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Coastal contexts

We live in a world confronted by mounting environmental problems affecting coasts and coastal zones such as

- the loss of species diversity,
- environmental pollution,
- the destruction of habitats,
- the flooding of coastal areas and
- global warming.

Jeanne-Claude Christo



Land-Art in Little Bay, Australia (1968-1969)

In everyday life inhabitants of coastal areas and coastal dwellers mourn the loss of valued coast- and seascapes, cherished species, destroyed livelihoods and homes. Underlying these problems are conflicting coastal images and coastal values. To date, dominant approaches to policy-making seem ill-equipped to capture the various ways in which coastal environments matter to coastal populations and other parts of society.

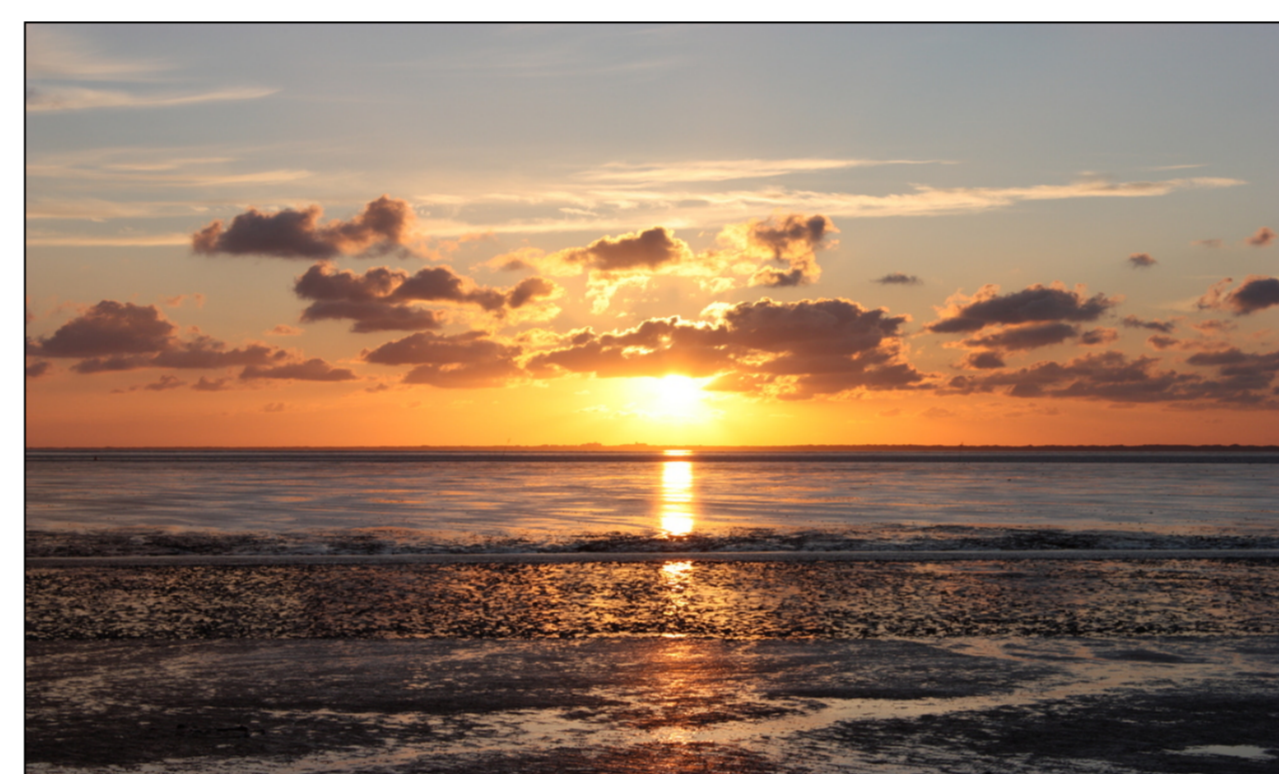
Some coastal images



Local cultural values
(Identity)



Non-local cultural values
(Recreation)



Landscape values
(Aesthetics)



Economic values
(Economic benefits)



Community values
(Leisure)

Coastal conflicts

Coasts are sites of conflict between different social groups and their values. Conflicts occur at a number of intermingled levels: the local level, the regional level or even the national level. The prevalent response to value conflicts has been to find a common – mainly economic – measure of values through instruments such as cost-benefit analysis and welfare economics. Cost-benefit analysis has been the most widely used decision-making tool in environmental policy for the resolution of environmental conflicts.



"The Wadden Sea provides a livelihood for fishermen and not a playground for researchers."

Empirical assessment of coastal values in coastal images

Coastal conflicts can be framed as a conflict of coastal values inherent in coastal images. To examine and assess contested coastal values, we empirically analyse coastal images and their intrinsic values from a linguistic and social science point of view. We use methods such as document analysis, participant observation, expert interviews, narrative interviews, biographical interviews and focus groups. The main aim consists in the development of an empirically grounded value catalogue that could be used in participatory procedures and societal negotiation processes.

Projects that successfully applied and apply this approach:

Coastal Images and Images of the Coast (University of Hamburg – HZG Institute for Coastal Research, 1997-1999, funded by HZG)

Contested Natures in the Wadden Sea (University of Hamburg – HZG Institute for Coastal Research, 1999-2002, funded by VolkswagenStiftung)

Climate Images across Different Coastal Societies (University of Hamburg – HZG Institute for Coastal Research, 2012-2015, funded by the Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft in the context of REKLIM – Regional Climate Change)