

Collaborating higher education institutions & supporting partners:

[Intercultural Research Centre, Heriot-Watt University](#)
[Centre for Nordic Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands](#)
[Shetland Museums and Archives](#)
[Learning for Sustainability Scotland](#)

PhD researcher: Cáit McCullagh

The project sought to establish how, in the context of highly vulnerable environments, heritage can be interpreted and utilised to foster sustainable community development and create museum products while preserving it as a resource.

Taking the Northern Isles as an example and major case study, the project combined academic research with co-curating practice within a reflexive approach informed by critical heritage studies and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Through a process of community engagement, the researcher co-produced a multi-format exhibition and a framework for sustainable heritage tourism.

Aims & Objectives

The project aim was to open up the maritime heritage of the Northern Isles as a cultural resource for sustainable community development, through the following objectives:

1. a survey of tangible and intangible maritime heritage
2. interpretation from a critical heritage perspective based on review of literature and practice in the field
3. community engagement with heritage
4. co-curation of maritime heritage
5. exploring the significance of heritage with reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and integrating heritage into a community-oriented framework of learning for sustainability

Research Questions

How can maritime heritage be interpreted and utilised to foster sustainable community development and create museum products while preserving it as a resource?

Specifically:

1. How accessible is maritime heritage in the Northern Isles?
2. What issues does interpretation raise for local communities?
3. How can community engagement be enhanced through creative responses to heritage?
4. How can the community best be involved in co-curating its heritage(s)?
5. What is the significance of heritage with regard to the UN SDGs and learning for sustainability?

Research Methods

In the first phase, the primary sources, including records of regional oral narratives and collections of material objects, were closely examined, and literature in critical heritage studies reviewed. Museum-based practice, involving creative workshops and focus groups, facilitated community engagement.

The next step was the co-curation, with local museums and community groups, of a [virtual exhibition](#) on maritime heritage of the Northern Isles.

Critical reflection on the sustainable management of this heritage for development established the Northern Isles as a major comparative case study for experience exchange within a community-oriented framework of learning for sustainability.

Supervisors

Professor Ullrich Kockel was Director of Heriot-Watt's Intercultural Research Centre, 2013-20. His research interests include traditional and regional culture in Europe, intangible cultural heritage, and sustainable endogenous development.

Professor Donna Heddle is Director of UHI's Institute for Northern Studies. Her research interests include the creation of new paradigms in Scottish and Northern Isles studies, especially cultural history, small island studies, language, and literature.

Dr Ian Tait is a curator at Shetland Museum and Archives, specialising in ethnology, although he has broad interests in Shetland heritage as a whole, especially working practises, tools, and traditions.