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## The role of the arts in coping with place change at the coast

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**SPECIAL SECTION****CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIES OF COASTAL CHANGE****The role of the arts in coping with place change at the coast****Gwenda van der Vaart | Bettina van Hoven | Paulus P. P. Huigen**

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This paper explores the role of the arts in people's coping with (potential) place change at the coast in light of wind energy developments. In doing so, we elaborate on the effects of the arts on people's emotional connections to the landscape; the memories, beliefs, meaning and knowledge they associate with the landscape; and the expression of people's attachments through actions. We draw on 28 walking interviews and three group discussions which were conducted in Pingjum, a village along the Dutch Wadden Sea coast. A key feature in Pingjum's landscape is the Gouden Halsband, a late medieval dike surrounding the village. Recently, the area around Pingjum (including this dike) was designated as a potential location for the construction of a new windfarm. In our study, we found that the arts in Pingjum fuelled people's emotional connection to their (coastal) landscape and the Gouden Halsband, enhanced their knowledge of both and triggered them to reflect on the meanings they assign to them. In addition, the arts enhanced people's awareness and stimulated their assessment of the windfarm plans. The arts framed people's interpretation of the windfarm plans, mainly bringing potential negative impacts on the landscape to their attention. In this way, the arts encouraged action, stimulating both efforts to preserve the Gouden Halsband and protests against the proposed windfarm plans.

**KEYWORDS**

coping with place change, place attachment, the arts, Wadden Sea coast, walking interviews, wind energy

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the value of the arts, beyond their aesthetic qualities (Ernstman & Wals, 2013). The American Planning Association, for instance, pointed out that "the arts and culture activities" can be used to "improve a community's overall understanding of history and heritage of place; foster tolerance and celebration of identity; and possibly provide opportunities for community residents to more actively participate in community visioning and planning processes" (2011, p. 2). These aspects support previous research that argues that the arts can help to articulate and strengthen links between communities and places (see, e.g., Anwar McHenry, 2011; Hall & Robertson, 2001; Morris & Cant, 2004).

Several authors have highlighted the arts as tools to (re)frame and engage with controversial topics. Miles (2010) and Weik von Mossner (2013), for example, argued that the arts can contribute to shifts in awareness and attitudes towards (dealing with) climate change. Stocker and Kennedy (2011) noted the arts can act as a catalyst to sustainable action. Their research is interesting since it addresses artistic representations of Australian seas and coasts in a similar way to our study. They concluded that the arts can help people to explore and develop their sense of identity and belonging on the coast,

which may subsequently lead to care and stewardship. Stocker and Kennedy regarded the arts as having additional value to “cognitive scientific evidence” in creating awareness and action for sustainability, because “emotional and affective responses to the natural world and environmental concerns can be more engaging and decisive than government reports or scientific data” (2011, p. 99). However, as Stuver et al. (2012) reminded us, the arts are never neutral. They noted that “a community-based art project could turn into a platform for a dismissive ‘not in my backyard’ attitude among local inhabitants or for alternative spatial scenarios that have not been considered by the planners” (2012, p. 308).

In this paper, we draw attention to the role of the arts in people’s coping with (potential) place change at the coast in light of wind energy developments. Place changes in light of new energy infrastructures can trigger forms of “place protective” action such as engaging in collective protest or signing petitions (Devine-Wright, 2009). People’s interpretations of place change are socially constructed, with various people, groups and institutions influencing one another (see, e.g., Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015; Stedman, 2002; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001). This paper zooms in on the role of artists in this context. The following section of the paper offers a theoretical contextualisation of people’s coping with place change and the role of others in this context. We then introduce the geographic location of our study and the research project. Next, we turn to our findings. We first discuss interpretations of our participants of the potential place change in their village. Subsequently, we zoom in on various arts activities in Pingjum and clarify how they, as seen from the perspective of our participants, influence people’s place attachments and their coping with the possible introduction of a windfarm.

## 2 | COPING WITH PLACE CHANGE

Researchers have been interested in the impact of place change on people and communities, especially those induced by (renewable) energy infrastructures have received much attention (see, e.g., Bailey et al., 2016; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015; Devine-Wright, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010; McLachlan, 2009; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001). However, before we can explain people’s responses to (renewable) energy projects, we first need to explain the concepts of place change and place attachment (see also Devine-Wright, 2009).

Place change can both be material/physical (such as the demolition of buildings) as well as non-material (such as a change in an area’s social status) (Wester-Herber, 2004). The literature on place change has a predominantly negative conception of it and has repeatedly noted its upsetting nature, pointing to (potential) feelings of anxiety, grief or loss, disruption to social networks and diverse coping strategies (Devine-Wright, 2011b; Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010). Here, place change is often named as being a source of disruption to people’s place attachment, but it may also actually enhance people’s place attachment (Devine-Wright, 2011b).

Place attachment – on the contrary – is described by Brown and Perkins (1992, p. 284) as “positively experienced bonds, sometimes occurring without awareness, that are developed over time from the behavioural, affective, and cognitive ties between individuals and/or groups and their sociophysical environment”. In the extensive literature devoted to place attachment, it is considered as an integral part of human identity and it is usually implicitly defined as positive, seen as filling people’s lives with meaning (Giuliani, 2003; Lewicka, 2011). However, people can hold ambivalent feelings or have alienated relationships toward places too (see, e.g., Bailey et al., 2016).

To deepen the understanding of public responses to unwanted local developments such as (renewable) energy projects, Devine-Wright (2009) proposed a multidimensional framework which draws on processes of place attachment. He distinguished the following stages of responses to place change: becoming aware, interpreting change, evaluating change, coping responses and, in certain circumstances, acting (e.g., behavioural resistance or support). Ultimately, it is how change is interpreted and evaluated that determines people’s response, not the form of place change itself. The symbolic meanings that people adopt and construct about the (proposed) project and whether those meanings “fit” with the symbolic meanings they assign to the place involved are crucial. When there is a good “fit”, people’s place attachment might be enhanced rather than disrupted and be a significant, positive predictor of project acceptance (Devine-Wright, 2011b). This was demonstrated in the study of McLachlan (2009), in which she assessed the formation of support and opposition to a wave energy project. She found various “symbolic logics” of support and opposition, which arose from the “fit” between multiple interpretations of both the place (e.g., as economically vulnerable, as a resource) and the technology (e.g., as commercial, as experimental).

A number of studies have shown that other people, groups and institutions (such as local opposition groups, developers, the media) are an important shaping factor in people’s interpretations of place change, because they influence each other’s way of thinking (see, e.g., Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015; Devine-Wright, 2011a; Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001; Wester-Herber, 2004). Batel and Devine-Wright (2015, p. 318), for example, argued that “responses to RET (renewable energy and associated technologies) need to be examined as social representations, that is, as co-

constructed, relational, contextual, dynamic and rhetorical meaning-making”. They noted that some groups or institutions might be more powerful than others in making their representations prevalent, leading to some representations being valued more or having more legitimacy in society than others that are circulating within the lay sphere. McLachlan (2009), for instance, explained that dominant or “official” assessments of what a place is may obscure the plurality of meanings given to a place. Drawing on historic images of a place could enhance the validity and credibility of claims to define the “essence” of a place. Subsequently, activities that do not correspond to this are regarded as being out of place and thus unacceptable (McLachlan, 2009).

In light of the above, when looking at people’s interpretations of (potential) place change, attention should also be paid to others beyond the individual (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Stedman, 2002). In our paper we focus on one group in particular that has received little attention until now: artists. We aim to discuss the role of their arts in people’s coping with (potential) place change at the coast in light of wind energy developments. In order to clarify the various ways in which the arts influence this, in our analysis we draw on Brown and Perkins’ (1992) distinction between three psychological aspects that are involved in people’s connections to places: affect, cognition and behaviour (see also Scannell & Gifford, 2010). First, *affect* involves people’s emotional connections to a place, in which place attachment is grounded. People’s relationship with a place can represent an array of emotions, from love to fear and hatred. Second, *cognition* concerns the memories, beliefs, meaning and knowledge that people associate with a place and that makes it personally important. Third, *behaviour* concerns the expression of people’s attachment through actions (such as pilgrimages) (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

### 3 | PINGJUM AND THE GOUDEN HALSBAND

The village of our case study, Pingjum, is in the north of the Netherlands and has around 600 inhabitants. It is situated along the Wadden Sea coast and surrounded mainly by agricultural land (Figure 1). In the media, Pingjum is presented as being an open and tolerant village, and has the reputation of being an “artist village”, hosting many cultural activities and having a relatively large presence of artists/’creatives’ (see, e.g., van Santen, 2013).

A key feature in Pingjum’s landscape is the Gouden Halsband (translation: Golden Collar), a late medieval dike that surrounds the village (Figure 1). This dike is one of the oldest dikes in the Netherlands, built to protect Pingjum from flooding. However, it lost this original function in the late 19th century when the sea dikes nearby were improved. Historian Karstkarel remarked that after these improvements, “the Halsband seemed like a joke. In terms of sea-defence this might be true, but as one of the earliest traces of human control of the sometimes terrifying nature, the Halsband is still a monument of great significance” (Karstkarel, 2011, p. 41, authors’ translation). He highlighted the dike’s current cultural-historical value. However, after the dike lost its (coastal) defence function, there was little investment in its maintenance and it deteriorated (Bolsward Nieuwsblad, 2014). Parts of the dike were used for heavy agricultural traffic and were excavated, which caused further damage. In 2009, a committee for the preservation and restoration of the Gouden Halsband was formed by concerned inhabitants. They attempted to increase the attention of authorities (such as the municipality) on the, in their view, cultural historical monument (Pingjumer Gulden Halsband, 2016). After some years, the committee was successful in obtaining funding from the Province and the EU. This meant they could start to further develop and implement their plans, such as conducting an archaeological study on the age of the dike, the restoration of a damaged part and the creation of a walking trail. Since 2013, a large part of the Gouden Halsband is included in the largest hiking-network of The Netherlands, meaning that the dike nowadays also has a recreational value.

Recently, the area around Pingjum (including the Gouden Halsband) was designated by the Province as a potential location for the construction of a new windfarm. Pingjum already has a history with wind energy, as in the 1980s the village was one of the first villages in the Netherlands to have its own wind turbine. The construction of a new windfarm would mean an increase of the sustainable energy function of the area. However, local responses to the new plans, which involve the construction of 40–60 wind turbines 200 m in height, are mixed. Some people are worried about the effects on the open landscape around the village and the Gouden Halsband (see, e.g., Bouma, 2012).

### 4 | METHODS

In this paper, we draw on a research project that was conducted in Pingjum. The participants for this project were recruited in several ways, such as by giving a presentation at the annual meeting of the village’s interest group and door-to-door



**FIGURE 1** The case study village Pingjum and the *Gouden Halsband* (the late medieval dike surrounding the village).

distribution of flyers. As a result, 28 participants were recruited, comprising people from different age groups (<25, 25–65, >65).

For this paper, we draw on the first two phases of the project. In the first phase, walking interviews were conducted. Each participant was asked to take the researcher on a “tour” through Pingjum to show (and take photographs of) places of significance to them, and places which in their eyes are facing potential changes or are disputed in the community. In addition, the interview questions during the walking interviews focused on the participants’ opinion on the role of the various arts activities and artists in Pingjum, the village community, and their opinion on (potential) changes for the village. Walking interviews are a good way of accessing community members’ connections to their surrounding environment and, compared with indoor interviews, generate more place-specific data (Evans & Jones, 2011; Kusenbach, 2003). This makes walking interviews a valuable method for research on people’s coping with (potential) place change, even though they have not been deployed much in this context up to now (but see Wheeler [2016] who used this method in her research on the long-term impacts of existing windfarms on local residents).

The second phase of the project consisted of group discussions in which the participants further discussed the meanings of particular places in Pingjum. In total, 16 of the participants took part in those group discussions (those absent were either unable to join due to a scheduling conflict or lacked interested in participating). The participants were divided into three small groups of mixed ages and used the photographs taken during the first phase as starting points for their discussions.

Before each phase of the project, the participants were given more background on the research project, its aim and content, possible uses of the data generated by it, and the possibility of being identifiable by others by taking part in the project. Then, the participants were asked to complete and sign an informed consent form. In this form, they could indicate their wishes with regards to how their names, quotes and photographs would be treated (e.g., use of photographs in which they are recognisable).

The walking interviews and group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed afterwards. The transcripts were analysed in NVivo, using codes that emerged both from the literature and from the data itself.

## 5 | FINDINGS

In light of the focus of this paper, it is important to note that a key theme that emerged from the data collection was the appreciation of Pingjum's open landscape (and the Gouden Halsband). In addition, participants named several artists and recalled artistic activities in the village that engage with the landscape (including representational and performative arts).

Below, we first discuss two ways in which the participants perceive the potential place change at their coast. Then, we discuss how the arts in Pingjum, as seen from the perspective of our participants, influence the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of people's attachments to the Gouden Halsband and their coping with the potential of place change because of wind energy developments. Although these dimensions are interconnected, we follow Brown and Perkins' (1992) analytical distinction in order to clarify the various ways in which the arts influence this.

## 6 | PERCEIVING THE POTENTIAL PLACE CHANGE AT THE COAST

As noted, people's responses to place change are determined by how change is interpreted and evaluated (Devine-Wright, 2011b; Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010). During the walking interviews, two key ways in which people perceive the potential place change at their coast emerged.

The first way indicates a mismatch between the symbolic meanings people associate with Pingjum's landscape and those they assign to the windfarm plans. This mismatch entails several elements: the location of the new windfarm, the quantity of wind turbines and their height (see Langbroek & Vanclay, 2012). These elements cause some of the participants to see the plans as an intrusion in the coastal landscape, conflicting with the tranquillity and space of it that they so greatly value. The following quote illustrates their views:

If many more [wind turbines] are added soon, well, I think it will be over with the nice views. And I would pity that, because yeah, I would think 'build them in the sea or somewhere else' [...] This is one of the areas in the Netherlands which is so beautiful and peaceful, with nature and so on. (Kees,<sup>1</sup> male, 25–65)

The second way in which the potential place change is perceived indicates a better fit between the symbolic meanings associated with Pingjum's landscape and the windfarm plans. These participants put the plans in a larger perspective (e.g., acknowledging the area's history with windmills) and experienced the new plans as less disrupting. During the group discussion, Pepijn (male, >65), for example, noted:

In the past, the Netherlands was full of windmills. The VOC built boats with wood that was sawed by the mills. The polders were made dry [reclaimed] by the mills [...] Windmills belong to the Netherlands [...] the question is 'how do we fit it [windfarm] in?', not '*should* it come?', but '*where* should it come?'. In my opinion, if you fit the windmills in in a good way, on industrial sites, along the road, in the landscape, then I do not have a problem with it at all. Then my sense of space, of freedom, of development... I feel okay with it.

Similar results were found by Wheeler (2016), who discovered that the specific historical context of windmills in one of her research areas emerged as a particular reason behind the relative support for the local windfarm, with several of her participants making connections between the region's traditional wind-pumps and the modern wind turbines.

## 7 | ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES

### 7.1 | Cognitive dimension

On the cognitive level, the arts in Pingjum were found to: (1) enhance people's knowledge of Pingjum's landscape and the Gouden Halsband, and to trigger people to reflect on the meanings they assign to both, and (2) play a role in enhancing people's awareness and stimulating their assessment of the potential place change at their coast.

The enduring artistic initiative Nieuw Atlantis provides a good example. During the walking interviews, Nieuw Atlantis was mentioned several times as having a kind of "leading role" in the village. The website of this initiative reads:

Nieuw Atlantis wants to signal the actuality, strengthen the relationship between human and landscape, and challenge residents of Friesland [the Province] to look with different eyes to their environment. To achieve this, we create crossovers between art and science in and around Pingjum. Together we imagine the village of the future, in which we sustainably and creatively interact with the landscape and our local identity. (Nieuw Atlantis, 2016, authors' translation)

Nieuw Atlantis organises several events in which inhabitants are invited to think and talk about Pingjum's landscape, covering the landscape's history, current state and future. They also pay attention to threats and opportunities for the landscape, such as climate change and the wind energy developments. Local experts, researchers, other artists and civil servants are invited to these events, which instigates and contributes to a substantive dialogue between the attendees.

Our participants confirmed that Nieuw Atlantis encourages people to think about Pingjum's landscape, how they are interacting with it and what kind of threats for Pingjum('s landscape) exist. Sarah (female, 25–65), for example, noted:

Nieuw Atlantis is really making an effort to map [...] the state of the landscape and eh, have people talking about that.

Talking about the Gouden Halsband specifically, she argued:

[I think] that more people started to think about the condition of the Halsband [...] and of course [Nieuw Atlantis] did ... some stuff on this, such as symbolically closing the dike with buckets of sand [...] it definitely contributes to the awareness.

As appears from this quote, the arts can enhance the cognitive dimension of people's place attachment as they stimulate people to think about and reflect on their connections to their landscape, raise their awareness of potential place change at their coast and provide food for thought to assess this change. These findings correspond to earlier work from Ernstman and Wals (2013), Miles (2010) and Stocker and Kennedy (2011), as mentioned above.

In our study, we found that the arts framed people's interpretations of the windfarm plans, for instance, by bringing only certain (potential) impacts of the construction of more wind turbines to people's attention. In this regard, we found that the arts mainly encouraged an interpretation of the potential place change in which the windfarm plans are regarded as disrupting Pingjum's landscape (Figure 2).



**FIGURE 2** Painting of Felix Roosenstein. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Source: Pingjumer Gulden Halsband, 2016

## 7.2 | Affective dimension

The arts in Pingjum contributed to the affective dimension of people's place attachment, understood here as referring to people's emotional connections to a place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). By using (parts of) the landscape as their input and/or setting, the arts bring Pingjum's landscape to people's attention and, sometimes, give them an experience in the landscape itself. This can enhance people's emotional connection to the landscape (see also Weik von Mossner [2013] on how documentaries can provoke strong affective responses from viewers).

A good example is the outdoor theatre play "Dijk vol Dromen" (translation: "Dike full Dreams"), which was performed several times in 2014. The performance "told, played, portrayed and voiced" stories about Pingjum, including stories about the Gouden Halsband and the windfarm plans (Hooghiemstra, 2014). The initiators of the play wanted to let people experience their familiar landscape in a different way, with a part of the play being performed on site.

One of our participants, Elle (female, 25–65), participated in the performance of "Dijk vol Dromen". She explained she loves those kind of (outdoor) arts activities, partly because:

[they] present you a different direction of thinking [...] when you are occupied with your work and household, your thinking has a limited perspective. And when you add arts and culture [to your life], that is ... just as with those outdoor theatre plays, it is something special that you can attend, it offers you another insight.

Another actor of "Dijk vol Dromen", an 80-year-old woman who has lived in Pingjum for 20 years, commented on the website of the artists association of the village:

I see the entire performance as a true ode to Friesland and the landscape. An ode to the gorgeous panoramic views, starry skies and sunsets. That is what I fell in love with when I moved to Friesland. (Kunst achter Dijken, 2014, authors' translation)

Her choice of words (i.e., fell in love with) illustrates her emotional connection to Pingjum's landscape. In addition, she explained that she appreciates that the play puts Pingjum on the map again, noting that she thinks it is important that the history and stories about the village stay alive:

I think it is lovely and important that, for instance, this magnificent medieval dike, the Pingjumer Gouden Halsband, is being put in the spotlight again during the performance. (ibid.)

By staging the play partly on the dike and including stories about it, "Dijk vol Dromen" can enhance the affective dimension of people's place attachment, bring the dike to people's attention and make them feel more for the Gouden Halsband.

## 7.3 | Behavioural dimension

The arts in Pingjum also enhanced the behavioural dimension of people's place attachment, stimulating both efforts to preserve the Gouden Halsband and protests against the windfarm plans.

A clear example is the painting in Figure 2, which was made by a painter who lives in Pingjum. It was displayed during an exhibition in the village. During her walking interview, Nina (female, 25–65) referred to this exhibition, noting:

At that time the debate on the wind turbines was also actual, and he [the painter] had made all kinds of paintings about it. I liked that. You can visualise that discussion a bit thanks to the paintings [...] I think the message was perfectly clear.

For her, the painting visualises the negative impacts of wind turbines, which she sees as "an intrusion in the landscape". The painting also featured on the website of the committee for the Preservation and Restoration of the Gouden Halsband, where it is introduced as follows:

Three years ago, Felix Roosenstein made this painting as a signal for everyone who is warmhearted for the Frisian landscape to be alert to the disastrous plans of the wind-entrepreneurs around the Pingjumer Gouden



Halsband. Now, they are back with their unwholesome plans. Let them know that you do not want this to happen and sign the petition. (Pingjumer Gulden Halsband, 2016, authors' translation)

Referring to Devine-Wright's (2009) framework on people's responses to place change, the painting can be said to cause inhabitants to *become aware* (or be reminded) of the windfarm plans. Furthermore, it potentially influences people's *interpretation* and *evaluation* of the plans, as it frames wind turbines in a dark, dominating way, instigating a sense of concern or fear. These stages are related to the cognitive and affective dimensions of people's place attachment. Last but not least, however, the painting also influences people's *acting*, as it is connected to a call to sign a petition against the windfarm plans and thus is meant to stimulate people's expression of their place attachment. In this particular case, the arts are deliberately used in order to increase attention for the Gouden Halsband and to gain support for its preservation.

## 8 | CONCLUSIONS

Taking the role of the arts in people's coping with place change into account can help to better understand people's responses to (potential) place change. Our study demonstrates that artists, with their arts, can influence people's interpretations of (potential) place change at the coast. We found that, in the eyes of our participants, the arts in Pingjum enhanced the: (1) *cognitive* dimension of people's place attachment, both enhancing their knowledge of their landscape and the Gouden Halsband and triggering them to reflect on the meanings they assign to them; and enhancing people's awareness and stimulating their assessment of the windfarm plans. The arts brought certain (potential) impacts of the plans to people's attention, hereby framing people's interpretation of the potential place change at their coast and mainly encouraging an interpretation in which the windfarm plans are regarded as disrupting Pingjum's landscape; (2) *affective* dimension of people's place attachment, making people feel more emotionally connected to the Gouden Halsband and Pingjum's (coastal) landscape; (3) *behavioural* dimension, encouraging action by stimulating both efforts to preserve the historic dike and protests against the windfarm plans.

However, it should be kept in mind that the arts have a limited and uneven influence. Some of our participants, for instance, argued that the arts only work for people who value the arts or who are already engaged in them, and many noted that this often comes down to the same active core group (see van der Vaart et al., 2017). Moreover, issues of legitimacy and power relations can be at play (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015), and there can be tensions on the "instrumentalisation" of the arts (see, e.g., Stuver et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, in the context of people's coping with place change at the coast, the arts, at least in our research, are a player not to be ignored. In our study the arts mainly encouraged an interpretation of renewable energy plans (such as wind energy) as disrupting the landscape and stimulated actions against such plans. On the other hand, however, as Clarke et al. (2013) noted, the arts could also play a role in resolving coastal (governance) challenges. Following Manzo and Perkins (2006, p. 347), acknowledging the role of the arts can "provide lessons about what mobilizes people, and what feelings about place are at the root of their reaction (to [potential] place change), which can help move a community toward conflict resolution or even consensus". As they further pointed out, people's emotional commitment to places in their community influences their ability and willingness to address local problems. Therefore, Manzo & Perkins argued, these bonds are critical to the wellbeing of communities and is it "essential for those working in community improvement and planning to better understand those emotional connections to place, how they are fostered, and how they might lead to action and effective participatory planning processes" (2006, p. 348). In the context of renewable energy projects, artists can be key players in people's interpretations of, and subsequent coping with, proposed projects. In addition, Stuver et al. (2012, p. 309) proposed that planners could include artists "as consultants of the immaterial values" of the citizens affected by a proposed plan. In this way, "local input still can have impact" before definite plans for a region are made.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Fictional names are used for the participants.

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