

# North Sea Rising: A Case for Water-Based Commons

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The North Sea holds immense economic, social, and ecological importance, functioning as a vital shipping route and acting as a central hub for oil and gas production. However, those living and working within the systems it sustains must grapple with several twenty-first-century challenges: from the imperative shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources to confronting the threats posed by climate change itself, all while navigating regulatory disparities and the need to safeguard delicate ecosystems. The North Sea, a complex environment of human and natural agency with highly urbanised shores, full of essential infrastructure, is challenged by sea-level rise, flooding, and degradation. Examining the intra-national interplays between complex environmental dynamics and cascading resource flows within the North Sea watershed, this book of essays aims to encourage a holistic, ecologically attuned remapping and reimagining of this vital European macro-region, enriching by the reflections with experts, practitioners, and activists. We seek to challenge traditional notions of territorial divisions and governance structures by integrating ecological, political, economic, and social aspects within a new manifesto for the North Sea macro-region. By challenging traditional dichotomies such as 'land' versus 'sea' and 'urban' versus 'natural', this book presents the sea-level rise, and climate change impacts as complex interactions between environmental, infrastructural, and sociocultural dimensions.

In 'North Sea Formation', we explore the historical evolution of the watershed, from its geographical transformation to the rise and fall of the Hanseatic League, towards the development, energy and environmental compromises that are needed today.

In 'North Sea Fragmentation', we describe the climate vulnerabilities of the region, from sea-level rise to flooding and the strategies that are employed in the region across different scales, calling for an ecosystem-based watershed paradigm reflected into conscious adaptive actions to flood.

Tom Holbrook's 'A New Hansa?' explores the inspirational value of the North Sea, historically and in the present, looking at the region as a centre rather than the edge with a shared idea of trade still visible in the management of today's port cities across the North Sea. He opens a conversation about multi-disciplinary approaches towards the changing environment of the North Sea that arise in the countries surrounding it, starting from a speculative project in the UK.

Di Fang, in her chapter 'Mapping the Human-Ocean Nexus', focuses on the Dutch relationship with water, the land reclamation expansion of the Port of Rotterdam and the contested impact of its associated environmental compensation projects. She discusses how conventional mapping fails to capture the complexity of the environment, comparing this with an emerging 'ocean thinking' which prioritises biodiversity and non-human communities.

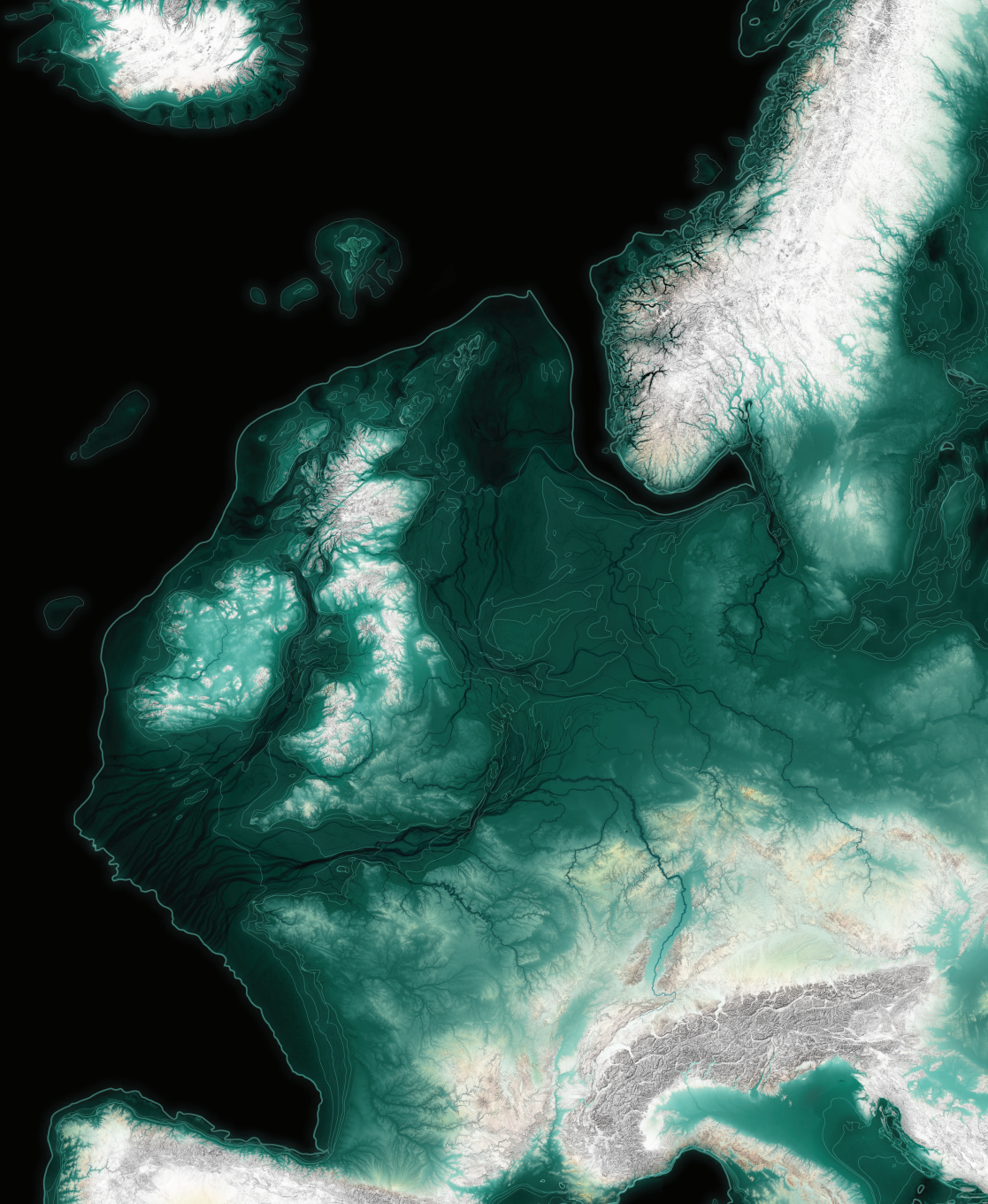
Nashin Mahtani's 'To Dream Like a River' takes us to Indonesia, where the Dutch model of urban water infrastructure has been introduced, mirroring the North Sea. Looking instead at the watershed as alternative geopolitical arrangements, she challenges the infrastructure-based paradigm, arguing instead for citizen-led networks and an ecosystem-based governance approach.

Finally, in 'North Sea Manifesting' we propose a framework for a new conceptualisation of the North Sea. We question the rigid separation between land and water, instead turning to a continuum landscape: the ground for identity between ecosystems and communities across the North Sea's waters. In this light we embrace coexistence with water, arguing for its integration into our planning and design, particularly in humanity's approach towards floods. Lastly, we strive for a fluid governance model based on collaboration, inclusivity, and respect for human and non-human communities. Resilience, community and infrastructure must be intertwined if we are to build a new narrative for the bioregion of the North Sea.

# North Sea Formation

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Doggerland. Illustration by Nabi Agzamov, 2024.



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