

Protected Area Management and Island Sustainability

DR. CORMAC WALSH

FREIIA

Interreg
North Sea



Co-funded by
the European Union



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About FREIIA

- ▶ **Facilitating Resilience Embracing Island Innovation**
- ▶ Interreg North Sea (2022-2025)
- ▶ Lead Partner: Province of Fryslan, Netherlands
- ▶ Focus on Governance for Innovation

Schedule

Today

- ▶ Current trends in protected area management across Europe
- ▶ Protected Areas and local communities (Wadden Sea)

Tomorrow

- ▶ Islands and sustainability
- ▶ Governance and Participation

Housekeeping

- ▶ Please raise hand to ask questions
- ▶ Short break halfway through
- ▶ Group discussion and / or breakout sessions
- ▶ Schedule is flexible

What are National Parks?

“A nature park designated for conservation purposes because of unparalleled national natural, historic or cultural significance” (Wikipedia)

“an area of a country that is protected by government because of its natural beauty or because it has a special history” (Cambridge Dictionary)

Protected Areas in Europe

- ▶ **EU Biodiversity Strategy (2020)** and **UN Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**:
 - ▶ at least **30% of the land** and **30% of the sea** should be protected in the EU
 - ▶ **10% strictly protected**.
- ▶ Recent focus on the designation of marine protected areas
- ▶ **EU Restoration Law (2024)**: binding targets for the restoration of marine ecosystems

Protected Area Management – Shifting Perspectives

► **What is protected?**

- Spectacular, iconic wildlife
- 'Wilderness'
- Endangered Species
- Ecosystems
- Biodiversity
- Cultural landscapes
- 'National' nature
- Natural and cultural heritage

► **For whom?**

- Visitors and tourists
- 'Mankind' / future generations
- Local communities?
- Science?

What is Wilderness?

“Wilderness” – an area without human habitation, cultivation or significant use

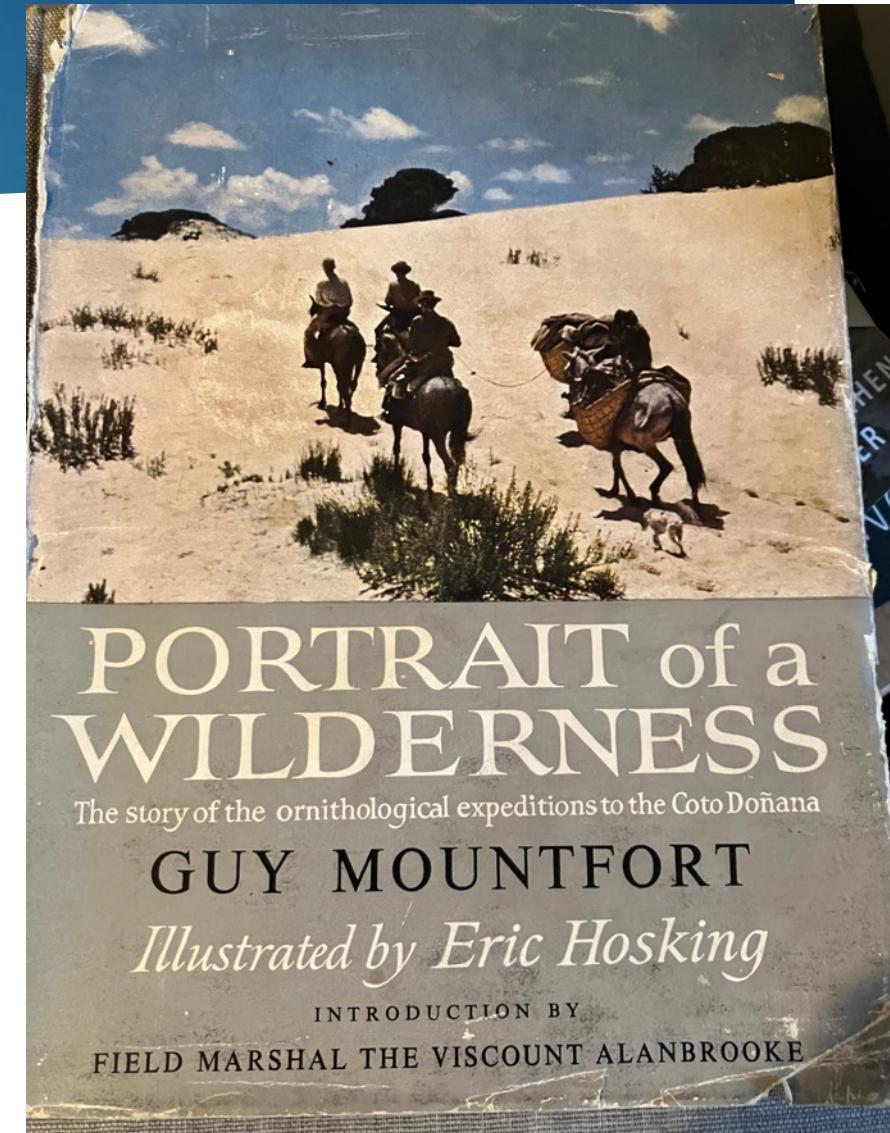
Historical meaning:
wild, unpredictable, nature
(e.g. high mountains, the North Sea)



The Trouble with Wilderness?

- ▶ Wilderness is how people living in cities view the land, (or the sea)
- ▶ Often, there is a long history of local /traditional human use that is ignored
- ▶ Local people have been displaced to create national parks (e.g. Yellowstone, Yosemite)

William Cronon (1996) *The Trouble with Wilderness*



Types of Protected Areas

- ▶ National Parks
- ▶ Nature Reserves
- ▶ UNESCO Biosphere Reserves
- ▶ Nature Parks
- ▶ Natural Monuments
- ▶ Landscapes
- ▶ Geoparks
- ▶ Marine protected areas



Bithsféir Chiarrai
Kerry Biosphere

Traditional Model

Objectives

- ▶ land set aside for conservation, taken out of productive use
- ▶ Mainly for scenic protection, spectacular wildlife – how things look
- ▶ Emphasis on 'wilderness'

Management

- ▶ Top-down management, expert-led
- ▶ Often displacement of local people
- ▶ Managed for visitors and tourists



Phillips (2003) https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/43599027.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Aac665e6dc2697cf0e238fb31ed51a0c8&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1

Modern Paradigm

Objectives

- ▶ Social and economic as well as conservation and recreation objectives
- ▶ Established for scientific, economic and cultural reasons
- ▶ Recognition that 'wilderness' areas are often culturally important places
- ▶ About active restoration as well as protection

Management

- ▶ Inclusion of local communities, indigenous groups, NGOs and other stakeholders
- ▶ Diverse skillsets – scientific input plus people skills

IUCN Definition and Categories

Protected Area:

“An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and management through legal or other effective means”



IUCN (1994)

IUCN Definition and Categories

- ▶ I – Strict protection (1a strict nature reserve, 1b Wilderness area)
- ▶ II – National Park - ecosystem conservation and protection
- ▶ III – Natural monuments – conservation of natural features
- ▶ IV – Conservation through active management (habitat species / management area)
- ▶ V – Protected Landscape / seascapes – conservation and recreation
- ▶ VI – Sustainable use of natural resources

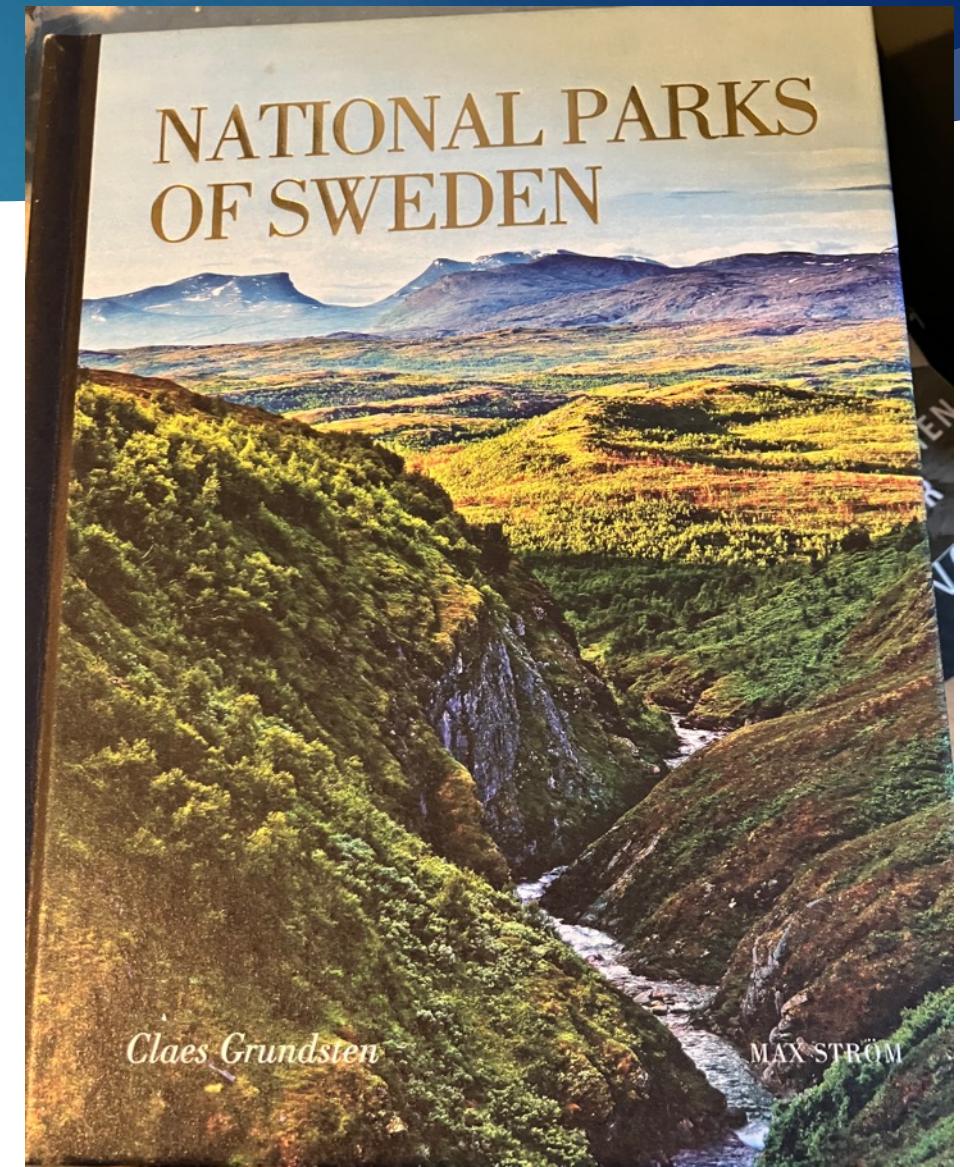


Prevailing conservation paradigms in Europe?

Country	Conservation Paradigm
► Germany	Letting nature by nature, traditional paradigm
► Netherlands	Modern paradigm, small national parks, inclusive approach
► UK / Ireland	Visitor attraction – strong emphasis on consultation, natural beauty, natural and cultural heritage
► Sweden / Norway	Nature, values, habitats, species, increasingly local stakeholders involved, sustainable use, adaptive protection

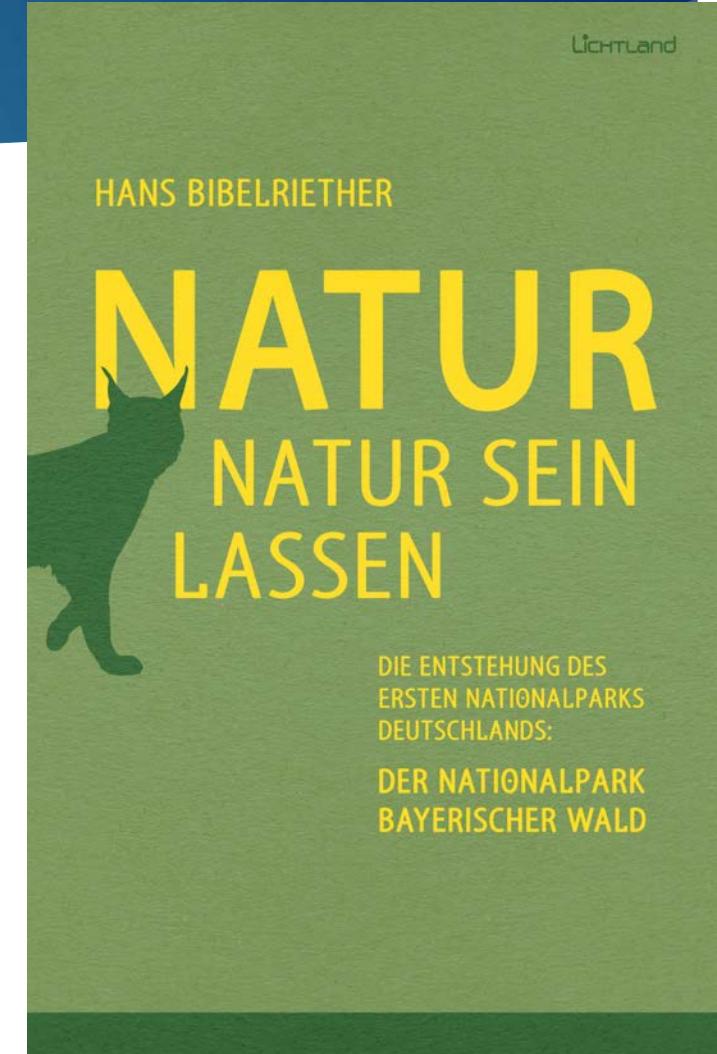
National Parks in Sweden

- ▶ First national parks in Europe, established in **1909**
 - ▶ Protecting iconic landscapes representative of Swedish nature
 - ▶ A source of national pride (Mels 1999)
 - ▶ Wilderness
- ▶ **2009:** Koster – First Swedish marine national park
 - ▶ Consultation, participation
 - ▶ Sustainable use and conservation
- ▶ Now 30 National Parks

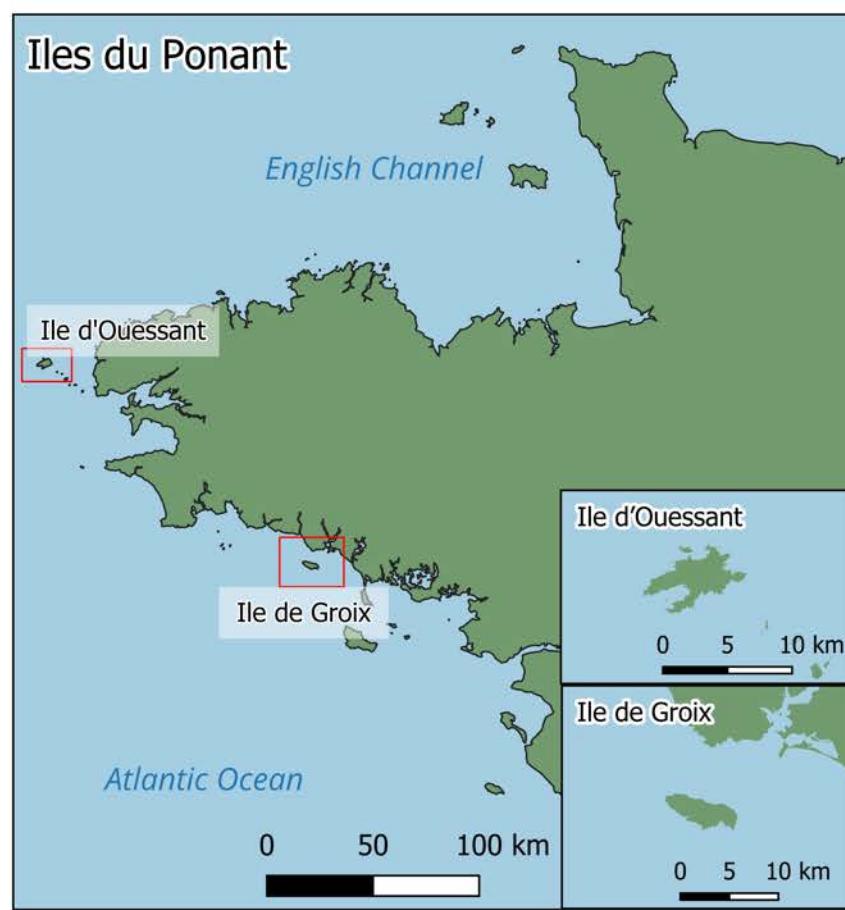
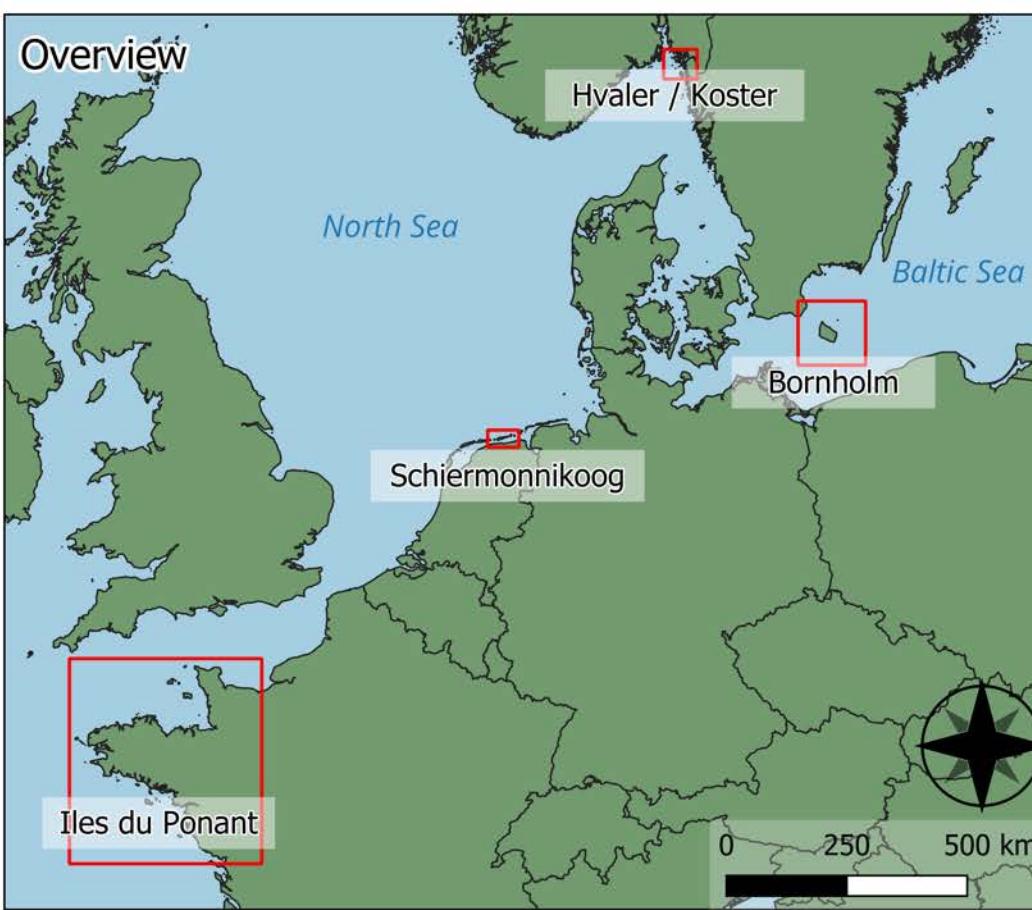


Germany – Traditional Paradigm

- ▶ First national park introduced in 1970, currently 16.
- ▶ Massive local opposition, top down designation and management
- ▶ **Objectives:**
 - ▶ 'Letting nature be nature'
 - ▶ Intrinsic value of nature, pristine wilderness, rewilding
 - ▶ Informed by science
- ▶ Also 14 Biosphere reserves, 98 nature parks



FREIIA Islands



Wadden Sea

Transboundary 'trilateral' cooperation since late 1970s

- Common Secretariat
- Agreed Definition of Conservation Area
- Agreed Conservation Objectives
- Definition of Wadden Sea Region

UNESCO World Heritage site

- NL & DE - since 2009
- NL & DE & DK – since 20143



Protected Area	Protected Area Type	Established	Area (Current extent, km ²)	Country
<i>National</i>				
Danish Wadden Sea Nature Reserve	Game and Wildlife Reserve (national regulations)	1979	1,243	DK
Planning Key Decision Wadden Sea	National planning regulations	1980	¹	NL
Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park	National Park (IUCN II)	1985	4,415	DE
Lower Saxony Wadden Sea National Park	National Park (IUCN II)	1986	3,450	DE
Schiermonnikoog National Park	National Park (IUCN II)	1989	72	NL
Hamburg Wadden Sea National Park	National Park (IUCN II)	1990	137.5	DE
UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea and Hallig	UNESCO Biosphere Reserve	1990	4,431	DE
UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Lower Saxony Wadden Sea	UNESCO Biosphere Reserve	1992	4,171	DE
Dunes of Texel National Park	National Park (IUCN II)	2002	43	NL
Danish Wadden Sea National Park	National Park (IUCN V)	2010	1,466	DK
<i>International</i>				
Trilateral Intergovernmental Declaration on the Protection of the Wadden Sea	Political Declaration	1982	14,950	DE / DK / NL
Wetland of International Importance	Ramsar Site	1984	2,710	DE / DK / NL
Wadden Sea World Heritage	UNESCO World Heritage site	2009 / 2016	11,434	DE / DK / NL

Wadden Sea: Germany

- ▶ National parks at *Länder* level established 1985 and 1986
- ▶ Coastal and island municipalities voted against (SH), minimal participation
- ▶ Inhabited islands not part of national parks
- ▶ Strict separation of natural and cultural landscape



Wadden Sea: Germany

- ▶ The Wadden Sea is not “a free space for nature” but “a living space for people”
- ▶ The state government and NGOs should help the local people in developing ways to manage and take responsibility for their environment rather than ‘chasing large-scale projects with fancy names’

(Hollander 1984, in Walsh 2020)

Wadden Sea: Germany

God created the sea, the Frisians coast

“The Wadden Sea is not an original natural landscape but a **cultural landscape lost to the sea**.

That is why they (the Frisians) primarily are entitled to decide about the Wadden Sea”.

(Paulsen 1974, in Steensen 2018)



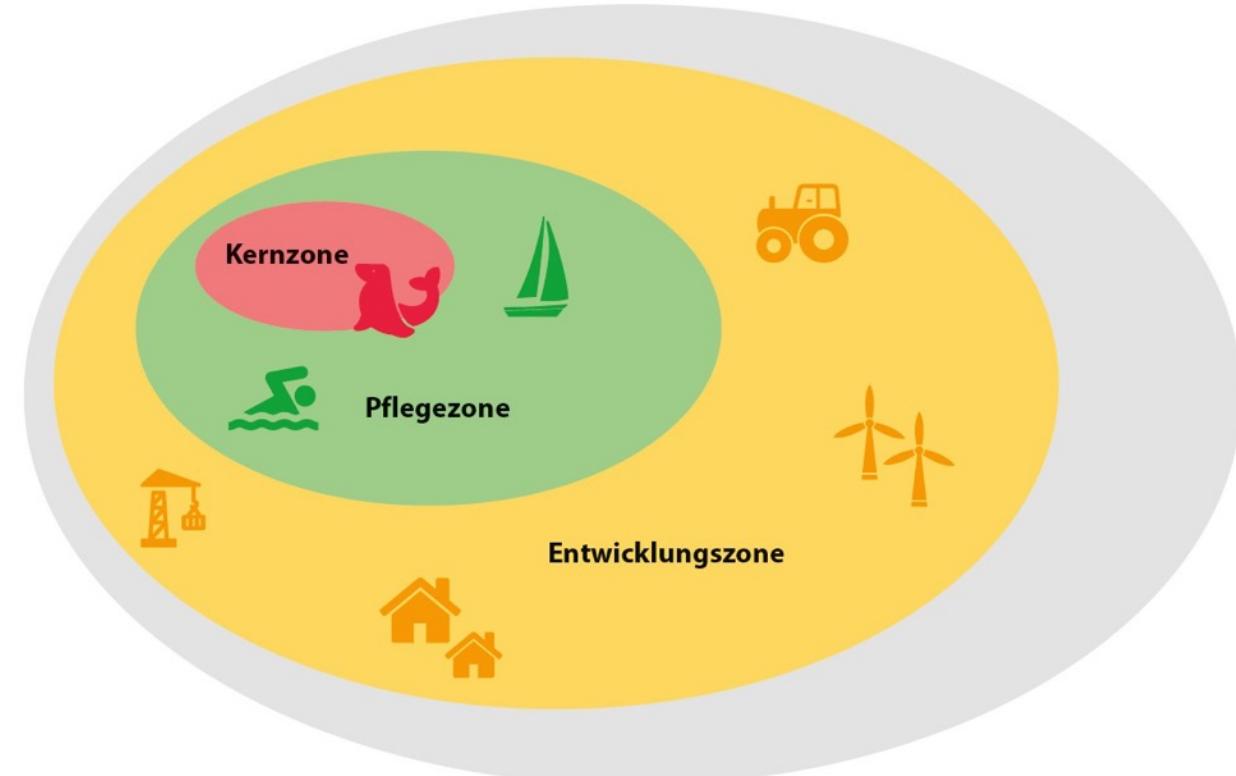
Germany Wadden Sea: Hallig Islands

- ▶ Low-lying marsh islands not protected by dikes (5 inhabited – total 230 people)
- ▶ Surrounded by Wadden Sea National Park (Schleswig-Holstein)
- ▶ Since 2004: development zone of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve
- ▶ Combined focus on natural and cultural heritage
- ▶ 'Unique and special relationship' between Hallig communities and their natural environment



Wadden Sea Biosphere Reserves

- ▶ UNESCO: model regions for sustainable development
- ▶ Schleswig-Holstein: Development zone: Hallig Islands and Pellworm
- ▶ Lower-Saxony: Development zone: municipalities in coastal hinterland



Wadden Sea: Schiermonnikoog (NL)

- ▶ Very small size
- ▶ NP as 'brand', common umbrella
- ▶ Shared responsibility between municipality and NGOs (Natuurmonumenten)
- ▶ Focus on land rather than sea
- ▶ Close link between NP and island sustainability but also some conflict...

'the National Park should belong to everyone on the island'

'the connections between nature and ecology on the one hand and the local economy, cultural history, recreation and tourism and community on Schiermonnikoog'... should be strengthened

(NP Schiermonnikoog 2024)



Nationaal Park
Schiermonnikoog

Danish Wadden Sea

- ▶ Protected area since 1979,
- ▶ National Park since 2010, following extensive open-ended consultation process

“The National Park brings together **many interests**. We are passionate about a common goal. To **use, protect** and **develop** the area with respect for the **past**, the **present** and the **future**”
(2019 NPP, 24)



Danish Wadden Sea

“The WSNP is a very broadly based unit aiming... to create a mutual understanding – with both the locals and visitors – that the Wadden Sea is a unique place” (NP secretariat)

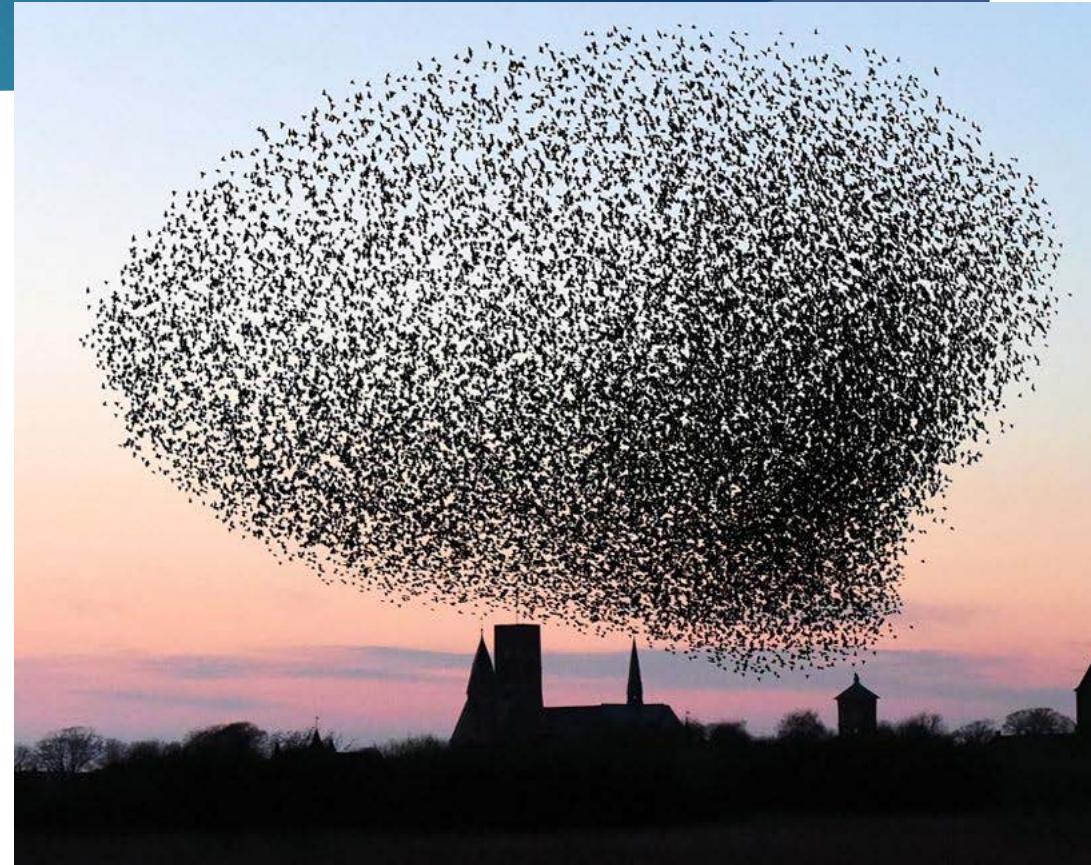
“The national park is a **sort of a frame** put down on this area... And also the neighbouring area” (I_N9)



Danish Wadden Sea

“You can stand... where we have our church and our old city hall... and you can **walk 200 metres and then you are in the national park.**

That's, of course, something we would like people to know in this municipality... that we are **proud of having the national park so close** to our [town]...” (I_L1)



Danish Wadden Sea

"a hunter was interested in hunting the birds and an ornithologist was interested in looking at the birds... So, saving the birds was one thing that both parts could [agree to]..."

and then afterwards we can discuss if we should shoot them or look at them!." (I_N6)



A New Generation of National Parks?

- ▶ Increased emphasis on sustainability objectives and appreciation of nature
- ▶ Working with rather than against local people
- ▶ Natural and cultural heritage
- ▶ But, also increased emphasis on strict protection and rewilding

Examples:

- ▶ Cairngorms, Scotland
- ▶ Danish National Parks

Failed National Park Proposals

- ▶ **Parc Adula, Switzerland** - rejected by local municipalities in referendum 2016
- ▶ **German Baltic Sea** – proposals debated 2023 and 2024, abandoned due to lack of local support



Relevance for Small Islands?

- ▶ Protected area management can only be effective with the **support of local communities**
- ▶ National Parks need to **understand and reflect local understandings** of nature, landscape, the coast and the sea
- ▶ Need to engage local communities to **avoid polarised debates**
- ▶ National Parks provide an **opportunity for small islands**

Schedule

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Relevance for Small Islands

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Sustainability on Small Islands

- ▶ Circular economy
- ▶ Sustainable tourism
- ▶ Water and energy
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Climate neutrality?
- ▶ Islands as innovative forerunners
- ▶ Potential for synergies with biodiversity objectives
- ▶ Potential for including 'nature-friendly' visitors?
- ▶ Potential contradictions – e.g. opposition to wind turbines

Is Sustainability Sufficient?

Regeneration paradigm:

- ▶ Linking active **nature restoration** and **transformative** regeneration
- ▶ E.g. high nature value farming, permaculture, low impact tourism, car-free
- ▶ Zero waste, carbon neutrality

Common Wadden Sea Secretariat | Annual Report | 2022

Authors: Janne Liburd & Cormac Walsh

04



Participants of the TriWadWork crossing boundaries on Rame © A. Orth

Island Particularity

► *Maritime Studies*, May 2025



Dealing with island particularity: place-based governance for small North Sea islands

Cormac Walsh¹ · Laurence Piper² · Lisa Bomble² · Simon Thomsen³

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Abstract

Islands are neither homogenous nor uniform. They are plural and diverse microcosms of the wider societies and relational networks within which they are situated. Small islands may be comparatively less accessible in physical terms but tend to have a strong presence in the popular imagination, often because of their perceived remoteness and status as 'places apart'. Neighbouring islands within an archipelago are often found to have distinct characters, reflecting locally-specific social, cultural and environmental dynamics. Islands are thus both ordinary and extraordinary places (see Robinson 2006). As a consequence of their distinctive island particularity, islands tend to face specific sets of governance challenges but can also become loci for innovation and transformative change. Many challenges faced by small islands related to accessibility, seasonality, infrastructure and service provision are shared by mainland rural communities but are placed in sharper focus and can have more significant and long-lasting implications within an island context. The location of islands at the boundary of the terrestrial and maritime further presents a challenge to sectorally organised governance systems. It is increasingly evident that local, place-specific solutions are required, which require a degree of flexibility within the scope of established institutional arrangements. We distinguish between two dimensions of place-based governance - place identity (fluid, contested and subject to reconfiguration) and strategic positioning, whereby governance actors try to position or frame their island within a wider geographical context as a response to governance challenges. We examine current approaches to addressing island particularity in national and regional policy, and opportunities for developing innovative place-based approaches. We draw on exploratory comparative case studies of small North Sea islands in Germany (Hallig islands, Schleswig-Holstein), the Netherlands (Schiermonnikoog) and Sweden (Koster islands), focussing specifically on the scope for place-based governance and strategic positioning within the specific contexts of each national system of public administration.

Keywords Islandness · Relationality · Governance · Place-based · Multilevel

Introduction

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The North Sea is becoming an increasingly crowded space, characterised as a frontier for a new wave of marine industrialisation and ongoing unsustainable exploitation of both living and mineral resources (Halpern et al. 2008; Emeis et al. 2015; Mallin and Barbesgaard 2020). Simultaneously, we see increased awareness of, and policy attention paid to marine conservation, with ambitious calls for the designation of extensive protected areas and the active restoration of coastal and marine ecosystems (e.g. van Tatenhove et al. 2021; Hermoso et al. 2022). Low-lying coasts and near-shore islands¹ have become the focus of flood protection

¹ We use the term 'nearshore' to refer to small islands located within territorial waters, excluding both inland islands (lakes and rivers) and

Why are islands interesting?

- ▶ Role of small nearshore islands in context of recent intensification of use of the sea and claims on sea space
- ▶ ‘Particular’ challenges of small islands?
- ▶ **Particularity** as product of both material ands discursive factors
 - ▶ Physical characteristics
 - ▶ Perception as distinct places set apart from mainland society

Peripherality and 'Islandness'

- ▶ Small islands are considered remote and peripheral
- ▶ Strong presence in the popular imagination founded on perceived on perceived remoteness and status as 'places apart'
- ▶ 'Lure of islands'
- ▶ **Island peripherality:** a modern invention, the product of histories told from the perspective of the metropolitan present



Governance and Island Particularity

- ▶ **Specific Governance Challenges**
 - ▶ Access
 - ▶ Infrastructure and Service Provision
 - ▶ Seasonality and tourism management
- ▶ Beyond focus on territorial autonomy – **nuanced multilevel governance** perspective
- ▶ Small islands as **policy-takers not policy-makers**

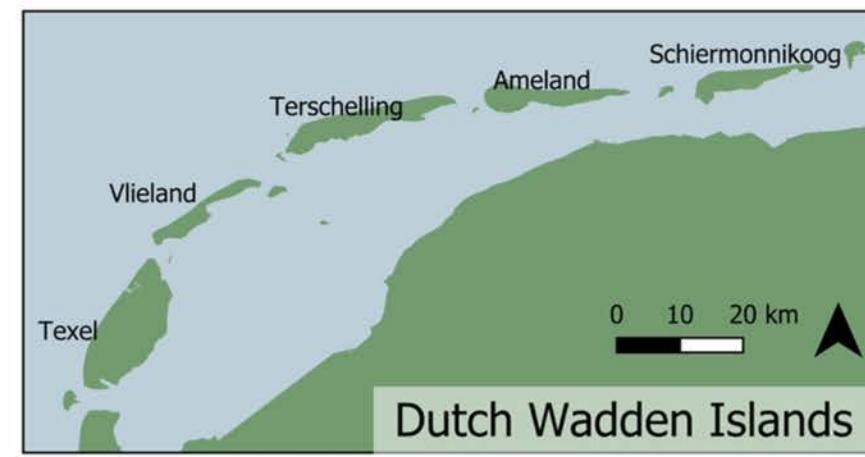
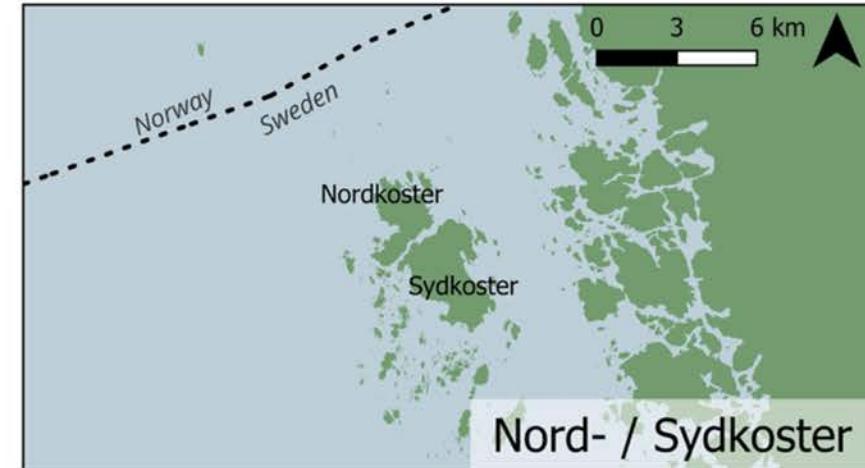


Place-based governance

- ▶ Two dimensions:
- ▶ **Place-based identity and branding** – contingent, contested, subject to negotiation
- ▶ **Strategic positioning** – how governance actors / stakeholders position or frame their island within wider multi-scalar geographical contexts

Research Questions

- ▶ How do **national governance systems** in NW Europe in address issue of island particularity?
- ▶ How can **place-based governance** address challenges of island particularity?
- ▶ How can **islands strategically position themselves** in wider geographical and governance contexts?



Small Islands in EU Policy

- ▶ Specific mention in **Art 174, Treaty on the Functioning of the EU**
- ▶ **Territorial cohesion** - reduce disparities in socioeconomic development at a regional level
- ▶ **Regions with geographical specificities** that can lead to disadvantage – incl. island regions
- ▶ Problematic focus on **island regions** defined at NUTS III level

National Legislation and Policy

Finland: first European state to introduce national island legislation (1981)

- ▶ Access to basic services,
- ▶ public sector employment,
- ▶ Protection of island landscapes

Scotland: Scottish Islands Act (2018)

- ▶ Islands 'proofing'
- ▶ National islands plan



National Legislation and Policy

Netherlands: 'Wadden test' (from 2008)

- ▶ Procedure to test whether future regulations have a disproportionate effect on the Wadden islands
- ▶ Incorporated within cooperation agreements between the island municipalities, provinces and Ministry of the Interior

Ireland: 'Our Living Islands' policy framework (2023)

- ▶ National framework but lack of binding budgetary commitments or legislative support
- ▶ No island municipalities

No National Recognition of Island Particularity

Sweden:

- ▶ Despite efforts of National Archipelago Association
- ▶ Lack of cross-sectoral integration (e.g. affordable housing and school provision)

Germany: German island resolution (2022)

- ▶ Called for islands ombudsman and simplified bureaucratic procedures

Cooperation among neighbouring islands

Netherlands – formal cooperation

- ▶ four Frisian islands (2009)
- ▶ Texel joined 2015 (population 23,000)
- ▶ Supported by partnership secretariat – funded by island municipalities
- ▶ Focus on issues of commonality across all islands

Germany – Island and Hallig conference (Schleswig-Holstein North Sea only)

- ▶ islands of very different sizes and characters
- ▶ Common representation on National Park issues



Protected Areas and Place-Based Governance

- ▶ Protected Areas as an **opportunity for dialogue** on relationship between society and environment on island-scale
- ▶ Consultation on designation
- ▶ Management Plan / Strategic Vision
- ▶ How is the island presented to visitors?

'the National Park should belong to everyone on the island'

'the connections between nature and ecology on the one hand and the local economy, cultural history, recreation and tourism and community on Schiermonnikoog'... should be strengthened

(NP Schiermonnikoog 2024)



National Park
Schiermonnikoog

Koster Islands (SE)

- ▶ Kosterhavet National Park designated in 2009 – extensive consultation
- ▶ Comprehensive spatial plan for Koster islands prepared in parallel
- ▶ Koster – focus of policy attention – moment of opportunity



Koster Islands - Challenges

- ▶ Limited resources of National Park
- ▶ At times difficult relationship between island community and municipality – improving through work of FREIIA
- ▶ Expectation that islanders speak with one voice
- ▶ Permanent residents, seasonal residents, visitors, - different perspectives



Bornholm (DK)

- ▶ Long-standing focus of nature conservation on landscape qualities – maintaining the status quo
- ▶ Proposed 'nature national park' – woodland area
- ▶ UNESCO Biosphere proposal – whole island?



Bornholm (DK)

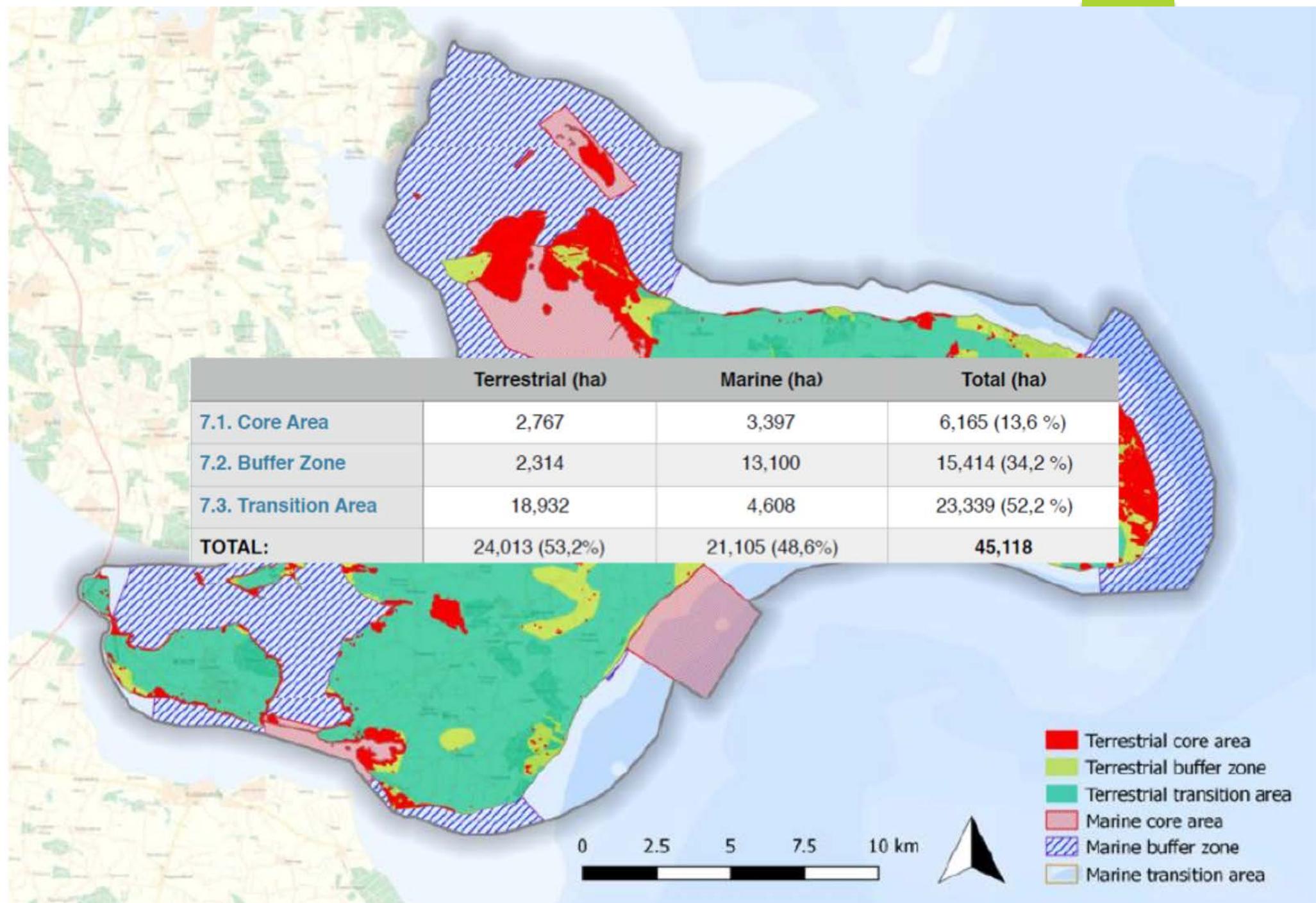
► **Nature-National Park**

- rewilding focus
- High fences
- Top-down management
- Limited consultation

► **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**

- Potential for inclusive perspective
- National Park as core 'beating heart'
- Link to circular economy initiatives





Participation and Conflict Management

Need mechanisms for inclusion of diverse types of stakeholders

- ▶ Island community organisations and individuals
- ▶ Resource users (e.g., hunters, fishers, farmers...)
- ▶ Knowledge holders (e.g. ecologists, cultural heritage / local history experts)
- ▶ Business professional organisations (e.g. tourism operators, ferry companies etc. etc.)
- ▶ Municipalities, other state organisations and NGOs



Danish Wadden Sea National Park

- ▶ **National Park Board:** primary decision-making authority – 15 members selected by Ministry for Environment (municipalities, sectoral interests, NGOs, public authorities).
- ▶ **National Park Council:** advisory forum, local and regional stakeholders
- ▶ **Wadden Sea Advisory Committee:** led by municipalities – parallel to National Park structures



Danish Wadden Sea National Park

“For some it is a little overkill and for others it **maintains the sovereignty of the municipalities**” (local politician)

“it's like a steam boiler where you take out the steam... You can laugh together. You drink coffee together. You have a lunch together. **And, of course, they still disagree when they leave the meeting.** But, they also... get an understanding of why the farmers... or the fisherman... or the authorities... or the NGOs say as they do”.

Some Conclusions

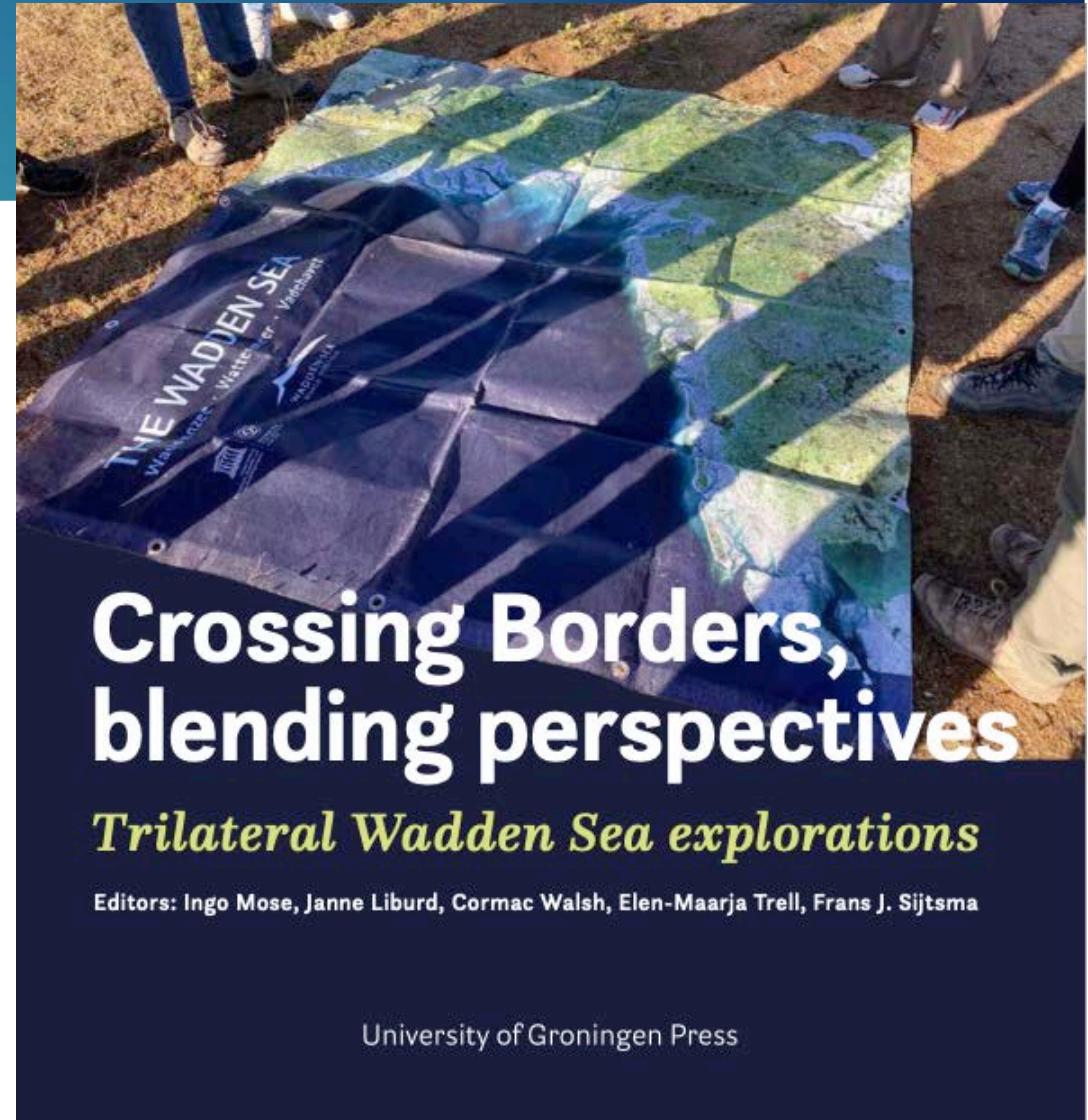
- ▶ Protected areas can provide an opportunity for **dialogue on island futures**
- ▶ Islands need to be proactive to **foster place-based governance** capacity (both internally and externally)
- ▶ Different types of protected areas can serve very **different purposes but are complementary**
- ▶ **Pluralist open debate** is important to bring in different stakeholders – who don't all have to agree with each other!
- ▶ **Governance structures** need careful consideration

Where do we go from here?

- ▶ Circulate Slides, distribute certificates of participation, additional resources
- ▶ FREIIA position paper on island governance protected areas
- ▶ Cooperation with ESIN (European Small Islands Federation)

Resources:

- ▶ **Scientific papers from Wadden Sea and islands research:** <https://cormacwalsh-consult.eu/wadden-sea/> (email for access for papers beyond paywall).
- ▶ Edited book, published June 2025: open access pdf: <https://books.ugp.rug.nl/ugp/catalog/book/225>



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