

The university's Centre for Recreation and Tourism Research is a partner in Gastrocert, a project examining the touristic promotion of local gastronomy as a way of enhancing cultural, social, environmental and economic sustainability.



While focusing on the promotion of Scottish gastronomy, our researchers are working with partners undertaking complementary research in Sweden, Spain and Italy.

The study will draw on sociologies of consumer behaviour, geographies of scale and attitudes toward food, place and culture to make sense of contemporary constructions of Scotland's food identity. While ultimately seeking to identify the ways in which cultural heritage might be promoted through the appreciation of local-regional food



Contemporary imaginaries of Scotland's national dishes

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systems, the team is also keen to explore ambiguities between broadening tourist markets and perceptions of national identity.

Discussions around what might constitute Scottish gastronomic heritage are common. Alongside more traditional understandings of Scottish gastronomy, such as haggis, shortbread and whisky, there is a sense that Scotland's identity is being appropriated through 'lowbrow' foods, such as the infamous deep-fried Mars bar.

Deep frying a high-calorie snack could be regarded as emblematic of the diet of a nation notorious for high levels of obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Yet the dish is extremely popular with visitors, eager to visit the fast food outlet credited with inventing the dish – perhaps with some sense of irony – but also as a pilgrimage to sample something contemporary and authentically Scottish.

In contrast, Scotland's world-class seafood attracts less attention. The majority of fish currently caught in Scottish waters is exported, while most fish eaten here is imported. This points to the potential cultural

and sustainability benefits of promoting locally caught and produced seafood as a dimension of the nation's food identity.

The town of Mallaig was historically the busiest herring fishing port in Europe, and prides itself on its famous smoked kippers. However only one traditional smokehouse remains. While Mallaig's identity and the fishing industry remain deeply entwined, tastes have evolved to favour imported fish species, such as cod.

While acknowledging the complexity of food systems, there is evident cultural justification for promoting west coast seafood as a local food rooted in the history, tradition and identity of the area. Sustainability benefits extend beyond cultural and economic dimensions; kippers caught in Scottish waters are identified on the Marine Conservation Society's list of sustainable 'fish to eat'.



In recognising these touristic possibilities, the Gastrocert project team will work with local food businesses to examine ways of promoting local produce to broader tourist markets, to enhance the sustainability of Scotland's remoter regions.



Dr Peter Varley
BA (Hons), PhD



Dr Peter Varley is director of the Centre for Recreation and Tourism Research, based at West Highland College UHI.

He established the centre in 2012, introducing an MSc in Ecotourism in 2015. Before joining the university, Dr Varley lectured in marketing at Manchester Metropolitan University for over 12 years.

He gained a BA (Hons) in Business Studies from the University of Huddersfield and completed a PhD in Sociology at Manchester Metropolitan University, based on the liminal experience of sea kayaking.

Dr Varley's research explores the potentials of ethnographic approaches to the study of health experiences in relation to natural landscapes, and the conceptual and applied development of 'slow adventure' – an alternative form of tourism emerging in response to mass tourism.

Email: peter.varley.whc@uhi.ac.uk
Tel: 07764 580664

Dr Anna de Jong
BA, BSc (Hons), PhD



Dr Anna de Jong's research examines the potentials and politics involved in promoting Highland larder as a way of enhancing regional sustainability.

A post-doctoral researcher at the centre, her published research has included studies into the role of cultural sustainability in enabling young people to continue living in regional areas, and the role of Pride parades as spaces for the performance of alternative forms of activism.

Dr de Jong obtained a BA in Philosophy, a BSc (Hons) in Human Geography and a PhD in Human Geography from the University of Wollongong, Australia.

Email: anna.dejong.whc@uhi.ac.uk
Tel: 01397 874308