

Protected Area Management and Island Sustainability

DR. CORMAC WALSH 24.02.2025

FREIIA

Interreg
North Sea



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Schedule

17th February: Today!

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

24th February

- ▶ Islands and sustainability
- ▶ Governance and Participation

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**

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



A Small Islands Perspective

- ▶ Challenges of infrastructure and service provision – **economies of scale**
- ▶ Need for greater recognition of specific island context – **place-based governance**
- ▶ Distinctive sense of place is also an asset – **'Islandness'**



Governance of Small Islands

- ▶ Islands as municipalities or parts of municipalities
- ▶ **Limited local autonomy**, distance to centres of decision-making
- ▶ Located within **multi-level hierarchical systems**
- ▶ **Policy-takers** rather than policy-makers
- ▶ Are island challenges **recognised in national policy**?

Governance for Small Islands: National Policies

- ▶ **Finland (1981)** national island legislation – securing island livelihoods, basic services, protection of island landscapes
- ▶ **Scotland (2018)** Scottish Islands Act – island proofing, National Islands Plan
- ▶ **Netherlands (2008)** – ‘Wadden test’ - cooperation agreements between islands, provinces and ministry
- ▶ **Ireland (2023)** – ‘Our Living Islands’ – Policy framework only
- ▶ **Sweden, Germany** – no islands policy / legislation

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 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)



Nationaal Park
Schiermonnikoog

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



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
- ▶ 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)

▶ 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
- ▶ Another meeting under FREIIA – with protected area focus?
- ▶ FREIIA position paper on island governance protected areas
- ▶ Cooperation with ESIN (European Small Islands Federation)

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Further Information:

- ▶ **Scientific papers from Wadden Sea research:** <https://cormacwalsh-consult.eu/wadden-sea/> (email for access for papers beyond paywall).
- ▶ **Wadden Sea Online Lecture Series at University of Groningen:** <https://www.rug.nl/rudolf-agricola-school/research/sustainable-landscapes-and-regions/files/triwadwalk-online-lecture-series?lang=en>
- ▶ **Island (and fisheries) poems by Ruth Brennan:** <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/2099>