

Research Article

To be or not to be a German-Ja, Ja Kämpfen Überwinden

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The question of what constitutes “the German” has long occupied historians, literary scholars, and political theorists alike. The works of Johannes Fried, Len Scales, Thomas Lau, Martin Langebach, Dieter Gosewinkel, Doris Blume, Raphael Gross, and Dieter Borchmeyer collectively demonstrate that German identity cannot be understood as a stable or timeless essence. Rather, it emerges as a historical construction shaped by political crises, cultural memory, religious transformation, nationalism, and legal definitions of belonging. Read together, these studies reveal not a single Germany, but a succession of competing and evolving ideas of what it meant — and still means — to be German.

In *Die Anfänge der Deutschen*, Johannes Fried undertakes an ambitious exploration of the medieval origins of the Germans. Fried dismantles simplistic nationalist narratives that project modern ethnic unity backward into the early Middle Ages. Instead, he presents German identity as the gradual outcome of political consolidation, Christianization, dynastic power, and cultural negotiation. His scholarship is vast and deeply learned, moving carefully through chronicles, royal politics, and ecclesiastical structures to demonstrate that “the Germans” did not suddenly appear as a coherent people, but slowly emerged through historical contingencies. At times, the density of detail threatens to overwhelm the reader, yet this very complexity underscores Fried’s central argument: identity is neither natural nor inevitable, but painstakingly formed through centuries of political and cultural transformation.

A similar concern with medieval identity animates *The Shaping of German Identity: Authority and Crisis, 1245–1414* by Len Scales, though Scales approaches the question from a different angle. Where Fried emphasizes origins, Scales investigates the paradoxical relationship between fragmentation and unity in the late medieval Holy Roman Empire. His central insight is striking: German identity developed not despite political instability, but partly because of it. In a realm lacking centralized authority, language, imperial symbolism, and collective political discourse became increasingly significant markers of belonging. Scales writes

with intellectual precision and historiographical sophistication, challenging older assumptions that national consciousness depends upon the existence of a strong nation-state. His work is demanding, occasionally abstract, yet profoundly rewarding in the way it complicates conventional theories of nationalism and political identity.

Thomas Lau’s *Deutschland* enters this conversation with a broader synthetic perspective. Lau is less concerned with a singular historical moment than with the *longue durée* of German history itself. His narrative traces continuities and ruptures across centuries, asking how political structures, cultural traditions, and historical memory contributed to the making of Germany. The strength of the work lies in its accessibility and breadth. Lau succeeds in rendering complex historical developments intelligible without entirely sacrificing nuance. Yet the challenges of synthesis are evident: broad historical surveys inevitably risk smoothing over contradictions and regional differences. Nevertheless, the work provides a valuable framework through which readers can situate the more specialized arguments of Fried and Scales.

If Fried and Scales reveal how identities emerge, Martin Langebach’s *Germanenideologie* demonstrates how historical myths may be weaponized. Langebach examines the ideological construction of “Germanic” identity within *völkisch* thought and nationalist extremism. His study is less a history of ancient Germanic peoples than an anatomy of modern mythmaking. Through careful analysis of ideological texts and cultural narratives, Langebach exposes the dangerous fusion of romantic nationalism, racial fantasy, and political radicalism. Particularly compelling is his demonstration that appeals to an imagined Germanic past often served contemporary ideological purposes rather than historical truth. The book possesses enduring relevance in an age still confronted with ethnonationalist rhetoric and mythologized histories. Although some arguments lean heavily toward intellectual history rather than social reception, Langebach’s work remains an incisive exploration of how identity can be transformed into exclusionary ideology.

Questions of belonging acquire a more explicitly political and legal dimension in *Staatsbürgerschaften: Frankreich, Polen und Deutschland seit 1789* by Dieter Gosewinkel, Doris Blume, and Raphael Gross. This comparative study of citizenship in France, Poland, and Germany demonstrates that national identity is inseparable from the legal mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Citizenship emerges here not merely as a juridical category, but as a political language through which states define who belongs within the nation and who remains outside it. The comparative framework is particularly illuminating, revealing how different historical experiences — revolution in France, partition in Poland, federalism and nationalism in Germany — produced divergent models of belonging. At times, the comparative breadth creates unevenness, yet the work succeeds admirably in linking legal history to broader debates concerning democracy, migration, ethnicity, and political modernity. In doing so, it moves the discussion of German identity beyond culture and mythology toward the structures of the modern state itself.

Where Gosewinkel, Blume, and Gross focus on citizenship, Dieter Borchmeyer in *Was ist deutsch?* turns toward the realm of culture, literature, and philosophy. Borchmeyer approaches Germanness not as a fixed definition, but as a centuries-long intellectual and artistic debate. Drawing upon figures such as Goethe, Thomas Mann, and Wagner, he explores the tension between cosmopolitan humanism and nationalist particularism within German cultural history. The prose is elegant and reflective, animated by a profound engagement with literary and philosophical traditions. Yet Borchmeyer's emphasis on elite intellectual culture occasionally leaves social realities and minority perspectives in the background. Even so, the book succeeds in demonstrating that German identity has often been articulated most powerfully not through political institutions, but through cultural self-reflection and artistic expression.

Taken together, these works form a remarkably rich constellation of perspectives on German identity. Fried and Scales illuminate the medieval processes through which collective consciousness emerged; Lau offers historical synthesis; Langebach exposes the ideological distortions of nationalist myth; Gosewinkel, Blume, and Gross analyze the legal and political structures of belonging; and Borchmeyer reflects upon the cultural imagination of Germanness itself. What unites them is the rejection of essentialism. None of these authors treats German identity as biologically fixed, historically inevitable, or culturally uniform. Instead, each reveals identity as contingent, contested, and continuously reconstructed.

The cumulative effect of these studies is profound. They remind the reader that nations are not ancient certainties handed down unchanged across time, but historical creations forged through memory, power, crisis, exclusion, and interpretation. German identity emerges not as a singular truth, but as an ongoing argument — one shaped as much by medieval emperors and modern legislators as by poets, historians, and ideologues. In this sense, the question “What is German?” remains less a problem to be solved than a conversation that history itself continually reopens.

The works of Johannes Fried, Len Scales, Thomas Lau, Martin Langebach, Dieter Gosewinkel, Doris Blume, Raphael Gross, and Dieter Borchmeyer are highly relevant to the thematic concerns of the *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* because they collectively interrogate the historical construction of identity, citizenship, political belonging, and cultural difference in the German and broader European context. Their studies illuminate how identities emerge through power relations, institutional developments, cultural narratives, and political crises rather than through fixed ethnic essences. Such questions stand at the very centre of ethnopolitical scholarship.

Johannes Fried's analysis of the medieval origins of “the Germans” contributes directly to theoretical debates concerning ethnogenesis and collective identity formation. Fried demonstrates that identities are historically contingent and politically mediated. This insight is deeply relevant to minority studies because it destabilizes nationalist assumptions that modern nations represent ancient and homogeneous communities. By exposing the constructed character of identity, Fried's work offers conceptual tools for understanding contemporary minority claims and competing narratives of belonging.

Len Scales' work on the Holy Roman Empire is equally significant for ethnopolitical inquiry. His argument that German identity emerged within a politically fragmented environment challenges conventional assumptions linking national identity exclusively to centralized statehood. Scales demonstrates that identities can be produced through symbolic discourse, legal traditions, and cultural practices even in the absence of unified sovereignty. This has important implications for the study of minority regions and transnational communities in contemporary Europe, where political authority is often layered and negotiated rather than absolute.

The Schleswig ecumene provides an especially compelling comparative framework through which these arguments may be interpreted. Schleswig historically functioned as a borderland between Danish and German political and cultural spheres. Rather than existing as a fixed ethnic frontier, the region evolved as a multilingual and intercultural space characterized by overlapping loyalties and shifting forms of identification. The Schleswig experience therefore exemplifies the fluidity of identity emphasized in Fried and Scales' scholarship.

The Schleswig case also demonstrates how minority rights can emerge through negotiation rather than violent homogenization. The Danish and German minorities developed institutional protections that eventually became models for European minority governance. The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955 established frameworks for cultural autonomy, linguistic rights, and political participation without requiring forced assimilation. This makes Schleswig highly relevant to contemporary debates on diversity management and democratic pluralism.

The region illustrates that peaceful coexistence depends not upon the elimination of difference but upon the institutional recognition

of diversity. Minority schools, bilingual cultural institutions, and political representation allowed identities to coexist within democratic structures. Such developments directly correspond to the journal's interest in minority rights and socio-political participation.

The Schleswig ecumene furthermore highlights the relationship between governance and identity. Effective governance in minority regions requires flexibility, legal guarantees, and reciprocal recognition between majorities and minorities. Schleswig's success demonstrates how democratic institutions can reduce ethno-political tensions by creating conditions of trust and participation. This resonates strongly with the journal's focus on good governance and conflict prevention.

Martin Langebach's critique of Germanic ideology offers an important counterpoint to such pluralistic models. His work reveals how nationalist mythmaking transforms cultural difference into exclusionary political ideology. By tracing the ideological uses of mythic Germanness within *völkisch* thought, Langebach exposes the dangers of ethnically essentialist narratives. His analysis remains profoundly relevant in light of contemporary right-wing populism and resurgent ethnonationalism across Europe.

Langebach's work also contributes to understanding interethnic conflict. Ethnic conflicts rarely emerge from primordial hatred alone; they are often produced through political mobilization, historical mythmaking, and institutional exclusion. The manipulation of identity narratives can intensify social divisions and legitimize discrimination. This insight is directly applicable to both historical and contemporary European minority politics.

The comparative study by Dieter Gosewinkel, Doris Blume, and Raphael Gross broadens these concerns by examining citizenship regimes in France, Poland, and Germany. Their work demonstrates that citizenship is never merely legal membership. It constitutes a mechanism through which states define inclusion, exclusion, and political legitimacy. Questions concerning who belongs to the political community remain central to contemporary ethnopolitics.

Their comparative framework also illuminates the relationship between democratization and minority inclusion. Democratic systems may either expand participation or reinforce exclusion depending on how citizenship is defined and administered. Minority groups often experience unequal access to political representation, legal recognition, and socio-economic opportunities. The study therefore contributes directly to discussions of racial and ethnic inequalities within European democracies.

The Schleswig model again provides a useful comparative example. In Schleswig, minority rights gradually became integrated into democratic governance rather than treated as threats to sovereignty. The institutionalization of minority protections contributed to regional stability and strengthened democratic legitimacy. This demonstrates that minority accommodation can reinforce rather than weaken democratic order.

Thomas Lau's broader historical reflections on Germany similarly contribute to ethno-political debates by emphasizing historical continuity alongside rupture. His work highlights how historical memory shapes political identity and public discourse. Competing interpretations of national history often influence contemporary attitudes toward minorities, migration, and citizenship. Historical narratives therefore possess significant political consequences.

Dieter Borchmeyer's cultural exploration of Germanness introduces another crucial dimension: the role of literature, philosophy, and artistic production in shaping national consciousness. Cultural identity is not produced solely through law and institutions but also through symbolic representation. Borchmeyer demonstrates that German identity has always contained tensions between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, openness and exclusion. Such tensions remain visible in present-day debates surrounding multiculturalism and European integration.

The Schleswig ecumene is particularly significant because it illustrates a historical alternative to homogenizing nationalism. Rather than enforcing rigid ethnic separation, Schleswig developed practices of coexistence rooted in bilingualism, local autonomy, and negotiated identity. This makes the region highly relevant for comparative studies of borderlands and minority accommodation in Europe.

The region also demonstrates the importance of socio-economic participation in reducing ethno-political tensions. Minority populations in Schleswig gained access to educational institutions, cultural associations, and political representation, thereby fostering social integration without cultural assimilation. Such arrangements challenge assimilationist models that equate national cohesion with cultural uniformity.

The Schleswig experience further complicates simplistic notions of majority and minority. Identities in border regions are often relational, situational, and overlapping. Individuals may identify culturally with one group while participating politically within another framework. This fluidity aligns closely with recent intersectional approaches within minority studies.

The works under discussion collectively encourage a critical rethinking of identity categories themselves. They reveal that identities are produced through institutions, narratives, laws, and historical memory rather than inherited unchanged across centuries. This insight is essential for ethno-political scholarship because it challenges deterministic understandings of ethnicity and nationalism.

These studies also demonstrate the importance of historical depth in analyzing contemporary minority issues. Present conflicts surrounding migration, citizenship, and national identity cannot be understood apart from their historical genealogies. Medieval political structures, nineteenth-century nationalism, and twentieth-century ideological conflicts continue to shape modern European debates.

The relevance of these works extends beyond Germany alone. Their theoretical implications apply to broader European discussions concerning minority governance, border regions, and cultural pluralism. The Schleswig ecumene, in particular, may serve as a comparative model for understanding peaceful interethnic coexistence in contested regions.

At the same time, the Schleswig example should not be romanticized. The region's peaceful accommodation emerged only after periods of conflict, nationalism, and political tension. Minority rights were achieved through political negotiation and international pressure rather than historical inevitability. This reminds scholars that diversity management requires continuous institutional commitment.

The journal's emphasis on interdisciplinary dialogue is also reflected in these works. History, political theory, cultural studies, legal analysis, and intellectual history intersect throughout these texts. Such interdisciplinarity is indispensable for understanding the complexity of ethnopolitical phenomena.

Collectively, these authors illuminate the central paradox of European modernity: identities remain politically powerful precisely because they are historically constructed and continually contested. Nations seek permanence, yet they are products of historical change. Minority politics emerge from this tension between claims of continuity and realities of diversity.

The Schleswig ecumene exemplifies a productive response to this paradox. Instead of denying difference, it institutionalized coexistence through democratic governance and reciprocal recognition. Such arrangements suggest that stable political communities need not depend upon ethnic homogeneity.

The broader significance of these works for the *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* therefore lies in their shared commitment to understanding identity as historical, political, and relational. They contribute to debates on minority rights, democratization, diversity management, and interethnic relations by revealing how communities define belonging and negotiate difference across time.

Ultimately, these studies demonstrate that ethnopolitics is not solely about conflict between groups. It is equally about the institutions, narratives, and cultural practices that make coexistence possible. The Schleswig ecumene stands as a historically grounded example of how plural identities may coexist within democratic structures without erasing cultural distinction. In this respect, it remains profoundly relevant to contemporary Europe and to the intellectual mission of the journal itself.

1. The Schleswigian Ecumene

An equally important dimension of the Schleswig ecumene concerns the presence of Jewish, Anglican, and Frisian communities, each of which complicates binary understandings of Danish-German

identity and demonstrates the multilayered character of minority coexistence in the region. Their histories reveal that Schleswig was never merely a contested frontier between two national groups, but rather a broader intercultural and multiconfessional contact zone shaped by migration, trade, religion, and linguistic diversity.

The Jewish population of Schleswig occupied a particularly significant position within this historical landscape. Jewish communities participated actively in the commercial and urban development of towns such as Altona, Flensburg, and Schleswig itself, contributing to regional economic modernization while simultaneously navigating exclusion and precarious belonging. Their experience illustrates the ambivalent nature of European citizenship and minority integration. On the one hand, Jewish populations often benefited from periods of legal emancipation and economic opportunity; on the other hand, they remained vulnerable to nationalist exclusion and racialized conceptions of belonging. In this sense, the Jewish experience in Schleswig reflects broader European tensions between civic inclusion and ethnic nationalism discussed by Gosewinkel, Blume, and Gross.

The destruction of Jewish life under National Socialism further demonstrates the fragility of pluralistic coexistence when confronted with ethnonationalist ideology. Langebach's critique of Germanic and *völkisch* mythmaking becomes especially pertinent here, as Schleswig's Jewish communities were targeted precisely because racial nationalism rejected the region's historically diverse social fabric. The erasure of Jewish communities from many parts of Schleswig serves as a stark reminder that interethnic coexistence cannot be sustained without democratic institutions, legal protections, and active resistance to exclusionary ideologies.

To connect this more directly to the German historiography you've been working with—and to the broader ethnopolitical framework of citizenship, minority governance, and borderland pluralism—you can think of Jewish identity as a kind of "stress test" for every major interpretive model found in authors like Fried, Scales, Borchmeyer, and Gosewinkel.

In Johannes Fried's reconstruction of early German identity, collective belonging is shown to be historically constructed rather than biologically given. That argument is crucial here, because Jewish identity similarly reveals how durable collective identities can exist without territorial sovereignty or ethnic homogeneity. In Fried's terms, neither "the Germans" nor "the Jews" begin as fixed nations; both emerge through long processes of political, religious, and cultural structuring. But the key difference is that Jewish identity develops in a diasporic condition, not in a state-forming one. This means that while German identity gradually becomes anchored in imperial and later national frameworks, Jewish identity remains structurally trans-imperial, organized through communities rather than territory. That difference matters for ethnopolitical theory: it shows that identity can be stable without statehood, and cohesive without territorial continuity.

Len Scales' analysis of the Holy Roman Empire helps refine this further. Scales argues that identity can arise in politically fragmented spaces through shared symbolic orders, legal practices, and cultural communication rather than centralized authority. Jewish history operates in a similar but even more dispersed register: instead of one imperial structure, Jews are embedded across multiple polities while maintaining coherence through religious law, textual tradition, and communal governance. In that sense, Jewish identity resembles an intensified version of Scales' fragmented imperial identity—except that its “unity” is not imperial-symbolic but halakhic and translocal. This comparison highlights a key ethno-political insight: cohesion does not require territorial unity, but it does require institutionalized practices of reproduction—law, education, and memory.

When you move to Dieter Borchmeyer's question “Was ist deutsch?”, the contrast becomes even sharper. Borchmeyer locates German identity largely in cultural self-reflection: literature, philosophy, music, and the idea of a shared cultural spirit. Jewish identity intersects with this German cultural space in a particularly intense way from the Enlightenment onward. Figures of the Haskalah and later assimilated Jewish intellectuals adopt German as a language of philosophy and literature, contributing centrally to what is often called “German high culture.” Yet this participation does not dissolve Jewish identity into German identity. Instead, it produces a dual positioning: Jews become both constitutive of German culture and persistently marked as “other” within it. This tension exposes a limit in cultural-national definitions of identity: cultural participation does not automatically equal political or social inclusion.

This is where Gosewinkel, Blume, and Gross become especially important. Their work on citizenship in France, Poland, and Germany shows that modern belonging is fundamentally legal and institutional, not merely cultural. Jewish emancipation in the 19th century illustrates this perfectly. In Germany, legal emancipation granted formal citizenship, but social equality remained uneven and reversible. Jewish identity thus becomes a key case for understanding what ethno-politics calls “conditional inclusion”—membership in the state without full security of belonging. It also demonstrates how citizenship regimes can oscillate between universalist legal principles and ethnically inflected exclusions. This tension culminates historically in the catastrophic breakdown of civic inclusion under racial nationalism, which redefined Jews not as citizens or cultural participants but as biologically excluded outsiders.

From the perspective of ethno-politics and minority studies in Europe, this is precisely where Jewish identity becomes analytically central. It shows that minority status is not simply a demographic category but a shifting political condition shaped by law, ideology, and institutional design. The same group can be simultaneously integrated, partially included, and violently excluded depending on the regime of citizenship in force.

If you bring this into a broader European frame such as the Schleswig

ecumene, the comparison becomes even more illuminating. Schleswig demonstrates a negotiated model of minority coexistence, where Danish and German identities were stabilized through institutional protections and reciprocal recognition. Jewish history in Central Europe shows what happens when such stabilizing mechanisms are absent, inconsistent, or ultimately destroyed. In Schleswig, pluralism becomes institutionalized; in much of German history, Jewish belonging oscillates between integration and exclusion without stable protection until after 1945. This contrast is not about “better” or “worse” cultures, but about different regimes of minority governance.

Finally, in relation to modern Israel and diaspora theory, the conceptual picture becomes triadic rather than binary. Jewish identity today is often described in terms of three overlapping modes: diasporic life, national sovereignty in Israel, and transnational cultural-religious networks. What is crucial is that none of these fully replaces the others. Diaspora identity continues to exist alongside Israeli national identity, and both exist alongside global Jewish cultural and religious life. This reinforces a core ethno-political insight: modern identities are not singular or exclusive but layered and situational.

Jewish identity disrupts all three categories. It is cosmopolitan in its historical mobility, but not reducible to cosmopolitanism. It is shaped by German intellectual and legal contexts in modern Europe, but never absorbed by them. And it can take national forms (especially in Zionism and Israel), but it is not inherently exclusivist in the sense of ethnic nationalism.

What emerges instead is a more precise ethno-political concept: Jewish identity is a historically adaptive, multi-sited form of collective life that persists through changing regimes of inclusion and exclusion, continuously renegotiating its boundaries in relation to the states, cultures, and legal orders in which it is embedded. That is also to say, the EU should not have *Berührungsangst* to criticising Israel, especially not in a constructive manner.

2. The Anglicans

The Anglican presence in Schleswig likewise reflects the region's transnational and cosmopolitan dimensions. Anglican congregations emerged primarily through commercial, diplomatic, and maritime connections linking Schleswig to Britain and the North Sea world. Their existence demonstrates that identity in Schleswig was shaped not solely by territorial nationalism but also by broader networks of trade, religion, and international exchange. Anglican communities contributed to a culture of religious plurality that distinguished many port cities and border regions within northern Europe. Their presence complicates narratives that reduce Schleswig's history to a simple national conflict between Danes and Germans.

The Frisian population introduces yet another layer to Schleswig's ethno-political complexity. North Frisians maintained distinctive linguistic and cultural traditions while simultaneously interacting with Danish and German political structures. Frisian identity illustrates the fluid and overlapping forms of belonging

characteristic of borderland societies. Frisian communities often negotiated multiple affiliations at once: local, regional, linguistic, and national. Their experience therefore challenges rigid nationalist frameworks and supports contemporary ethno-political theories emphasizing hybridity and intersectionality.

The preservation of Frisian language rights and cultural institutions also offers an important example of minority protection within democratic governance. Frisian schools, media, and cultural organizations demonstrate how linguistic minorities can maintain distinct identities without threatening political stability. Schleswig's accommodation of Frisian identity aligns closely with the journal's concern for diversity management and minority participation. It shows that democratic states can recognize multiple cultural identities within a shared political framework.

Together, the Jewish, Anglican, and Frisian experiences reinforce the argument that Schleswig should be understood not simply as a bilateral Danish-German borderland but as a historically plural ecumene shaped by overlapping ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. This broader perspective deepens the relevance of Schleswig for ethno-political scholarship because it reveals how coexistence depends upon institutional flexibility, cultural recognition, and the rejection of exclusivist nationalism.

The Schleswig case therefore offers a historically grounded model for understanding minority accommodation in Europe. Its significance lies not in the absence of conflict, but in the gradual development of structures capable of managing diversity without erasing difference. The histories of Jewish, Anglican, and Frisian communities demonstrate that pluralism in Schleswig was never peripheral to the region's identity; it was constitutive of it. Their experiences remind us that borderlands are often sites not only of contestation, but also of cultural creativity, social negotiation, and democratic experimentation.

3. Did National-Liberal and Vulnerable Danes Fighting for Democracy Make Germany ?

The Danish-German relationship, from the era of Bismarck and Monrad to today's Schleswig borderland, is one of Europe's clearest examples of how conflictual nationalism can gradually transform into institutionalized coexistence. It is also a useful case for understanding how collective identities are not fixed opposites but historically negotiated formations shaped by war, diplomacy, minority protection, and shifting ideas of sovereignty.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Schleswig question stood at the centre of this tension. For Denmark, especially under figures like Ditlev Gothard Monrad, Schleswig was conceived as an integral part of the Danish nation-state project. This reflected the broader rise of romantic nationalism, in which language, culture, and historical memory were used to define political belonging. For the German side, particularly under the strategic leadership of Otto von Bismarck, Schleswig-Holstein became entangled in the logic of unification politics within the emerging Prussian-led German state. The Second Schleswig War of 1864, in which Denmark was defeated by Prussia and Austria, marked a decisive rupture.

It transformed a complex multilingual borderland into a symbol of national sovereignty and geopolitical contestation.

From an ethno-political perspective, what is striking about this early phase is the absence of mechanisms for managing diversity. Identity was framed in zero-sum terms: Schleswig was either Danish or German, and political control was expected to reflect national "ownership" of the population. This logic reflects the nineteenth-century fusion of ethnicity and statehood that many of the historians you have been working with—especially in studies of German identity formation—seek to deconstruct. Identity here was not yet a space of negotiation but a claim to territorial and cultural exclusivity.

The twentieth century, however, marks a profound transformation. After the First World War, the 1920 Schleswig plebiscites introduced a radically different principle: self-determination through local voting rather than military conquest. The result created a stable border while also producing recognized minorities on both sides. This was not merely a political compromise but an early experiment in minority governance that anticipated later European norms.

The decisive turning point came after 1945 with the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955. These agreements institutionalized minority rights for both the Danish minority in Germany and the German minority in Denmark. They guaranteed cultural autonomy, schooling in minority languages, and political participation without requiring assimilation. Importantly, they were based on the principle that loyalty to the state and cultural identity are not mutually exclusive. This marks a fundamental departure from the nineteenth-century model of ethnonational exclusivity.

Today, the Schleswig borderland is often regarded as a model of "exemplary relations" in Europe. Institutions such as minority schools, cultural associations, bilingual signage, and cross-border cooperation reflect a political culture that treats diversity as a resource rather than a threat. The relationship between Denmark and Germany is now defined less by territorial conflict and more by shared membership in the European Union, Nordic cooperation frameworks, and transnational governance structures.

What distinguishes Danish and German identities in this contemporary setting is therefore less a matter of antagonistic essence than of historical experience and political culture. Danish political identity tends to emphasize small-state pragmatism, social cohesion, egalitarian trust, and a relatively homogenous national narrative that nevertheless accommodates recognized minorities at its borders. German identity, by contrast, is historically shaped by federal complexity, legal constitutionalism, and a more explicit confrontation with the legacy of nationalism and its destructive potential in the twentieth century. These are not rigid opposites, but different historical pathways through modernity.

In Schleswig itself, these differences are moderated by a shared

commitment to democratic governance and minority protection. The Danish minority in Germany and the German minority in Denmark both function not as competing national projects but as integrated participants in their respective states. This reflects a broader European transformation from ethnic nationalism to civic and pluralist models of belonging.

From the perspective of ethnopolitics and minority studies, the Danish–German case illustrates several key dynamics. First, that violent national conflict can be transformed into stable coexistence through institutional design. Second, that minority rights are most effective when they are reciprocal rather than unilateral. Third, that identity is most stable not when it is rigidly enforced, but when it is allowed to remain culturally meaningful without determining political loyalty.

What ultimately distinguishes the earlier Bismarck–Monrad era from the contemporary relationship is not simply peace versus conflict, but two fundamentally different conceptions of what identity is for. In the nineteenth century, identity functioned as a justification for sovereignty and territorial control. In the contemporary Schleswig ecumene, identity functions as a protected space of cultural continuity within a shared democratic order. The shift from exclusionary nationalism to managed pluralism is what makes the Danish–German relationship one of the most successful examples of minority accommodation in modern Europe.

4. Peaceful Co-Existence

The Schleswig ecumene is best understood as a long-duration borderland regime of negotiated pluralism in which Frisians, Danes, Germans, Jews, and Anglican-linked maritime communities did not converge into a single identity, but instead developed durable, institutionalized ways of coexisting while remaining distinct. Rather than producing cultural fusion or a melting-pot outcome, the region accumulated a thick repertoire of practices that made difference administratively manageable, economically productive, and socially predictable. The region of Schleswig sits at the center of this configuration, shaped over centuries by shifting sovereignties, fragmented authority structures, and its position between North Sea and Baltic worlds.

At the most basic level, multilingualism operated not as a symbolic marker of cosmopolitanism but as a functional infrastructure of daily life. Frisians in coastal and insular zones routinely navigated between Frisian, Low German, High German, and Danish depending on whether they were engaging in local exchange, regional administration, or wider trade. In the Danish–German contact zones, receptive bilingualism became a widespread social technology: people often understood multiple languages without necessarily speaking them fluently, enabling practical coordination without requiring full assimilation into a single linguistic community. Jewish communities added further complexity to this linguistic ecology. Hebrew structured religious and liturgical life, German provided the main medium for commerce and professional interaction, Danish was often necessary for dealings with local administration, and Yiddish or regional vernaculars could appear

in intra-community or informal contexts. Maritime and mercantile English, carried by traders, sailors, and chaplaincies, introduced yet another layer tied to long-distance commerce and Atlantic-facing networks. Across these settings, language functioned less as a boundary of identity than as a flexible instrument for navigating overlapping spheres of authority and exchange.

This linguistic adaptability was closely tied to the region's economic structure, which was inherently transregional and multi-scalar. Schleswig was not an isolated economy but a nodal zone embedded simultaneously in North Sea and Baltic systems. Frisian ports oriented toward the North Sea connected the region to the Low Countries and to Britain, while Danish and German towns were integrated into Hanseatic, Scandinavian, and inland continental circuits. These overlapping routes created dense patterns of commercial interdependence. Jewish mercantile actors played a particularly important role in this structure through brokerage functions, credit provision, and long-distance coordination that linked otherwise separated markets. English-speaking maritime networks added another connective layer, tying parts of the region into broader Atlantic commercial and naval systems. In this environment, economic rationality consistently favored cooperation across difference: trade was easier, credit was more stable, and information flowed more efficiently when groups maintained working relationships rather than attempting segregation.

Legal and political structures mirrored this same logic of layered coexistence. Instead of a single unified legal order, Schleswig developed a composite system in which multiple normative frameworks coexisted and were selectively activated depending on context. Danish royal law governed certain administrative and dynastic matters, German territorial legal traditions structured others, Frisian customary rights remained influential in local contexts, and Jewish communal statutes regulated internal affairs within recognized degrees of autonomy. Rather than resolving these into a single hierarchy, the system functioned through situational legal navigation. Individuals and communities learned to move between frameworks, invoking different authorities depending on the nature of disputes, transactions, or obligations. The result was a form of political belonging in which jurisdiction, identity, and cultural affiliation were not assumed to align, and where legal plurality was not an anomaly but a normal condition of governance.

Religious diversity in Schleswig followed a similarly managed and institutionally stabilized pattern. The dominant confessional landscape was shaped by Lutheran Danish and German communities, alongside localized Frisian Lutheran expressions that incorporated regional custom and practice. Jewish communities maintained a distinct and internally governed religious life structured through halakhic tradition and communal autonomy, while Anglican chaplaincies served mobile populations connected to maritime trade, diplomacy, and foreign residence. Importantly, this was not a system aimed at theological synthesis or doctrinal convergence. Instead, it was an arrangement in which confessional

difference was expected, bounded, and administratively integrated into everyday governance. Religious plurality was not eliminated or absorbed; it was regulated in ways that allowed parallel systems of practice to persist without constant conflict.

Over time, these overlapping structures produced a distinctive form of shared social consciousness that can be described as distributed minority awareness. Nearly every group in Schleswig experienced minority status in some context or historical phase. Frisians often occupied culturally distinct and geographically peripheral positions relative to dominant administrative centers. Danes and Germans alternated between majority and minority positions depending on shifting borders and state formations, especially following the territorial changes of 1864 and 1920. Jewish communities remained minorities across all political regimes, while Anglican-linked populations existed as small enclave communities embedded in wider continental societies but oriented toward external networks. This repeated experience of positional vulnerability across different groups generated a broadly shared intuition: social stability did not depend on dominance, and cultural continuity did not require political centrality. Identity could remain durable even when power was not fixed or monopolized.

The modern form of this system, particularly in the post-1945 period, represents not a rupture but a formalization of older practices into institutional design. Minority rights regimes, cross-border cooperation frameworks, educational autonomy structures, and cultural self-governance mechanisms transformed historically emergent patterns of coexistence into explicit governance principles. What had previously functioned as a pragmatic adaptation to complexity became a codified political model in which pluralism was treated not as a transitional condition to be resolved but as a permanent feature to be maintained and managed through institutions.

In comparative perspective, Schleswig stands out not because it was free of conflict or division, but because it sustained a relatively stable equilibrium of difference over long periods without requiring homogenization. Many European borderlands experienced similar mixtures of populations, but often through cycles of forced assimilation, episodic tolerance, or violent restructuring. By contrast, Schleswig developed a more persistent system in which interaction was structurally incentivized, legal plurality was normalized, linguistic flexibility was routine, and confessional difference was administratively integrated rather than eradicated.

Taken together, the Schleswig ecumene can be understood not as a cultural synthesis but as a long-lived operating system for managing heterogeneity. Its coherence does not arise from shared identity or unified culture, but from a cumulative repertoire of coexistence practices—multilingual adaptation, economic interdependence, layered legal belonging, managed confessional diversity, and distributed minority consciousness—that allowed deeply different groups to inhabit the same space without requiring

them to become the same.

5. Schleswig, Germany and Europe

Schleswig is one of the clearest European cases where identity cannot be understood as a single “ethnogenesis” event, but instead as a layered and continuously negotiated borderland formation. Its relationship to German identity is therefore not linear or purely additive; it is structural, contested, and historically recursive. At the same time, it occupies an unusual position in European regional history: neither fully core nor fully peripheral, but a hinge-zone where state formation, minority regimes, and cultural boundary-making were repeatedly reworked.

The region of Schleswig is central to understanding this dynamic because it has repeatedly shifted between Danish and German political spheres while maintaining internally diverse populations that do not map neatly onto either national narrative.

6. Schleswig and the formation of German identity

Schleswig’s contribution to German identity is best understood indirectly: it functioned less as a “source” of Germanness and more as a testing ground for its limits. In the 19th century, especially during the rise of nationalism, Schleswig became entangled in the broader project of defining what “German” meant in linguistic, cultural, and political terms. The Schleswig Wars and the 1864 transfer of the duchies into Prussian-Austrian control did not simply expand German territory; they forced German nationalism to confront the problem of mixed populations and ambiguous cultural boundaries.

In this sense, Schleswig exposed a central contradiction in German national thought: whether “German-ness” should be defined by language, state belonging, or cultural-historical continuity. Large parts of Schleswig contained populations that were linguistically and culturally fluid—German-speaking, Danish-speaking, Frisian-speaking, or multilingual depending on context. This made it difficult to map nationality onto territory in a clean way. German nationalism, particularly in its Prussian-inflected form, tended toward administrative and linguistic standardization, but Schleswig resisted full assimilation because everyday life there was structured by overlapping loyalties and pragmatic bilingualism.

After 1864 and again after the 1920 plebiscites, Schleswig became a paradigmatic minority space within German political consciousness. It contributed to the later development of minority-rights thinking in Germany by demonstrating that national integration did not necessarily eliminate cultural plurality. Instead, it had to be managed through institutional arrangements rather than assumed convergence.

7. Ethnogenesis and its Limits in Schleswig

The concept of ethnogenesis—the formation of ethnic groups as historically emergent processes—is useful in Schleswig, but only if it is applied cautiously. Schleswig does not display a single ethnogenetic trajectory; instead, it shows overlapping and partially

contradictory processes of identity formation.

Frisian identity, for example, is often interpreted as an older ethnolinguistic continuity adapted to shifting political environments. Danish and German identities in Schleswig, however, are more clearly “state-linked ethnogeneses,” meaning they were reinforced by administrative borders, schooling systems, and ecclesiastical organization rather than purely local cultural continuity. Jewish identity in Schleswig is better understood as a diasporic communal ethnogenesis embedded within broader European legal and commercial frameworks, while maintaining internal cohesion through religious law and communal institutions.

The key analytical point is that Schleswig demonstrates that ethnogenesis is not a single-track process. Instead, multiple identity formations can coexist in the same space, each operating on different scales (local, regional, imperial, transnational) and through different mechanisms (language, law, religion, trade). This undermines any simple model in which ethnic groups emerge, stabilize, and then compete within a bounded territorial field.

8. Schleswig as a European Borderland System

Within the wider European context, Schleswig occupies a structurally significant position as a “hinge region” between North Sea and Baltic Europe, and between Germanic and Scandinavian cultural-political spheres. Unlike frontier zones defined primarily by military conflict or imperial expansion, Schleswig developed a more persistent pattern of institutionalized coexistence.

Its position is distinctive for three reasons. First, it sits at the intersection of multiple macro-regions: the German-speaking central European world, the Danish Scandinavian sphere, the Frisian coastal Atlantic system, and the broader maritime trade networks connected to Britain and the Low Countries. Second, it developed layered governance structures in which legal, religious, and linguistic systems did not collapse into a single hierarchy but remained partially autonomous. Third, it sustained long-term minority presence across multiple groups without full homogenization.

This places Schleswig in a category closer to other European borderland ecumenes—such as Transylvania, Alsace, or parts of the Baltic region—but with a relatively strong post-1945 institutional stabilization that formalized minority rights and cross-border cooperation rather than resolving difference through assimilation.

9. Minority Structures and the Logic of Shared Vulnerability

One of the most important features of Schleswig’s historical development is the recurrence of minority status across almost all groups. Frisians often functioned as culturally distinct minorities within both Danish and German state structures. Danes in Schleswig became a minority after 1864, while Germans in northern Schleswig became a minority after 1920. Jewish communities remained minorities across all regimes, and other small groups—such as Anglican-linked maritime enclaves—existed as externally oriented micro-minorities embedded in trade networks.

This repeated inversion of majority and minority positions created a distinctive political psychology: no group could assume permanent dominance, and no identity could rely entirely on state protection or cultural insulation. The result was not equality in a modern normative sense, but a historically conditioned awareness of vulnerability across boundaries. This contributed to a form of pragmatic coexistence in which survival and continuity depended more on negotiation and institutional adaptation than on cultural supremacy.

10. Schleswig’s Broader European Significance

In the broader European context, Schleswig is significant because it complicates standard narratives of nation-state formation. It shows that national identity does not emerge solely through homogenization, but can also develop in tension with enduring pluralism. It also demonstrates that border regions are not merely transitional zones destined to be absorbed into national cores, but can become stable systems of managed diversity.

From this perspective, Schleswig contributes to a more general rethinking of European identity formation. It suggests that modern Europe is not only the product of nation-building and standardization, but also of long-lived border ecologies in which difference was not eliminated but organized.

11. Synthesis

Schleswig’s relationship to German identity is therefore paradoxical: it helped define the boundaries and problems of German nationhood without being fully absorbed into it conceptually or culturally. Its relevance to ethnogenesis lies in showing that identity formation is multi-layered, non-linear, and often overlapping across competing frameworks. And its position in Europe is that of a stabilized borderland ecumene—neither periphery nor core, but a structural interface where linguistic, legal, religious, and economic systems intersect and remain in productive tension.

In that sense, Schleswig is less a case of “becoming German” or “becoming Danish” and more a long-duration example of how European identities are continuously negotiated in spaces where no single identity can fully dominate the others.

12. Bringing Things Together

Bringing Schleswig into dialogue with that scholarly line of argument sharpens the central claim rather than merely illustrating it: “the German” is not a substance to be discovered but a historically shifting field of practices, exclusions, and administrative negotiations. The work of Johannes Fried, Len Scales, Thomas Lau, Martin Langebach, Dieter Gosewinkel, Doris Blume, Raphael Gross, and Dieter Borchmeyer converges on a shared insight—that German identity is not a fixed essence but a contingent formation produced through law, memory, language politics, and shifting imperial and national frameworks. Schleswig becomes especially revealing in this context because it sits precisely at the fault-line where those processes were never able to fully stabilize.

In Fried's and Scales' emphasis on medieval and early modern formations of order, "Germany" appears less as a nation than as a composite political and cultural space held together by layered jurisdictions, ecclesiastical structures, and imperial imaginaries. Schleswig extends this condition forward in time: rather than resolving into a bounded national unit, it preserves the logic of overlapping authorities. The duchy's historical entanglement with

both Danish and German crowns prevents any clean retroactive nationalization. What emerges is not an early "German" core extending northward, but a zone in which imperial and royal sovereignties remain structurally entangled. Schleswig thus functions as a reminder that the pre-national German world was not simply fragmented, but relational—defined by interfaces rather than centers.



Figure 1

Thomas Lau's attention to the *longue durée* of German political culture and Dieter Gosewinkel's work on citizenship and legal belonging further deepen this point. Gosewinkel in particular shows that modern German identity is inseparable from the history of legal inclusion and exclusion, from imperial subjecthood to modern citizenship regimes. Schleswig complicates this trajectory

by multiplying the legal orders in play. Danish royal law, German territorial frameworks, Frisian customary norms, and Jewish communal autonomy coexisted in a single social field. This produces a situation in which belonging is not singularly defined by citizenship but distributed across multiple overlapping regimes of recognition. In Schleswig, one does not simply "become

German” or “become Danish”; one is positioned differently across several legal and institutional scales at once. This destabilizes any linear narrative of German citizenship as a gradual consolidation.

Raphael Gross’s work on memory, trauma, and the ethical construction of German identity introduces another layer: German identity is not only legal and political but also moral-historical, shaped by the burden of remembering violence and rupture. Schleswig contributes here by offering a contrasting memory regime—less centered on rupture and more on managed coexistence. Yet even this contrast is instructive. The post-1864 and post-1920 reversals of sovereignty in Schleswig generate a form of “minority memory,” in which groups repeatedly shift between dominance and subordination. This produces a distributed memory structure rather than a single national narrative. Gross’s concern with the moral weight of German history is thus complemented by Schleswig’s demonstration that memory itself can be spatially and socially plural rather than nationally unified.

Doris Blume and Martin Langebach’s work on identity formation, youth cultures, and the pedagogical reproduction of national narratives highlights how “the German” is continuously re-encoded through education, culture, and institutional socialization. Schleswig again introduces friction into this model: educational and cultural systems in the region have historically operated in bilingual and binational frameworks, especially in the post-1945 minority regime. German identity here is not simply transmitted; it is negotiated in parallel with Danish identity and Frisian cultural persistence. The result is a form of identity formation that is dialogical rather than unilateral—less about internalizing a single national script and more about navigating between multiple legitimized narratives.

Dieter Borchmeyer’s emphasis on German cultural self-understanding—particularly through literature, music, and philosophical tradition—foregrounds the symbolic and aesthetic dimension of Germanness. Yet Schleswig resists full incorporation into this cultural canon. While it is certainly entangled with German literary and intellectual history, it is equally shaped by Scandinavian, Frisian, and maritime Atlantic cultural circuits. This dilutes the idea of a singular “German cultural space” and replaces it with a braided cultural geography in which aesthetic production and reception are not nationally contained. Schleswig thus functions as a limit-case for cultural essentialism: it shows how “German culture” is always already in contact with adjacent systems that it cannot fully absorb or exclude.

Taken together, these scholars converge on a shared deconstruction of German identity as essence, but Schleswig adds a further refinement: it shows that this non-essentialism is not merely theoretical or historiographical, but spatially embedded and institutionally stabilized in certain regions. It is not only that “the German” is historically constructed; it is that in places like Schleswig, construction never resolves into closure. Instead, identity remains permanently in a state of negotiated adjacency.

The deeper implication is that Schleswig forces a shift from thinking about German identity as a bounded object to understanding it as a field of differential positioning. German-ness in this context is not what people are, but a set of relations they occupy—legal, linguistic, economic, and symbolic—within a multi-layered border ecology. This aligns with the broader scholarly consensus represented by Fried, Scales, Lau, Gosewinkel, Blume, Gross, and Borchmeyer, but pushes it further: it suggests that the instability they describe is not a transitional phase in the making of Germany, but one of its enduring structural conditions.

German identity debates often *sound like* they’re about “**Kämpfen und Überwinden**” (struggle and overcoming), as if history is a sequence of obstacles to be resolved into clarity: fragmentation → unification → stabilization → memory-work → finally, coherence. That narrative is emotionally satisfying, and it does appear in various political and cultural self-descriptions. But Schleswig quietly ruins that story.

Because what it shows is that many of the “struggles” never actually get “overcome” in the final sense—they get *managed, institutionalized, or translated into routines*. Languages don’t disappear; they become situational. Loyalties don’t resolve; they become layered. Borders don’t settle identity; they redistribute it. Even conflict, when it appears, often ends not in synthesis but in administrative redesign (minority rights regimes, bilingual schooling, cross-border frameworks).

- ***So, if you Want the Wry Version***

German identity history is not really a saga of Kampf und Überwindung. It is more like a long process of discovering that what refuses to disappear must eventually be scheduled, translated, and shared.

- ***Or, Put More Sharply***

It’s not “struggle → resolution,” but “struggle → coexistence. And Schleswig is one of the places where that becomes impossible to ignore.

13. The Wadden Sea

The Wadden Sea dimension of Danish, German, and Dutch foreign policy can be characterised as transboundary environmental governance diplomacy in which foreign policy is shaped primarily by shared ecological management, legal obligations, and technical coordination rather than traditional geopolitical concerns. It operates as a soft foreign policy space where cooperation is structured around a common coastal ecosystem that spans national borders.

Ecological interdependence is a central driver of this policy field because the Wadden Sea is a continuous environmental system. This makes unilateral national action ineffective and encourages sustained coordination between Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. As a result, foreign policy behaviour in this context is shaped by necessity rather than preference.

Cooperation in this area is highly legalised and grounded in European Union environmental law, Natura 2000 regulations, and UNESCO World Heritage obligations. This produces a framework in which foreign policy is largely rule-bound and embedded in formal commitments rather than flexible diplomatic bargaining.

A significant feature of this policy dimension is the role of scientific and technical expertise. Much of the coordination is conducted through environmental agencies, monitoring bodies, and research institutions, meaning that scientific knowledge functions as a key resource in cross-border decision-making.

Although often presented as technical cooperation, the issues involved are politically sensitive. Decisions about offshore wind development, port expansion, fisheries regulation, and coastal defence involve competing national interests and distributional conflicts, even if they are managed in a technocratic style.

The spatial nature of this policy field is also distinctive. It focuses on maritime zoning, coastal infrastructure corridors, and ecological protection zones in the North Sea and Wadden Sea, making it a form of spatial or maritime foreign policy rather than a territorial one in the traditional sense.

Energy transition policy has further intensified cross-border interdependence. Offshore wind infrastructure and electricity interconnectors have turned the region into an integrated energy governance space where climate policy and foreign policy overlap.

At the national level, Germany's approach is shaped by strong legalistic and environmental planning traditions associated with the *Energiewende* and EU compliance frameworks. Denmark's approach is more pragmatic and infrastructure-oriented, with emphasis on offshore wind development and regional energy integration. The Netherlands combines spatial planning expertise with adaptive coastal engineering and integrated marine management.

Overall, the Wadden Sea dimension of foreign policy can be understood as a hybrid governance regime combining environmental diplomacy, technical coordination, and spatial planning within a shared legal and ecological framework. It is defined less by strategic competition and more by continuous interdependence created by a shared and fragile coastal environment.

Having said that, Golidluck, the Wadden Sea cooperation between Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands is one of Europe's clearest examples of how a shared ecological system can generate sustained legal, political, and economic coordination without producing a unified identity. It is not a project of integration in the conventional sense, but a long-term governance arrangement structured around a common environmental constraint: a dynamic tidal ecosystem that no single state can manage independently.

The Wadden Sea itself is a continuous intertidal zone stretching along the coasts of the three countries, including the Schleswig coastal and island regions. Its defining characteristic is ecological

instability. Mudflats, tidal channels, salt marshes, and islands are constantly reshaped by water, sediment, and wind. Because migratory birds, fish populations, sediment flows, and coastal erosion processes do not respect national borders, environmental management inevitably exceeds the limits of individual sovereignty. In Schleswig, particularly along the North Frisian coast and islands such as Sylt, Föhr, and Amrum, this ecological logic has long structured livelihoods and settlement patterns. The sea is not a boundary but a living system that conditions human survival.

Historically, each state managed its portion of the Wadden Sea through separate legal regimes. Denmark administered its northern coastal zones, while German territories moved from Prussian and imperial frameworks into federal structures, and the Netherlands developed its own provincial and national coastal policies. These systems were primarily oriented toward navigation, land reclamation, fishing rights, and coastal defense. Over time, especially from the mid-20th century onward, this fragmented governance proved insufficient as environmental pressures such as pollution, habitat loss, and large-scale engineering projects produced cross-border consequences. This led to gradual institutional convergence, formalized through initiatives such as the 1978 Joint Declaration on the Protection of the Wadden Sea and the later Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation framework. The result is not a supranational authority but a coordination regime in which states retain sovereignty while aligning standards, monitoring systems, and conservation strategies.

Politically, this arrangement rests on a deliberate balance between necessity and sovereignty. Cooperation is required because the ecosystem is continuous, but authority remains national or subnational. Decisions are made through consensus rather than hierarchy, and implementation is decentralized. In Schleswig, this structure echoes older patterns in which overlapping Danish, German, and local Frisian systems coexisted without full institutional unification. The result is a political culture that tends to privilege pragmatism over ideological closure, where cooperation is justified by functional necessity rather than identity.

Economically, the Wadden Sea region has undergone a long transition from extraction to regulated sustainability. Historically, fishing, salt production, peat cutting, shipping, and land reclamation formed the backbone of coastal economies. In Schleswig's coastal zones, livelihoods combined maritime activity with agriculture and trade. In the modern period, economic activity has increasingly shifted toward regulated fisheries, conservation-based tourism, renewable energy infrastructure in surrounding areas, and strict limits on industrial extraction. Tourism in particular has become central in Schleswig's islands and coastal towns, where protected landscapes are also economic assets. At the same time, environmental regulation constrains certain traditional practices, creating ongoing tensions between conservation objectives and local economic continuity. The defining feature of this economy is not expansion but managed limitation, where ecological protection is inseparable from economic value.

Within this system, Schleswig occupies a structurally central position in the eastern Wadden Sea. Its coastal communities and islands are embedded in multi-level governance networks involving Danish environmental agencies, German federal and state institutions, European Union frameworks, and international scientific bodies. This produces a dense layering of authority that resembles older Schleswig patterns of overlapping legal and political orders. Local actors operate simultaneously within regional, national, and transnational systems without any single framework fully displacing the others.

Socially, population sentiment in the region is shaped by this ecological and institutional complexity. Many residents express a strong sense of belonging tied less to the nation-state than to the coastal landscape itself. The tidal environment, with its cycles of change and exposure to storm risk, functions as a primary reference point for identity. At the same time, national affiliations remain present and are often context-dependent, whether Danish or German, alongside regional identities such as Frisian or Schleswig-Holsteinian. These layers of belonging do not usually compete in a zero-sum way but are activated differently depending on social and institutional context.

There are also tensions within this structure. Some local economic actors perceive environmental regulation as externally imposed constraint that prioritizes ecological values over local livelihoods, while others view the same regulatory frameworks as essential for long-term regional survival. This division reflects not a simple conflict between local and external interests, but differing interpretations of dependency on the same ecological system.

What emerges overall is a layered structure of belonging that operates across ecological, regional, national, and transnational scales simultaneously. Individuals and communities in Schleswig's Wadden Sea region do not inhabit a single identity but move between multiple frameworks of affiliation depending on context and necessity.

In synthesis, the Wadden Sea cooperation does not produce unity between Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. Instead, it institutionalizes a form of coordinated sovereignty that reinforces Schleswig's longer historical pattern: coexistence without fusion, cooperation without homogenization, and identity that is real but never singular, grounded as much in landscape and ecological dependence as in nationhood.

Focusing specifically on the Wadden Sea, strengthening governance during a Danish policy review is mainly about improving how a single ecological system is managed across three sovereign states without breaking the delicate balance of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation.

The Wadden Sea is already governed through cooperation between Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, but it remains a coordination regime rather than a unified authority. That means its effectiveness depends less on formal power and more on alignment, implementation discipline, and shared legitimacy across borders.

A key priority is improving policy coherence across the entire ecological system. The Wadden Sea functions as one continuous tidal landscape, so differences in national rules for fisheries, tourism pressure, coastal engineering, or habitat restoration can create fragmentation effects. Strengthening governance here means tightening alignment of environmental objectives across the three states so that conservation targets, spatial planning rules, and climate adaptation strategies are not only shared at the level of declarations but reflected consistently in national implementation. Another central issue is enforcement asymmetry. Because the system is non-hierarchical, compliance depends on each country translating joint agreements into domestic law and practice. A Danish policy review can strengthen governance by ensuring that national implementation mechanisms are not only aligned with trilateral agreements but also systematically reviewed against German and Dutch equivalents. This reduces "weakest link" dynamics where uneven enforcement in one jurisdiction affects the entire ecosystem.



Scientific integration is also a core governance lever. The Wadden Sea is already heavily monitored, but data systems, indicators, and assessment cycles can still differ between countries. Strengthening governance means deepening shared ecological baselines: unified

biodiversity indicators, harmonized sediment and water quality metrics, and joint scenario modeling for sea level rise. The stronger the shared knowledge system, the less room there is for political disagreement about ecological reality.

A further dimension is institutional continuity. The Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation depends on long-term trust between administrative bodies, scientific institutions, and ministries. Governance becomes stronger when these relationships are insulated from short-term political shifts. Denmark can reinforce this by supporting stable funding for joint secretariats, long-term research programs, and permanent expert bodies that operate independently of electoral cycles.

Local integration is equally important. In the Danish part of the Wadden Sea—particularly in the southern Jutland and island areas—legitimacy depends on whether local fishing communities, tourism operators, and municipal authorities perceive governance as participatory rather than imposed. Strengthening governance here means embedding co-management structures more deeply into protected area administration, ensuring that local knowledge feeds directly into trilateral decision-making rather than being filtered only through national ministries.

Climate adaptation is another structural pressure point. The Wadden Sea is one of Europe's most climate-exposed coastal systems. Strengthening governance requires shifting from static conservation planning to adaptive governance frameworks that can respond to rapid ecological change, especially sea level rise, storm surge dynamics, and habitat migration. This implies more flexible regulatory instruments that allow policies to adjust based on ecological thresholds agreed across the three countries.

Finally, coherence between conservation and economic use is essential. The Wadden Sea is simultaneously a protected UNESCO landscape and a lived economic space for fisheries, tourism, and coastal infrastructure. Governance is strongest when these functions are not treated as competing systems but as integrated planning challenges. That means aligning economic development strategies with ecological carrying capacity across the entire trilateral region, rather than managing them separately within national silos.

In synthesis, strengthening Wadden Sea governance in a Danish policy review is less about creating new institutions and more about tightening alignment across existing ones. The core task is to ensure that a single ecological system is not fragmented by three administrative systems—by improving shared data, harmonizing implementation, stabilizing institutions, embedding local legitimacy, and making climate adaptation an integrated trilateral process rather than a national one.

14. Governance of Wadden Sea

Revising the legal basis of the Wadden Sea governance system begins with addressing its central structural limitation: it is currently a coordination regime built on soft-law declarations, national implementation, and overlapping administrative networks rather than a binding, unified legal framework. The most effective reform direction is therefore not centralization in a supranational sense, but the creation of a stronger legal spine that binds existing cooperation more tightly together while preserving national

sovereignty.

A key step would be the transformation of the existing cooperative arrangements into a formal Trilateral Wadden Sea Framework Convention. This would elevate the system from political commitment to binding international treaty status. Such a convention would define the Wadden Sea as a single transboundary ecological management unit, require domestic legal transposition in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, and establish enforceable baseline obligations for habitat protection, water quality, and spatial planning. The critical shift here is from voluntary alignment to legally structured obligation.

Within this framework, harmonized minimum ecological standards would replace fragmented national thresholds. Rather than imposing full regulatory uniformity, the system would define shared baseline requirements for biodiversity protection, emissions, sediment management, and climate adaptation. Individual states would retain the ability to adopt stricter measures, but not to fall below jointly agreed minimums. This preserves sovereignty while eliminating regulatory weak points that undermine ecosystem integrity.

The compliance architecture would also need strengthening. At present, enforcement relies heavily on transparency and political trust. A revised system would introduce mandatory reporting cycles, standardized indicators, and independent scientific evaluation of compliance across all three states. Where deviations occur, formalized notification and corrective action procedures would be triggered. This creates structured accountability without requiring a full judicial enforcement system.

A further legal refinement would be the explicit recognition of the Wadden Sea as a single ecological legal object. This would mean that the entire system is treated as one continuous environmental entity for the purposes of assessment, planning, and impact evaluation. This change is subtle but significant, because it obliges states to consider cross-border ecological effects as internal to the governance system rather than externalities.

The legal framework would also need embedded adaptive mechanisms. Instead of static long-term rules, the convention would include automatic review cycles and threshold-based triggers for policy adjustment. This allows governance to respond to sea level rise, biodiversity shifts, and other ecological changes without requiring complete renegotiation of the treaty structure.

The governance architecture built on top of this legal basis can be understood as a layered system. At the top sits a Trilateral Council composed of Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, responsible for strategic direction, target setting, and policy alignment. Parallel to this is an Independent Scientific Body that establishes shared ecological baselines, oversees monitoring systems, and provides authoritative assessment of environmental conditions. This scientific layer is not merely advisory but functions as a co-equal pillar that anchors the system in shared ecological reality.

Below these two pillars operate sectoral working groups that handle functional domains such as fisheries, coastal defense, tourism, biodiversity, and energy infrastructure. These groups translate strategic objectives and scientific findings into operational coordination across borders. They ensure that policy alignment is not abstract but embedded in specific sectors where ecological pressure and economic activity intersect.

Implementation occurs through national ministries and agencies, which remain the primary legal executors within each state. However, their work is increasingly synchronized through trilateral obligations and shared reporting structures. This national implementation layer is complemented by regional and municipal actors, particularly in coastal and island areas such as those in Schleswig, where local knowledge and economic dependence on the Wadden Sea are most direct.

At the base of the system are structured local stakeholder forums and cross-border coastal management zones. These provide formalized channels for fishers, tourism operators, conservation groups, and local authorities to feed into decision-making processes. Rather than informal consultation, these mechanisms are embedded into the governance structure as recurring inputs to higher-level coordination.

The overall effect of this revised architecture is to transform the Wadden Sea system from a loosely coupled coordination network into a layered governance framework with clearer legal foundations, stronger accountability, integrated scientific authority, and structured local participation. It preserves the principle of shared sovereignty among Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, but reduces fragmentation by aligning all levels of governance around a single ecological reality.

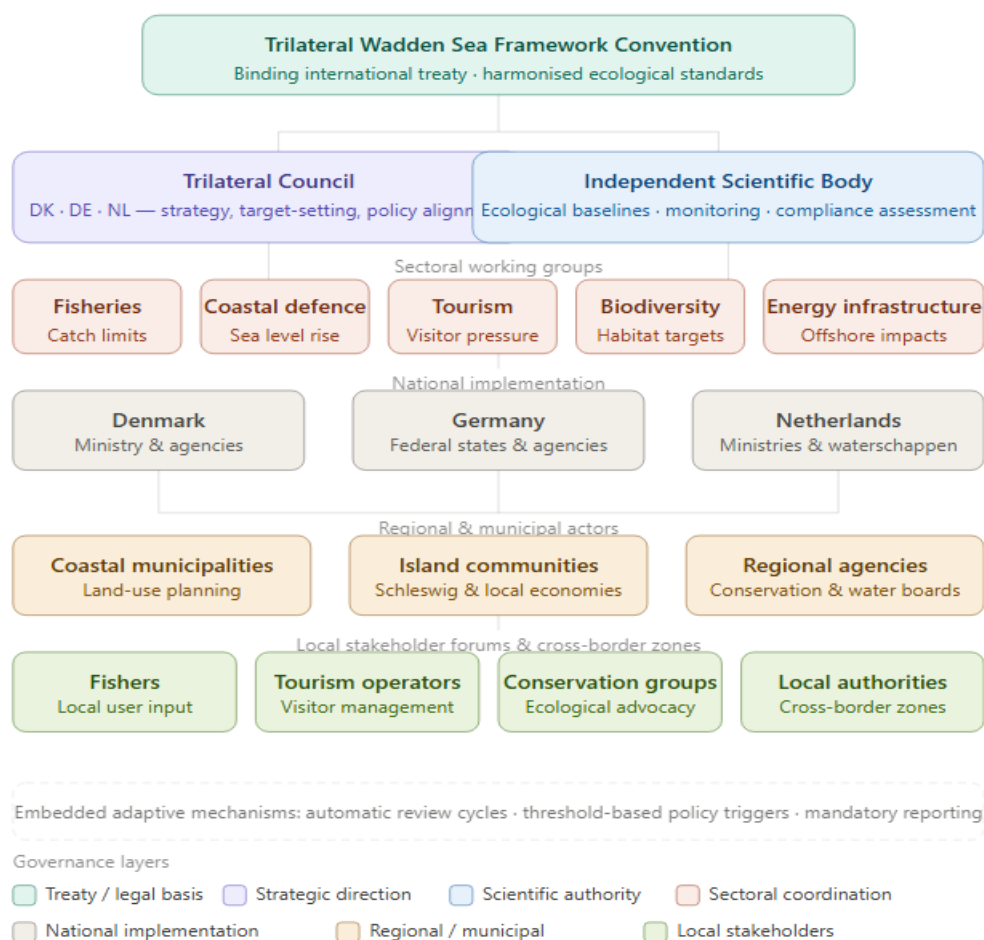


Figure 2

Treaty Framework Convention (binding legal spine)

The foundational legal instrument establishing obligations, principles, and long-term cooperation commitments across all participating states and governance levels. Twin Pillars (co-equal structure) Trilateral Council (political pillar) responsible for strategic direction, intergovernmental coordination, and high-level decision-making across Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Independent Scientific Body (technical pillar) providing evidence-based assessments, monitoring, modeling, and advisory input to guide policy decisions. A dashed institutional bridge links both pillars, representing continuous knowledge exchange and mutual accountability between political authority and scientific expertise. Sectoral Working Groups.

Thematic implementation units translating strategy into sector-specific action, including fisheries management and marine resources, coastal defence and climate adaptation, tourism and sustainable development, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem protection, and energy transition and offshore development. National Implementation Layer

Domestic ministries and agencies responsible for translating joint decisions into national policy and regulatory frameworks in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. Regional & Municipal Layer Regional governments, coastal municipalities, island communities, and specialized agencies involved in place-based implementation and coordination. Local Stakeholder Layer

On-the-ground participants contributing knowledge, legitimacy, and operational input, including fishers and fisheries cooperatives, tourism operators and destination networks, environmental and conservation organizations, and local government representatives.

15. Summary

German identity formation can be understood as a historically evolving process rather than a fixed cultural essence, shaped differently in the past, present, and future. In the past, German identity emerged gradually through medieval political consolidation, linguistic and cultural differentiation, and the structures of the Holy Roman Empire. Rather than forming around a unified nation-state, early German identity developed in a fragmented political landscape where loyalty was often local or imperial rather than national. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, processes of nationalism, unification, and later ideological appropriation further reshaped “Germanness,” culminating in competing interpretations that ranged from liberal-

national to ethnonationalist and exclusionary visions.

In the present, German identity is strongly embedded in the framework of the federal democratic state, European integration, and constitutional principles of citizenship and rights. Contemporary identity formation is shaped less by ethnicity or culture alone and more by legal belonging, political participation, migration, and multicultural coexistence. Debates around memory culture, immigration, and European responsibility continue to redefine what it means to be German in an open and plural society.

In the future, German identity is likely to become even more fluid and post-national in character, increasingly shaped by demographic change, transnational mobility, digital connectivity, and European and global interdependence. At the same time, tensions between inclusive civic identity and resurgent nationalist narratives may continue to shape political and cultural debates. As a result, German identity is likely to remain an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a settled definition.

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