

INDIGENEITY AND URBAN DESIGN: *Examining Generative Urban Design Approaches within the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Context*

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GLOSSARY

Urban Design: The process of shaping places for people.

Generative Urban Design: A group of people designing a place without knowing exactly how it will turn out in the end (a.k.a. *incrementalism*).

Compositional Urban Design: A group or an individual designing a place, where the end result is mapped out in advance (a.k.a. *master planning*).

Place-Based Norm (PBN): Common ("normal") feature of the built form of a particular place.

Built form: Buildings, roads, docks, and everything else human-made in a place.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Indigenous communities, including the Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw Nations, have always planned our villages to reflect our culture and our natural environment in a way that kept us and the environment healthy. We all suffered many negative things after European contact, and planning was one of many tools used to oppress and hurt us.

Modern Indian Reserves do not reflect our cultural values or planning practices, but if they did, it would probably contribute to our healing. That's why I decided to research this topic, with a focus on my own community, to try and revitalize Indigenous urban design practices.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Is it possible to encode GNN place-based norms into a generative urban design tool?

SUB-QUESTIONS:

1. *What are the traditional place-based norms of the GNN?*
2. *How can a generative processes tool encode GNN place-based norms in a useable way?*
3. *How can urban design be done in a way that is culturally valid, Indigenizing, and decolonizing?*



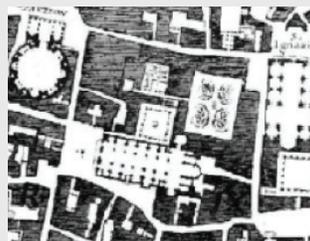
RESEARCH SITE

I studied maps, film, and photographs from four village sites: Wyclees and Takush/Kigeh in Gwa'sala territory; Tigwexsti and Ba'as in 'Nakwaxda'xw territory.

This map shows the location of these village sites in relation to the Tsulquate Reserve, on Vancouver Island, where the GNN were relocated to in 1964.

ABSTRACT (SUMMARY)

For the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations (GNN) and many other Indigenous peoples, community planning has been used as a tool of colonization, contributing to geographical dispossession and cultural genocide. This thesis represents a re-indigenization and decolonization of community planning by reclaiming urban design as a traditional GNN practice. By combining analysis of archival and contemporary sources, the results propose how planners and communities may re-indigenize the practice of urban design while suggesting the value of a generative approach to guide future urban design and development for the GNN and other Indigenous communities.



Generative Planning

This is an image from Rome, showing an organic built form that was created over a long period of time by many people.



Compositional Planning

This is an image of a suburb, that was planned at once and built according to plan, in a less organic way & with a mechanistic result.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

I had to do a lot of research about the history of urban design and Indigenous peoples for this thesis. Many people have written about what communities look and feel like, or what they "should" look and feel like. Most of the people who wrote about this were White men, who mostly saw the world like a machine instead of something that is alive. They invented some planning tools that many planners use (e.g. zoning), but lots of these planning tools have been harmful for Indigenous peoples and others because they treat communities like machines.

There are different planning tools that may be better for our communities because they treat communities like they are alive, but most planners don't know about these tools and don't know how to treat a community as if it were alive. Thought leaders in this area (generative planning) include Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, Fumihiko Maki, and Michael Mehaffy.

While there's a lot of research about Kwakwaka'wakw peoples and GNN (especially in anthropology, art history, ethnology, and cultural geography) and about urban design, hardly anyone has written about Indigenous urban design, so my research didn't have many precedents to follow.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I used an over-arching holistic methodology (“everything is interconnected”) and a decolonizing approach. My project is an embedded case study because I was looking at individual villages (cases) within a larger case, the GNN community.

I had planned to do a lot more spatial analysis, but abandoned that approach because I realised it was too focused on form to the exclusion of cultural values and other invisible factors. I did archival analysis of text and visual records, and two interviews, with Chief Thomas Henderson Sr. and Chief Paddy Walkus.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION (CONCLUSION)

While my research took me in a different direction than I thought it would, in the end I learned a lot about how to do planning in a culturally appropriate way. I learned that you can’t just look at the built form, you have to dig deeper, to the cultural values of the community, and think about how a community works, not just what it looks like. Also, I came to understand why we can’t just recreate traditional villages in today’s world – our technology is different, our location is different, and even if our cultural values were still the same, the villages will look different.

I came up with a model, shown in the lower right corner, called the **Whirlpool Model of Community Analysis** to help describe how I was beginning to see communities. Imagine looking at a whirlpool. You don’t always notice the rocks, the riverbank, the logs and all of the things that make the whirlpool, if you just focus on the surface of the whirlpool itself.

Think of the community as the whirlpool - it’s something that you can see, and there are things like technology, the landscape, and cultural beliefs which are like those rocks and logs upstream or under the surface, each playing a part in creating the whirlpool even though you don’t see them right away.

Looking at a community like this might help researchers and urban designers in the future to look at other Indigenous communities as living things, not as machines. It might also help us to consider the role that these invisible factors play in how we build communities.

While I had hoped to create a tool, like a set of rules for building a truly GNN community, in the end I came to the conclusion that it’s more important to help keep the culture alive than to create a document that might just sit on a shelf. If our culture, language, and traditional practices are strengthened in our community, then we can work together to plan and build the community that reflects our living culture.

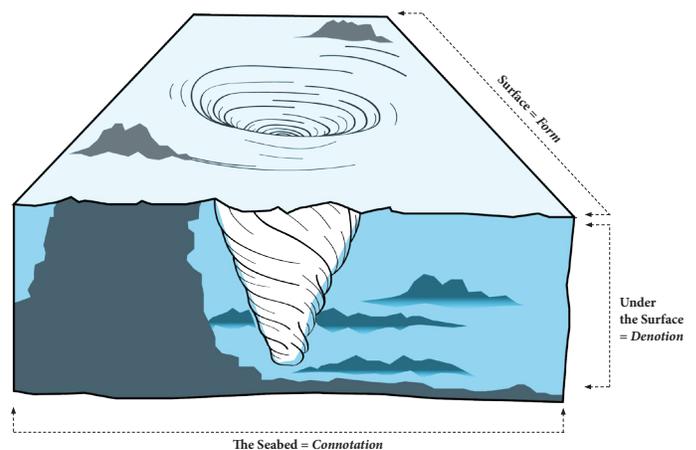
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & FINDINGS

I started out my research looking at the visible, built “form” of GNN villages, especially Wyclees, Takush/Kigeh, Tigwexsti and Ba’as. I thought that looking at pictures and reading about these villages would teach me about how our people built communities. Ten distinctive things showed up:

- 1) located on the waterfront;
- 2) boardwalk;
- 3) paths in the back of the houses;
- 4) houses on peninsulas/small islets;
- 5) small islands were used for gravesites;
- 6) Big houses built in a particular way
- 7) adaptable buildings;
- 8) painted/carved designs and crests ;
- 9) new building practices & technology;
- 10) use of wood

Because each of these things is “normal” in our traditional villages, they can be called **place-based norms or PBNs**. After describing these things, it still felt like something was missing. I realized that talking about what the villages look like was the same as looking at the community like a machine, and I wanted to talk about the community as if it was alive. I realized I needed to write about cultural values and how cultural values and beliefs like **awina’kola** (the idea that everything is interconnected), **cyclical time** (the idea that time doesn’t move in a straight line, but goes back and forth in a cycle), **noxsola** (knowing your history), and **maya’xala** (respect) played a big role in the way our communities were built.

As I started to write about these values, I realized they were too big to write about in one thesis, and too complicated for the English language, so I could only write a little bit about each one. I finished this part of my thesis by writing about how planners might try and help plan communities that reflect these types of cultural values out of respect for Indigenous peoples and recognition of the wisdom these values hold about how to live well as part of the system of living things.



WHIRLPOOL MODEL OF COMMUNITY ANALYSIS