



TOWARDS A NEW 'NORMAL'

Re-approaching Indigenous Housing in Canada

Architects Without Borders: Indigenous Housing Ideas Competition 2017

Evan Taylor, November 2017

This proposal aims to make visible the vast and complex web of realities that encompass remote indigenous housing. Here, a series of looped, themed graphical connections set a stage for unpacking and unraveling potential directions towards future buildings in these communities.

This is an inventory of ideas, mapping and unraveling larger processes that are implicated in all facets of a complex humanitarian issue. Themes, labeled here as 'portals', are overlapped and flow into and through other themes.

Can we overlap the objective technical realities of building in remote communities with the generations of stories, knowledge and cultural lifestyles in the landscape that many of these communities were founded on? Can we set up a project framework that encompasses all of those who are directly and indirectly involved in the process of construction in remote and off-grid locations to work towards a mutually constructive and positive future?

This project cannot be illustrated without acknowledging the inherent biases that might be held by someone outside of a remote community. Positions of bias establish perceptions that may not directly align with the values and realities of the communities involved and eventually effected. One two-page ideas proposal cannot satiate all of the issues related to living in remote areas, but we can move forward towards a beneficial future through successive iterations and considerations.

PROJECT PORTALS

The overall **vision** of this proposal is to make aware the necessity of collaboration within a specific remote community that work toward critical and robust explorations of design and building practices. Ideas that pose a blanket solutions for building practices over all remote communities will eventually fail just as the institutional "solutions" that preceded them. These ideas should be specifically curated within the individual remote community and it's specific **place** in their respective cultures, embedded knowledge, spirituality, histories, landscapes, environments and climatic scenarios. The land which has sustained the community for millennia, should continue to reflect a sense of "home", through material resources, and ongoing cultural histories. For First Nations place and culture are inextricable, therefore appropriate building designs will emerge organically within their own regional and communal specificities.

Concepts of **sustainability** take on new meanings beyond economics, energy consumption and material efficiency and longevity. Remote architecture should nurture and sustain traditional activities, cultural practices in the passing on of knowledge, stories, and evolving histories. Collectively engaging activities and educational sessions (ie. workshops, out of community schooling, demonstrations, presentations, discussions, studies, reports) become shared experiences of understanding between all those involved and a mutual position of perception. Value is gained through a wisdom of many voices.

Remote **communities** tend to have a strong relationship with the environments around them. Deep understandings of local ecologies link specific uses and traditions to the materials. Climate equally forms negotiations between the community and the landscape and how structures are built and maintained. These relationships could be further explored to maximize new potentials of these local materials forming new building assemblies, construction practices, and subsequent maintenance application as opposed to relying on the standard and typical construction methods.

Establishing regional material sourcing and processing, localized design importances, as well as long term construction and maintenance practices will allow the community to adapt, maintain, and instill **growth** as it sees fit. Opportunities for increased autonomy can augment resources and time needed for government funding to initiate and justify projects. Subversion of the standard client-consultant relationships, protocols of project development and **funding** through INAC, CMHC, and various levels of government put more onus on the community to decide what is necessary and appropriate for their community. Outside expertise and involvement of professional architects, engineers, contractors, social and health scientists, etc. become avenues of mediation.

INVENTORY OF CASE STUDIES

Localized projects can result in a wide array of experiments specific to their respective environment can create new opportunities for building experimentation. If seen as case studies, these small solutions can be inventoried to a larger cross-country list of ideas, tests, successes and lessons learned which were formed to the distinct parameters of a community. By creating a running inventory of documented ideas and projects (good and bad) from each remote communities can be reused and adapted to suit the needs and desires in other communities.

BUILDING AS EDUCATIONAL TOOL

The integration of educational programs and workshops that teach various skilled trades can yield a collection of people who can adapt traditional knowledge of making with contemporary building practices. A unique blend of local material supplies and the desire for contemporary utilities and facilities can create a new local vernacular that is specific to the community it is built in. These new built works can then integrate all of the ingredients necessary responds to the needs of the present while being rooted in the realities and desires of the present.