

The Natural and Cultural Landscape Heritage of Northern Friesland

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Manuscript for *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, spring 2005, please only quote from strongly revised published version

According to the trilateral resolution of the environmental ministries of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, the Wadden Sea, an area of tidal flats stretching along the coasts of these countries, is to be nominated as part of UNESCO's World Heritage. The Wadden Sea is one of the largest coastal wetlands in the world, admired as a unique and precious eco-system whose aesthetic and natural beauty no one doubts.¹ (**figure 1**: caption: Map of the area: The Wadden Sea encompasses the coastlines of the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany.) An important share of this natural and cultural heritage belongs to Northern Friesland. Its coastal landscape has been stamped by a centuries-long interaction between people and the sea, a history of land reclamation and of heavy storm tides which have washed away large parts of the land and left behind a spectacular chain of islands and *Halligen* (holms)—minuscule islands with only a few houses on dwelling mounds which are surrounded by flood waters up to sixty times a year (**figure 2** caption: 'Hallig house on a dwelling mound, surrounded by salt meadows (Hamburger Hallig)').

But to address the natural and cultural heritage of Northern Friesland is not only a question of man and his natural environment; it is also to enter into a politically and emotionally charged debate. The nomination of the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage site is to be made only with the consent of the coastal population, and there lies the problem; in many places, and especially in Northern Friesland, the proposal has met with considerable resistance. Representatives of the coastal communities, farmers' organisations, political parties and angry citizens have loudly expressed their opposition, and the general tendency is towards refusal. One of the central protest slogans is 'An inheritance can also be refused'.

The heated debate about the natural and cultural heritage of the Northern Friesian coastal landscape is the subject of this article.² What sort of nature, what sort of culture, is here to be declared part of the heritage of mankind? Why do the North Friesians refuse this mark of distinction for their landscape, which would, as its advocates observe, increase the value of the region, boost tourism and, one might suppose, fill local hearts with pride? Do the inhabitants live in another landscape? The material presented here is the result of my social anthropological fieldwork carried out within the framework of an interdisciplinary research project entitled 'Nature in Conflict: Natural Conservation, the Concept of Nature and Images of the Coast'.³ Using the ongoing conflicts about the contested coastline in Northern Friesland as an example, we have been investigating, from linguistic, theoretical, historical and social anthropological perspectives, the question what nature really is—admittedly, a big question. So instead of treating the UNESCO nomination as an isolated process, it is here discussed in the broader historical context of a landscape that has always been pre-eminently contested.

Though the whole nomination process is in danger of failing, it is here argued that the controversy brings to light an often overlooked aspect of this unique landscape: through local resistance to the UNESCO nomination it is revealed as a political landscape in the literal sense of the term. While in the heritage debate culture and nature are often made into essentialist categories⁴, the general understanding of the term 'political landscape' is, on the other hand, usually a metaphorical one. By contrast, I seek to develop a

concept of political landscape that is neither essentialist nor metaphorical. In accordance with this concept, the political is not projected onto the region but is quite concretely rooted in it; in nature as well as in culture. Political landscapes in Northern Friesland have always been, as the cultural geographer Olwig has shown⁵, literally political entities. In this article I shall argue that this concept not only sheds new light on the ongoing controversies, but challenges the ways how the UNESCO heritage conception is put into practice.⁶

Contested Coastal Landscape

The present debate about World Heritage can be understood only in the historical context of previous discussion concerning the National Park ‘Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea’, which was initiated in 1985. One of the main reasons for creating a National Park is its value as a resting place for migratory birds. Bird conservationists set up bird-protection areas on the wetlands as early as the 1930s. At the centre of the National Park is a preserve for so-called ‘undisturbed natural processes’, which comprises about 36% of the total area. In the remaining part of the Wadden Sea, restricted traditional use of the landscape is permitted. The overall goals of the national park are a) the conservation of the beauty, variety and uniqueness of this eco-system; b) the services that the eco-system of the Wadden Sea places at our disposal, and c) the conservation of pure nature.

Since the foundation of the Park, there has been vehement conflict between the local population and the Park authority; this culminated at the end of the nineties in a discussion about a change in the law concerning the regulation and the extension of the Park.⁷ Parts of the local population feared restrictions in hunting, fishing and recreational use of the Wadden Sea. ‘Down with Eco-Dictatorship’ and ‘God created the sea and the Friesian created the coast’ (**figure 3** caption: ‘Pure Nature versus pure Culture: ‘Down with Eco-dictatorship. God created the sea, the Friesian the coast.’’) were popular protest slogans. While denouncing hegemonic conservationist discourse as blasphemous, locals insisted provocatively on an essentialist cultural identity as Friesians. The eminently science-based discourse of the conservationists was deconstructed, and scientists were debunked as important stakeholders, who were accused of using the Wadden Sea as their laboratory and ‘playground’. (**figure 4** caption: ‘Demonstration of local fishermen against the National Park in 1996: ‘The Wadden Sea is a livelihood for fishermen and not a playground for scientists’). The Wadden Sea is in fact among the best researched coastal environments world-wide, and it was the object of the largest eco-system research project ever conducted in Germany.⁸ The debate culminated in the fundamental question of whether the coastal landscape of Northern Friesland was a natural or a cultural landscape. Seen from an historical, and less heated, perspective, there is no easy answer to this question. Characteristic of the North Friesian coastal region is the fluid transition between North Sea and mainland. The Roman writer Pliny the Elder was surprised that the sea was now there and now vanished, that one could never know whether one stood on firm ground or in the sea.⁹ The coastal region is a geologically and biophysically dynamic landscape; heavy storm tides have time and again altered its boundaries. Where there was sea, there is now land; where there was land, there is now sea. And not only the forces of nature have formed this region. Above all, the coastal inhabitants’ reclamation of land through the constant construction of dikes has pushed the boundary between earth and sea ever farther westwards. Where does nature begin and culture end, and vice versa? In this coastal landscape bio-geological processes and human efforts are inextricably intertwined.

Needless to say, especially in times of climatic change, the dikes and the protection of the coast is of central importance to the inhabitants. But not even the dikes mark a fixed boundary between land and sea. This issue is apparent in contemporary discussion concerning coastal protection; whereas the local residents plead for reinforcement and elevation of the dikes, many scientists and conservationists favour the selective re-transformation of reclaimed land into wetlands through abandonment of the dikes.¹⁰ With the foundation of the National Park, however, there ensued a fixation of these fluid boundaries, a demarcation that is of administrative and political nature and based on scientific expertise.

The question of the Wadden Sea as pure nature is actually the result of heterogeneous societal and natural processes; it is, as Latour might put it, a constructed fact.¹¹ The notion of ‘pure nature’ has stimulated the counter-construction of a notion of a ‘pure culture’, a revived Friesian identity. Thus the question seems to be not about nature and culture in an essentialist sense, but rather about the good or bad construction of facts. Nature in the National Park, after more than a decade of fierce debates, is a more or less accepted mediated reality. It took a long and often painful debate to turn the constructed fact of the ‘Wadden Sea’ into a largely accepted one, into a well-constructed fact. But while the protection of the Wadden Sea is on the way to becoming a matter of concern for all involved parties, the debate about the Wadden Sea as UNESCO heritage appears to be opening old wounds.

The UNESCO World Heritage Discourse

Although the resolution to nominate the Wadden Sea as World Heritage had already been formulated by the Trilateral Wadden Sea Co-operation in 1991, its actual proposal was postponed until the outcome of the conflict over the Park was settled, and the amendment of the National Park law was finally, willy-nilly, accepted. To avoid similar discussions, its advocates propose that the World Heritage area be identical with the boundaries of the National Park, which begins seawards 150m behind the dike. The idea of nominating the Wadden Sea as part of the World Heritage had its origin in an initiative of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Co-operation, that is, it originated at the level of government and the environmental ministries. As the core of the application and as a basis for the public discussion, an independent expert opinion was commissioned. The internationally known coastal researcher Peter Burbridge of the University of Newcastle updated his earlier feasibility study from 1991 and arrived at an all-round positive result:

‘Major progress has been achieved since the 1991 Feasibility Study in ensuring that the integrity of a World Heritage site could be maintained. The Wadden Sea now enjoys a level of environmental protection and wise management that is unprecedented throughout Europe and other parts of the world in terms of harmonised international and national policies, management arrangements, and integrated environmental monitoring and assessment processes.’¹²

The central argument of this opinion appeals to the already existing protective measures that guarantee the fulfilment of the conditions for the UNESCO criteria. Among other things, these criteria require ‘significant on-going geological processes’, ‘significant ongoing biological and ecological processes’, and ‘areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance’.¹³ The Wadden Sea area easily satisfies these criteria; that is, the area is in large part identical with the already existing National Parks, it is part of the RAMSAR and NATURA 2000 Agreement, it is subject to the guidelines for flora, fauna and habitat (Special Areas of Conservation) and for the protection of bird life

(Special Protection Areas), and its condition is monitored by a Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme (TMAP).¹⁴ Thus at the centre of this argument is a scientific concept of nature, a pure nature of natural laws, combined with and framed by administrative measures for its protection. In confirming for this area the further UNESCO criterion ‘of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance’, the study applies a form of assessment that assigns natural phenomena an additional qualitative value. (**figure 5:** caption: ‘Tidal flat as heritage-projection screen: significant biological, ecological and geological processes, or optionally exceptional natural beauty.’)

Burbridge further takes into consideration the declaration of the Wadden Sea as a cultural heritage, as a cultural landscape, and refers to the research project LANCEWAD,¹⁵ which lists archaeological monuments and historical sites such as lighthouses, ship-wrecks and salt-mines. Nevertheless, he advises a graduated procedure for nomination that assigns priority to the natural heritage—while mentioning, however, that the aspect of cultural heritage might meet with greater acceptance amongst the population.

In the entire argument for the World Heritage, scholarly and exact as it is, the aspects mentioned refer exclusively to natural phenomena, aesthetic values and prospective museum artefacts, all stripped of their actual cultural, social and political meanings and neatly placed into an already existing administrative context. The political dimension of the coastal landscape emerges only indirectly in Burbridge’s study. Thus he advises those responsible that ‘(g)iven the number of consultations and the potential mounting resistance on the part of the local people to new initiatives, there are concerns that any new consultations will have to be very well planned and implemented with great skill’.¹⁶

In his feasibility study, Burbridge follows the guidelines of the UNESCO Heritage, combined with a certain scientific routine. The nature and culture in question are as reductionist as were those outlined for the National Park. Consequently, the Wadden Sea, in its quality as a political landscape, first became recognisable at those public consultations and information meetings.

(Mock) Public Debates

At a typical public consultation, the UNESCO World Heritage was represented by the Environmental Administration of Schleswig-Holstein in the presence of regional and communal political representatives, garnished with deputations from UNESCO and World Heritage sites. The local people were represented by several dozen interested citizens along with the usual politicians from the communities and municipalities. During the National Park debate both sides had learned to know and hate one another, and now at the big meetings at the district level,¹⁷ they were all too ready to forget all compromises and start the fight anew.

The organisers had engaged a professional conflict moderator, who succeeded in bringing off the presentation without opposition and the discussion without surprises. The administration repeated well-known arguments, decorated them with familiar pictures of the Wadden Sea, and emphasised above all the economic advantages that the World Heritage would bring to the locality. In the highly competitive market of tourism, they promised, the nomination to the World Heritage would function as a ‘unique selling point’, as it is called in the language of professional marketing. Thus, in the public consultations, the scientific and administrative discourse of the feasibility study

switched into the discourse of marketing, baldly interpreting nature's purity as a capitalistic commodity. (**figure 6** caption: 'Nature? Culture? At least, the Wadden Sea serves as a 'unique selling point'.')

The voice of the people was represented, as it had been at the meetings opposing the National Park in earlier years, by a citizens' organisation called 'Initiative for the Cultural Landscape of Eiderstedt'. They decorated the foyer and the meeting room with protest posters and distributed leaflets denouncing with martial rhetoric the 'in part brazen and impudent propaganda action of the British scientist Peter S. Burbridge'.¹⁸ In rhyming verse, their placards condemned the 'Ecos' who at the cost of the tax-payer were forever creating new administrations and decrees, who were forever 'snatching, snatching, snatching', namely money and ever more power, and who were letting the land beyond the dikes run wild into salt meadows and neglecting the protection of the coast. A dialogue hardly occurred, and when it did, it readily threatened to slip into fundamentalisms.

Quite apart from all this, no one doubts the uniqueness of the Northern Friesian coastal landscape, including the opponents of the World Heritage site. But they recognise the bid for power that lurks behind the innocent word 'nature' and in the museum definition of culture. In the view of the locals, World Heritage is important for the environmental administration, for the nature conservationists, for the people involved in the Heritage business. But for many of the locals themselves, World Heritage obviously is not an inheritance that is worth taking possession of.

Asked about the protected status given the Wadden Sea by the National Park, Ramsar, Natura 2000, and the brand name that World Heritage would create for it, one angry citizen replied:

'And now the World Heritage! That's all a lot of hot air. When we walk on the dike and look at the water, we all see the same thing as 20, 50 or 100 years ago. Whether that is a National Park or a World Heritage site, makes no difference for the people who come here. They come because of the Wadden Sea'.

What kind of purity does this assertion imply? Neither the scientific nor the local conception of purity seems to offer a way out of the deadlocked debate. It is the conflict and the debate itself that are fundamental to the understanding of this blockade. As in the debate on the national park, there is a sharp sensitivity for the symbolic and political dimensions of the landscape in question. How to break out of this endlessly circular quarrel between nature and culture? One condition would be not to ignore the political, because, as I shall show in the following, the political is an integral quality of the landscape itself.

Political landscape

Using the example of the historical landscape of Northern Friesland and Dithmarschen, the cultural geographer Olwig has shown that the coastal inhabitants' perception and definition of the coastal landscape in past centuries has been political and social:

'The link between ideas of customary law, the institutions that embody that law, and the people enfranchised to participate in the making and administration of law is of fundamental importance to the meaning of the root *Land* in *Landschaft*. (...) Custom and culture defined a *Land*, not physical geographical characteristics—it was a social entity that found physical expression in the area under its law.'¹⁹

However, I do not mean to maintain here the idea of a perfect historical continuity. Today the institution called *Landschaft* is no longer an influential political entity, except via the heritage of customary practices and the idea of community autonomy—which can still exert practical and ideological power. Nor is there any reason to neglect natural forces such as the ever-present wind and the storm tides. But using the concept of political landscape brings to light the complexity of the coastal landscape beyond restrictive dichotomies. It puts natural forces as well as human efforts to administer and shape the natural environment into an historical context, without having to reduce the complexity of reality. In the following, some examples from the case study show how UNESCO's global authority and overreaching discourse has been condensed into a local political affair that is well worth considering.

Part of the field research led to the classical marshland, the Reussenkoege, west of Bredstedt. Here one finds, even today, fierce opponents of the National Park, and the refusal of the World Heritage resolution is considered to be a matter of course. The polders of Reussenkoege result from an historically continuous conquest of the Wadden Sea in the form of diking ever westwards. These so-called polders²⁰ first arose in the 16th century, financed and established by the Danish king and later by his favourites, then by princes and still later by the nation-state, by private financiers and finally of course by the settlers who leased, purchased and worked the land.²¹

The last polder built for agricultural use was finished in 1925 and is called the Soenke-Nissen polder. Long before becoming a candidate for global heritage, this polder was already part of globalisation; its diking was financed by a Friesian entrepreneur who had acquired his wealth in the South African diamond trade.²² The settlers, from the neighbouring marshland and from the inland, but also from distant Dithmarschen, leased the land and were, owing to the worsening economic crisis of the time, heavily encumbered by debts. In the thirties, they voted almost unanimously for the National Socialists, who promised a cancellation of their debts and who were happy to indulge here in the myth 'blood and soil' and of land reclamation for a 'people without living space'. Even though circumstances improved in the decades after the war, some of the farms were not finally free of debt until the 1980s. Today the polder is a prosperous agro-industrial landscape, and many of the farmers who did not go broke have become rich and are investing strongly in the heavily subsidised industry of wind power.

Here and in the marshlands in general, the social system and forms of organisation have been determined for centuries by the need to maintain the dikes and water drainage, by a strong tension between independence from and dependence on foreign financiers, and by a competition for land which has in the marshlands always been intense.²³ Scarcity of agricultural land in the restricted area of the polders, dependence on international markets, and the end of land reclamation still force large parts of the population to emigrate, and those who remain need to master innovative production techniques, lease additional land, and acquire new sources of income, such as from wind power, tourism, pig breeding or even ecological farming. Thus, to accept an inheritance, means to this day entering into the great risks between gaining a fortune or going broke. Adaptive strategies not only to ever-changing market devices, but also to paradigm changes such as the societal estimation of nature conservation, have to be taken into account.

A decisive turning-point in the forms of organisation came before the end of the politics of land-reclamation, when the state took over responsibility for important parts of dike maintenance and coastal protection.²⁴ The role of the dike masters, who functioned as

brokers between the external powers (financiers, state administration) and the competing settlers, was thus weakened, as was also that of the influential dike and sluice organisations.²⁵ The last diking took place in 1987. The heavy storm tides of 1962 and 1976 had necessitated it in order to protect the coast, but it marked at the same time an historic turning point. Owing to pressure from a supra-regional protest movement, the burgeoning German Eco-movement, the new polder was not given over to agricultural use but instead declared a nature reserve. Today it is a landmark of the final end of land reclamation on the entire coast.

With the establishment of the National Park, a new administration became active in this political landscape. At first, the coastal inhabitants scarcely had access to the new power and expected from it neither protection nor profit. Quite the contrary—in this administration they saw a powerful competitor that placed restrictions on agricultural and fishing activities and competed for land. There may also be historical parallels for the opposition to the National Park; alliances among the coastal inhabitants have always required both the sponsorship of a tutelary power as well as the threat of a strong opponent—whether the sea, the Danish king or today the conservationists.

It is conspicuous that the inhabitants interviewed no longer really dream of new diking and further land-reclamation, and like other citizens they see the necessity of nature conservation. The community itself is involved in manifold negotiations with the National Park authority, some of them of economic importance, such as the establishment of eco-tourism. Yet despite this adaptation through conflict, as it may be put, their view of the landscape unfailingly discerns in nature conservation the component of power that its advocates prefer to keep out of sight. *Nature* in the phrase ‘nature conservation’, precisely as *land* in the word landscape, is a political quantity. The idea of the ecological value of the coastal landscape is only one perspective among many possible other ones. Writing about the cultural heritage of Stonehenge, the archaeologist Bender²⁶ insists that ‘(t)here is never *a* landscape, always many landscapes’ and that there are many ways to interpret the ‘sedimented pasts that make up the landscape’. According to Bender²⁷, many of the ‘Heritage people’ tend to create normative landscapes and to ‘freeze’ them. And, in fact, many of the coastal inhabitants in Northern Friesland ask themselves whether they really stand ‘to inherit something’ with the World Heritage. Though the UNESCO Heritage people pretend not to add further regulations but rather only to preserve the dynamics of the natural and cultural processes of the Wadden Sea within the already established framework of the National Park, the establishment of a UNESCO heritage would mean a change of the political landscape. In order to prevent this or to make their own adaptation to the new circumstances, the locals prefer conflicting strategies. In doing so they demonstrate the political dimension of the UNESCO discourse and challenge its conceptual foundations.

Conclusion

How will the nomination process end? Perhaps some political trick will enable the Minister of the Environment to put through the World Heritage resolution without openly breaking his promise to make his decision dependent on the assent of the local population. On the other hand, perhaps the resolution will land in the waste-paper basket if the hard-liners among the coastal inhabitants get their way. Or there is also the possibility that the inhabitants will themselves take the whole process in hand. They would probably have no problem doing that; recently some oppositional mayors and their communities decided to join the biosphere convention. But it may be too late to turn a top-down initiative into a bottom-up process. By its bid for power, which it

cannot admit to, the Environmental Administration of Schleswig-Holstein has hoisted itself with its own petard.

For environmental research and heritage studies in general, there may be another lesson. Besides the regional peculiarities, there are also many generic symptoms in this case study. Everybody knows of course that bottom-up succeeds better than top-down. But there is more to rejected nominations than wrong strategies. Everywhere, conservationists still insist on the existence of a pure nature and the complementary essentialist understanding of culture, and their arguments often depend on this. Scientists are still misused to depoliticise political and administrative measures in the name of truth or reality. Public consultations and debates are too often nothing more than miserable rituals, with experts and locals holding monologues and pursuing their special interests. The list could be easily extended. To overcome the agony of many environmental and conservationist debates, essentialist and reductionist concepts should be abandoned and replaced by new experimental strategies that acknowledge the complexities of human and non-human affairs. Nature, too, is a political quantity, and there is no purity in a thing such as the Wadden Sea. This is perhaps one lesson we can learn from the miscarried debate about the World Heritage resolution.

[1] Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, *Das Wattenmeer als Weltnaturerbe – Eine globale Auszeichnung*, Wilhelmshaven, Germany, 2001 (Flyer).

[2] Trilateral decision processes are by nature very complicated. In this article, I do not address the discussion in the other parts of the Wadden Sea area, each of which has its own history. At the moment, Denmark shows little interest in the nomination, owing to protests of the local population. Complementary to the nomination process, the government has started a campaign to declare also the Danish part of the Wadden Sea a national park. Holland has not yet entered into the decision process. Among the federally organised states of Germany, Hamburg and Lower Saxony have already given their consent, as has also the district of Dithmarschen. According to my informants, the decision process in Northern Friesland is of central importance for the overall nomination.

[3] Funded by Volkswagen Foundation (2001-2003).

[4] I use the term ‘essentialist’ here in a polemical way as defined (and critically discussed) by Herzfeld: ‘The distinctive mark of essentialism (...) lies in its suppression of temporality: it assumes or attributes an unchanging, primordial ontology to what are historically contingent products of human or other forms of agency. It is thus also a denial of the relevance of agency itself’ (idem, essentialism, in: Barnard, A. and J. Spencer (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, London / New York: Routledge, 188).

[5] K. R. Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic*.

[6] Thus, paradoxically, the resistance to the trilateral resolution contains a constructive element which challenges UNESCO’s idea of an ‘objective’ nature based in science, but at the intersection of admittedly differing cultural perspectives, characterised by the prefix *ethno*. Against this idea of *mononaturalism* and an implied *multiculturalism*, as Latour puts it, I argue that a common nature or culture is not something that is revealed but rather something that has to be achieved in a common – and often controversial – effort. Short definitions of mononaturalism and the related concept of multiculturalism in B. Latour, *Das Parlament der Dinge*, 293.

[7] For a closer look at these debates, see W. Krauss, *The Culture of Nature: Protected Landscapes as Sites of Conflict*.

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- [8] Stock, M. et al. 'Oekosystemforschung Wattenmeer – Synthesebericht: Grundlagen fuer einen Nationalparkplan.' *Schriftenreihe des Nationalparks Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wattenmeer*, (1996), Heft 8.
- [9] Cited in T. Steensen, 'Das Wattenmeer als Weltkulturerbe? Ein Diskussionsbeitrag.', 13 *Nordfriesland* Nr. 134, Nordfriisk Institut (2001) 12-17.
- [10] Steensen, op. cit. (note 8), 13
- [11] See more on this subject in B. Latour, *The Promises of Constructivism*.
- [12] Peter R. Burbridge, *The Nomination of the Wadden Sea Conservation Area as a World Heritage Site*, 3.
- [13] Burbridge op. cit. (note 12), 19.
- [14] Burbridge op. cit. (note 12), 8f.
- [15] LANCEWAD means 'Mapping the Landscape and Cultural Heritage in the Wadden Sea Region' and is an initiative of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat. More information at <http://www.lancewad.de>
- [16] Burbridge op. cit. (note 12), 25.
- [17] The environmental administration took the promise of public debate quite seriously: there were discussions and information at all administrative levels.
- [18] Flyer of the Initiative Eiderstedter Kulturlandschaft (I.E.K.), 2001.
- [19] Olwig, op. cit. (note 5), 17.
- [20] The German word for polder is 'Koege', as in 'Reussen-koege'
- [21] For a detailed description, see H. Kunz & A. Panten, *Die Koege Nordfrieslands*, Bredstedt: Nordfriisk Institut, 1999 (1997¹).
- [22] For the history of this polder and the life of Soenke Nissen, see N. Paulsen, *Soenke Nissen – Koog*, Breklum: Breklumer Verlag, 1999 (1974¹).
- [23] The quality of the agricultural land in the Marshlands is close to the optimum of 100 points in the official ranking of farm land in Germany.
- [24] For further details on the end of land reclamation in this area see Krauss, *Contested Coastal Regions*.
- [25] The dike master, often entitled the *Deichgraf* ('Dike Count'), was an elected representative of the community whose job was to see to it that all fulfilled their obligation to maintain the dikes.
- [26] B. Bender, *Stonehenge*, 25.
- [27] Bender, op. cit. (note 25), 26.

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Figures:

- Figures 1 <http://www.waddensea-secretariat.org/news/documents/WSP-Maps/wsp-spa-engl.pdf>
 Figure 2 <http://www.wattenmeer-nationalpark.de/main.htm>
 Figure 3 foto by Hendrik Brunckhorst
 Figure 4 foto by Martin Doering
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abstract

In this article I argue for an approach to environmental and heritage studies beyond a conceptual divide between nature and culture. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, the case of the ongoing debate about the nomination of the Wadden Sea as a UNESCO heritage site gives insight into the complexity of attitudes towards the area in question, of widely differing perceptions and values. The focus on the detailed analysis of the controversies about the "National Park Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea" and the public debate in Northern Friesland about the UNESCO heritage highlights the political dimension of conservation strategies. Instead of recurring to the concepts of pure nature, pure culture and its relating marketing value, I propose to adapt the historically rooted concept of political landscape. Once a form of political organization and practice in Northern Friesland, the concept of political landscape challenges the UNESCO heritage conception based and offers new perspectives on conflicts between local population and nature conservation.

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6 keywords

political landscape, ethnography, environmental conflicts, National Park, wetland, social construction of heritage