



## **History of Perceptions and Present Day Conflicts: The Cultural Dimension of Conflicts over Appropriate Measures to Protect Against the Threats of Storm Surges and Flooding**

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Study and awareness of the history and of different cultural perceptions of coastal areas and storm surges are not just of academic interest for professional historians or for cultural studies research. Rather, being aware of and taking into account the multiplicity and diversity of stakeholders' perspectives, their values and interests is crucial for understanding to-day's conflicts in coastal areas and is indispensable for any approach to resolve these disputes.

This paper is based on three case studies on conflicts over and cooperation on building and strengthening coastal defence infrastructure designed to improve protection against the threats of storm surges and flooding in the Jade Bay, Southern North Sea, in Germany. Analysing this process, there will be highlighted the role of historically grown perspectives, deeply rooted value differences, perceptions and expectations of the parties in conflict.

The case studies, covering a period of more than a decade from 1997 on, illustrate the process the disputants went through: In the beginning, the perceptions of the coastal area as such, the interpretations of the area and the expectations of how to use that area for industrial, commercial, agricultural, transport, housing, recreational, or nature conservation purposes and what role coastal protection should or could play in that context, were quite disconnected and diverse. This even resulted in inconsistencies between different sections of State Law, namely on coastal protection on the one hand and on nature conservation on the other hand. Finally, by mutually learning about the other parties' perspectives and thus developing a more holistic -and a more realistic- understanding, the parties succeeded to build consensus.

Given climate change and expectedly more severe threats of storm surges, coastal protection will become even more important for sustaining life in coastal regions. There will be needed more space and more money for coastal protection infrastructure, imposing restrictions on competing claims to land use in the coastal zones in general and in the near vicinity of these structures, such as dykes, especially. New and more conflicts are to be expected.

As an example, the case studies reported in this paper demonstrate that being aware of and exploring the diversity of cultural perspectives is a prerequisite for understanding and resolving to-day's and future conflicts. Furthermore it is shown, that social and institutional learning is possible and how structural provisions and procedural tools enable stakeholders to develop a more holistic understanding of the issues at stake.