

**Living Tradition:** Supporting the Inuvialuit Community of Tuktoyaktuk  
Through Productive Cultural Space

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Global connectivity is affecting culture in the Canadian North. The Inuvialuit people of Canada's Northwest Arctic have experienced a long history of contact with foreign cultures that has led to the homogenization, assimilation and erasure of their distinct local culture.

This thesis investigates how productive cultural space can combat historic colonizing forces by supporting the cultural traditions of remote Canadian arctic communities.

By analyzing past foreign cultural encounters and speculating future changes to the community, this thesis develops a programmatic strategy rooted in maintaining communal activity, traditional knowledge and resource accessibility, while also providing a place for tourist interaction and exchange. By developing community narratives, this thesis develops a methodology for siting future polar developments that reinforces the communities socio-cultural activities. Architecturally, this thesis investigates Inuvialuit artifacts in order to set up culturally rooted design principles that work in conjunction with contemporary building technologies to accurately represent contemporary Inuvialuit culture.



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the relationship between culture, architecture and connectivity in the Canadian North.

### Culture

In order to elaborate further I must establish Culture as it is to be understood in this context. Culture, much like what it is seeking to define, has constantly been reworked throughout history. The term was first understood by the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”, from which he goes on to imply is universally homogenous due to the deep rooted similarities across the human mind.<sup>1</sup> While thinking about culture as homogenous and universal has fallen out of favour with contemporary anthropologists, the base of Tylor’s definition became the foundation from which future interpretations of the term were built upon. For the purposes of this thesis I draw from a more contemporary understanding of culture as described by author and professor Paul James who describes culture as “a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held in common.”<sup>2</sup> What is important in James’ definition that Tylor’s neglects to acknowledge is that culture is both a social and physical representation of the commonality of inhabitants. Physical elements such as architecture and the built environment have been accepted as cultural artifacts that represent unique cultural attributes.

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1 Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: J. Murray, 1871), 1.

2 Paul James, (Paul Warren), *Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice : Circles of Sustainability* (Abingdon, Oxon: New York, NY: Abingdon, Oxon: New York, NY : Routledge, 2015), 53.

Further to this, I have accepted ideas regarding the dynamics of culture and tradition from folklorist Henry Glassie who argues that the terms culture, history and tradition are inextricably linked and imply a natural evolution over time.<sup>3</sup> Glassie is critical of traditional methods of ethnographic study where the observer would “invent natural, static and functionally pat cultures” in order to depict their preconceived mythical utopian views of a place. Instead, Glassie argues that “culture and traditions, we have come to accept are created by individuals out of experience. They have reasons for their actions, and their actions entail change.”<sup>4</sup> By accepting culture as a dynamic facet of society, it allows traditional activities to be brought into the modern world without ideas of static preservation, or the act of preserving primitive activities because they are deemed ‘traditional’.

## Architecture

Architecture is a physical manifestation of a number of complex cultural characteristics at any specific point in time.<sup>5</sup> As these cultural characteristics evolve, the built environment, which can be understood as a collection of architectural elements, evolves with it. The evolution of the built environment can be aptly described as a product of a specific communities building culture.<sup>6</sup> American author and professor of architecture Howard Davis defines building culture as a complex system of human relationships, knowledge, institutions, rules and built objects.<sup>7</sup> The aforementioned characteristics are integral in the understanding of a culture within its larger context, but also work to help visually express the uniqueness and individuality of diverse cultures at a human scale. Davis goes on to further describe the relationship between building culture and the larger culture in which it resides by stating that “just as the

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3 Henry Glassie, “Tradition,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (1995): 395-412.

4 *Ibid.*, 398.

5 Howard Davis, *The Culture of Building* (New York: Oxford: New York: Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2006), 95.

6 *Ibid.*, 25.

7 *Ibid.*, 25.

motivation for building reinforces cultural tendencies, the architectural form of buildings reinforces and expresses the aesthetic sensibilities of the culture as a whole.”<sup>8</sup> From this we are able to begin to understand the interlinked relationship between architecture and culture and how one has an active role in defining the other, and vice versa.

## **Connectivity**

This interlinked relationship between culture and the built environment supports a natural, utopian evolution through time; however, this is often not a realistic representation of development. Encounters with foreign social groups commonly influence this natural cultural evolution, resulting in the overriding of long-standing traditions, activities and architectural practices. For the purposes of this thesis, this phenomenon will be analyzed through two types of foreign social encounters, colonialism and tourism.

## **Colonialism**

Colonialism can be understood as “the establishment and maintenance... of rule over an alien people that is separate and subordinate to the ruling power.”<sup>9</sup> A result of this process is the homogenization, assimilation and erasure of distinct, unique indigenous cultures and the creation of what can be described as a colonial city and society that is often segregated via its social and cultural components.<sup>10</sup> What emerges are hybrid cultures and communities that remove themselves from ideas of specificity and local logic and transition towards ideas of a singular universal identity. It is with this understanding of the effects of colonial cultural interaction that this thesis begins to investigate the ways in which the indigenous or colonized culture can begin to rebuild and reinforce cultural traditions within a contemporary society.

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8 Ibid., 95.

9 Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development : Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: London : Routledge, 2010), 17.

10 Ibid., 17.

## Tourism

Often considered to be a form of contemporary colonization, tourism can have potentially destructive effects on local culture. Tourism - more specifically cultural tourism - involves the commodification and consumption of culture and space.<sup>11</sup> While this commodification may have economic benefits for the host community, it can also lead to the 'disneyfication' or fabrication of the host culture in order to suit the tourists perceptions of the host community.<sup>12</sup> This perception often entails primal purity devoid of all forms of modernity, resulting in a community that is seeking economic growth, but is trapped representing a previous or false existence. As a result, space and architecture are no longer organized for practical or functional use by the communities contemporary standards, but are organized by the perceived consumable qualities determined by the tourist.<sup>13</sup> Daily activities become governed by their 'consumption' rather than being appropriate or functional for the host community inhabitants.

A sustainable model of tourism development can only truly be achieved if the contemporary needs and wishes of the host community are acknowledged and accounted for.<sup>14</sup> This can be done by redefining the previously 'consumed space' to embody the contemporary cultural ideals of the host community as its primary mission. This switch from consumed space to productive space allows for economic prosperity of the host community without sacrificing their cultural honesty. By utilizing local development strategies that emphasize ground up spatial planning, the host community is provided the opportunity to manage the potential negative effects of tourism and cultural consumption to ensure that tourist spaces are a product of functional and productive community space, as opposed to the other way around.<sup>15</sup>

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11 Kevin Meethan, *Tourism in Global Society : Place, Culture, Consumption* (Basingstoke, Hampshire UK); New York: Basingstoke, Hampshire UK; New York : Palgrave, 2001), 114.

12 Ibid., 65.

13 Ibid., 26.

14 Ibid., 59.

15 Ibid., 59.

## **Thesis Question**

How can productive cultural development combat colonial and assimilating forces by supporting cultural traditions while simultaneously providing an opportunity for economic growth through tourism?

## CHAPTER 2: TUKTOYAKTUK

The Inuvialuit community of Tuktoyaktuk has been chosen to test this thesis question due to its **past** history of colonial encounters, its **present** push towards cultural revitalization, and the potential of **future** social and economic changes brought on by the development of a new resource road into the community.

Tuktoyaktuk is one of six communities located in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) of the Northwest Territories. Geographically, the region surrounding Tuktoyaktuk can be characterized as a low, flat extension of the Canadian prairies, spotted with lakes and an undulating coastline.<sup>16</sup> Large ice hills, called *pingos* spread across the landscape providing the only topographic relief.<sup>17</sup> The Mackenzie river and Beaufort delta regions surrounding Tuktoyaktuk are rich in harvestable resources such as whale, fish, seal and caribou. These animals have been harvested by the Inuvialuit for hundreds of years and have contributed significantly to their success living off the land. The community sits on the 69th parallel, which falls above both the Arctic circle and the northern tree line. The permafrost laden earth and cold temperatures prevent the growth of trees and large bushes, making the only vegetation low lying grasses and shrubs.<sup>18</sup>

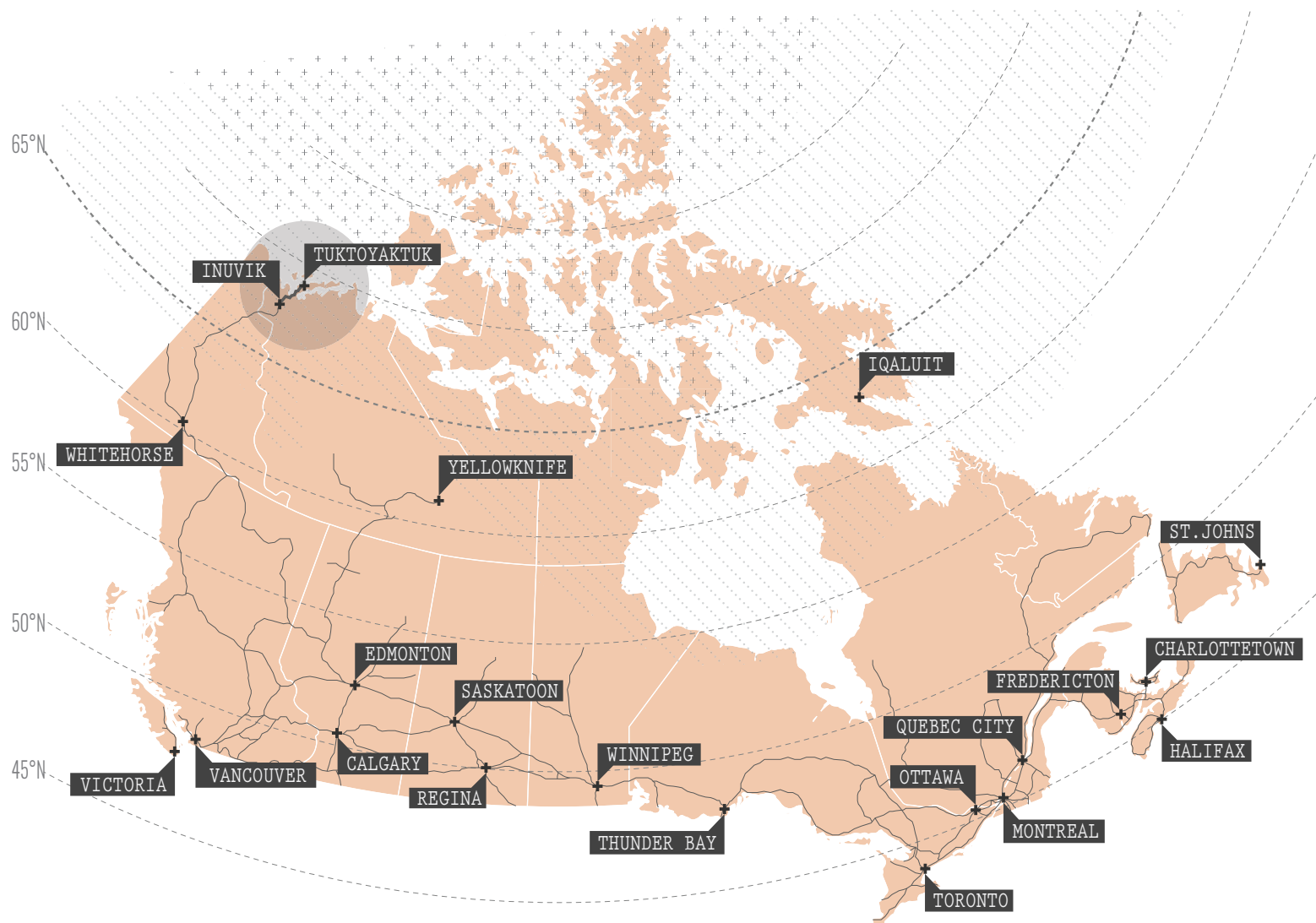
### Past

The Inuvialuit people of Canada's Northwest Arctic have experienced a long history of colonization by foreign social groups. From the first contact with European explorers and the Hudson Bay Company in the early 1800's to present day, aspects of Inuvialuit culture have been under constant pressure to resist homogenizing and assimilating forces.

16 Ishmael Alunik, *Across Time and Tundra : The Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic*, ed. Eddie D. Kolausok, David A. Morrison (Vancouver : Seattle : Gatineau, Quebec : Vancouver : Raincoast Books: Seattle : University of Washington Press: Gatineau, Quebec : Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2003), 214.

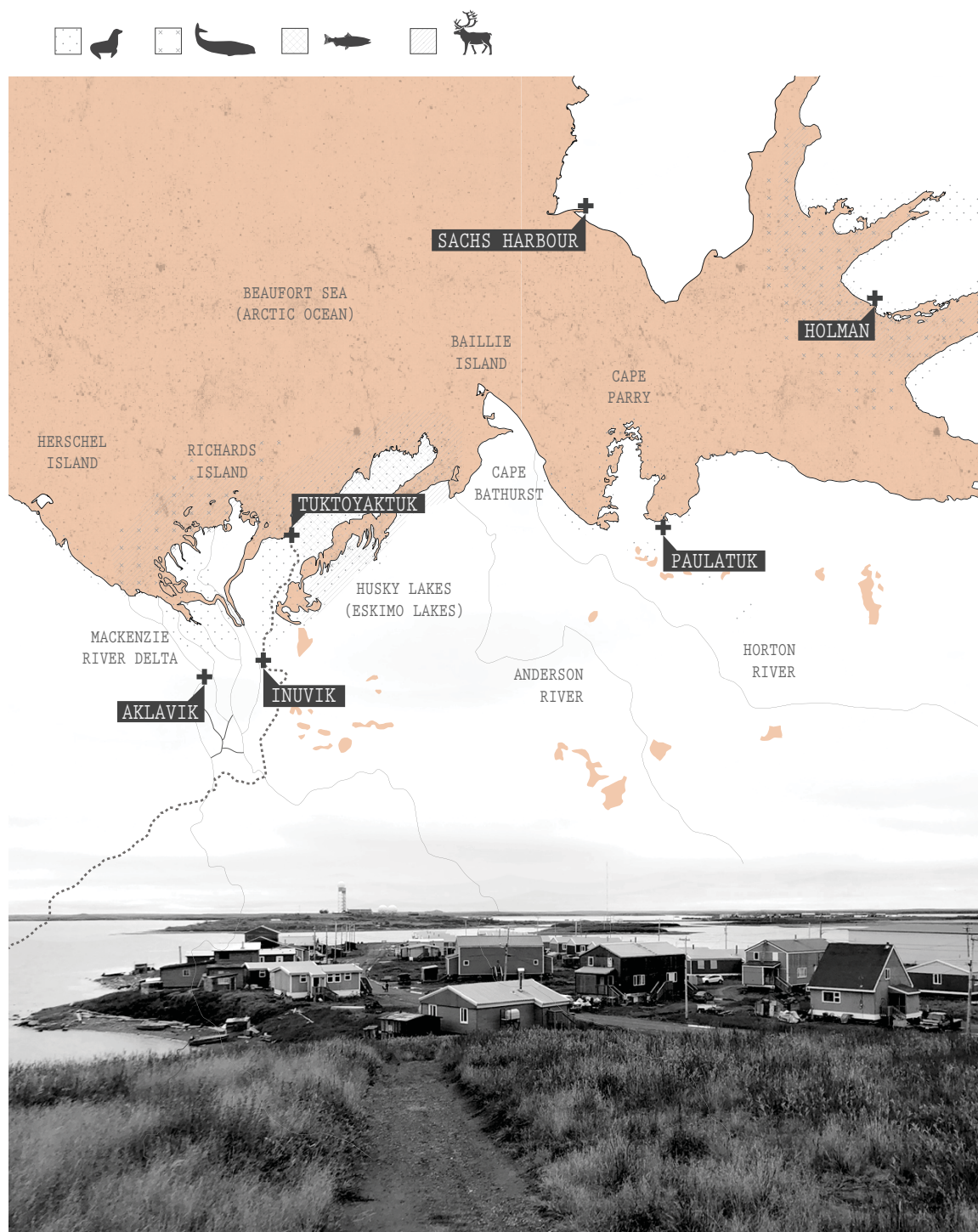
17 Ibid., 3.

18 Mason White and Lola Sheppard, *Many Norths : Spatial Practice in a Polar Territory* (New York: New York : Actar Publishers, 2017), 10.



Map of Canada's major road networks including the newly completed Inuvik - Tuktoyaktuk highway completed in 2017.  
 Data collected from the Government of Canada National Highway System (NHS) Map.





Map of the 6 communities within the Inuvialuit settlement Region & a photograph of the hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk.  
 Base map collected from Google Maps. "Map of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Northwest Territories"  
 Ecology data collected from L. Hartwig, 2009.

Descendants of the Thule people of Northwestern Alaska, the Inuvialuit of the Canadian arctic were a semi-nomadic people that enjoyed a subsistence based lifestyle, and placed great cultural importance on the connection and relationship with the land.<sup>19</sup> They have traditionally been great hunters and fishermen who have learned to access and harvest from resource rich land that surrounds them.<sup>20</sup> The Inuvialuit traditionally lived in small family-centric communities consisting of permanent sod and driftwood dwellings called *igluyuaryuk*.<sup>21</sup> These permanent dwellings would be used for the majority of the year, only transitioning to more ephemeral dwellings like *iglu*'s or summer tents while out on the land.<sup>22</sup> The Inuvialuit used dogsleds, animal skin kayaks and larger flat bottomed boats called *umiaqs* for hunting and moving across the landscape.<sup>23</sup> Socially, the Inuvialuit focused on community relationships and performed a variety of communal activities from hunting and gathering to singing and dancing. Inuvialuit drum dances were an opportunity for community members to come together and share stories about their experiences on the land.<sup>24</sup> However, many of these unique cultural qualities were greatly affected by the introduction of foreign social groups.

The introduction of Hudson's Bay trading posts in the late 18th century, and later the direct trade with American whalers brought on a greater reliance upon foreign manufactured goods and foods.<sup>25</sup> New technologies such as the rifle and whaling ship ultimately changed how traditional activities were performed. Activities that would have previously required the work of a number of community members could now be done by a single individual.<sup>26</sup> This led to decreased communal activity and to a

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19 Alunik, *Across Time and Tundra*, 10.

20 *Ibid.*, 1.

21 *Ibid.*, 19.

22 *Ibid.*, 18-21.

23 *Ibid.*, 28.

24 Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC), "Drum Dancing," *Inuvialuit Cultural Centre Digital Library*, accessed February 9, 2019, <https://inuvialuitdigitallibrary.ca/items/show/2410>.

25 Alunik, *Across Time and Tundra*, 84.

26 *Ibid.*, 84.

more southern, individualistic way of thinking. Further to the increased efficiency, these new goods and technologies also influenced many people to transition from the traditional subsistence based economy into a new trade economy. People began spending time hunting or trapping beyond their immediate needs in order to trade for these foreign goods.<sup>27</sup> This new trade economy affected how and where people spent their time, and would later completely restructure Inuvialuit ideologies.

As quickly as the new trade economy was brought to the region, it was taken away equally as fast. The decline in demand for Inuvialuit harvested products such as whale baleen and furs in the early 20th century left many Inuvialuit socially and economically lost. People had become reliant upon foreign goods, and with no strong trade resources many Inuvialuit were left to seek alternative means of income in order to acquire them.<sup>28</sup> The result of this was the transition from the semi-nomadic settlements to the southern model government settlements that had been established surrounding the existing trading posts. These permanent settlements were a product of a southern community planning strategies. Land was parcelled, divided, and sold, which ultimately reshaped the Inuvialuit understanding of ownership, and further emphasized a more southern, individualistic way of thinking. Accompanying parcelled land and ownership is the notion of accessibility. Resources that were once publicly accessible became increasingly privatized and parcelled off.

One of the most culturally detrimental periods in Inuvialuit history was a result of the decline in the trading economy and transition to permanent government communities. After the second World War and the rising tensions surrounding the Cold War the Canadian Government became interested in the Northwest Arctic as a means of national security and sovereignty.<sup>29</sup> As a result the Canadian government established a

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27 Ibid., 115.

28 Ibid., 128.

29 Ibid., 162.

presence in the region in the form of RCMP outposts and government offices. This new found interest in the North by the Canadian Government led to the establishment of welfare programs in order to aid Inuvialuit families struggling in this new southern reality. The Family Allowances Act was established to provide Inuvialuit families with tax free benefits in the form of groceries, clothing and other supplies deemed essential for each child under the age of 16.<sup>30</sup> However, the eligibility requirements in order to receive these subsidies stated that all children must attend an established government or religious residential school.<sup>31</sup> Traditional Inuvialuit education emphasized time spent on the land learning to access and harvest resources, however the southern educational model that was being enforced lacked relevance in this unique cultural climate and ultimately sought to civilize, Christianize and assimilate the Inuvialuit children into a southern way of life.<sup>32</sup> This educational model created a generational break in traditional knowledge and cultural activities that is still being felt today.

## Present

The years following World War II and the Cold War led to an increased government presence in the Canadian North. An increased government presence led to an increase in industry. A significant oil discovery on traditional Inuvialuit territory in the early 1970's led the Canadian government and industry leaders to commission the construction of pipelines, highways, and other extraction infrastructure throughout the Canadian North.<sup>33</sup> Worried about the negative social and environmental impacts surrounding resource extraction, a group of Indigenous people came together to create "The Committee for Original People's Entitlement (COPE)<sup>34</sup>. COPE's primary objective was to become "the voice of

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30 Ibid., 162.

31 Ibid., 163.

32 Ibid., 200.

33 Ibid., 177.

34 Ibid., 178.

indigenous people seeking their rights and entitlement to the land they have occupied for time immemorial.”<sup>35</sup> COPE continued to fight against the Canadian government, who at the time “sought to eliminate the Department of Indian Affairs and rapidly integrate Native people into Canadian society, at the same time extinguishing all special rights.”<sup>36</sup> The advocacy and resilience of COPE culminated with the submission of a regional land claim agreement to the Canadian government in 1977, and after several years of negotiations the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) was signed, giving the Inuvialuit people of the Northwest Arctic a political foothold to fight for their culture, land and economic standing.<sup>37</sup> The first page of the IFA states three primary goals:

- to preserve Inuvialuit culture, identity and values within a changing northern society;
- to enable Inuvialuit to be equal and meaningful participants in the northern and national economy and society; and
- to protect and preserve the Arctic wildlife, environment and biological productivity<sup>38</sup>

Since the signing of the IFA and the establishment of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation as the governing body of the Inuvialuit, many efforts have been taken to collectively remember and document areas of traditional Inuvialuit culture that were lost or are at risk of actively disappearing. The transcribing of elders experiences and the documentation and teaching of traditional Inuvialuit language, *Inuvialuktun* are among the top priorities within these communities. Further to this, researchers and students are working to uncover traditional Inuvialuit settlements that are at risk of being washed away due to a degrading permafrost in an effort to better preserve and understand traditional Inuvialuit way of life.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>38</sup> Inuvialuit Final Agreement, 1.

## Future

Tuktoyaktuk is facing a number of new social and economic issues that will have an effect on the future development of the community and on Inuvialuit culture as a whole. In November of 2017 the community was physically connected to the rest of Canada via Canada's most northerly all-weather road, the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk highway. The road was first conceived in the 1960's to further explore offshore oil deposits in the Beaufort Sea, but was never realized.<sup>39</sup> After the signing of the IFA the project was revitalized by the Government of the Northwest Territories in the 1990's with the hopes of bringing economic prosperity to the community. After years of public consultation and impact assessments, the project began construction in January of 2014.<sup>40</sup>

The completion of the road brings with it a variety of both positive and potentially negative social, cultural and economic impacts. Tourism, among other things is expected to increase and the projected 2.7 million dollar per year in tourist spending will undoubtedly benefit the community economically, however this influx of tourists and visitors will most definitely create an increased strain on the communities public infrastructure - or lack there of.<sup>41</sup>

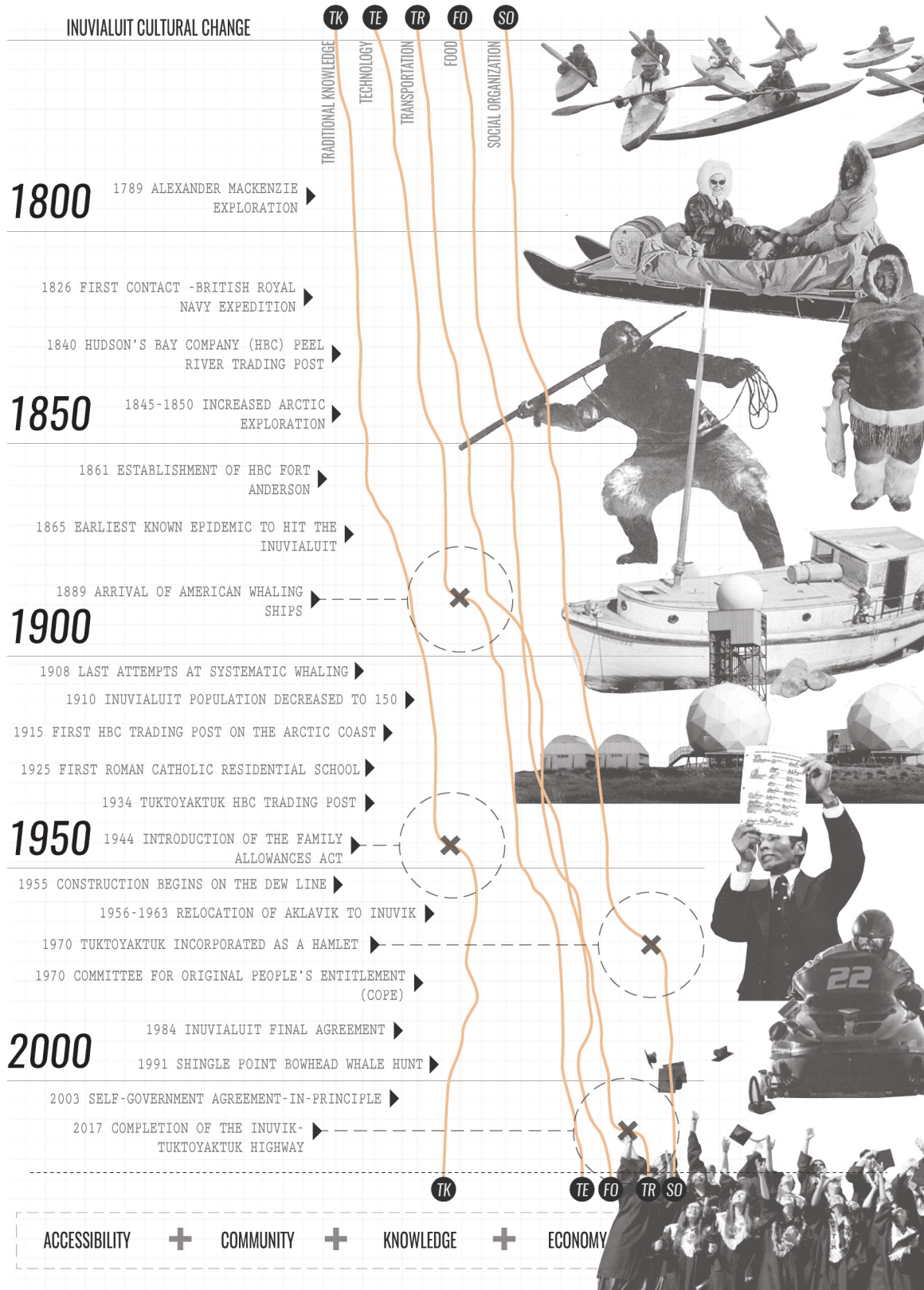
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39 Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Infrastructure, "Inuvik Tuktoyaktuk Highway Project," accessed Feb 4, 2019, <https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/en/ITH>.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.





Timeline mapping significant moments of cross cultural interaction that has led to significant changes in Inuvialuit culture. Data collected from Ishmael Alunik, *Across Time and Tundra: The Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic*, 2003.

## CHAPTER 3: PROGRAM

After analyzing the communities past, present and future through the lens of 5 identified cultural characteristics - traditional knowledge, technology, transportation, food and social organization - I was able to identify moments throughout history that have had a significant effect on traditional Inuvialuit culture. These were moments that caused aspects of Inuvialuit culture to change both for the positive and negative. This process led to the development of 4 primary goals for this architectural intervention:

- the first is to reinforce **accessibility** to the communities shared resources that have become increasingly more privatized with the implementation of southern community planning strategies,
- the second is to support **communal activities** that were lost with the implementation of southern technologies throughout the 20th century,
- the third is to provide space for the community to **grow economically** from the expected increase in tourism due to the new highway,
- and finally is to rebuild the **cultural continuity** across generations that became affected by the implementation of the welfare act and the forced southern education models.

I am proposing an Inuvialuit Cultural Centre that focuses on activities surrounding food, craft and performance. The proposal includes space for the harvesting, processing, storage and preparation of country foods, workspaces for creating traditional art, clothing and artifacts, a performance space that will facilitate community events that take place throughout the year, a media library with a collection of Inuvialuit books and public internet access, and finally a small commercial component that will allow the sale of food, art, artifacts and clothing.



This proposed program addresses issues of **accessibility** to the communities shared resources by providing public infrastructure for the harvesting, processing and smoking of fish and other animals that have been caught in the region. The public performance space and the craft workshops support **communal activity**, while the commercial component provides space for the community to **grow economically**. Finally, the program supports **cultural continuity** and the transfer of knowledge through the practice of these productive cultural activities and facilitating intergenerational engagement through visually and socially connected spaces.

Each of these program activities have significant 'high' and 'low' seasons throughout the Inuvialuit calendar year. The diagram on the following page identifies the key cultural activities such as harvest seasons and community events and compares them with the peak tourist seasons and the unique environmental phenomena that take place throughout the year. I used this diagram to identify three times of the year - March, July and December - that all demonstrate different cultural activities and environmental seasons. I have chosen to represent these three times of the year in my architectural representations of the proposal.

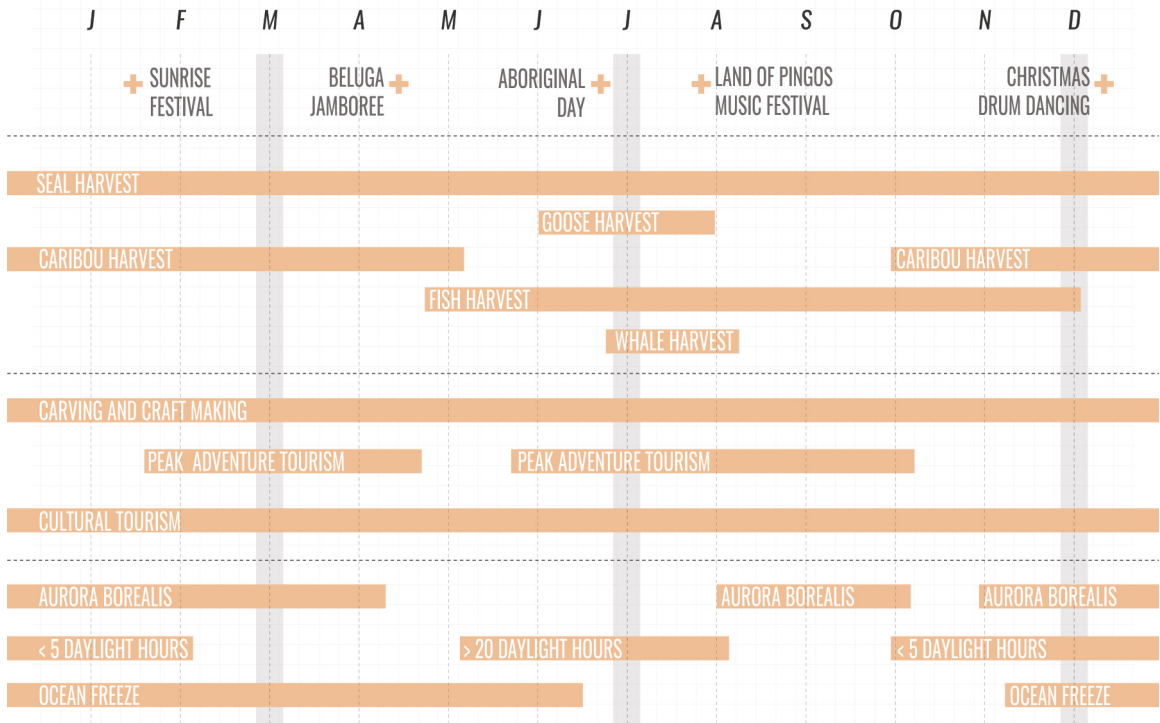


  
**KNOWLEDGE**

  
**FOOD**

  
**CRAFT**

  
**PERFORMANCE**



Program diagram highlighting important cultural activities that take place throughout the Inuvialuit year. Ecological data collected from the Inuvialuit Harvest Study, Data and Methods Report 1988-1997.

## CHAPTER 4: SITING

In order to develop a siting strategy for the proposal I started by looking at contemporary Northern development proposals. During the middle of the 20th century a number of modern community plans were proposed for northern Canadian communities. A common critique of almost all the proposals during this time was that they all represent a scientific response to the unique northern climate, “but lack imagination and innovation in responding to the socio-cultural opportunities that could emerge from more considered hybrid of traditional and modern settlement strategies.”<sup>42</sup>

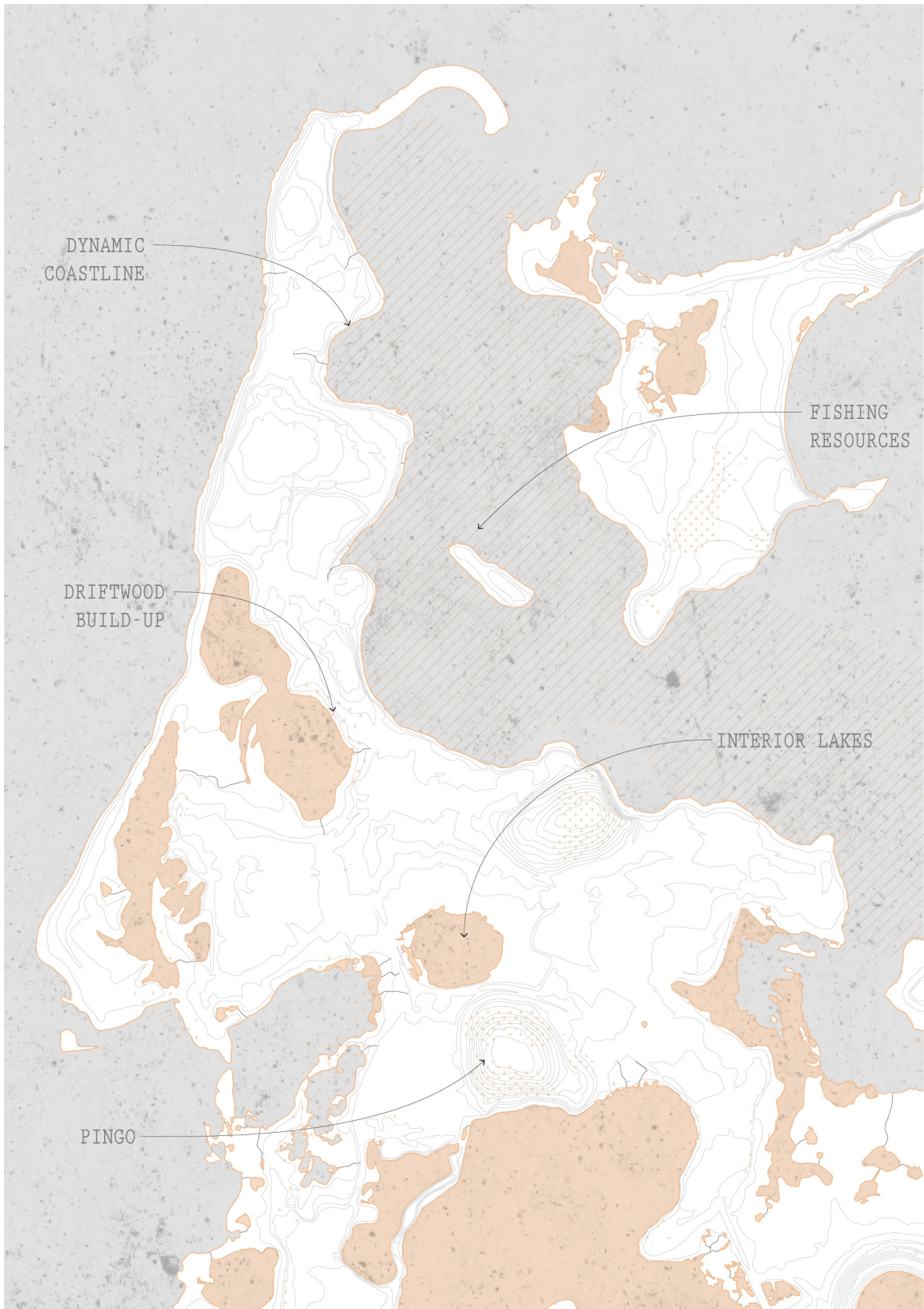
In the attempt to bridge this socio-cultural gap of northern community planning I focused on developing cultural narratives based on personal experience and research and layered them with environmental and geographic information to determine the most culturally and environmentally sensitive location for this architectural intervention.

### Ecology & Resources

Tuktoyaktuk’s physical geography consists of a dynamic coastline, a series of land-locked lakes, and a number of unique ice hills called pingos. The northwest coast of the community is under constant erosion due to high winds and rough waters. The hooking peninsula curls to form a natural breakwater which has created a relatively calm bay on the east side of the community that is used for the launching of boats and fishing. The community contains a number of natural resources that are widely used within the community. Most notably are the access to fish in the calm portion of the bay on the east side of the community and the large amount of driftwood that finds its way to the community from the south via the Mackenzie river and is littered along the shoreline.

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42 White and Sheppard, *Many Norths : Spatial Practice in a Polar Territory*, 10.



Map highlighting the significant environmental features and public resources within the community.  
Base map data collected from the Government of Northwest Territories Atlas mapping service.

## Access

Prior to November 2017, the community was only accessible via aircraft or ice road (during the winter months). The airport is located on the south edge of the community but has received a significant decrease in use since the completion of the new road due to the cost disparity between flying and driving. There is one primary roadway that runs through the community connecting the new highway to the arctic ocean, and a number of smaller tertiary roads that branch off to support residential neighbourhoods.

## Settlement

Similar to the roadways and community access points, the “undulating shoreline and interior water bodies have resulted in a radial expansion of the community around these landscape features”.<sup>43</sup> The settlement pattern mimics that of southern communities with established building lots and property lines. The majority of the public architecture has been internalized within the community and does not have immediate access to the shoreline.

## Community

Through observation and research, I sought to identify the communities most frequently used socio-cultural spaces. Through my observations while visiting the community I was able to identify 3 internal “neighbourhoods”. This observation was based off of the movement of children playing within the community. Children on bikes and ATV's did not move far beyond their immediate ‘neighbourhood boundaries’.

Secondly, I have identified that grocery stores currently act as social gathering spaces. Both kids and adults gather and spend a great deal of time outside or in the front of the two grocery stores, socializing, playing and purchasing goods. This observation maintains consistent with past

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43 White and Sheppard, *Many Norths : Spatial Practice in a Polar Territory*, 74 .





Map highlighting the primary road networks within the community.  
Base map data collected from the Government of Northwest Territories Atlas mapping service.



Map highlighting the communities settlement plan and the location of the main public buildings.  
Base map data collected from the Government of Northwest Territories Atlas mapping service.





Map highlighting the communities informal public/ cultural spaces.  
Base map data collected from the Government of Northwest Territories Atlas mapping service.



social organizations, as historically food was also a catalyst for social interaction.

Finally, due to the cultural significance surrounding the people's relationship with the landscape, I found that people tended to gather outdoors and in close proximity to the water. The majority of people that were observed while in the community were socializing while working or harvesting the land near the waters edge.

### **Tourist**

The final layer to the community is the tourist. For many visitors the 'end of the road' or the arctic ocean is the goal of the pilgrimage to Tuk. Tourists drive the main roadway through the community to the campsite on the edge of the arctic ocean, stay for a day or two and then drive back along the new highway. This means that this main roadway represents a significant point of interaction between the community and the tourist.

### **Site Selection**

Ultimately this reading of the community has lead to the selection of a site for the proposed architectural intervention. The chosen site not only acknowledges the environmental conditions faced by the community, but also important socio-cultural spaces as well. The site is located at a geographic pinch-point within the community, and falls at the junction of the three identified internal neighbourhoods. The site is located on the calm side of the bay, providing access to both the shoreline and the communities shared fish resources. Finally, the site falls along the primary route through the community, not only making it easily accessible for the community members but for tourists entering or leaving the community as well.



Map highlighting the communities primary tourist spaces.  
Base map data collected from the Government of Northwest Territories Atlas mapping service.





Map highlighting the proposed site location.  
Base map data collected from the Government of Northwest Territories Atlas mapping service.

## CHAPTER 5: ARCHITECTURE

### Program Adjacencies

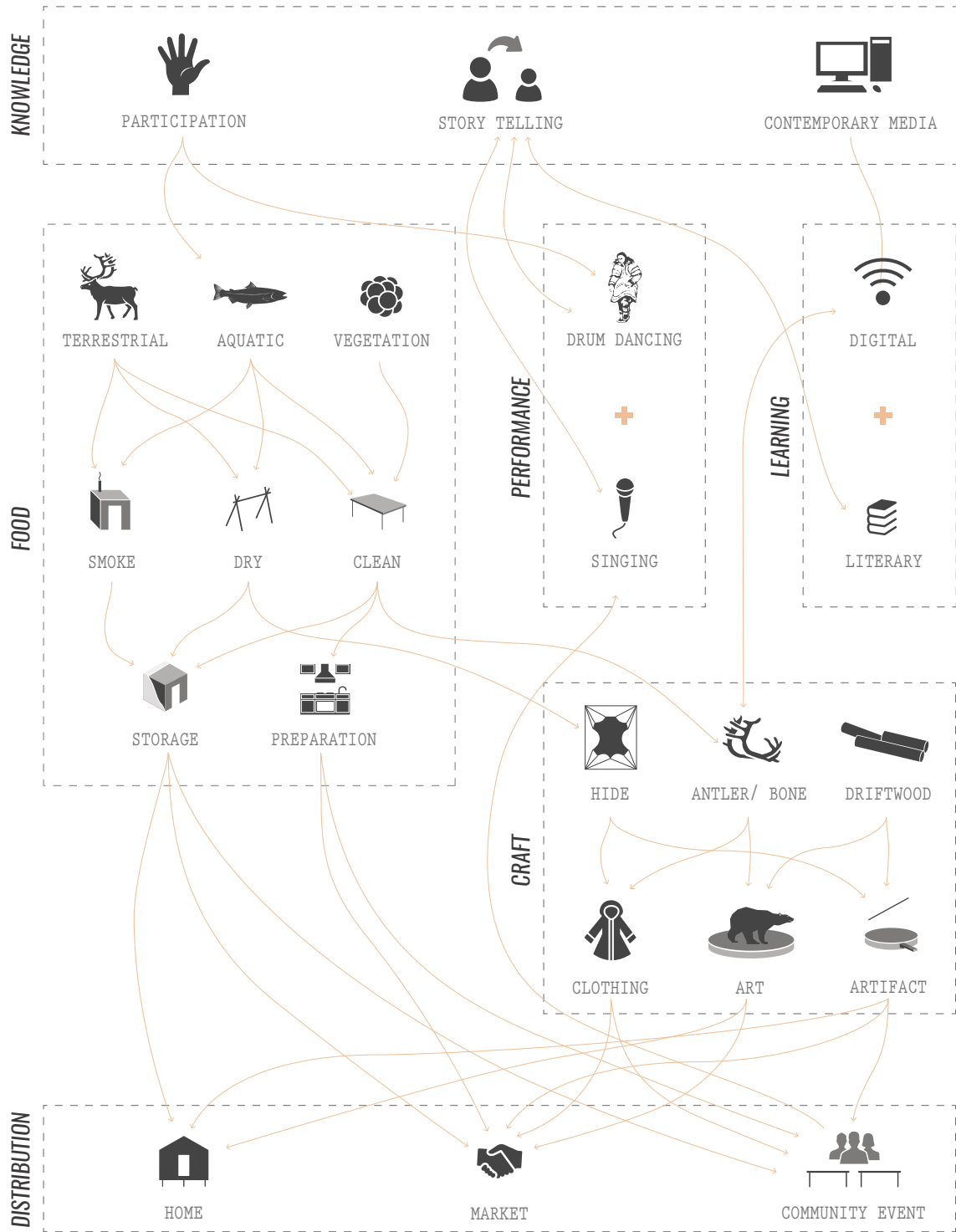
In order to help orient the proposal on the site I started by developing a programmatic sequence to better understand the relationships and potential adjacencies of the different program activities.

As one of the primary goals for this proposal is to support cultural continuity and the transfer of knowledge across generations, I began by identifying 3 areas of knowledge transfer - participation, storytelling and contemporary media.

Knowledge through participation involves the practice of relevant cultural activities such as the harvesting, processing and preparing of traditional foods, and the making of cultural artifacts such as clothing and artwork. By actively performing these important cultural activities it will ensure that the required skills will transcend generational barriers.

Storytelling for the purposes of this thesis not only includes the literal telling of stories from elders to younger generations, but also includes other forms of communication such as song and dance. Traditional Inuvialuit drum dancing has always been a way of expressing past experiences while out on the land. By creating spaces for community events and traditional drum dancing it allows for the continued telling of these stories and experiences.

Finally, because this proposal is seeking to support both traditional and contemporary Inuvialuit culture it is important to acknowledge new forms of knowledge acquisition such as the internet and contemporary literature. Currently there is no library or point where you can publicly access the internet within the community. By providing a media library it allows for Inuvialuit youth to participate and engage with contemporary technology while simultaneously focusing on Inuvialuit specific activities.



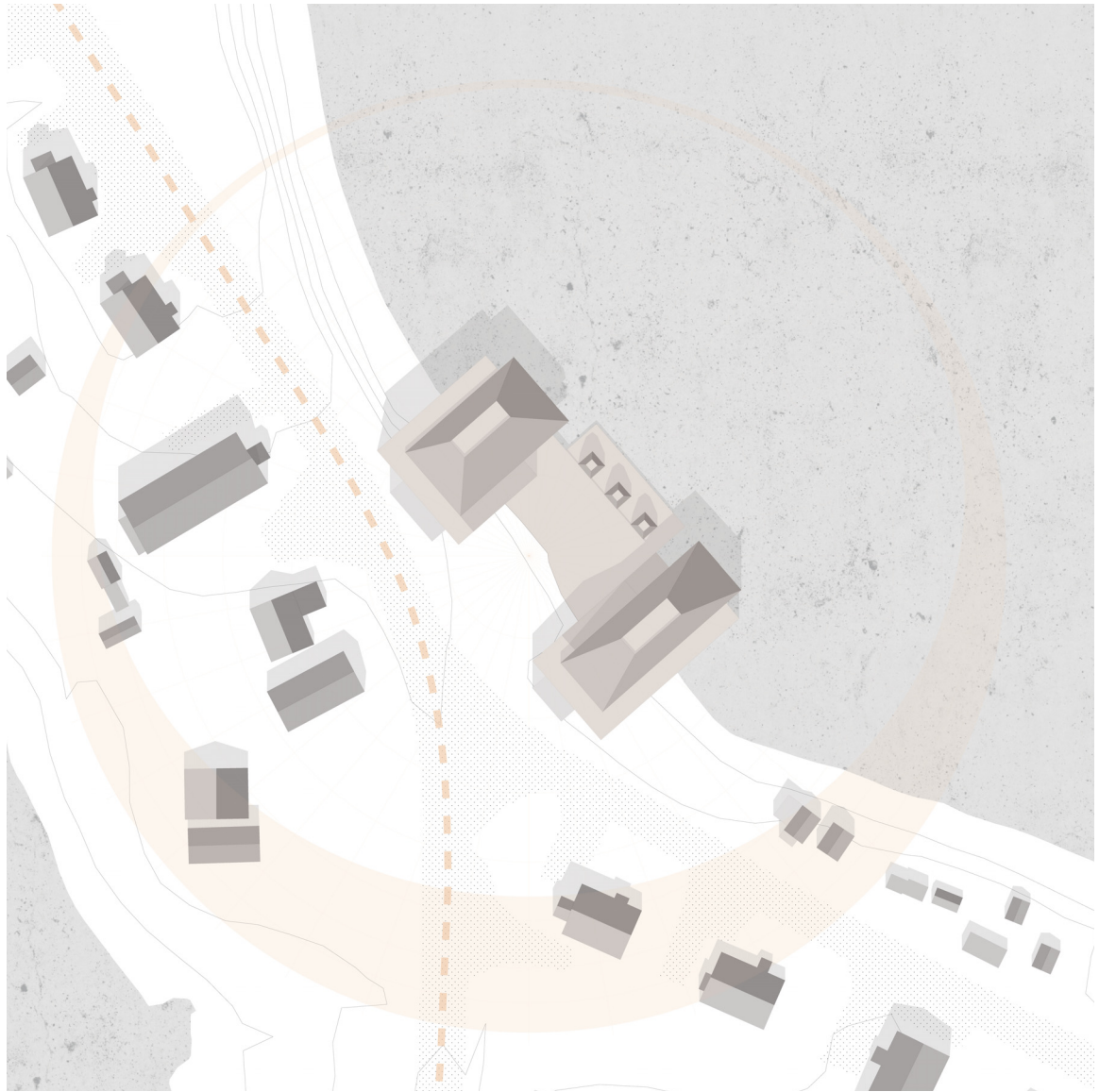
Programmatic Sequence Diagram

In addition to the transfer of knowledge, each programmatic activity has its own flow and sequence that relates to other programmed activities. The diagram on the previous page was a tool used to better understand these program relationships. What became clear after developing this drawing was that these activities that are often perceived to be a linear process in western culture, are in fact quite dynamic within Inuvialuit culture and have a variety of complex relationships. As a result this project seeks to provide flexible spaces that allow for different programmed activities, but aren't left being completely ambiguous.

## **Design**

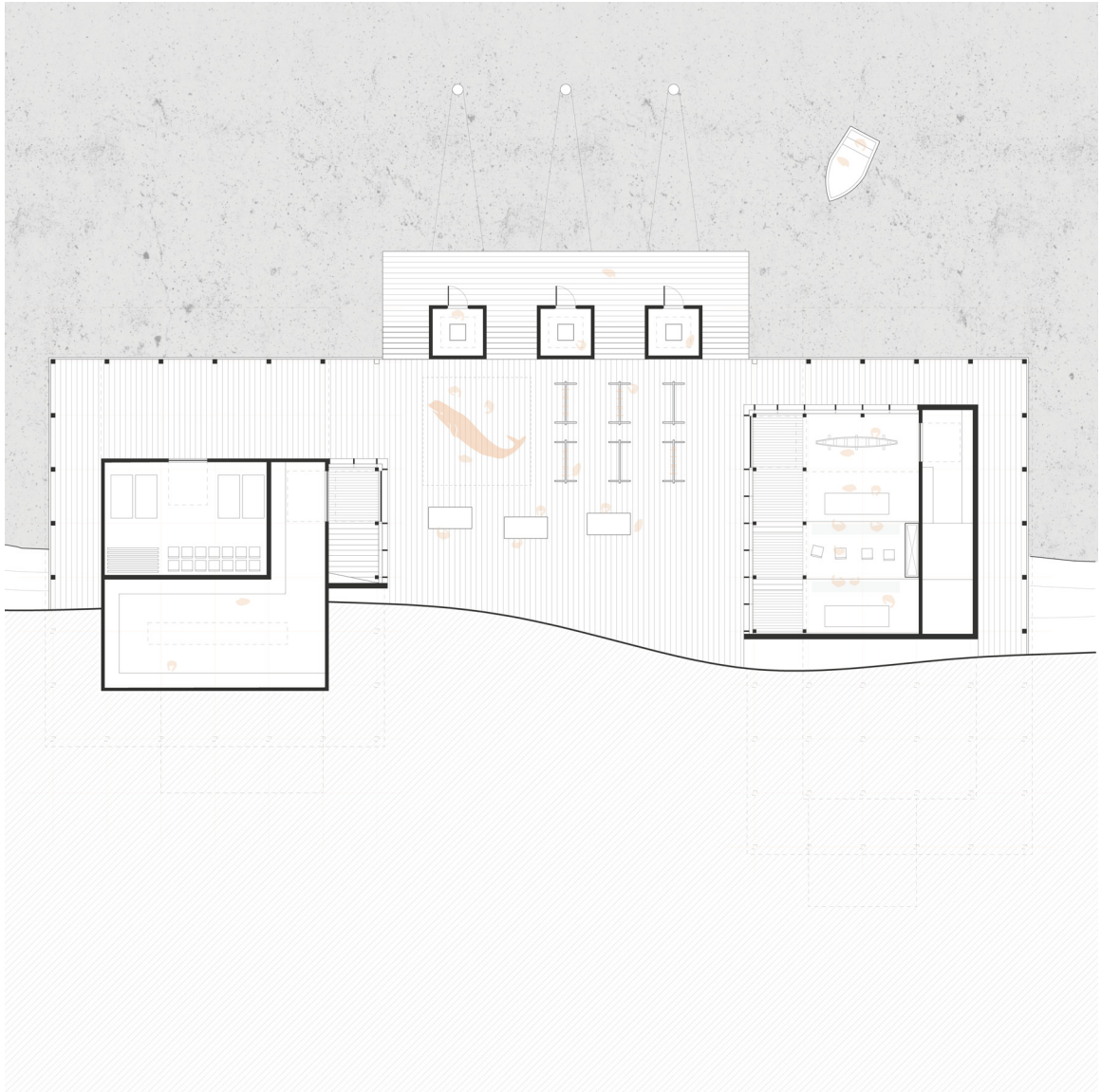
Due to the cultural significance surrounding food, the proposal has been oriented around a large central processing courtyard, with two cultural buildings flanking either side that support the craft, performance and media library elements of the program. The courtyard acts as a point of celebration and supports the cleaning, drying and smoking of meat. The courtyard bridges the shoreline supporting public access to the water and allows for the drop off of animals from both the land and sea. Three smoke houses skirt the shoreline helping to spatially define the courtyard while simultaneously maintaining permeability and allowing for the flow of people down to the waters edge. The courtyard has been oriented in a way to receive southern sun while simultaneously being screened from the strong northwesterly winds. The courtyard opens up to the street offering views of the processing activities to anyone coming in or out of the community.

Once the animals are processed they enter one of the two flanking cultural buildings that support the food and craft programs. The two building forms run perpendicular to the waters edge and extend back to the communities main roadway. This orientation supports the flow of goods from the processing space back to the street where it can be distributed to the community and tourist. The media library and performance space



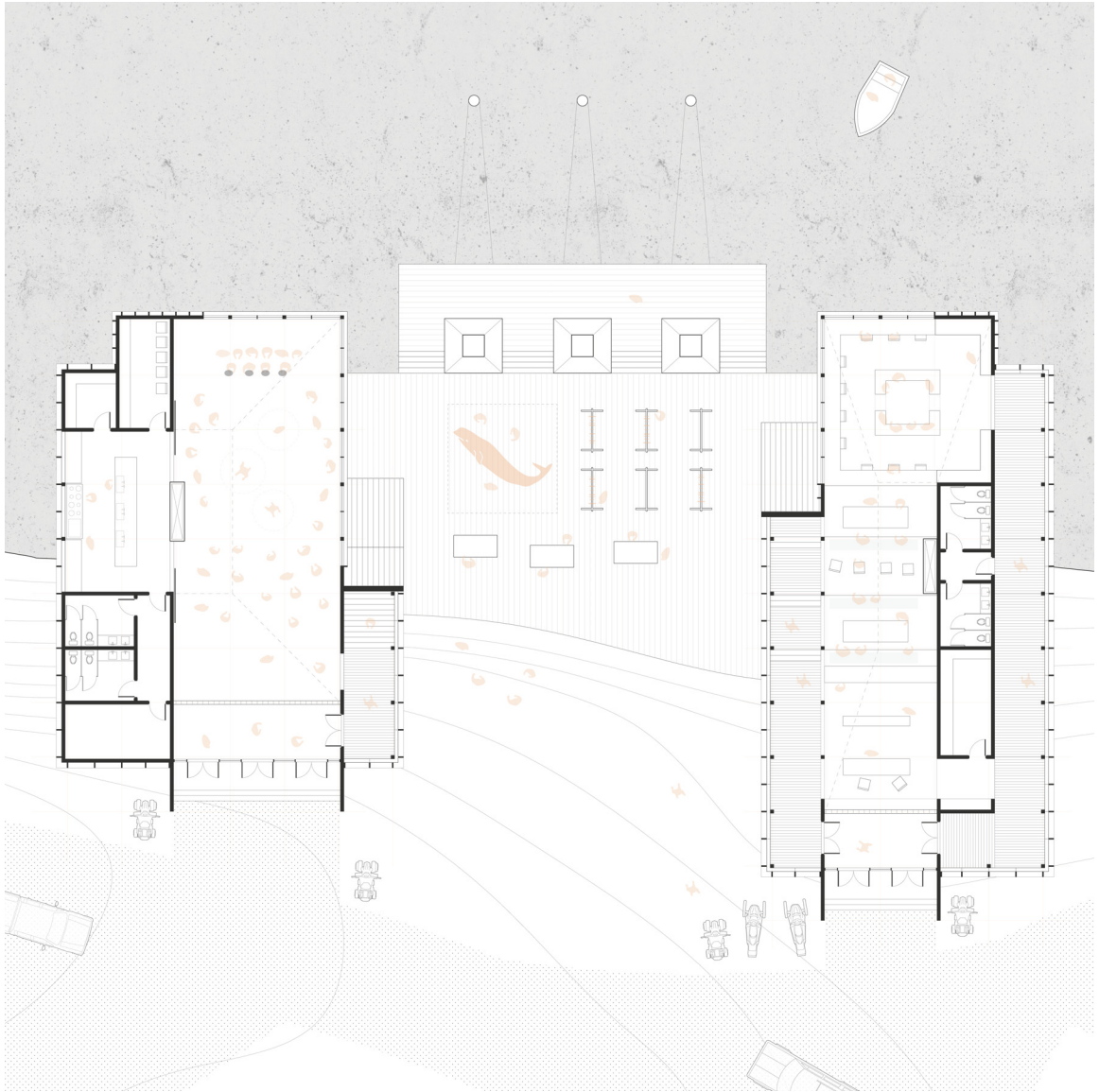
Site plan





Level 1 Floor Plan





Level 2 Floor Plan

have been located on the second level and extend out towards the water with views to the processing courtyard and the landscape. A service and circulation bar wraps the primary cultural spaces allowing the occupants to navigate the sites natural topography and move between the different programed spaces.

## Design Principles

I have established an architectural language for the project through the reading of Inuvialuit artifacts such as the traditional sod dwelling and distilling relevant principles from which to reinterpret using contemporary architectural technologies. Below is an analysis of 4 design principles and their relevance within contemporary Inuvialuit culture.

### Entry & Access

The entry vestibule of traditional Inuvialuit sod dwelling was a compressed 'tunnel' called a "kataq" that was used to trap cold air from entering the occupied space.<sup>44</sup> People would crawl along a driftwood lined floor, before entering up through a small hatch into the dwelling.<sup>45</sup> This entry vestibule would also act as a place of storage and would allow the residents to catalogue or inventory their food stores each time they entered or left the dwelling.<sup>46</sup>

### Light & Heat

Traditional sod dwellings consisted of few apertures. In most cases a single animal skin skylight in the centre of the cruciform shaped plan brings light into the space while simultaneously acting as a point of exhaust for smoke produced by an internal fire.<sup>47</sup> Oil lanterns and driftwood fires were used as the primary light and heat source within these dwellings.<sup>48</sup> Due to the

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44 Alunik, *Across Time and Tundra*, 19.

45 Ibid., 19.

46 Ibid., 19.

47 Ibid., 19.

48 Ibid., 20.

long winters and large amount of snow in the region, the small amount of light and smoke that was exhausted from the building helped to make them act as way-finding devices. The glow from the light, and the small stream of smoke through the central skylight vent was representative of life and activity within the dark landscape.

### **Landscape**

Traditional sod dwellings were built into the landscape as a way of retaining heat.<sup>49</sup> Due to the sod exterior of the dwelling, and the snow blanket that they received during the winter months, these dwellings were very much a part of the landscape and from the exterior appeared to be no more than small mounds of snow.<sup>50</sup>

### **Construction**

The traditional sod dwelling consisted of a four post driftwood structure with a vertical driftwood walls and a sod layer on the exterior as a form of insulation.<sup>51</sup> During the winter months the dwellings would become covered by a layer of snow which would further act as an insulative layer, helping to maintain and regulate the internal temperature of the dwelling.

### **Contemporary Adaptation**

The next step was to take these traditional design principles and reimagine them within contemporary Inuvialuit society.

### **Access**

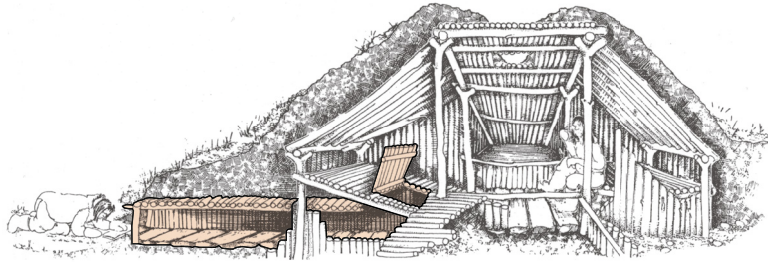
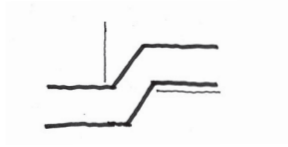
In a similar way to how the traditional dwellings used small compressed tunnels to mediate the temperature difference between the interior and exterior, the two cultural buildings utilize compressed entry vestibules that step up into the space off of the street level. The vestibules provide

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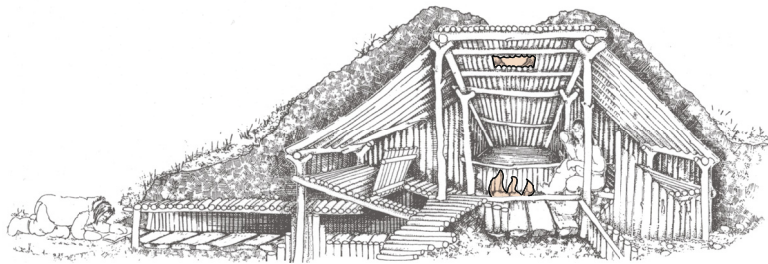
49 Ibid., 19.

50 Ibid., 19.

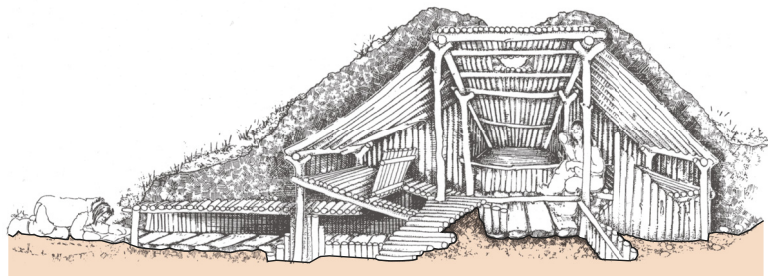
51 Ibid., 19.



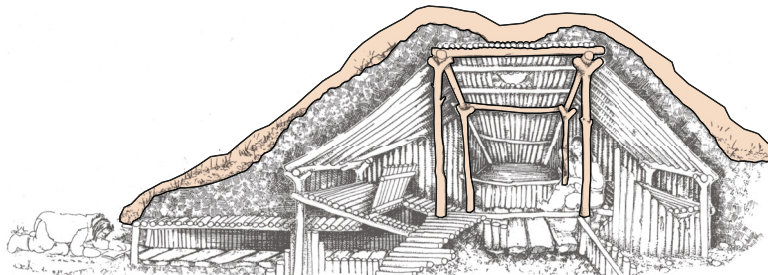
ENTRY & ACCESS



LIGHT & HEAT



LANDSCAPE



CONSTRUCTION

The projects primary design principles that have been established by analyzing traditional Inuvialuit artifacts. Base image interpreted from *Mackenzie Inuit house* by Terrence Pamplin, as found in "Documenting Mackenzie Inuit Architecture Using 3D Laser Scanning" in *Alaska Journal of Anthropology*.

a temperature buffer prior to entering the conditioned interior space. The vestibules are located parallel to the primary wind direction, helping to reduce the amount of snow accumulation at the entry doors.

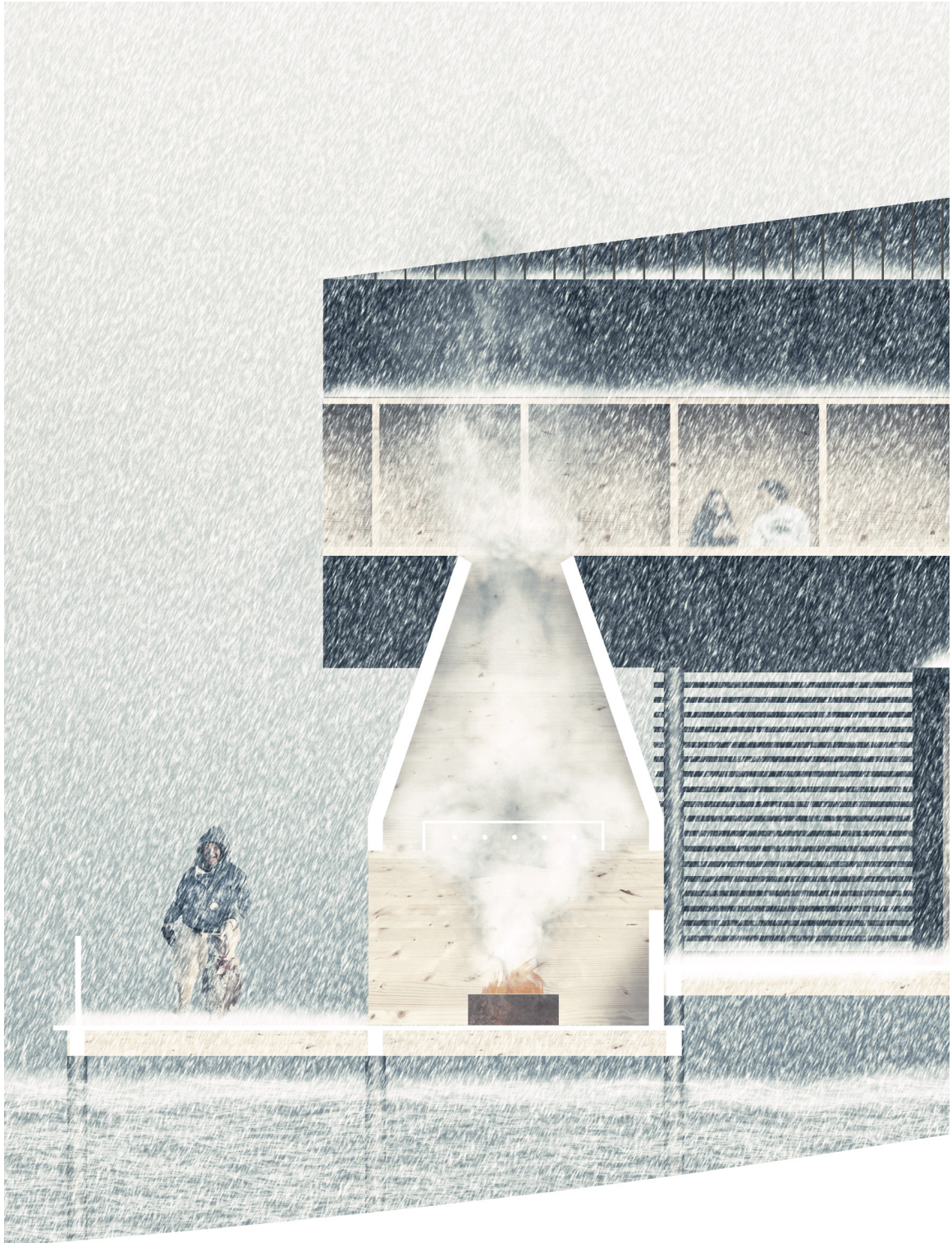
### **Light & Heat**

Much like the traditional dwellings, this building is meant to act as a way-finding device through the use of light and smoke. The circulation spaces on the perimeter of the building are clad in a translucent insulated channel-glass system that will allow the building to glow during the dark winter months. Additionally, the two cultural building roof forms lead up to a central hearth that will emit smoke, further signifying life and activity. The location of the hearth in relation to the large central skylight allows for the occupant to look up and experience the smoke exhaustion in a similar way to how it would have been experienced within the traditional sod dwellings. The elements of the project that emit smoke are the two central hearths within the cultural buildings, and the three smoke huts at the extent of the processing courtyard. All three elements are tied together through their upward expression and the weathered steel cladding material. It was important that the form of the smoke houses, much like the larger cultural buildings, express the exhaustion of smoke. This was done by creating an elongated hip roof that leads to a central skylight. In order to make the space functional as a smoke house, the internal framing creates a smoke trap that will allow for the smoking of the animal meat before overflowing and exhausting upwards through the skylight.

### **Landscape**

The project responds to the landscape in two different ways. The community food storage component of the program has been set into the landscape, taking advantage of the cold permafrost temperatures, where the craft and media library building avoids issues of permafrost degradation by being elevated up on piles, but mimicking the gentle slope of the landscape. By elevating the building on piles it eliminates the thaw





Section through the smoke hut showing the smoking being collected in the smoke trap before being released through the expressive roof opening.



bulb effect which is caused when the heat from a building radiates through the slab or floor system into the active layer of permafrost causing it to melt and create differential settlement of the building.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, by elevating the building it allows for wind driven snow to move underneath the building and prevent snow accumulation at the base of the building. Where the building has been set into the landscape the project welcomes the accumulation of snow as the program in these spaces are 'cold' programs with untempered space. Therefore, issues surrounding permafrost degradation and snow accumulation are negligible.

### **Construction**

Much like the traditional sod dwelling, the proposal is constructed from wood with a heavy timber primary structure and a stick framed exterior enclosure. When determining the construction methodology for the building it was important that the community be able to participate in the construction process. By using stick frame construction local labour can be trained and can become active members in the construction process. The wall framing can be prefabricated within the community in the large school gymnasium before being transferred to the site.

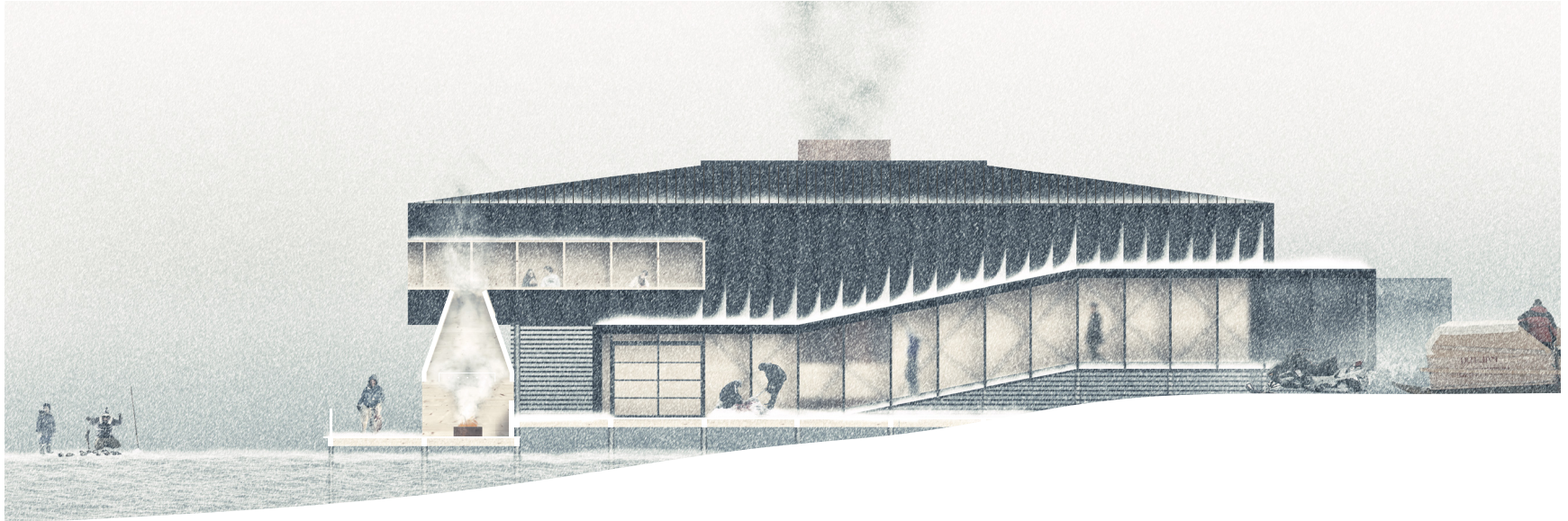
The two buildings are clad in plywood panels with vertical wood fins concealing the seams. Both the panels and fins have a layer of surface applied Stockholm tar as a form of weather protection. The tar gives the exterior a dark grey colour that will allow the buildings to contrast the white snow in the winter months while simultaneously allowing them to absorb solar radiation during the summer months. By panelizing the cladding system with a surface applied preservative layer it allows for easier maintenance and replacement if the panels were to fail. In a similar way to how snow was used as an insulative layer on the traditional dwellings, this project uses the wood fins to actively capture wind driven snow during the winter months to further assist in insulating the building.

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<sup>52</sup> White and Sheppard, *Many Norths : Spatial Practice in a Polar Territory*, 186.



Long section through the craft workshops, media library and commercial components of the program. July.



Long section through the food processing courtyard. March.





Long section through the food storage and performance spaces. December.



View of the processing courtyard from the road. July.





View of the project from the ocean during the ocean freeze. March.



View of the project from the road during winter. December.

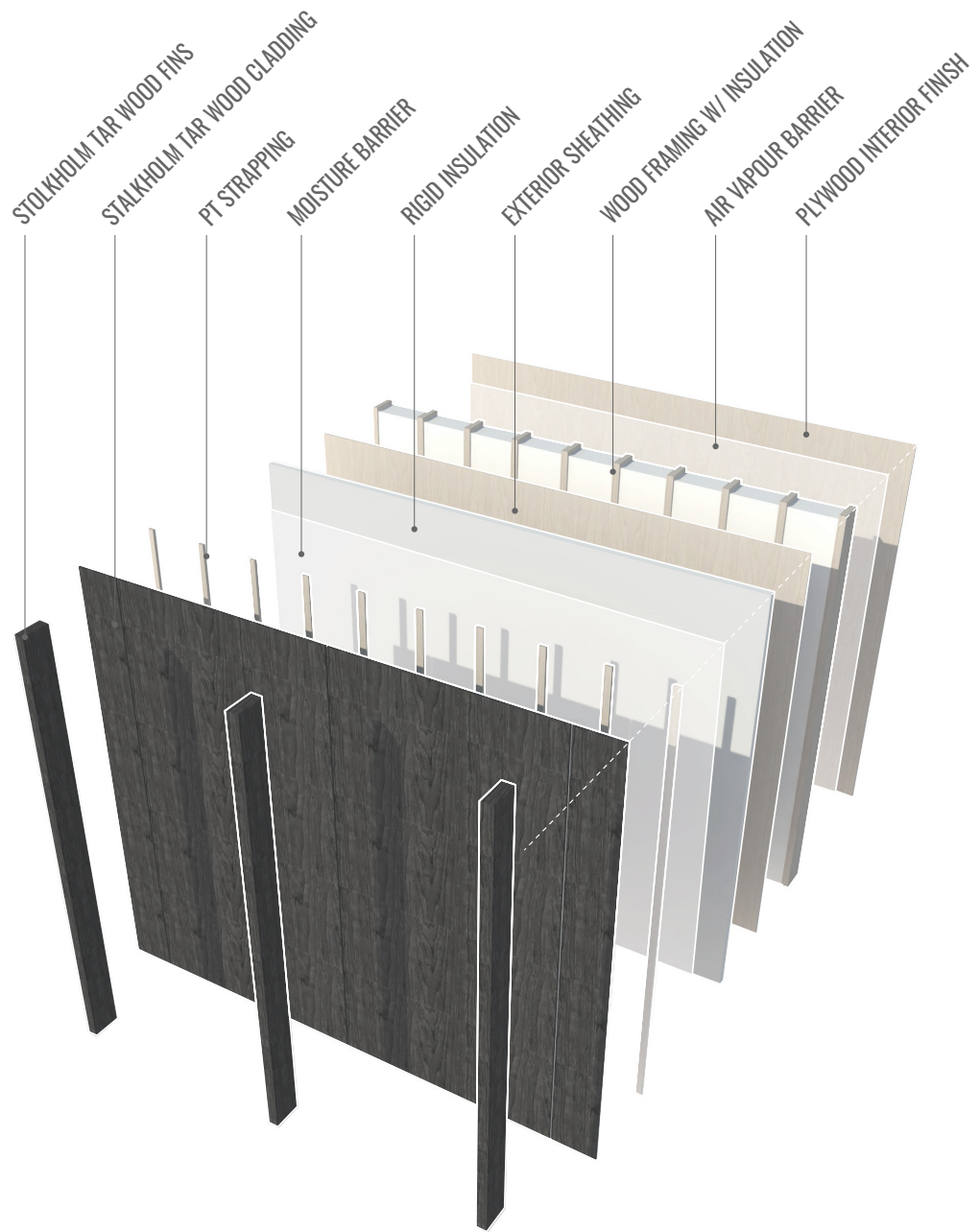


Diagram of the projects opaque wall assembly system.





Diagram of the projects translucent wall assembly system.

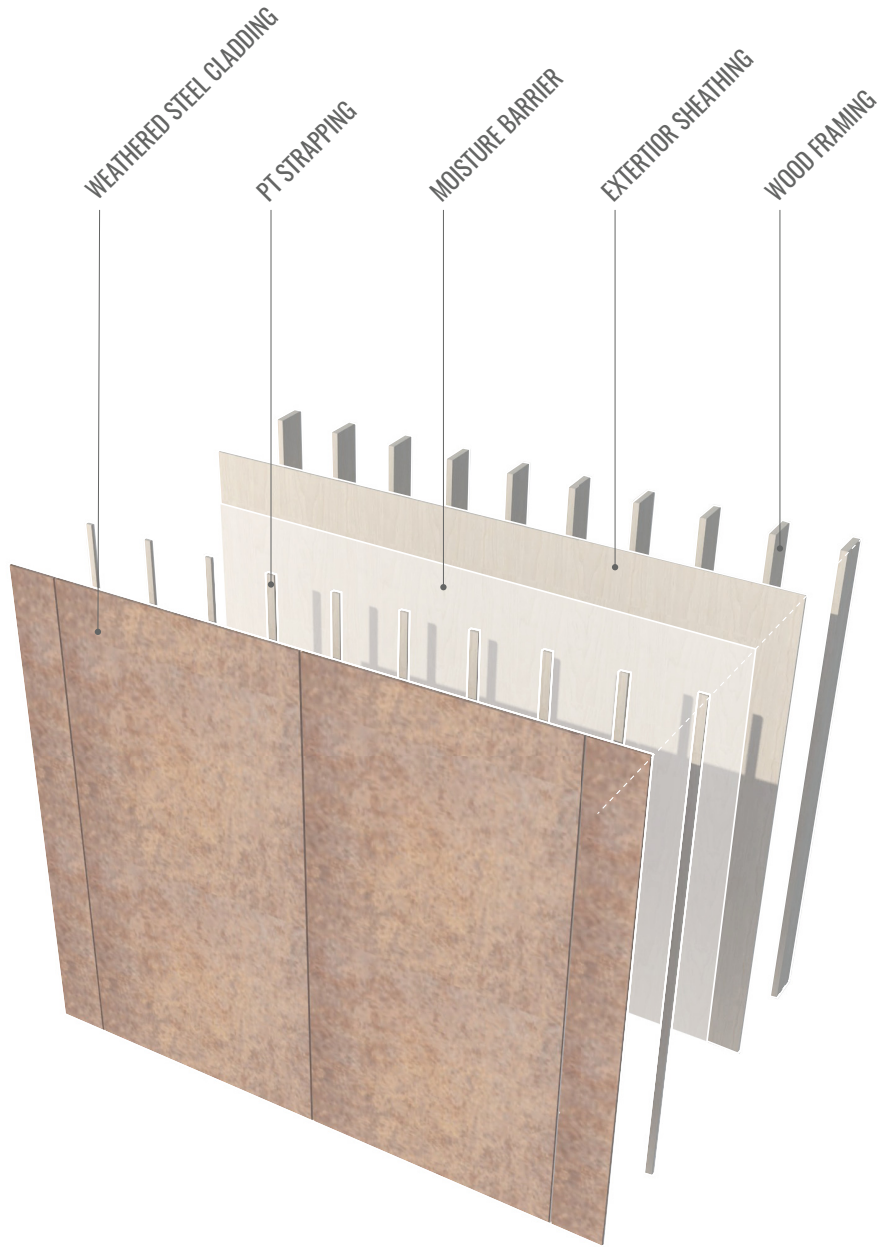
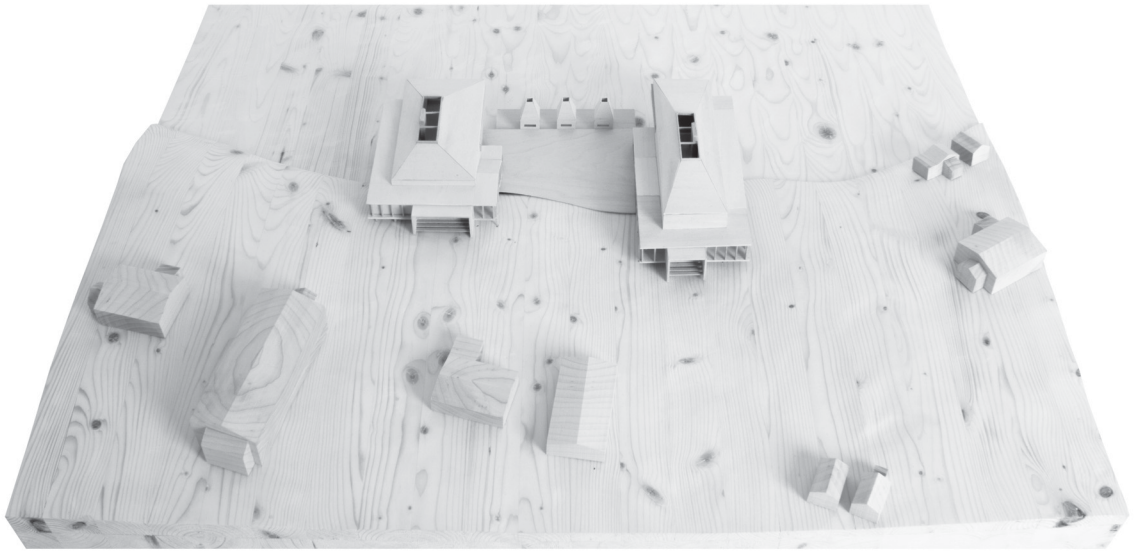


Diagram of the projects untempered wall assembly system.

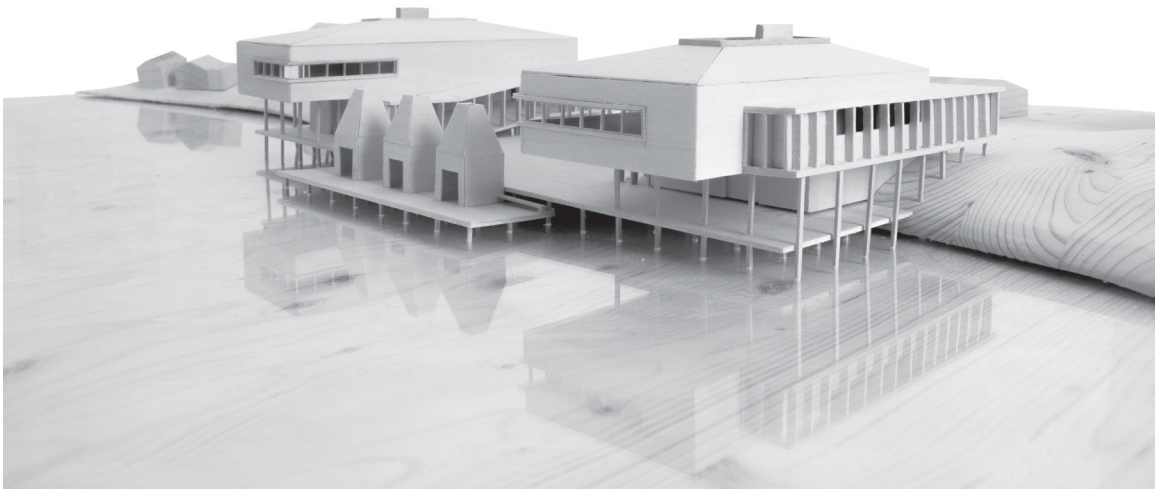




Building Model



Building Model



Building Model



Framing model of the smoke huts

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis began by attempting to understand the effects that global connectivity has had on the culture, traditions and the built environment of remote northern Canadian communities. The intent of this thesis was to reimagine the northern development process as a way of counteracting traditionally colonial processes by supporting both traditional and contemporary Inuvialuit culture.

The established design process demonstrates that productive cultural space can combat the consumptive tendencies of cultural tourism by placing the immediate needs of the community at the forefront of spatial decision making.

By analyzing, interpreting and speculating the past, present and future of the community, an architectural program can be developed that focuses on reinforcing diminishing traditional activities, while simultaneously supporting contemporary social and economic growth.

By identifying the ecological and socio-cultural layers of the community a siting strategy has emerged that extends beyond the traditional 'scientific' response to northern climates, and adopts traditional and contemporary social organizations as a way of siting and space planning.

The architecture acknowledges traditional artifacts for both their functional and poetic spatial qualities, but does not limit the construction methodologies to being traditionally static. In contrast, the architecture actively seeks to reimagine these traditional design principles through a contemporary architectural lens helping to eliminate perceptions of the communities 'primitive' nature.

While the ideas put forth by this thesis might be used across the Canadian north, the cultural history, site specificity, and experiential interpretation are all essential in developing the project framework.



It must be stated that many of the decisions for this theoretical project have been established based on personal experience and time spent in the community. After spending a week visiting the community as a part of a research scholarship, I was able to observe, interpret and experience many aspects of Inuvialuit culture that helped to inform many of the projects design decisions. However, the development of an architectural proposal in this cultural climate would require further community engagement in developing all areas of the project.

The architecture developed in this thesis is not to be considered a new form of northern vernacular, as 'the north' is a broad categorization of many unique and distinct cultural contexts. However the design process that has been established may be applied and adapted to any remote northern community. The transferable processes include gaining a deep understanding of the cultural history in order to develop a program that supports long-standing cultural traditions but meets the needs of the contemporary society, the reading of both the ecological and socio-cultural layers of the community to develop a culturally sensitive siting strategy for the project, and finally to analyze relevant traditional artifacts from which to reimagine in a contemporary context.

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