Shielin-bough: Building Collaboration Across the North

Ella Haavisto[1] and Gina Wall[2]

[1]University of Lapland, Finland, [2]The Glasgow School of Art, Scotland

The interdisciplinary and ecocultural approach to revitalisation and regeneration aims to cultivate education for cultural sustainability amidst the pervasive challenges posed by globalisation, urbanisation, and climate change (see e.g. Auclair & Fairclough, 2015; Dessein et al., 2015). The project which we draw upon to formulate the case study for this chapter is *shielin-bough*, a multi-stage collaboration between The Glasgow School of Art and the University of Lapland. This collaboration coalesced around the concepts of shelter, food and storytelling. The title plays linguistically with the name of a Scottish vernacular building used for seasonal inhabitation, a *shieling*, and bough, or branch, denoting our interest in the cultures of wood and wooden shelters. Therefore, *shielin-bough* comes to represent both

Figure 1. *Shielin-laavu.* Photograph: Gina Wall, 2024.

a place of shelter and an idea, it is a term which arches over the project making space to collaborate and learn together (Figure 1). This space was enlivened through inter-cultural exchange; storying ourselves, our places, and our experiences through building, making and being together.

Sustainability and heritage have been core principles for the project, both of which are understood as commitments to ways of being and doing that are attentive to time and landscape. Material sustainability was reflected in the choice of local, untreated timber and low impact approaches to building, and cultural sustainability was honoured through the exploration of deep connections between landscape and vernacular cultures of building in Scotland and Finland. We think of heritage as both action (Härkönen, 2020) and inheritance (Derrida, 2013, p.41), acknowledging the potential impacts of our choices as they arc through many possible futures, and valuing historical cultural knowledge as an ingenuity of place which can inform those futures. Cultural sustainability has been defined, in terms of cultural heritage, as the vitality of local communities and societies, and also as the cultural change required to achieve sustainability (Dessein et al., 2015). Recent regenerative futures scholarship presents the case to move beyond sustainability, towards models of practice which promote net positive outcomes and support the conditions for growth and renewal (Camrass, 2020). Regenerative practice has impacted a range of disciplines with an emergent interest around regenerative pedagogy (Damus, 2024; King, 2021; Milstein, 2020) in a range of educational settings. Working with people in place through Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) supports the revitalisation of northern communities through the participation of knowledge holders which surfaces knowledge that already exists in place (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2021). We explore this way of working by practising across geographical, cultural and disciplinary boundaries in order to understand some of the challenges faced by Arctic regions and northern inhabitants. Our case study, set in the context of higher education, exemplifies this approach.

Shielin-bough incorporated creative, hands-on learning experiences through participatory pedagogical methods while innovating traditional shelters, namely the Finnish *laavu* and the Scottish *shieling*. The project began with conceptual exploration and co-design in Autumn 2022 and culminated in practical outcomes during a field school at The Glasgow School of Art's Highlands & Islands campus in Autumn 2023. Various approaches to working beyond established borders ranged from hybrid workshops in new learning environments to interdisciplinary, inter-cultural, and intergenerational collaboration. The methodology of the project employed innovative processes, practices,

and actions which took account of the inter-connectedness of ecological and cultural realms, blending tradition with innovation, and engaging with the materiality of northern landscapes. It was crucial for the project to take a longitudinal approach which gave the time and space to develop relationships through online meetings, virtual seminars, co-design workshops and a field school.

The Scottish Government (2019) has acknowledged the importance of fostering Scotland-Arctic relations, and through the Arctic Connections Fund, has aimed to support opportunities for exciting regional collaboration. The *shielin-bough* project aligns with the University of the Arctic's (UArctic, n.d.) objectives in higher education, research, and outreach, to enhance human capacity in the North by sharing northern knowledge embedded in the lived experience of working with wood in the Arctic region. This collaborative project forms part of the activities of the UArctic Thematic Network on Arctic Sustainable Art Design (ASAD) which enables us to reflect on its outcomes in terms of the northern knowledge system (Jokela, 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2020a). Situated at the intersection of materials-led pedagogy and ABAR, the *shielin-bough* project exemplifies successful cross-border collaboration in the north and serves as a valuable pedagogical prototype for similar initiatives. This chapter will commence with an outline of the cultural context in which we share background information on the *laavu* and the *shieling*. Following on from this we give an overview of the critical framework within which the project has operated. The project acknowledges the significance of deep regional epistemologies, and the importance of northern knowledges will unfold as we share the critical framework. This will lead in to a discussion of the methodology for our work and lastly, we will present the findings of our project.

Cultural Context

The intertwining of landscape and cultural tradition was an important starting point for our work and we took direct inspiration from vernacular eco-shelters, the Finnish *laavu* and the Scottish *shieling*. The challenge lay in designing a structure which took account of these shelters and adapted this for contemporary purposes. This undertaking required meticulous attention to the surrounding landscape, a sensitivity to local materials and the application of innovative design principles, along with interpreting history through diverse sources of historical knowledge, communal perceptions and personal testimony.

The project commenced with online collaborations and fieldwork, which engaged with both historical and contemporary concepts of the *laavu* and *shieling*. This process involved extensive desk and archive research, online meetings, field research, community engagement and workshops, which enabled participants to connect with and interpret cultural traditions drawn from historical research and first hand experiences. Through working with the natural and cultural landscapes of the Scottish Highlands and Finnish Lapland, the project empowered students to collaboratively reimagine and redesign a shelter inspired by these traditional buildings.

Laavu

The *laavu* is a Finnish eco-shelter which symbolises the deep connection between Finns and their forests. Originally constructed by hunters and fishers for overnight stays, *laavus* were built using locally sourced materials like pine branches and spruce boughs (Järvinen, 1956). Figure 2 shows a temporary *laavu* built by log drivers from birch and spruce, heated by a traditional fire made from two logs called a *rakovalkea* (Figure 2). *Laavus* share characteristics and functions with the temporary dwellings of Indigenous Sámi cultures, known as *lávvu* in Northern Sámi. However, these vernacular *lávvu* structures were traditionally formed of long poles stacked to an apex and covered with reindeer hides and their temporary nature was designed for a nomadic lifestyle across vast, often treeless plains.

As part of the *shielin-bough* project, Finnish students visited a community *laavu* at a historical logging site in Meltosjärvi, a small village in Northern Finland, maintained by an active village association (Figure 3). Today, this logging site and its *laavu* are central gathering spots that invite everyone to participate in local events and explore logging and forestry, giving a very practical demonstration of the revitalisation through sharing and using northern knowledge. Although the design and function of *laavus* have evolved, over time they have remained an integral part of the Finnish landscape and outdoor culture. Today, they have transformed into permanent communal gathering spaces, commonly found along hiking trails, at sites of natural interest, and even within urban settings, reflecting their integration into modern recreational activities. The *laavu* is a powerful symbol of revitalisation and regeneration, emphasising the close relationship between nature and the people of Finland, which we consider in this chapter to be exemplary of an ecocultural approach

Figure 2. (Above) Log driver's *laavu* by a *rakovalkea*. Photograph: Sakari Pälsi, 1923. Courtesy of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

Figure 3. (Below) Community *laavu* at a historical logging site at Meltosjärvi Village. Photograph: Ella Haavisto, 2022.

Shieling

Shielings are small, temporary farm dwellings found mainly in the Scottish Highlands, but also in less density in the Lowlands and Borders, which were fundamental to the region's pastoral lifestyle. They were modestly constructed from locally found materials like stone, wood and turf, often rebuilt seasonally (Figure 4). Strategically positioned on hillsides and near water sources, *shielings* supported a system of transhumance, the seasonal movement of families and livestock between winter homes and summer pastures. This system fostered a blend of agricultural activity, community and cultural life, underpinned by shared land use and clan systems. Although *shieling* usage waned in the Highlands around the early to mid 19th century under pressure from landowners' pursuit of sheep farming and land improvement (Taylor, 2016, p. 61), in the Outer Hebrides, on Lewis in particular, the practice persisted until the 1950s (McRobert, 2020). Ongoing initiatives to support the Gaelic language supported by the National Gaelic Language Plan, currently in its third iteration (2023–28) (Scottish Parliament, 2023) underpinned by the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 (Scottish Parliament, 2005) support an increasing interest in traditional ways of life, including regenerative approaches to farming. Contemporary efforts are being made to revitalise this distinct element of Scottish culture and contemporary educational programmes such as An Àirigh / The Shieling Project (n.d.) highlight the importance of re-engaging young people with traditional and indigenous practices. These efforts aim to revitalise biodiversity and support the acquisition of traditional knowledge, countering the deep impacts of the demise of the of the clan kinship system, which was exacerbated by the global expansion of Empire and accelerated by the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions (Taylor, 2016, p. 3). This was further intensified by the steady increase in concentration of landownership in Scotland amongst the wealthy few through the steady acquisition of common and church land (Wightman, 2015, p. 5) leading to the depopulation of large areas of Scotland (Figure 5). There are significant questions to investigate, specifically for us through an ecocultural lens, which centre around the relations between language, place and belonging in both the *Gàidhealtachd* and Lapland. While there is not sufficient scope to discuss it here, this is an area of concern for the broader *shielinbough* project. We anticipate this to be an area of future inquiry, informed by the intersection of indigenous research methodologies. For example, *Dùthachas*, an ancient Gaelic worldview and way of life, which Meighan (2022) develops into a Scottish Gaelic Methodology, learning from indigenous research practices to support ethical kincentric and relational approach to community-led research.

Figure 4. (Above) Reconstruction of a *shieling*. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2024. Courtesy of the Highland Folk Museum.

Figure 5. (Below) At the *Shieling*, Dava Moor. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2022.

Critical Framework

The *shielin-bough* project is informed by the critical paradigms of post-humanism and new materialism, and acknowledges that the marginalisation of ecocultures and traditional practices has been shaped by political narratives, enacted by colonial histories, and exacerbated by contemporary challenges like climate change and globalisation (Milstein et al., 2011). Our approach foregrounds the entanglement of the cultures and materials of place, and respects their importance for learning. In addition, we believe in the significance of the role that art and design education can play in the revitalisation and regeneration of cultures, places and people. The key terms which we will introduce in this section of the chapter are ecoculture, the northern knowledge system, revitalisation, and finally we will explore the impact of these framings for regenerative pedagogies of place.

Ecoculture has a compound form which emphasises the inter-dependence and interconnectedness of ecology and culture. It is a generative proposition for our work because ecoculture's foregrounding of the entanglement of ecology and culture asks us to think beyond our human-centred positioning. The dualistic structure of thought that has permeated Western industrial society, which defines our relationship with the natural world through a hierarchical dichotomy of nature and culture (Foster & Martusewicz, 2018; Plumwood, 2002), is challenged by ecoculture which acknowledges the interplay of ecological and cultural realms. As Parks writes:

> Ecoculture, as a focal term and conceptual framework, reminds us to decenter [*sic*] our own socially constructed anthropocentric perceptions and seek more place-based, ecologically centred perspectives that can reinstate value and agency to the more-than-human world. (2020, p. 70)

New materialism, aligned with post-humanist principles, emphasises intra-active engagement and coexistence with more-than-human species (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2003). Ecoculture emphasises the significance of physical locations and materiality (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022), and Haraway's assertion that '[n]atures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not pre-exist in their intertwined worldings' (2016, p.13) reminds us that the categories nature and culture are inseparable (Haraway, 2003). Wildcat calls upon us to learn from millennia of Indigenous wisdom and ingenuity, or 'indigenuity' (2023) to learn from the earth.

The intrinsic connectedness between nature and culture embodied in the concept of ecoculture has a significant bearing on epistemology. Following Haraway (2003) and

Barad (2007), we can argue that that knowledge emerges intra-actively in and from place, which means that thoughts and ideas are generated from hyperlocal and regional knowledge systems, which we will go on to discuss in a moment. Ecocultural relations with place are framed through different epistemologies such as traditional ecological knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, tacit knowledge, and local, situated knowledge, including the northern knowledge system, conveyed through visual language and transmitted across generations (Helander-Renvall & Markkula, 2017; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022; Kimmerer, 2002; Kimmerer, 2013; Malone, 2016; Valkonen & Valkonen, 2018). In our study, these frameworks offer insights in to building meaningful connections between people and their environments, including more-than-human world (Cajete, 1994; Demos, 2017; Haraway, 2016).

Sustaining northern cultures and their traditions requires us to value ancient knowledge that has enabled survival in harsh Northern conditions (Lempinen, 2018). Our study applies learning from Huhmarniemi and Jokela's conceptualisation of *northern knowledge* to explore the cultural traditions and tacit understanding within local communities and ecosystems in the north, respecting their specific contexts and ways of relating to the world. As Huhmarniemi and Jokela write:

> We describe the nature of the shared dialogic heritage of the Arctic as the Northern Knowledge system, following ideas of an indigenous knowledge that consists of traditions, a historic understanding of humans' interactive and responsible nature relations and the use of natural materials in livelihoods. (2020b, p. 10)

Through the *shielin-bough* project we stress the diverse ways of knowing prevalent in rural, communities close to nature in the north (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022), emphasising the connections between local traditions and the landscape expressed in vernacular building practice.

Developing dialogues between participants from differently situated ecocultural knowledge systems necessitates a serious commitment to foregrounding intercultural awareness and respect, actively promoting processes of exchange that create spaces of encounter among diverse beings, knowledges, logics, and practices (Walsh, 2005). While Indigenous peoples are among the most vulnerable to societal impacts in the changing Arctic (Stephen, 2018), the region also includes other cultural minorities whose traditions and identities require collaborative integration into local cultures (Chartier, 2018; Härkönen, 2020; Hiltunen et al., 2020). This is evidenced by various Arctic art projects (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2021; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022; Härkönen, 2020).

Cultural revitalisation is essential for revealing previously silenced local environmental knowledge and fostering dialogue about landscape change (Rodríguez, 2017). In line with the growing focus on culture, linguistic and cultural revitalisations have become crucial for decolonisation in the Arctic (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015). In various parts of the world, local revitalisation projects are progressing in areas such as traditional foods, economies, education, language, cultural practices, and rights (Pilgrim & Pretty, 2013). Given the complex nature of Arctic ethnicity, revitalisation should be extended to multi-ethnic and non-Indigenous communities as well (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020b). We adopt their view of revitalisation as a socially constructed process that revives traditional practices within a contemporary socio-cultural context, fostering cultural continuity, reconstructing ancestral skills, and supporting local cultural identities (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2021). In our project, we understand that revitalisation encompasses language, arts, crafts, and other cultural practices, which can play a role in rejuvenating places, villages, and regions. This approach leverages local uniqueness and vitality to promote regional identities. Strong human-nature relationships are typical in northern communities throughout the Arctic region (Valkonen & Valkonen, 2018) and revitalisation draws on the aforementioned ecocultural and situated knowledges of place.

In *shielin-bough*, we have applied the principles of incorporating local knowledge and practices in order to foster a more inclusive, contextually relevant and place specific educational experience. Huhmarniemi and Jokela call on us to reflect on the remit of art education in the Arctic north in particular:

> The idea of situated knowledge as part of ecocultures also challenges art education. What kinds of traditions should we aim to pass on to new generations through art education, and what should artists learn in art universities in the Arctic? (2020a, p. 4)

Aside from Haavisto, Jokela and Wall, the participants that engaged in the project changed with each iteration, which brought many voices and many ideas to the table. This transient learning community, comprising of students, technicians and academic staff, gave space to a contingent pedagogy which operated in a non-hierarchical way, during which all participants brought both individual expertise and the personal space to learn. This way of learning together supported what Puig de la Bellacasa calls 'thinking-with', a relational thinking that 'creates new patterns out of previous multiplicities' (2017, p. 72). This relational modality of learning operated across generations, disciplines and cultures, encouraging playful learning and cross-disciplinary skill sharing.

This gave rise to high levels of collaboration through the project, which was one of its great rewards. With each iteration, *shielin-bough* was brought to life by those who participated in various ways. Although we had an end goal in mind it was not only the final outcome that mattered for the teaching team involved in the project, the learning itself was equally important. This emphasis on the ways of doing rather than outcomes was translated from our overarching philosophy that the project should support engaging, high-quality learning above all. Central to this was bringing materials, stories and people into place to enrich ourselves, enhance our surroundings and leave a joyful legacy.

> A key feature of regenerative fields is the lack of focus on outcomes alone and an equal emphasis is placed on 'ways of working'. Entrenched manners of thinking are challenged to achieve epistemological change. (Camrass, 2020, p. 405)

Through our project the learning and teaching opened up to a regenerative way of working. This was a pedagogy which valued ways of learning together and gave creative ownership to the group, which during the live build was led by students. The shelter, part architecture part public artwork became, as the students from Mackintosh School of Architecture described it, a framework upon which the group could hang their ideas. It is also a platform which supports experimentation and play for future students, a structure with a legacy full of the potential for future learning.

Methodology

In its entirety the project has utilised a qualitative, mixed method approach, employing desk research, field research, multisensory workshops, participatory architectural co-design (facilitated by the In the Making collective) and a live build pedagogical field school. Ella Haavisto engaged as an equal as did other students in the process, emphasising collaboration among participants as a core aspect of ABAR activities (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022). In this chapter we have utilised a variety of materials collected in the series of workshops, including photographs, drawings and observational data. Group discussions which ran concurrently with the project will be reflected upon in Haavisto's Masters thesis in art education.

Materials-led pedagogy and Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) served as our methodological orientations for designing and implementing the project, focusing on practical skills, participatory engagement, material handling and reflection. As a method, ABAR was developed in response to the sociocultural and sustainable development

needs of the north, addressing real world concerns and community change (Jokela, 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018), and our project learns from practice-based research which develops specific insights through the handling of materials (Bolt, 2006; Carter, 2004). *Shielin-bough* mobilises the strengths of each methodology. Materials-led pedagogy, informed by practice based research provides significant insight in terms of learning with and through materials, and ABAR is especially apt for use in participatory, sociocultural contexts.

One of the touchstones for this project was the necessity of learning through making and through material thinking (Carter, 2004). The project explored the cultural significance of vernacular systems of shelter in the north, and our ambition in the latter stages of the project was to facilitate a field school which enabled students to work in an interdisciplinary learning space to build such a structure at scale. In the increasingly risk averse educational environments of the United Kingdom, it is challenging to develop cultures of learning through live build, and the team felt that too much is lost in the absence of this type of learning space, especially in terms of material literacies and skilful handling of tools. In 'Materializing Pedagogies', Barbara Bolt argues that through material thinking the eye and mind become productively entangled. Although writing primarily about the knowledge generated through artistic practice, we feel that this is equally relevant to learning through making. As Bolt writes:

> Material thinking offers us a way of considering the relations that take place within the very process or tissue of making. In this conception the materials are not just passive objects to be used instrumentally by the artist, but rather the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist's creative intelligence. (Bolt, 2006)

Thus it can be said that the intelligence of the materials intra-acts with the intelligence of the learner/maker. Vernacular materials are embedded within a long history of use in specific localities, which we might argue, constitutes some of the intelligence that they carry. Through these materials we both learn and make place (Sivtseva, 2020).

By merging online collaboration with hands-on fieldwork, the initiative facilitated a collaborative design process involving students and tutors from two campuses at The Glasgow School of Art in Scotland and one at the University of Lapland in Finland. The practical field school activities were built upon the co-design groundwork contributed by students in the previous semester, which was critical for laying the project's conceptual foundation. This initial phase culminated in a unique hybrid

co-design event featuring preliminary model sketches. Students utilised a digital platform for collaborative research using a Miro® board, where they could share and save their research findings, sketch ideas, and find others' contributions. This approach to co-design not only bridged geographical distances but also enabled a rich exchange of ideas, where cultural insights could be shared and embodied into the design process.

The live build took place over two iterations and central to this was the acquisition and development of embodied, skill-based learning with materials at scale, and the majority of the work was completed with hand tools. There was a generosity to this learning, with all of the students working for the benefit of the collective, each developing responsibility for significant aspects of the build. Acting with care and concern for fellow students was a value that was quickly established by the student-led team. Team work was essential, a bodily understanding of the relative weight of beams and lengths of wood was developed as they were manoeuvred with care around the site. Understanding how heavy a piece of wood actually is, determined the approach to undertaking tasks safely on site which was navigated thoughtfully and respectfully, with acute awareness of the field school as a place of relational care for all.

The inter-cultural aspect of the project also meant that there were many languages spoken on site at any given time. The shared language for verbal communication on site was English, but at times the significance of body language and by extension, drawing, came to the fore as a common space in which ideas would be shared with exceptional clarity (Figure 7; Figure 8). In her article on learning-by-making, Sivtseva cites the importance of drawing as a tool for mutual understanding and learning, during an analysis of a live build undertaken by a group of her Masters' students in Northern Siberia. Sivtseva articulates this as follows:

> The participants understood the process most easily through live hand-drawings and oral explanations. These two methods seemed not to work separately, only in combination…Thus, it was a process of collaborative thinking through drawing. (2020, p. 106)

We can also learn from the community engagement facilitated by this *Growing Structures Project*, which tested the opportunities of 'civic engagement, through construction: not only literally growing plants and buildings but also growing networks and institutions for civic action through collaborative architectural making.' (Sivtseva, p. 97) The learnings from our project can be applied to other pedagogical settings, such as col-

laborative learning opportunities between the GSA Highlands & Islands and our local community. In order to lever these opportunities to maximum effect, it is perhaps worth reflecting on what literacies may be developed for this approach to be iterated effectively with participants from non-Art School backgrounds. How might visualisation be facilitated in co-design workshops with, for example pre-secondary school children, or intergenerational community groups? What might a materials-led pedagogy look like for these participants?

At the start of academic session 2022/23. The students at Mackintosh School of Architecture intensively workshopped the design in response to detailed feedback from the structural engineer. This element of live professional learning was helpful in terms of the calibration of expectation and refocusing the team on the buildability of the structure. The design came to life during FieldSchool, held at The Glasgow School of Art's Highlands & Islands campus. This field school served as a hub for interdisciplinary learning,

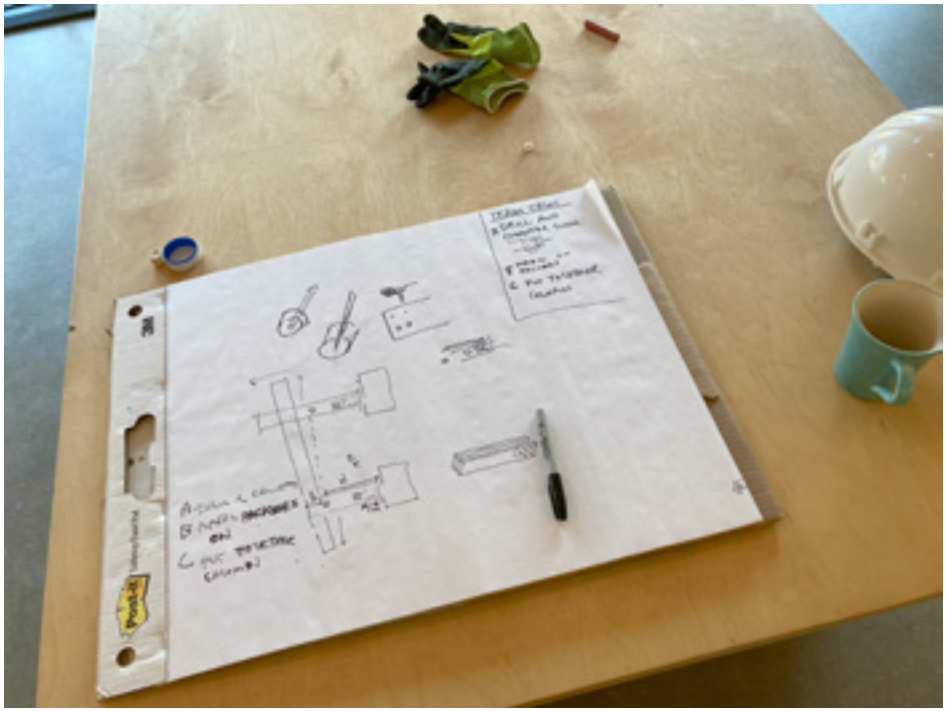

Figure 7. Thinking collectively through drawing. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2023.

Figures 8-9. Architects at work and levelling the foundations. Photographs: Gina Wall, 2023

bringing students together from architecture, environmental design, and art education, with a common focus on the cultural and practical aspects of materials. The hands-on interaction with materials enriched students' knowledge of their characteristics, limitations, and potential applications. The construction process itself was highly collaborative, with students working alongside experienced architects, technicians, and artistic practitioners/teachers (Figure 9).

Through the materials-led pedagogy of FieldSchool, participants had access to locally grown pine which came from within a 60-mile radius of the campus. All of the wood was processed at a neighbouring sawmill, Logie Timber, which became an important collaborating partner in the project. Working with local materials enabled the design team to order bespoke timbers which were untreated and sustainably sourced. This sensitivity to the environmental impact of the structure was a value shared by all of the participants involved. The traditional construction methods were characterised by their collaborative processes, encouraging community participation (Figure 10). Working with a growing awareness of vernacular materials led to experiments with heather thatching (Figure 11), a traditional roofing material and biodegradable building processes used in *shieling* construction. This was a moment of creative hybridity, when the *laavu* received a local Scottish treatment, blending Finnish and Scottish traditions.

Figure 11–14. Collaborative construction. Photographs by Gina Wall. The photograph top right corner by Ella Haavisto, 2023.

Figure 15. *Rakovalkea* lamp. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2024.

In traditional settings, the *Rakovalkea*, an overnight campfire (Figure 2), was constructed from dead pine wood selected for its appropriate thickness, ideally as straight as possible (Järvinen, 1956). The space between two logs would be filled with birch bark and spruce boughs (Järvinen, 1956). Due to regulations prohibiting open fires at the build site, the *Rakovalkea* concept was adapted into a lamp, crafted from similarly sourced Finnish dead pine wood, maintaining the ambience and warmth of the traditional campfire (Figure 15). As dusk fell and the firelight glowed, *laavus* became venues for storytelling, showcasing the deep ties between Finnish folklore and forests. This storytelling tradition was encapsulated through laser-cut plywood signs that illustrated students' reinterpretations of the *laavu.* In contemporary *laavu* culture, visitors engrave personal marks on wood, creating a guestbook embedded within the structures. Participants inscribed their signatures on the plywood board, which represented their home country (Figure 16). This practice embodies the communal essence of the *laavu* and the symbiosis between material and cultural practices. The *laavu* was engraved with a compass, orienting it in relation to north, pointing towards its place of inspiration (Figure 17).

Figure 16. (Above) Engraved wood, maps of home. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2023

Figure 17. (Below) North, compass engraving. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2024.

Findings

The following section reflects on three key strengths of cross-border collaboration. First, the hands-on approach, where theoretical knowledge converged with practical application, facilitated exchanges with architects, designers, and art educators. This integration resulted in the construction of a physical structure embodying the intangible elements of the *laavu* and *shieling,* their history and their cultures. Students were motivated by the opportunity to create something tangible and enduring, which would be utilised by others.

The interdisciplinary approach aligns with the principles of new genre Arctic art, which parallels and enhances the future-oriented approach of ABAR by exploring strategies that unite communities through interactions with traditions, ecocultures, and local environmental issues (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022). This approach integrates art, design, and crafts within a unified field of creation and education (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022), emphasising the material aspects and examining how natural materials influence and interact with cultural and educational practices (Huhmarniemi et al., 2021). In the *shielin-bough* project, architecture students were introduced to environmental art practices, encouraging them to integrate principles of ecological awareness and sustainable art practices, including the use of natural materials and exploration of ecological dynamics.

The revitalisation of ecocultures has been fostered through art projects using local materials and traditional methods, sharing stories and beliefs through public art (Härkönen, 2020; Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2019). Jokela et al. (2021) introduced the concept of new genre Arctic art, paralleling new genre public art (Lacy, 1994), to describe contemporary artistic interventions, public art, and performances that include activism and engagement with current issues. This approach combines beauty and practicality, art and design, and other northern ways of knowing embodied in creative production. Our pedagogical method adhered to the principles of new genre Arctic art, focusing on sharing traditions and passing on the material cultures of the Arctic to new generations.

Another significant strength was the integration of diverse geographic settings and international participants, which facilitated the sharing of local knowledge from across the globe through cultural exchanges. Huhmarniemi et al. (2021) suggest cultural encounters are an important part of revitalisation, which aim to share northern knowledge with international participants by inviting international students to collaborate with local communities, learn cultural practices from the Northern and Arctic regions. Besides students from Scotland and Finland, the design process welcomed international students, primarily from China, further enriching the cultural exchange. Students inter-

preted local materials and practices through their cultural lenses, fostering a multifaceted approach to knowledge creation. The team composition evolved throughout the project, with most students participating in FieldSchool being newcomers. This continual integration of new members and ideas brought fresh perspectives, making the process dynamic and adaptable. As Haraway (2016) suggests, meaningful change often arises from unexpected collaborations, and this collaboration exemplified how new participants can invigorate and transform a collaborative endeavour.

The project also delved into the intangible elements of food, culminating in a celebration where participants recognised their achievements over a communal meal and traditional food explorations. This phase, alongside group discussions, personal reflections, and feedback sessions, was pivotal for integrating lessons learned and assessing the project's impact. It underscored the significance of cultural exchanges and the project's successes in fostering these interactions, emphasising the vital role of food cultivation and preparation as carriers of intangible cultural tradition. These practices, often dismissed as mere acts of neighbourliness in today's consumer-driven societies, are deeply rooted in ancient worldviews and knowledge systems that prioritise caring relationships and the health and happiness of communities (Foster & Martusewicz, 2018). This collaboration demonstrated that these traditional practices are relevant in fostering a sense of community and cultural continuity within contemporary education contexts.

The third strength of the project was the seamless integration of tradition and innovation through the reinterpretation of vernacular shelters, which acknowledged the profound connections between people and the land. The design required a balance between interior and exterior elements, enclosure and openness, symbolising both the protective nature of the shelter and its relationship with the landscape. Discussions about the *shielings* and *laavus* sparked broader conversations on sustainability, land ownership, and the cultural imprints of colonial practices on Indigenous lands. These conversations align with the concept of ecoculture, which we have already seen, places an emphasis on how land and culture are intricately interwoven.

Revitalising local ecocultures and integrating them into contemporary higher education is crucial for the acquisition of forgotten skills, fostering cultural continuity, and promoting cultural pride (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022; Auclair & Fairclough, 2015). Engaging students with local communities and immersing them in the cultures of the northern and Arctic regions has proven effective in achieving these objectives. For example, at the Meltosjärvi logging site in Finland, villagers brewed coffee and shared meals by the campfire at a *laavu*, recounting stories from their early log cabin days to

current efforts to rejuvenate their dwindling village. This experience raised awareness of local challenges and highlighted how the *laavu* can serve as a setting for the revitalisation of ecocultures from an educational perspective.

The intertwining of the *shieling* and *laavu* allowed students to infuse these shelters with new meanings. While the *laavu* holds contemporary significance in Finnish culture, the nearly forgotten *shieling* was reinterpreted through student research into the enduring traditions of the *laavu*. Students explored common themes such as connections to the landscape and the harsh climate. Discussions also revealed the need for inclusivity in the traditionally male-dominated *laavu* tradition, reflecting on community engagement in the *shieling* tradition. These insights shaped the welcoming atmosphere of the newly created gathering space, inviting everyone to experience the rich landscape of The Glasgow School of Art's Highlands & Islands campus together.

Conclusion

Although we feel this collaboration is a valuable and important contribution to revitalisation of ecocultures and northern knowledge, it only represents a beginning. The interdisciplinary and intercultural nature of the project successfully merged the communal and ecological qualities of both the *shieling* and the *laavu*. This integration not only strengthened connections across ecocultural traditions but also bridged diverse cultures, disciplines, and communities within the Arctic and beyond. The revitalisation process in our study weaves together ecological and cultural elements, blending tradition with innovation, and emphasising the dynamic interplay between the human and the more-than-human in northern landscapes. We hope that this collaboration provides a platform for further study and our insights gained may be applied to future live build collaborations.

Our results underscore the transformative potential of cross-border collaboration in higher education, demonstrating innovative ways to seamlessly integrate traditional and contemporary elements. This collaboration extended the educational experience beyond conventional architectural training, incorporating elements of environmental art, intercultural collaboration and intangible heritage. Students critically examined how their designs interacted with the environment, fostering a holistic approach to architecture. The field school reinforced practical construction skills alongside promoting student leadership in safe working practices, while deepening students' appreciation for the complexities of designing in harmony with natural and cultural elements.