹.

Although the Wadden Sea Area is mainly framed as a unique natural habitat, it also represents a place with a rich cultural diversity (Fischer, 1997). This is particularly apparent in the coastal landscape (Vollmer et al., 2001) which has constantly been modified throughout the centuries by coastal inhabitants and exhibits a remarkable variety of dike structures, drainage systems and traces of land reclamation (Allemeyer, 2006). Start of the 1980s, the uniqueness of the natural ecosystem instigated an intensive scientific research programme that culminated in 1996 in the publication of the so-called synthesis report (Stock

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¹ Due to political controversies the Hamburg part of the Wadden Sea followed with an UNESCO world heritage inscription in 2011 and the Danish part followed in 2014.



Fig. 1. Demonstration by local people in 1996: 'The Wadden Sea is a livelihood for fishermen and not a playground for scientists.' Photo by Hendrik Brunnchorst.

et al., 1996) for the Wadden Sea Coast of Schleswig-Holstein. Brought together under the conceptual umbrella of ecosystem research, this collective scientific study offered a comprehensive analysis of the biological uniqueness of this intertidal coastal zone undertaken by scientists. Driven by a conservationist agenda from the start, the ultimate aim of this politically supported procedure was to investigate and assess how the Wadden Sea in North Frisia could be protected from human-induced harms and negative effects caused by economic practices such as cockle fishing, hunting, intensive farming and tourism. The idea of establishing the National Park Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wattenmeer with all related usage restrictions led to concerted and sometimes fierce local resistance, with the local population particularly critical about the scientifically driven and politically endorsed top-down process of implementation (Jakubowski-Tiessen, 2007). This enforcement strategy created disputes (Fig. 1) and blockages (Fig. 2) which had to be laboriously settled during the following decade. As a consequence, the experiences made during the implementation period led members of the national park authorities to conclude that good processes of implementing nature protection cannot solely be informed by and based on pure scientific knowledge as legitimate foundation for decision-making: it should rather be grounded in social interaction, intensive communication and mutual understanding and meanings to cooperatively define a shared knowledge basis and to achieve commonly defined targets.

As a reaction to the long lasting disputes, a survey was commissioned by the national park authority to get a better understanding of the socio-cultural framing of the North Frisian Wadden Sea as 'Heimat' (Reusswig/Schwarzkopf 2003) in which flagship species such as different kinds of seagulls, landscape aspects, wideness, identity issues such as being Frisian and emotions such as peace and love for the nature of the Wadden Sea emerged. The elements disclosed by Reusswig and Schwarzkopf (2003) were estimated as functional by the national park authority as they were conceived to serve as a starting point for dialogue between local inhabitants and the scientists of the national park for the implementation process of the UNESCO World Heritage (Krauß and Döring, 2003). Thus, a move towards a 'Heimat'-based (Stewart et al., 2013) management took place that did not prove to be effective in resolving all controversies: it however proved to be a useful starting point to facilitate dialogue and generate commonality and mutual understanding. This step towards considering socio-cultural knowledge as a significant element of

the decision processes represents an important turning point as it was the first attempt to acknowledge non-scientific knowledge as an important ingredient for the management of the Nationalpark Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wattenmeer. Hence, the development demonstrates a conceptual shift from government to governance (Evans, 2012: 32) that later on materialised in new institutional arrangements, management approaches, the re-organisation of



Fig. 2. 'Down with Eco-dictatorship'; 'God created the sea, the Frisian the coast.' Photo by Martin Döring.

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