

# “A thing alive!”

## Maritime heritage-making in Orkney and Shetland: Learning for sustainable development in fragile environments

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## **Curating Heritage for Sustainable Communities in Highly Vulnerable Environments: *The Case of Scotland's Northern Isles***

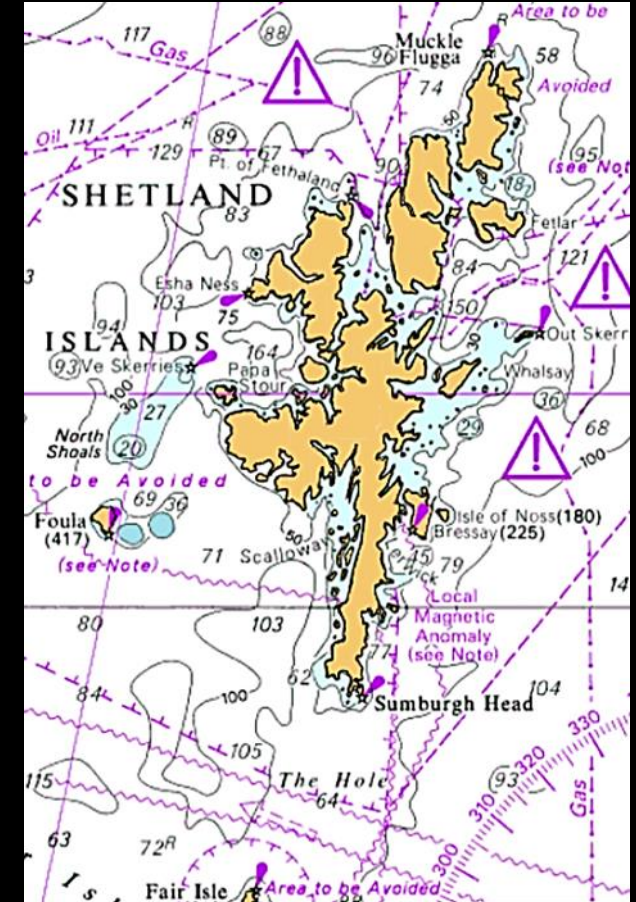
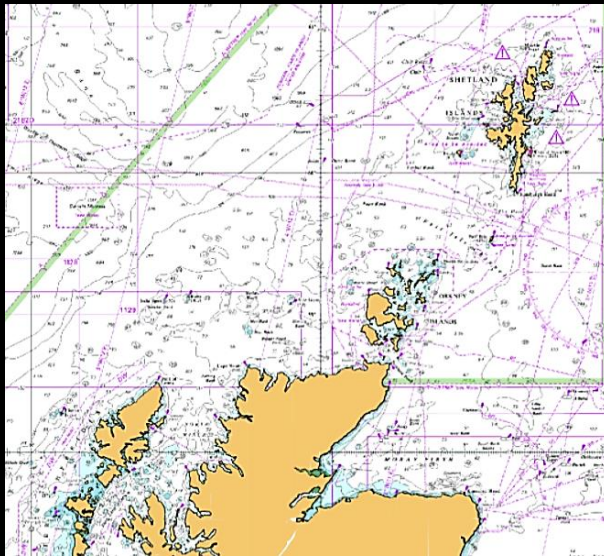
*The Sustainable Development Goals provide a real and very exciting opportunity for research into history, heritage and historical justice ... in terms of the framework they provide for realising much more fully the present-day and future relevance of engagement with [pasts].*

*Poverty, the unsustainable exploitation of [culture/natures], persistent out-migration, uncertainty over land [and sea] ownership and chronic unemployment are major present-day challenges which all have complex genealogies stretching back through time.*

(Kehoe and Dalglish 2018:4)



*So many scattered isles in the Polar Ocean ...  
(James V, 1512 – 1542)*



**North-ness, Seascaping, Borealism, Romanticism**  
*Out of sight, out of mind (after Ray 1988)*

# Vulnerable environments: Leaving people behind?

## **UNEP-UNESCO Environmental Vulnerability Index:**

- *remoteness,*
- *migrations,*
- *geographic dispersion,*
- *natural disasters,*
- *economic openness*
- *limited or damaged natural resource base.*

(Kaly, Pratt and Mitchell 2004)

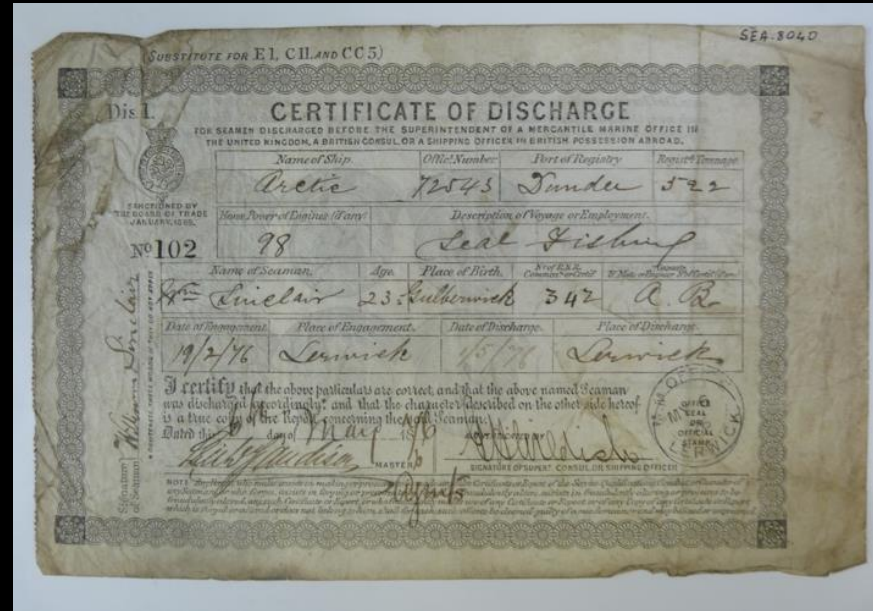




... major present-day challenges ... have complex genealogies stretching back through time.



Gloup Disaster Memorial  
1832, Shetland  
102 fishers lost in one day



Whaling Discharge  
1876, given for seal fishing  
©Shetland Museum



Herring Gutter, Migrant Worker  
1900, Stromness  
© Orkney Archive

*... spaces rather than places ...*



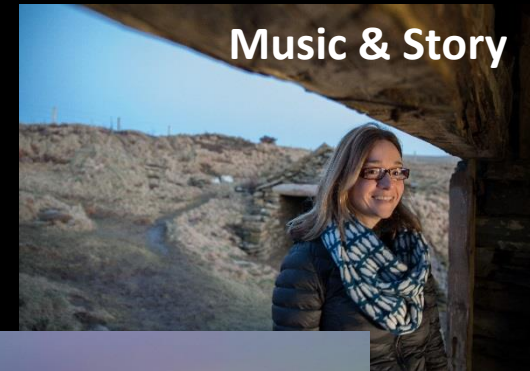
*... heritage pastiche[s] ...  
deny the potential for  
coming to terms with the  
economic, cultural and  
political processes which  
constitute places.*

(Walsh 1992: 137)

# An active, practice-based ethnology

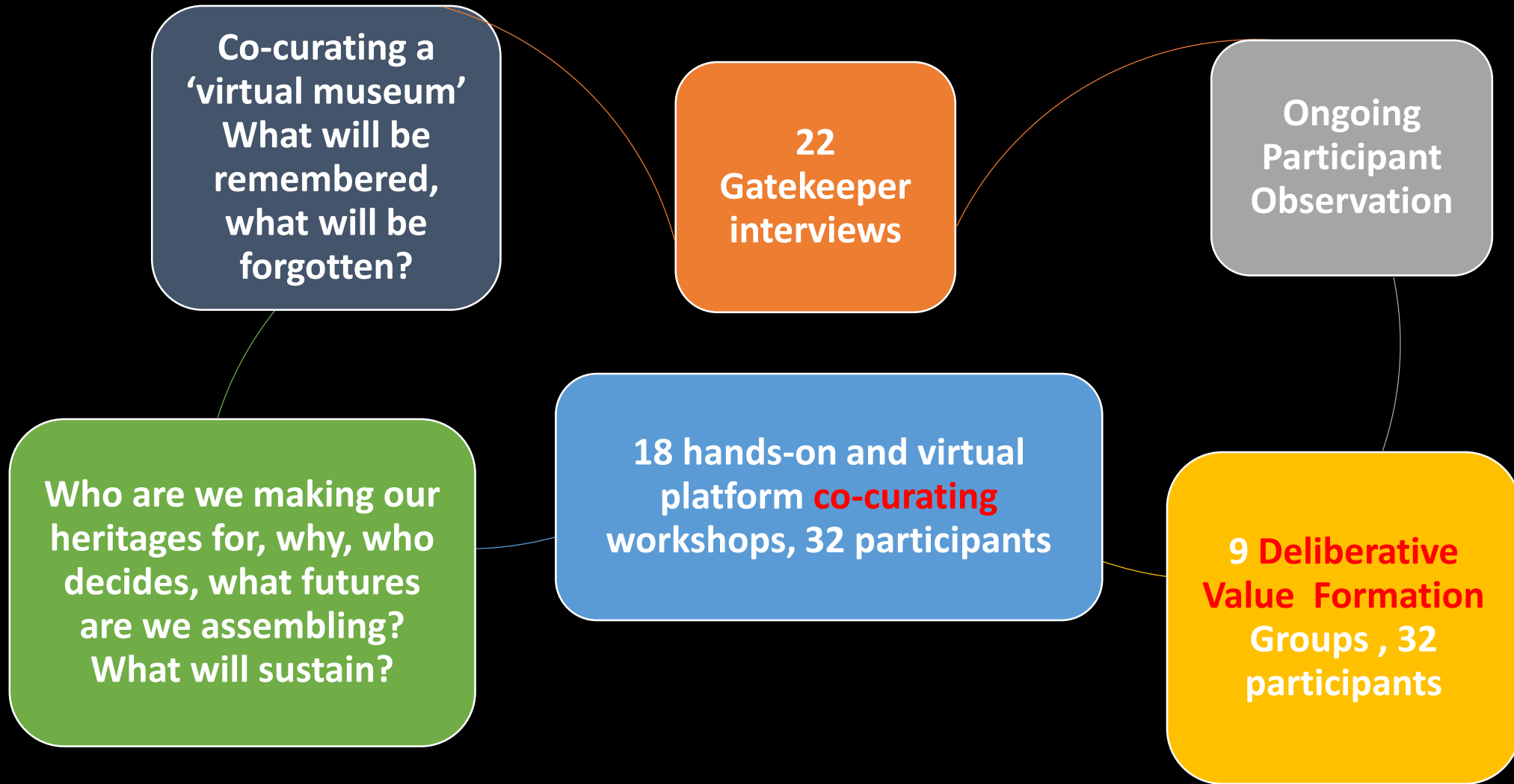
*Action-focused fieldwork that ... looks at what people do – and how and why they do it in their respective historicities and environmental contexts ... should demonstrate the progressiveness of many cultural traditions, and thus challenge the interests behind the fixation of certain heritages.*

(Kockel 2007: 31)



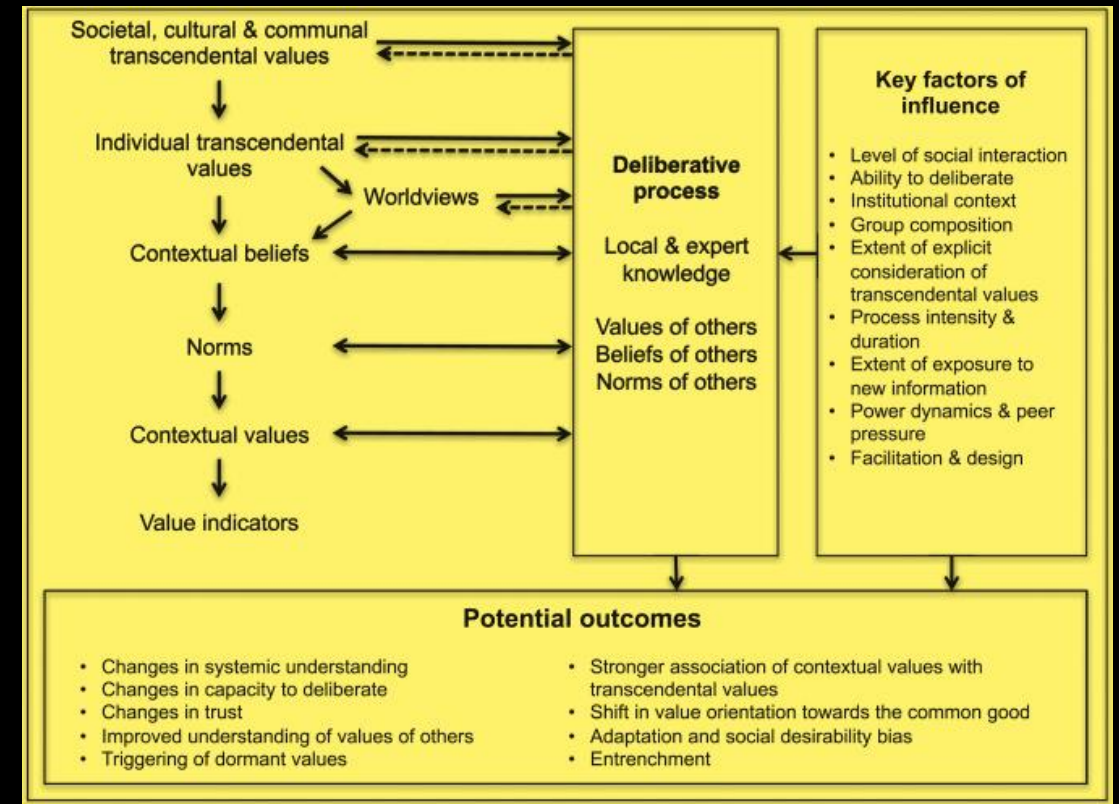


# *New Connections Across the Northern Isles: 11.2016 – 03.2019*





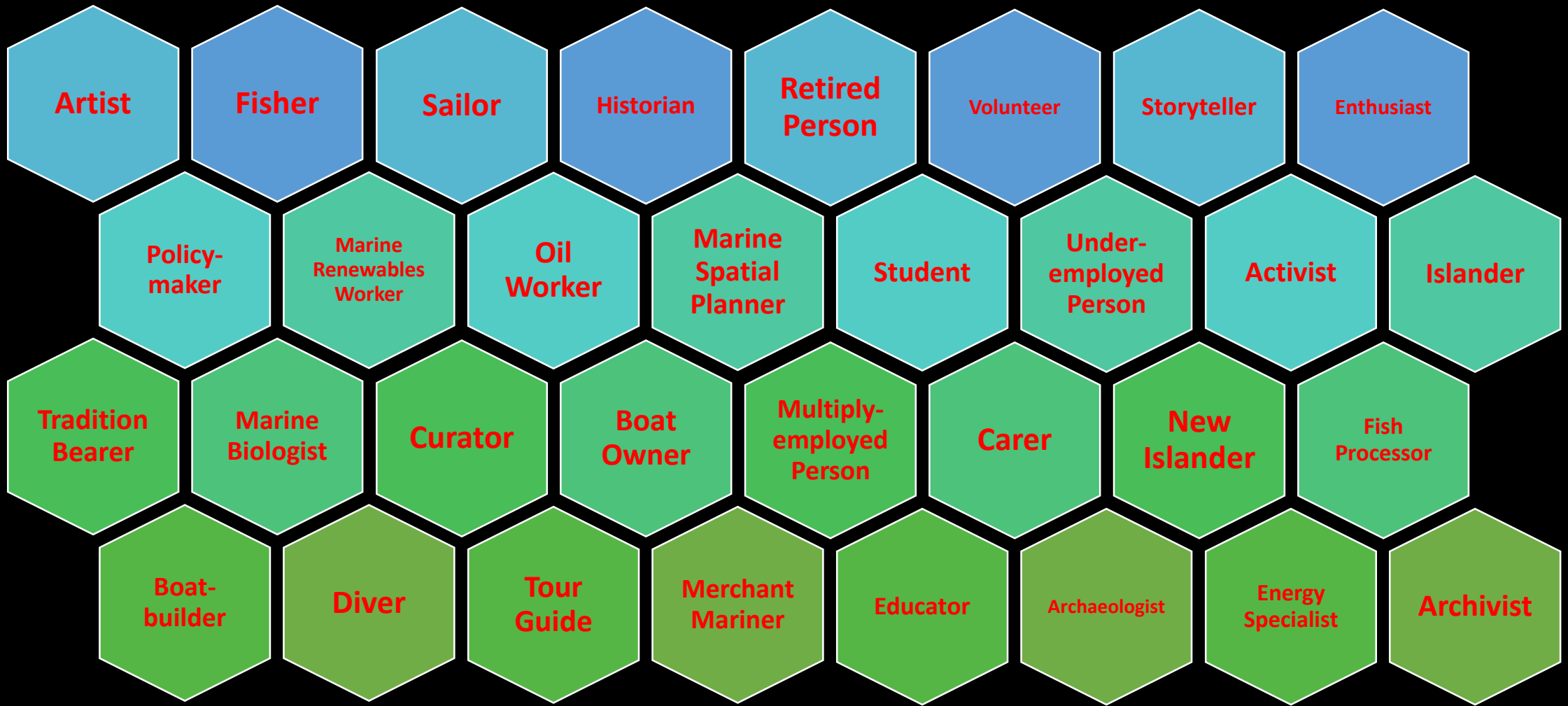
**Deliberative value formation:**  
eliciting difficult to access values and  
social learning concerning the  
ecological impacts of behaviours and  
choices.  
(after Kenter et. al. 2016)



**Co-curating:** *untangling the process of curation, finding elements that point towards new pathways to explore, narratives that are not expressed in words but in choices and actions* (Carreau 2018: 409).

Heritage doesn't just happen.  
Heritage-making is a present-day social action.  
Through this action, people assemble futures now by selecting expressions of past[s] to remember forward.

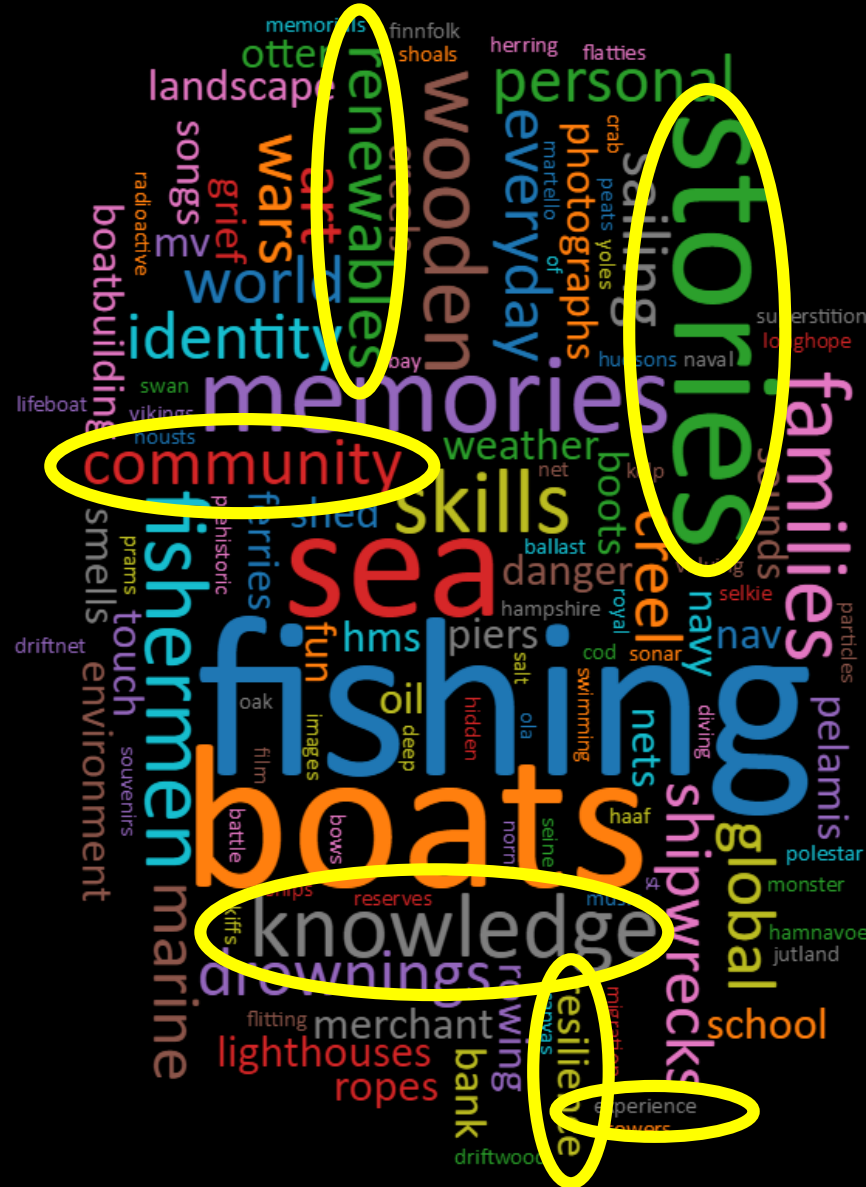








## “Becoming heritages” (after Harrison 2015)



## TA1 Summation of prominent themes, Orkney Groups, McCullagh 2017



# Complex maritime environments: Virtually assembling futures:

*Dispersed, multi-phased, intangible, submerged, in collections, in boatsheds, people, environments.*



*Authenticity in doing, making, and agency (de Bernardi 2019)*



[Co-curating] isn't just about history, it's also about building for the future ... *to make wise decisions about how we live on these islands in the future ... we have to continue to be in touch with the environment. We have to respect it. We have to feel that we're part of it* (John, *New Connections* co-curator 2019)

*We would never have gotten through the medieval period without that Hansa [traders], giving us an economy to thrive the same as the oil ...*

*that should be remembered for the future ...*

*we need to look forward and think about sustainability ...*

*there'll be booms again, and we'll have lessons that we've learned and dealt with as a community, and how we can move it into the future.*

(Jenny, *New Connections* co-curator 2019)

# Vulnerable Environments: Alternative futures?

*As zones of partial incorporation, margins  
provide **fertile ground both for imagining and  
constructing alternative futures***

(Steinberg 2001: 190)

# Thank you ...

## Selected References

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**Virtual Museum launches May 2019: [irc.hw.ac.uk/new-connections.html](http://irc.hw.ac.uk/new-connections.html)**