Upcycling Up North: A working method built on contemporary hacking practices in northern Canada

Written paper / verbal presentation

Susane Havelka, Architect
David Harlander, Intern Architect AIBC

McGill University

Today, conventional methods of building in Canada’s northernmost settlements rely on southern influences and produce unnecessary waste. Twice a year, building materials make their way via sealift from southern Canada to some of the country’s most remote villages. Since the energy and logistical requirements make shipping waste materials back to the south for recycling an absurd affair, communities are forced to manage ever growing landfills. In recent years northern communities have begun to present alternatives to this status quo. Rooted in an Inuit way of building, northern villages have begun to demonstrate inspiring communal working methods of repurposing waste materials for community landfills. It is within this context that the First Nunavik Hackathon was launched in September of 2017. The event, organized by McGill university and the Northern Village of Kuujjuaq worked to build on the unique DIY hacking practices widely used in northern villages and apply them to community design. This paper will outline the
details of the event, which saw a team of design students from southern Canada, collaborate with a group of youth from the northern Village of Kuujjuaq. Over 5 days the team created an outdoor community pavilion/shelter made entirely of repurposed materials. As a shared activity, the Hackathon presents a unique precedent which successfully brought a range of agencies and individuals together. This event challenges governments, schools, and architectural practices to adopt a more collaborative approach to policymaking and design leadership in northern Canada and can be understood as an instrumental process of valorising the rich design/build culture that already exists in the north. It provides a compelling alternative to the consumptive methods of building which continue to predominate northern Canada.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

David Harlander holds a Master of Architecture from the University of British Columbia and a post-professional Masters in Urban Design and Housing from McGill. In 2013 he was involved with the creation of a series of DIY renovation strategies for government sponsored housing in the Northwest Territories. Recently his research has focused on adaptable approaches to housing in the context of the Canadian north. He has worked in architectural offices in Beijing and Vancouver.

Susane Havelka is a doctoral candidate at McGill University in Architecture. Susane investigates self-built houses and building systems in the Eastern Arctic. She is inspired by the creative ingenuity and DIY abilities that exists within Arctic settlements. Susane earned a Master of Architecture degree at Columbia University and Bachelor of Science in Art and Design at MIT. She has created a web page called Canada’s Arctic Cabin Culture and is currently working on an Inuit designed prototype for the Arctic.